



## MARKS OF CONGREGATIONAL VITALITY

*This survey is meant to help congregations discern their strengths, challenges and help them look at themselves honestly to discern a vital future. An apt and appropriate conclusion may be that the congregation now in this building may be better served and may better serve in new and vital ways. You are encouraged to wrestle with these vital questions around the Baptismal Covenant.*

### **Part 1: Mission and Ministry**

#### **BCP: Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?**

- ✚ Is our church's worship lively - does it shed God's light on the rest of the week? Is it welcoming to people outside the congregation, inclusive and inviting full participation of the laity? Name five ways in which we do this. Consider asking newcomers about their experience.
- ✚ What are the ways our congregation gathers for prayer - on Sunday and beyond? What are our regular liturgies? Is there Eucharist at least once a month? What happens on the weeks where there is no communion? How do we raise up new leaders in liturgy?
- ✚ How does our congregation extend hospitality to newcomers, visitors, neighbors, and the wider community, in worship and through programs, activities, and use of facilities?
- ✚ Does our congregation have an on-going stewardship program and engage in clear financial planning? How does this get lived out? How is it evidenced in our budget and year round stewardship message? If our congregants had to articulate the connection between stewardship and their lives with God, what would they say?
- ✚ In what areas does our community experience its greatest spiritual vitality?

*How are excellent leaders being raised up in this area in an ongoing way? Where in the area of tending to the spiritual life of the congregation do we need support, resources and/or encouragement?*

#### **BCP: Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?**

- ✚ How does our congregation live out Christ's call to be peace-makers, ambassadors of reconciliation? In what ways are individuals in our congregation encouraged to live this out in their own lives? Be specific.
- ✚ In what ways are clergy and laity actively involved in providing pastoral care that

is nurturing and supportive both in times of illness and crisis and in the course of everyday life?

- ✚ How are the ministries of healing and recovery lived out in our congregation?
- ✚ How does the congregation handle internal conflict? How does our congregation have the hard conversations? What are the “elephants in the room” and how do we name them? Give a couple of examples.

*How are excellent leaders being raised up in this area in an ongoing way? Where in the area of reconciliation do we need support, resources and/or encouragement?*

**BCP: Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?**

- ✚ What is our mission statement? Does the parish know it? How do we live it out intentionally?
- ✚ How does our congregation articulate its particular call to participate in God’s mission of “and of all things.”? How do we live into it? In what ways do members address conflict within the community and in the larger community? Is reconciliation/forgiveness a hallmark of the members of our community?
- ✚ In what ways does our congregation live out the call to proclaim the Good News of God in Jesus Christ with the world? How do we incorporate modern use of technology? Do we have a website? Is it regularly brought up to date? Do we reach out in other ways: Facebook, twitter, etc?
- ✚ How do members of our congregation regularly share their personal stories of faith with one another?
- ✚ What is our congregation’s strategy for reaching and engaging individuals in surrounding populations to offer of the Good news of God in Christ? What are our benchmarks for success?
- ✚ What are our on-going practices of Christian formation to teach, baptize and nurture new believers and equip the saints, to offer of God’s love into the world? In what ways are Christians of all ages being formed?

*How are excellent leaders being raised up in this area in an ongoing way? Where do we need support, encouragement, creative thinking, and training in the proclamation of the Good News?*

**BCP: Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?**

- ✚ In what ways does our congregation respond to human need in the surrounding community through outreach or in-house programs? How many parishioners are involved in these ministries?
- ✚ With whom does our congregation collaborate in ministry? ( other churches, Episcopal or not; other religious organizations; non-profits; international partners) In what ways do those partnerships get lived out?
- ✚ How does our congregation discern, train, equip and support leaders, clergy and lay? Are there enough willing leaders to serve who aren’t married or related to each other so that people can rotate off as officers and vestry members? In what ways are people invited into leadership?

*How are excellent leaders being raised up in this area in an ongoing way? Where do we need support, encouragement, creative thinking and training in this area?*

**BCP: Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?**

- ✚ Are all volunteers who work with children or other vulnerable populations (like the elderly) trained in respecting the dignity of every human being through safe church workshops? Do our doors have windows? Have we done background checks on all adults who work with children?
- ✚ In what ways does our congregation seek to transform unjust structures of society, and address systemic societal and global inequities? How do we reach out to those in need? How do we give voice to those who have no voice in our world?
- ✚ How does our congregation strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth?

*How are excellent leaders being raised up in this area in an ongoing way? Where do we need support, encouragement, creative thinking and training in this area?*

**Part 2: Marks of Vitality and Sustainability in Parish Infrastructure**

**Personnel**

Do we have a priest or have we made provision for regular services of Holy Eucharist? If not, what is our plan to address this?

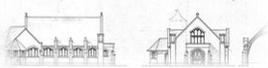
Is our staff paid justly? Are clergy and lay people compensated according to Diocesan guidelines? If not, what is our plan to address this?

Are we in compliance with legal and canonical requirements around insurance? If not, what is our plan to address this?

Is there a yearly Mutual Ministry Review so that needs and direction can be assessed and determined faithfully? Are the findings in that review taken seriously with follow-up discussion and action?



**Buildings**



In what ways is our building used for ministry? Is it only open on Sunday morning?

Are our buildings in good repair? Have they been inspected for hazards, fire code, safe church issues? Are they properly insured?

If not, what is our plan to address this?

What outstanding issues need to be addressed? What is our plan for addressing those?

What long range plans do we have for maintaining your buildings? If, for example, we developed a major leak in the roof, would we be able to afford to repair it?

## **Finances**

Do we present a balanced budget each year? If not, how long have we had a deficit budget? Is a deficit budget a chronic issue (has it happened for more than 5 years in a row)? How are we addressing this in a long term, proactive, transformative way?



How do we live out the message of being good stewards of your resources? Is the message of our being God's stewards of the Christian and local community consistently and effectively part of the preaching and teaching in our congregation?

## **Part 3: Some Hard Questions**

"A truth is a fact with  
a meaning."

G.K. Chesterton

Having addressed these questions - is our congregation vital? Is the way we do "church" (i.e. building, location, personnel, mission) something that reflects abundant life? Or something that drains life from people? Have the concerns for maintaining the building taken over our vestry meetings?

Do we regularly pose the difficult questions in our vestry meetings and in the congregation? Do we "spin our wheels"? Do we spend most of our vestry meetings worrying about the details or do we spend prayerful, fruitful time in conversation about mission?

Is there a person in our congregation who regularly "rescues" a situation (for example: pays for the major repair)? What will happen when that person dies or moves away?

Is it time to take a good hard look at reality and find a plan to address the issues that keep us inwardly focused? What sense of grief or loss would we experience in this conversation? What keeps us from the willingness to have this difficult conversation?

Is it time to say "well done, good and faithful servants" and find ways to be part of another parish community that is seeking to thrive and is in a place where God's mission can be lived into faithfully, where the people of our congregation can find new life?

## **Part 4: Suggestions for use**

Grapple with one set of questions at each vestry meeting. Be honest; don't settle for the easy answers!

Join with another congregation/vestry for a retreat day and look at the questions.

Identify one or two areas for deeper conversation and learning. When you realize that you are struggling with an area, ask for resources or learning opportunities.

Ask one of the Canons for support in identifying learning resources.



\*With thanks to the work of Dioceses of Connecticut and Massachusetts who graciously shared their similar documents and allowed us to draw from them!