



Presbyterian Mission
**Theology, Formation
& Evangelism**

Vital Congregations
Revitalization Initiative

Basic Information Application



Contents

- 3 Vision of Vital Congregations Initiative
- 5 Seven Marks of Vital Congregations
- 7 Letter of Interest
- 8 Interest Application for Presbyteries
- 9 Interest Application for Individual Churches
- 10 2021–22 Important Dates
- 12 Facilitator Role
- 14 Cost Estimate Template for Presbyteries
- 15 Cost Estimate Template for Churches



Vital Congregations Vision

I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? (ISAIAH 43:19)

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? (1 CORINTHIANS 3:16)

See, the home of God is among mortals. ... See, I am making all things new. (REVELATION 21:3,5)

Vision:	By the power of the Holy Spirit, and in authentic relationships with mid councils, we seek to equip, nurture and support church leaders to empower their congregations to renew, recover and live more fully into faithful discipleship to Jesus Christ.
Purpose:	The purpose of the Vital Congregations Initiative is to work alongside mid council leadership, and leaders of existing congregations, in a process that seeks to help assess, discern and live into transformative actions that increase vitality. Through intentional spiritual practices and relational connections, this two-year process takes us deeper into following Jesus Christ, making disciples and being the vital community of Christ throughout particular communities and the world.
Values:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Courage, Conviction and Commitment to faithful discipleship• Prayerful discernment• Reliance upon Scripture• Persistence — emboldened/enacted faith• Honest Assessment• Resilience• Intentional pursuits of reconciliation• Hopefulness in change
What we believe:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is necessary to have a re-turn to God and re-forming of God's people.• It is a crucial time of awakening throughout our neighborhoods, nation and world.• The Holy Spirit's power is changing, re-forming and revitalizing the Church.• It is necessary to rediscover faithful discipleship in a 21st-century context.• God is calling the Church to transform and transcend cultures and contexts.• We must move from inward institutions to neighborhood relationships and mission.

What this initiative IS:

The hope is this is the beginning of intentional, authentic relationships between the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Mission Agency and mid council leaders and pastors to:

- Come together as the people of God
- Pray: re-turn to faithfulness in God
- Inspire openness to the Holy Spirit's transformation/change
- Honestly assess, discern and act
- Resource, equip and support leaders and pastors
- Practice missional evangelism and faithful discipleship
- Equip vital congregations and develop a praxis of sustainability and ongoing assessment
- Capture congregational stories and develop new measurements of vitality

What this initiative IS NOT:

- A universal program instructing churches and assuring vitality and sustainable life
- Another plan that promises an immediate fix
- A guarantee of revitalization for every congregation.
- An attempt for the PC(USA) to tell churches what to do
- An institutional survival guide for membership numbers and buildings
- An encouragement to tweak, yet remain the same
- A return to glory days gone by, nor a guidebook on calling the young pastor

Overview

The Revitalization Initiative is a two-year covenant relationship between presbyteries and the PC(USA) to prayerfully walk with pastors and existing congregations in intentional efforts of revitalization.

Year 1 builds authentic relationships of faith. Churches will embark on an honest assessment, capturing their unique stories, confessing their realities and discerning the Spirit's call to action. From Seven Marks of Congregational Vitality, churches will determine a course between Three Actions:

- 1) Re-forming churches — re-envision and change how we are church together through the Seven Marks of Congregational Vitality;
- 2) Missional Clustering churches — revitalization by clustering congregations into new communities of worship and ministry;
- 3) Death and Resurrection churches — revitalizing by grace and gratitude in the death and legacy of a congregation, in witness to the resurrection.

Year 2 is about joining Christ in the new thing taking place, allowing the wonder of God to transform, and faithfully living into change. Through Seven Marks and Three Actions, we pray that God will revitalize the church in missional action and faithful discipleship in Jesus Christ throughout our neighborhoods, our nation and the world.

- **Year 1 — Relational:** Authentic Relationships and the Honest Assessment and Discernment of Congregations
- **Year 2 — Incarnational:** Revitalizing Church in Three Actions: Re-forming, Missional Clustering, Death and Resurrection



7 Marks of Congregational Vitality

<p>1 LIFELONG Discipleship Formation vs. complacent “Christian” piety, simply teaching good morals, or offering the latest programs</p>	<p><i>“The righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness of God based on faith.” (PHIL. 3:9B)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• From the cradle to the grave seeking to be formed for right living with God and with all people.• Faith — seeking understanding, cultivating wisdom, and actively following Christ. It is not an extra-curricular activity nor merely head-knowledge.• Discipleship awakened and engaged in issues facing today’s culture: injustice, inequality, divisive segregation, oppression, suffering, abuse of creation.• Discipleship formed and strengthened in the community of Christ and permeates daily practices and daily living.
<p>2 Intentional Authentic Evangelism vs. “Jesus freaks;” “Christian” hypocrisy; a committee</p>	<p><i>“We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God.” (2 COR. 4:7)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intentionally sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, not just acts of kindness.• Authentically sharing Christ because it is intrinsic to self-identity; overflow of Christ in our life.• Relational, not programmatic or systematic.
<p>3 Outward Incarnational Focus vs. inward institutional survival; closed communities of assimilation/exclusion</p>	<p><i>“The gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (MATT. 7:14)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Outward exploration, awareness, and focus on neighbors and neighborhood.• Beyond relationship with those of similar existence, the incarnate Christ dwells among the lowly and least, the stranger and the suffering, the marginalized and majority.• Missional focus on where Christ is already living and present, and calling us to dwell.
<p>4 Empower Servant Leadership vs. the Pastor’s job; monopolized leadership; hiring the young, energetic pastor</p>	<p><i>“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers.” (MATT. 9:37–38)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify, nurture, support the use of spiritual gifts of all people to serve; not monopolized cliques of power.• All voices and people are necessary, and it is noticeable when people are absent/missing.• Nurture and encourage those specifically called and gifted for pastoral ministry.

5 Spirit-Inspired Worship
vs. self-gratifying worship,
stale ritual divorced of
meaning,
or consumer
entertainment worship

“These people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote.” (ISAIAH 29:13)

- Worship is about God. We get to come on holy ground, encounter God, and experience wonder.
- Worship is active participation in the living relationship of the triune God, thus all should feel welcome just as they are to come.
- Worship challenges, teaches, transforms, encounters, convicts, and sends people out different.

6 Caring Relationships
vs. any other social club;
façades, hypocrisy, and
judgment of “church”
and “religion.”

“By this everyone will know that you are disciples, if you have love for one another.” (JOHN 13:35)

- Sharing in God’s true agape moves us beyond half-hearted programmatic participation, lukewarm faith, and pretending.
- Instead of a closed, judgmental community, people find freedom to share stories, encounter the Savior, and ask for help.
- Welcome and hospitality are not left to a committee, but, imperfectly, we strive for all people find identity, purpose, and belonging in the household of God.
- Confront conflict, seek reconciliation in all divisions, find ways to embrace all diversity, seek to be peace-makers and bridge-builders together.

7 Ecclesial Health vs.
unhealthy dysfunction;
toxic environments;
obsolete and irrelevant
buildings

“The body does not consist of one member but of many. God has so arranged the body that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.” (1 COR. 12:14, 24B–25)

- Understanding of: Why we are a church community? How are we a church community in practice? Prayer permeates all life together.
- Clarity in mission, core values to ministry, passion and joy in being the church. Our budget reflects these values, vision, and ministries.
- Fiscally responsible — stewardship and tithing are taught, transparency in spending, continual assessment/discernment of a sustainable budget.
- All are aware of how decisions are made, stake-holders in the process and procedures, valued voices in the envisioning, open to changes, continual assessment of the “why” and “how” we are church together.
- Nurturing and supporting the health of pastor(s), staff, and all called to lead; fighting against burnout.



Letter of Interest

Invitation

This is an invitation for all presbyteries and churches interested in engaging in covenant relationship to God and to one another, as we share in the vision for Vital Congregations: By the power of the Holy Spirit, and in authentic relationships with mid councils, we seek to equip, nurture and support church leaders to empower their congregations to renew, recover and live more fully into faithful discipleship to Jesus Christ. The Office of Vital Congregations for the PC(USA) invites you to share your interest in joining with other presbyteries and churches in the Two-Year Vital Congregations Initiative.

The purpose of the Vital Congregations Initiative is to work alongside mid council leadership, and leaders of existing congregations, in a process that seeks to help assess, discern and live into transformative actions that increase vitality. Through intentional spiritual practices and relational connections, this two-year process takes us deeper into following Jesus Christ, making disciples, and being the vital community of Christ throughout particular communities and the world.

We invite you to review the information, share the vision among your presbytery leadership and churches, and prayerfully fill out the Letter of Interest Form. **All letters need to be submitted by March 5, 2021.** The office of Vital Congregations, in consultation with the PC(USA) Staff Team and the Vital Congregations Coaches Team, will prayerfully discern a maximum of **20 presbyteries and a Church Cohort group of 15 churches** to begin this journey. Please note: The maximum numbers of presbyteries and churches ensures honoring intentional covenantal relationships and the needs of each particular presbytery and church. Discernment of presbytery and church selections will be based upon the established relationships between leadership and the PC(USA) Staff and/or Vital Congregations Team, as well as the preparedness of each presbytery and church indicated in the Letter of Interest.

The Third Wave of 20 selected presbyteries and 15 selected churches in the Church Cohort group will be contacted by **April 12, 2021.** We will begin the Preparation and Vision Sharing Year together in spring 2021. All important dates and special Vital Congregations events are included in this information packet. Please note: We will inform and continue to build relationships with all presbyteries and churches who submit a Letter of Interest, as we plan to launch a new wave through the process annually.

We hope this process together will strengthen the people of God, in the mission of God, so that all might know vital life in Christ Jesus, our Lord. We look forward to receiving your letter, and to growing in relationship together.

In Christ,

The Office of Vital Congregations, Theology, Formation & Evangelism, PC(USA)

Interest Application for Presbyteries

Application Checklist

- Letter of Interest, including:
 - What attracts you to this initiative?
 - What do you hope to gain out of this experience?
- Completed application

Application deadline to be considered for the Third Wave and Church Cohort is March 5, 2021.

Name of Presbytery _____

Presbytery leader(s) name(s) _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Email of contact person _____

Person(s) preparing Letter of Interest _____ No. of congregations _____

Please answer the following questions. Each answer should not exceed 300 words.

1. What attracts you to the Vital Congregations Initiative? How does the initiative speak to your presbytery's vision for congregational transformation?
2. What would a "vital" conclusion to the initiative look like for you? How will you know you are meeting your expectations or goals of the Seven Marks?
3. What is the level of interest from church pastors, committees and congregations in participation? Describe hopes, expectations, questions or concerns people have.
4. Is your presbytery willing to invest human and financial resources for two years in this initiative? Will you be willing/able to provide and support a minimum of two candidates to be trained as facilitators?
5. What do you consider the top two to three largest obstacles/issues in your presbytery at this time? How do you think the vision of Vital Congregations will help address these?
6. What steps have you already taken to share the vision of vitality, the Seven Marks and the work of revitalization in your presbytery?
7. What existing ways do your pastors currently gather?
8. Does your presbytery plan to apply for a Transformation Grant? If so, please include a copy of your presbytery budget as well as information on what the Transformation Grant will be used for.

Cover Letter:

Please submit a cover letter with your application that includes a brief description of your presbytery: leadership; churches; mission; geographical makeup; all diversity; strengths; weaknesses; existing relationships with the Presbyterian Mission Agency; and any other information you feel is helpful.

Signature of person(s) preparing Letter of Interest application _____

Signature of presbytery leadership _____ Date _____

The application deadline to be considered for the Third Wave is **March 5, 2021**. Selection is in **April 2021**.
Email your completed application and cover letter to: **vitalcongregations@pcusa.org**

Interest Application for Individual Churches

Application Checklist

- Letter of Interest, including:
 - What attracts you to this initiative?
 - What do you hope to gain out of this experience?
- Completed application

Application deadline to be considered for the Third Wave and Church Cohort is March 5, 2021.

Name of Church _____

Pastor/church leader(s) name(s) _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Email of contact person _____

Person(s) preparing Letter of Interest _____

Presbytery leader(s) name(s) _____

Please answer the following questions. Each answer should not exceed 300 words.

1. What attracts you to the Vital Congregations Initiative? What would a “vital” conclusion to the initiative look like for you?
2. What is the level of interest from your congregation in participation? Describe hopes, expectations, questions or concerns people have.
3. Is your church willing to invest human and financial resources for two years in this initiative? Will you be willing/able to provide and support a minimum of one candidate to be trained as a facilitator?
4. What do you consider the top two to three largest obstacles/issues in your church at this time? How do you think the vision of Vital Congregations will help address these?
5. What steps have you already taken to share the vision of vitality, the Seven Marks and the work of revitalization in your church?
6. What resources, if any, will you need from your presbytery in order to be successful? Have you discussed this with your presbytery leader(s)?

Cover Letter:

Please submit a cover letter with your application that includes a brief description of your church: leadership; mission; geographical makeup; all diversity; strengths; weaknesses; existing relationships with the Presbyterian Mission Agency; and any other information you feel is helpful.

Signature of person(s) preparing Letter of Interest application _____

Signature of church leadership _____ Date _____

The application deadline to be considered for the Third Wave is **March 5, 2021**. Selection is in **April 2021**.
Email your completed application and cover letter to: **vitalcongregations@pcusa.org**



2021–22 Important Dates and Deadlines

March 5, 2021: *Letters of Interest due*

- *Presbyteries and churches can find a Basic Information Packet with the Letters of Interest process on the Vital Congregations website.*

April 12, 2021: *Presbyteries and Church Cohort contacted and announced*

- *The Preparation Year begins.*
- *Presbyteries and Church Cohort are contacted by VC PC(USA) staff and VC coaches team liaisons*
- *Letter from Office of VC with important dates/deadlines, Handbook of Preparation, VC Manual and VC Immediate Toolkit will be mailed out.*

June 4, 2021: *Presbytery and church information due to the Office of Vital Congregations*

- *Names and information of two facilitators from the presbytery/one facilitator for the Church Cohort are due.*
- *Presbyteries and churches will receive a Doodle Poll for quarterly meetings for facilitators and presbytery and church leaders.*

Big Tent 2021

- *Facilitator Training will take place post-Big Tent event. All facilitators and presbytery leaders should be present for this training event.*

Early fall 2021:

- *The Registration information for VC Gathering is live in June 2021! Flyers are prepared and sent with registration information.*
- *Scholarship grant application is sent.*

Sept. 30, 2021: *Deadline to register for 1001 New Worshiping Communities and Vital Congregations Conference.*

- *All church pastors, one church officer and presbytery leadership are to register for the annual Vital Congregations Gathering. This will be a training and planning event for all presbyteries and churches participating in the initiative. Facilitator Training will be held pre-gathering.*
- *Deadline to submit Doodle Polls to VC Office.*
- *Deadline to submit scholarship applications for conference.*
- *Deadline to submit list of churches participating in the initiative (begins on p. 12 of Preparation Handbook)*

(Continued next page)

October 2021: *1001 New Worshiping Communities and Vital Congregations Conference*

- *One gathering for the presbyteries preparing to walk through the initiative. The event is for pastors, presbytery leadership and clerks of session to learn about the two-year initiative, plan for their particular churches and contexts, and get ideas and training on the two-year initiative.*
- *Two regional “makeup” gatherings will be held, if requested. These gatherings will be facilitated with local leadership and the VC office in fall 2021.*

2022 launch of initiative

- *Presbyteries and the church cohort who feel called and ready, and have determined and informed the Office of Vital Congregations, will begin in January 2022 and will be officially celebrated at the initiative launch at General Assembly in June 2022.*
- *Workbooks should be ordered prior to the January 2022 launch date. You may order church and presbytery workbooks by going to **forms.gle/mTgVFPhsac95Lfco9**.*



Vital Congregations Facilitators

fa·cil·i·ta·te: “to make easy” or “ease a process.”

What a facilitator does is plan, guide and manage a group event to ensure that the group’s objectives are met effectively, with clear thinking, good participation and full buy-in from everyone who is involved. Your key responsibility as a facilitator is to cultivate this group process and an environment in which it can flourish.

Objective:

Presbyteries should identify and elect a minimum of two members to be trained by the PC(USA) for the role of Vital Congregations facilitator. These facilitators should be trusted leaders among the presbytery with gifts for helping congregations. Facilitators should be objective — without conflict of interest in assisting churches. They will be trained by the Office of Vital Congregations and utilized at the discretion of presbyteries in consultation with pastors, or a session for churches without a pastor. They will also be supported/mentored by a liaison from the PC(USA) Vital Congregations Team and have quarterly video meetings with other facilitators around the country.

Rationale:

In order to support congregations who are walking through the Vital Congregations Initiative, presbyteries should have trained leaders who can help congregations in the assessment, discernment and planning stages. These leaders should not be “sent in” from the PC(USA), but should be called from the contexts in which they live. These leaders should be equipped to support congregations and pastors in faithful and difficult conversations and help them navigate the challenging and hope-filled work of being a more vital congregation. They will serve as trained support to presbyteries, pastors and congregations long after the initiative.

Facilitators should be able to help:

- Share the vision of Vital Congregations
- Assist pastors and/or session
- Ask good, sometimes difficult, questions
- Mediate conflict resolution and reconciliation
- Facilitate assessment dialogues for churches
- Facilitate the process of discernment and decision-making
- Engage in problem-solving, visioning, planning

Gifts:

- Faithful
- Positive attitude; encouraging
- Lead and navigate group dynamics
- Relational and trustworthy
- Good communication skills; honesty
- Adaptive leadership: assertive/visionary/democratic/inspiring
- Pastoral/peace-maker
- Emotional intelligence

Calling upon facilitators:

We envision that facilitators will be used for two key points in the two-year initiative:

Year 1 — during the Assessment Review and Discernment stage for congregations

Year 2 — as congregations envision and map a plan for action

These facilitators will be deployed at the discretion of the presbytery in consultation with pastors (if a pastor is present) and the PC(USA) Office of Vital Congregations. Examples:

- Facilitators gather with pastors and session members of congregations discerning a plan to do missional clustering in various ways.
- Facilitators walk with a congregation without a pastor who needs assistance with conflict resolution and reconciliation.
- Pastors and congregations want assistance from a facilitator in looking at the mark of vitality — Outward Incarnational Focus — and discern ways they can engage their neighborhoods.
- Facilitators gather with pastors and sessions of congregations faced with difficult discernment and pray together, walking them through the challenging questions and conversations.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: How many facilitators are needed?

A: Presbyteries should have a minimum of two facilitators for the Vital Congregations Initiative. However, presbyteries may elect more than two depending on presbytery size, the number of churches without pastors, ethnic-cultural diversity and languages.

Q: What do facilitators cost?

A: Presbyteries should cover all costs associated with the Facilitator Training Conference by the PC(USA). In addition, presbyteries may elect to pay their facilitators a stipend for the two-year initiative. Finally, we encourage the reimbursement of mileage and meals as these facilitators serve.

Q: What is the time commitment of a facilitator?

A: For each presbytery, the demands of a facilitator's time will be dependent on how and when they are utilized. Facilitators will spend four days being trained by the Vital Congregations Office of the PC(USA). Facilitators will be given quarterly video meetings, lasting approximately one hour, as an opportunity to check-in with facilitators around the country, to share ideas, discuss case studies and pray together.



Cost Estimate for Presbyteries

Note: The following is an estimate based on current available information and could change based on final actual cost for production of resources and travel expenses at the time of events.

Estimated Survey Cost:	No. of Participants	Per Church No. of Churches
Shipping \$17.00	200	15
Cost/Congregation .00	Cost Per Church	Cost Per Presbytery
	\$17.00	\$255.00
Estimated shipping cost of surveys to one (1) congregation:		\$17.00
Estimated total survey cost for one (1) congregation:		\$17.00
Estimated total cost of surveys for 15 churches in one (1) presbytery:		\$255.00

Estimated Facilitator Training Cost (Per Event):		
	1 Facilitator	2 Facilitators
No. of Facilitators Per Presbytery: 1		
Estimated Travel:	\$450.00	\$900.00
Estimated lodging for 2 nights	\$330.00	\$660.00
Estimated Meals	\$112.00	\$224.00
Estimated Total Facilitator Training Cost	\$892.00	\$1,784.00

Estimated Resource Cost:		
(Workbook) for one (1) church, 1 item per church	\$31.00	\$465.00
Resource: Facilitator Manual, two (2) per Presbytery		
1 item: Digital	\$12.00	\$24.00
Estimated Total Resource Cost	\$43.00	\$489.00

Total Estimated Cost for Training and Resources **\$2,273.00**

Grand Total Estimated Budget **\$2,528.00**



Cost Estimate for Individual Churches

Note: The following is an estimate based on current available information and could change based on final actual cost for production of resources and travel expenses at the time of events.

Estimated Survey Cost:	No. of Participants	Per Church No. of Churches
Shipping \$17.00	100	1
Cost/Congregation .00	Cost Per Church	Cost Per Presbytery
	\$17.00	\$17.00
Estimated shipping cost of surveys to one (1) congregation:		\$17.00
Estimated total survey cost for one (1) congregation:		\$17.00
Estimated total cost of surveys for 15 churches in one (1) presbytery:		\$17.00

Estimated Facilitator Training Cost (Per Event):	
No. of Facilitators Per Presbytery: 1	1 Facilitator
Estimated Travel:	\$450.00
Estimated lodging for 2 nights	\$330.00
Estimated Meals	\$112.00
Estimated Total Facilitator Training Cost	\$892.00

Total Estimated Cost for Training and Resources **\$2,273.00**

Grand Total Estimated Budget **\$2,528.00**

Estimated Resource Cost:	
Estimated resource cost for one (1) church, 2) items per church	\$62.00
Resource: Facilitator Manual — one (1)	
Estimated resource cost for Presbytery 1 item: Digital	\$12.00
Estimated Total Resource Cost	\$74.00

Total Estimated Cost for Training and Resources **\$966.00**

Grand Total Estimated Budget **\$983.00**