

## **Fundamentals of Renewal/Vitality**

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2018 - Reflections on 7 plans for Strategic Renewal/Vitality

### INTRODUCTION

The confession from Sundays and Seasons for the 500 anniversary of the Protestant Reformation is particularly appropriate for a time of Renewal/Revitalization/Reformation of the Church:

#### **Confession and Forgiveness**

Blessed be the (+) holy Trinity, the one who fashions us,  
the one who heals us, the one who reforms us again and again. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin, calling for God's transforming power.

*Silence for reflection and self-examination.*

Source of all life,

**we confess that we have not allowed your grace to set us free.**

**We fear that we are not good enough.**

**We hear your word of love freely given to us, yet we expect others to earn it.**

**We turn the church inward, rather than moving it outward.**

**Forgive us. Stir us.**

**Reform us to be a church powered by love, willing to speak for what is right,  
act for what is just, and seek the healing of your whole creation. Amen.**

God hears our cry and sends the Spirit to change us and to empower our lives in the world.  
Our sins are forgiven, God's love is unconditional, and we are raised up as God's people  
who will always be made new, in the name of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

### **LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD**

Renewal and Vitality is a revolving circle of listening, acting, and reflecting. We always begin with listening to God through Word and prayer. Then we listen and build relationships with each other. Then we listen and build relationships with our community. And then we start again.

Here is what some selected scriptures say about what the church is to do and be:

#### **Matthew 28:18-19**

<sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

#### **Matthew 22:37-40**

<sup>37</sup>He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." <sup>38</sup>This is the greatest and first commandment. <sup>39</sup>And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' <sup>40</sup>On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

### Acts 1:8

*<sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

### Luke 4:18-19

*<sup>18</sup>“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, <sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

### Philippians 2:1-3

*If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, <sup>2</sup>make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.*

### Matthew 16:24-25

*<sup>24</sup>Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup>For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.*

The are some common themes running through these verses. Making disciples, living for others, denying self, and being witnesses. As the disciples spent time with Jesus and the early church began its ministry the focus was always outward. It began with a relationship with Jesus. And then always grew from that to inviting, serving, and welcoming to all.

Congregations are either in a constant state of renewal, or on a downward trajectory. The most common factor in a declining congregation is being inward focused. Here are helpful ways to work on renewal and vitality.

***The ELCA in cooperation with other mainline denominations has compiled research showing the 7 most effective plans for renewal in a church. Here are the 7 categories and some reflections on them. This is just the beginning of the conversation. This is not an exhaustive list. It is only a start. Ideas will emerge as individual congregation engage their context and listen to see what people want and what is needed in your mission field.***

## **INTRODUCTION**

Renewal in a congregation is not magic. It also does not happen totally by divine intervention. It is the people of God, working with God to bring about renewal and change. The place to start is a time of lent. The season of Lent is a time of prayer, reflection, self denial, and reconnection with the root and source of our faith. That is especially true for congregations that choose to path of renewal. What ever brings on the desire to renew: financial woes, a change in pastors, decline of membership or spiritual awakening, here are some ideas on how to get started:

### **- A time of prayer**

Not just the printed prayers on Sunday morning, but individual and corporate prayer for God’s spirit to bring devotion, dedication, and change

- Faith formation

The congregation needs to know or rediscover who they are as a faith community. The community cannot be engaged if the congregation does not know who they are or what they believe in

- Self denial

Often the reason a congregation needs renewal is that it has become too inward focused. Just as Lent focuses on giving up things close to us for a time, so too the renewal process might best begin by congregational members giving up their own self interests as a priority in order to see what are God's interests and priorities both in the congregation and the community

- Vision

A time of renewal is a time to be open to seeing through new eyes. Eyes of folks of different generations, the community, and those of different cultures than your own.

- Listening

A time of renewal is about listening to God, listening to each other, and listening to the community where the church is set. It means listening more than talking. In Lent we listen for God and seek by listening to reconnect with the heart of our faith. In renewal we listen more than talk in order to reconnect with the heart of those we serve. One on One Relational listening is a highly effective tool.

## **7 Plans for congregational Renewal**

### I. A congregational plan leading to numerical growth in worship and participation in the life of the church - Evangelizing Outreach

#### A. Learning to talk about Jesus and faith

Lutherans are good at outreach and social ministry, but these days we have to be able to engage people in meaningful conversation about life and faith issues. We need to be able to tell why we do outreach. We need to learn again how to share our faith stories as we help those in need. And then invite them to join us. Move from welcoming to inviting.

#### B. The cultural of inviting

We can't just be welcoming. The congregation can be the most welcoming group on earth, but if no one invites, very few if any will come. We have to take the initiative to invite. Enter into conversations.

The single most effective evangelism is church participants inviting friends, neighbors, family members, colleagues, and classmates to church activities in a face to face conversation. Building relationships with people inside and outside the church building is the single most effective form of renewal and evangelism.

It is vital that we learn or re-learn the language of invitation.

Make sure that we have something meaningful to invite people to.

Assess our welcoming to make sure that it is working, along with follow-up.

We practice our elevator speech, responding to people who ask about our church with a practiced 30 second speech

#### C. Marketing - internet

In partnership with inviting is marketing. Congregations have to tell who they are and a brief description of what “kind” on church it is, or the assumption will be made that your church is closed minded and legalistic, like those in the media.

Webpages, social media, and other types of electronic communications are a must.

Logos and branding are helpful.

#### D. More than social service - we are great at food. It is our heritage.

As we help others, it becomes even more meaningful if we tell them the story of why we do social service. If we actually say, “we do this because when I was down, God and God’s people helped me” or “I have been blessed by God and because God blessed me, I must share it”.

#### E. Accompaniment

Walking alongside of people, listening to them, sharing how we can learn from them and empower them; not just tell them what we think they need. Doing more listening than talking.

### II. A congregational plan to develop, equip, and empower self-reliant leaders.

#### A. Role/Model of the pastor

The pastor has to be one that both models good leadership and empowers others to lead. A church where only the pastor leads will be limited in growth by the pastor’s time and energy. As the pastor grows in relationship with the people, the renewal of the congregation works best when the pastor give leadership away and supports the leadership growth of others. Be a church that is constantly raising up new leaders, both lay and rostered, for the work of the whole church.

#### B. Structure to foster shared leadership and innovation

Much of our church structure stifles growth rather than fosters it. In the changing world the church has to be able to make quick decisions, empower people to try new things, and give lay leaders to lead.

#### C. Involve and inspire youth and young adult leaders

Growing and renewing congregations share leadership with all ages, and raise up new leaders for the future. Mentoring, encouraging, and sharing leadership will grow young leaders. A congregation must be open to new ideas and new way of doing thing. Youth and young adults will not be inspired to keep things just the way they are.

Consider sending youth to Leadership Training such as Living Water Ministries’ Bridge Builder Camp.

D. There is a shortage of pastors across the Christian Church.

In what ways does the congregation talk to gifted people about being a pastor/rostered minister. Scholarships are available.

III. A plan for the congregation to reflect the diversity of the mission field and community.

A. Anti-Racism + cultural sensitivity

Many congregations were started by ethnic communities. Now those communities have changed. There may be new ethnic communities, or the economic make-up of the community may be different. A congregation will likely not grow and flourish if it is only made up of people from outside the community. Congregations in renewal invite the neighborhood in, listen to their needs, and welcome changes that reflect the neighborhood.

B. Get to know the community, the neighborhood and surrounding of the church location.

How has it changed over the years? How is the church visible besides the building? How does the church engage the people of the neighborhood? How does the congregation support the neighborhood? What changes has the congregation made to reflect the diversity of the neighborhood?

C. Openness to cultural differences - celebrate

A congregation that welcomes the neighborhood may need to initiate new activities and celebrations that reflect the values and heritage of the current neighborhood.

D. Use history of serving the community to support future mission

The congregation's history may reflect the cultural heritage of the community that established it. That history could be good evidence that one of the congregation's guiding principals is to always be open to the community, its language and culture, even when it changes.

IV. A congregational plan to develop the discipleship/faith practices of the ministry participants. Its no longer just Sunday School. There are a wide variety of options in sharing faith and teaching discipleship.

A. Bible study

Congregations that are growing and in renewal offer a variety of opportunities to engage people in the Word. These opportunities may vary in type and location. Often they can be an entry place

B. Children, youth, young adults

Opportunities are offered for children to hear, role play, and live out bible stories in fun, exciting, and engaging ways. Youth and young adults, in addition to having opportunities to discuss faith and life, also are given leadership roles in teaching younger children

C. Families at home

Parents are eager to find opportunities to teach the faith at home.

Resources are provided to assist parents in home activities of faith and life.

#### D. Spirituality

People are eager to cultivate spirituality in their lives. Renewing Congregations foster spiritual renewal as a vital part of growth. Including spiritual gifts inventories, healing services, and opportunities to engage in spiritual mentoring. Many are looking for opportunities to engage in deeper spirituality.

E. How can faith formation be made available to the community. Camp sponsorship.

### V. A plan for holistic, year-round stewardship.

#### A. Yearly response method

The first step is a plan for a yearly time for commitment. A challenge to giving in response to what God has done, and giving as a response to belonging

#### B. Year round education and story telling

Congregations renewing and growing in stewardship and mission support never overlook opportunities to share the stories of people whose lives they have touched. People need to know why to give, and how their gifts are working to help others. We have to tell them about ministry we are doing.

#### C. Preaching stewardship when it is text appropriate

Pastors should not shy away from talking about money and possessions when it appears in the lectionary. Jesus talks about money more than he talks about heaven and hell. Preaching Stewardship resources are available.

#### D. Thanking

Congregations must use sound fund raising practices to compete in the non-profit world. Pastors and church leaders must have a consistent way of acknowledging and thanking gifts.

#### E. Modeling behavior

Pastors and church leaders model stewardship behavior, sharing faithful stories about why they give, and how. Leaders must model the giving expected by members

#### F. Stewardship of gifts, talents, environment

Renewing congregations have regular methods of discerning spiritual gifts, and use that information to recruit leaders, matching gifts to positions

G. Working toward a goal of at least 10% giving to support mission beyond the local church; synod, synod ministries, churchwide efforts

H. Good financial practices that inspires confidence. Established endowment funds and policies for receiving memorials, bequests, and major gifts

### VI. Developing a worship and music ministry that is relevant to the community

#### A. Cultural awareness

Many congregations are stuck in worship and music styles that reflect the past and not the desires of those in the pews. The liturgy and order of Service does not have to be compromised in order to make music and worship relevant to the community

## B. Theologically Consistent music and worship

Music and liturgy that is theologically consistent with Lutheran tradition and theology. Avoid music that supports glory theology, prosperity theology, and “me and Jesus” personal savior theology. There are no verses in the scripture where Jesus says he comes as your “personal savior”. Jesus always comes for the community of believers and the outsiders. Traditional elements of Lutheran liturgy can be shared in many music styles.

## C. Differing worship services

Congregations may have to offer more than one service with differing styles to reach out to the diversity of the neighborhood.

## D. Music/Worship done well

No matter what the style, music and worship must be done well. Renewing congregations pay attention to the quality of music and planning for worship

E. What is the culture of your community? Ethnic, age range. Lutherans just think that if we can get people to like funeral dirges on the organ, then everything will be OK. There has to be a variety of music that touches the variety of tastes in the worship community and the neighborhood.

## VII. Plans for partnering with the community - last but not least!

### A. Listening - Renewal involves

- 1) Listening to God - bible study and reflection
- 2) Listening to the congregation - dedicated time to talk with one another about the mission and ministry of the church
- 3) Listening to the community - The pastor and church leadership look for every opportunity to engage in conversation with the community and its leaders. These conversations develop relationships, spark ideas of community engagement, and generate ideas for the congregation to meet community needs

### B. Frequent places where people gather

The pastor, church leaders, and church activities frequent places outside the church building where people and community members can be engaged

### C. Volunteer for public visibility

When serving the community, church members advertise their connection to the church. This can happen with shirts, signs, logos, etc

### D. Always be about inviting

With the congregation involved in the neighborhood, they are always inviting people. Inviting not just to church or worship, but inviting into a relationship with Jesus, and into a community of faith

### E. Visit with those who use the building

The church building serves as a community center and a gathering place and church members and the pastor engage those who use the building to build relationships and further invite. Community group greeters.

F. Cultivate mission to meet community needs. Keep in contact with community leaders. Ministering to those who fall through the cracks.

G. Accompaniment - again

Walking alongside of people, listening to them, sharing how we can learn from them and empower them; not just tell them what we think they need.

H. How can the congregation touch the lives of kids in the neighborhood instead of telling them to “get off the grass?”

#### Further resources

Assessment: [www.congregationalvitalitysurvey.com](http://www.congregationalvitalitysurvey.com)

Take the short or long survey

go to: resources and use workbook or lesson plans at bottom

Of the page

Renewal: [Living Lutheran: Renewing Your Church](#) Dave Daubert

[Autopsy of A Deceased Church](#) Thom Rainer

[Pathway to Renewal](#), Smith and Sellon

[A Field Guide for the Missional Church](#), Rouse and Gelder

[The Invitational Christian](#), Dave Daubert

Stewardship: [Rich Church Poor Church](#), Clif Christopher

The Tree Great Listenings:

Listening to God—Bible Study and Prayer

Listening to each other—congregation

Listening to the community—leaders and pivotal people

Go to the synod webpage - [www.mittensynod.org](http://www.mittensynod.org)

Drop down menu “mission”

Click on Director for Evangelical Mission’s blog

Consult with Pastor Sprang: Mission, Vision, Renewal, Strategic Planning

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