



Congregational **Vitality**

Encouraging Healthy Missional Momentum

The Vitality Team Ministry Description Field Guide

A Manual for Discernment and Empowerment

Produced by the Department of Church Growth & Evangelism

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Introduction

Dear Vitality Team,

Thank you for serving on the Vitality Team. God has brought each of you together for a beautiful purpose. This packet is designed to get your Vitality Team off to a good start and to keep it on track throughout the process.

The journey before you is both adventurous and treacherous. I know, I've been there. All of Heaven is cheering for you and all of Hell is working against you. Trust in what Jesus said, "I will build my church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

You are not alone on this journey. Covenant churches everywhere are walking this same congregational vitality pathway. We are in it together!

At the end of the pathway, your church will have its own strategic plan that will carry you forward into God's future. There are strategic planning elements embedded in the pathway, especially in the work of the Vitality Team. By the time you come to the formal strategic planning phase (after PULSE), the culture of your church will be healthier and even more receptive to what God wants to do. In the meantime, keep doing good ministry and continue to pray for the Holy Spirit to move among you. Remember, vitality is not the goal. It is merely a by-product of doing good ministry over a long period of time and the moving of the Holy Spirit.

Guard yourself (and others) against thinking of vitality in terms of a program. Vitality is not a program; it is a process, an organic pathway, a movement. In this case, the process is just as important (if not more important) than the product.

Something good happens to us as we simply walk the pathway. We develop a common language, an understanding of vitality, our hearts become more responsive to the Holy Spirit's leading, old wounds are healed, ministry is released, resources are aligned, people become Christians, and the list goes on and on. It is like what the disciples experienced while walking with Jesus (unbeknownst to them) on the road to Emmaus, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32). Something happened to the disciples as they walked that dirt road with Jesus. Vitality, then, is something that "gets" us!

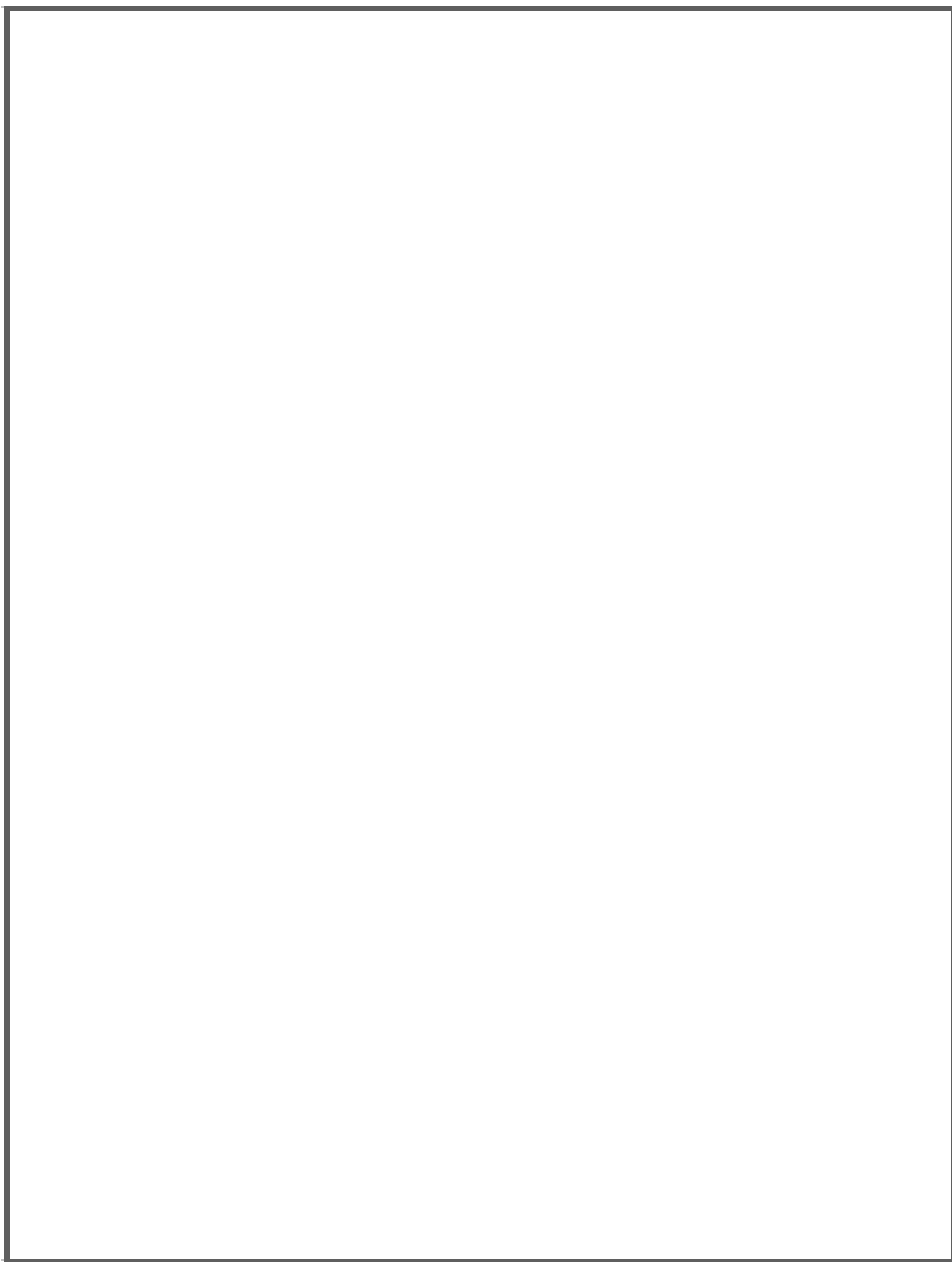
The fact that you are serving on the Vitality Team speaks volumes about your passion for Christ, your love for your church, your concern for those who are far from God and your desire to meet the compassion, mercy and justice needs of your community. May God himself greatly bless you and your community as you walk the congregational vitality pathway. As one of my old mentors used to tell me, "Keep walking and the Holy Spirit will show up in some amazing ways."

In Christ's love,
John Wenrich, Director of Congregational Vitality
Evangelical Covenant Church

Vitality Team – Ministry Description Packet

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The Vitality Team Ministry Description Overview

Introduction:

Follow up to Veritas is essential. Churches that create a Vitality Team do much better than those churches that simply let the Veritas conversation fade away. The Vitality Team helps to keep the conversation fresh and alive.

Veritas is more than a workshop. It is a language, a lifestyle, a way of being. Jesus said in John 8:32, "You shall know the truth (that's reality) and the truth will set you free (that's vitality)." There is no vitality without reality.

Here are a few suggestions that will help you create a Vitality Team:

Purpose:

To gain input, which will inform elected leadership about the attitudes and actions of people since the Veritas experience, assist in discerning God's spiritual strategic direction, and recommend possibilities for the future of the church.

People:

The Vitality Team is usually comprised of 7-9 people. One or two can come from elected leadership, and thus serve as a liaison. Sometimes it is appropriate to have a staff person as well. Beyond that, the rest should be positive influencers who have the trust and respect of the congregation. At least a couple of people should have been to Veritas. The Team should become familiarized with the Veritas language. (Please use the Veritas DVD to bring Team members up to speed on the language). The Pastor may serve on the Vitality Team. If the Pastor is on the Vitality Team, it is best that the Pastor not chair.

Process:

The Pastor arranges a meeting with the emerging Vitality Team. The Team organizes, develops a purpose and then subdivides and engages in various activities.

The functions of the Vitality Team are as follows:

- Debriefing the Veritas experience.
- Finding your Biblical story.
- Developing a process for creating a behavioral covenant.
- Gathering internal assessment data.
- Gathering external assessment data which assesses opportunities and feeds into the development of future possibilities.
- Establishing a process of pervasive prayer.
- Communicating between the Vitality Team, elected leadership and congregation
- Learning from our history about what informs our future.

Another note about communication:

The Team reports regularly to the elected leadership and staff. The Vitality Team is a recommending and referring body, not a decision making body. They also can assist the elected leadership in creating

and implementing a communication strategy, which is very necessary during a time of uncertainty. Frequent, transparent communication is essential. Say the same thing often in many different ways.

The benefits of a Vitality Team are many:

- Some load is removed from elected leadership.
- “Space” is created, which facilitates healing and restores a sense of order.
- Movement indicates that there is a future and “we are moving ahead.”
- It is an added resource in “taking the pulse” of the congregation.
- The Team helps the church walk the Congregational Vitality Pathway and stay on course.
- Strategic planning elements are embedded into the culture early on.

Frequency and Duration:

Most Vitality Teams meet once a month for two hours. In between the monthly meetings, the sub group leaders are gathering their own teams and working on projects. Plan to meet for as long as the church is walking through the Congregational Vitality Pathway (about 14 months). At the end of the Pathway, the church will have their own strategic plan that will guide them in their forward movement.

Vitality Facilitator:

You may also invite a Vitality Facilitator to enhance your process. The Vitality Facilitator will meet with your Vitality Team preferably at the first meeting and then at a subsequent meeting. The first two visits are paid for by the conference and the denomination. If the church wants to continue working with the Vitality Facilitator, a separate agreement is used between the church and the Facilitator.

To inquire about a Vitality Facilitator for your Vitality Team, please contact your conference office or Daniel Booker, Coordinator for Congregational Vitality (daniel.booker@covchurch.org).

Vitality Team – Ministry Description Debriefing the Veritas Experience

Purpose:

To review the Veritas experience at the first meeting of the Vitality Team.

Key verses:

John 8:32, Romans 12:3

Bible Study

Before your Vitality Team meets for the first time, invest some personal study into Revelation 2-3. The four types of churches (healthy missional, stable, critical moment and at-risk) are all based on the seven churches of Revelation. Which of the seven churches is most like your church? What might Jesus say to your church?

Key Question:

Do we agree with the initial assessment we gave ourselves during Veritas?

Rationale:

The Vitality Team (VT) keeps the conversation about vitality fresh and alive. Although the VT is only a recommending body, the work done by this team is crucial in creating an environment that is conducive to health and growth. Vitality Team leaders do not do all the work themselves; they recruit others to join in the process.

Keep in mind that the Vitality Team is like a microcosm of the entire church. You may need to deal with some difficult issues on this level in order to move past pseudo community and on to real community. Use this opportunity to create a pocket of healthy missional excellence within your church. Use it to establish healthier patterns of relating to each other in life and ministry. Start out in prayer and focus your time on debriefing the Veritas experience. Hopefully your group is meeting with a Vitality Facilitator provided by the conference and denomination.

Ministry Description:

- Open and close each meeting with prayer. Start on time, stay on time, stop on time.
- As a Vitality Team, debrief the Veritas experience by having a civil, compassionate and Christ-honoring conversation regarding the following questions:
 - Where were the 'X's'? What was the trajectory?
 - Do you agree? Why/why not?
 - What is the church's level of VIM?
 - How have you sensed God with you through the process to this point?
- Review the eight functions of the Vitality Team.
- Review the Congregational Vitality Pathway. Eventually you will want to work together to recommend a strategic timeline to walk the Congregational Vitality Pathway. Do not rush the process. Go slow to go fast.

- Create seven sub teams according to the functions of the Vitality Team. (You have just done the eighth function by debriefing the Veritas experience as a Team)
- Review the sub group ministry descriptions.
- Choose a leader for each sub group from among the Vitality Team.
- Discuss who to recruit for each sub team. This eliminates the same person being asked five times for different sub teams.
- Sub group leaders then recruit their own teams (2-7 people depending on the ministry description)
- Each sub group meets once before the next official Vitality Team meeting to pray and set direction for the group. Bring the names of the people on your sub team and give an initial report of your first meeting.
- Make sure that each sub group leader has a well thought out agenda for each of their meetings. Distribute the ministry description to each member of the sub group.

Vitality Team – Ministry Description Prayer

Purpose:

To bathe the vitality process in prayer.

Key verses:

Psalm 127:1, Ezekiel 37:1-14, Ephesians 6:10-20

Bible Study

Study examples of the early church in prayer/worship at strategic moments in its life. What do you learn about prayer in these passages that applies to vitality?

- Acts 2:42-47
- Acts 4:23-31
- Acts 13:1-3

Key Question:

Are we intentionally committing this process to prayer?

Rationale:

There is a mysterious connection between human activity and Holy Spirit inspired fruitfulness. Vitality is not the goal; it is merely a byproduct of doing good ministry over a long period of time and the moving of the Holy Spirit. Richard Foster writes, “We cannot do the work of the Spirit in the power of the flesh.” Without the movement and blessing of God, all we are doing is running in place but not really getting anywhere.

So we cry out for God’s anointing. We ask God for wisdom and guidance in discerning how He is at work in and through His church. We dedicate ourselves and align our resources with God and His mission. We also recognize that there are spiritual forces of evil working against congregational vitality. In the powerful name of Jesus, we come against these forces as we stand in the full armor of God. Our victory is always and only in Christ. At its core, congregational vitality is about a spiritual awakening, the refiner’s fire, the living water and the wind of the Spirit.

Ministry Description:

- Recruit a team of 4 to 7 people to serve on the prayer team. Look for the “prayer warriors” in your congregation.
- Develop a “prayer plan” to accompany the work of the Vitality Team. Individual prayer, group prayer, concerts of prayer, a prayer room, leadership prayer, days of prayer, etc.
- How will this plan be implemented? Who needs to know? Who needs to be involved?
- Ensure that communication is flowing back and forth between the prayer team and the rest of the Vitality Team. This is a dynamic process of sharing prayer requests, answers to prayer and discernment items.
- Present the plan to the next meeting of the Vitality Team.
- Commit to serve as a praying force for the Vitality Team and the congregation throughout this process.

Vitality Team – Ministry Description Behavioral Covenant

Purpose:

To create and implement a process for developing a behavioral covenant.

Key verses:

John 15:12-13, Ephesians 4:14-16

Bible Study:

Study Colossians 3:12-17 and I Thessalonians 5:12-26

- What behaviors emerge from these passages?
- Which of these apply most to our setting?

Key Question:

Do we have a way to walk hand in hand when we cannot see eye to eye?

Rationale:

The behavioral covenant is the conversation before the conversation. It communicates a shared understanding about how to have conversations that are civil, compassionate and Christ-honoring. Gil Rendle describes behavioral covenants as “holy manners for a faith community.” The journey of vitality is both adventurous and treacherous. It is during the treacherous parts of the journey that the behavioral covenant really comes into play. It is important to realize that the behavioral covenant is not something to live up to, but something to live in to. It is a lifestyle, not a law. It is an invitation to relate to others in a way that pleases God and edifies and strengthens the church. The way we relate to each other in Christian love is also a powerful witness for those who are far from God.

Ministry Description:

- Review the Veritas DVD on behavioral covenants.
- Review material in Gil Rendle’s book “Behavioral Covenants in Congregations” (Alban Institute).
- The process of creating a behavioral covenant is actually more important the product. What do you notice about yourselves and your church as you work on this process? Record these observations and present them to the elected leadership of your church. What does this say about the underlying culture of your church...about how things are done around here and our automatic responses?
- Ensure that many people in the congregation have an opportunity to give input. People are down on what they are not up on. A vision imposed is a vision opposed.
- What resistance do you anticipate to the concept of behavioral covenants?
- Obtain sample behavioral covenants from other ECC churches by visiting the Congregational Vitality website (www.covchurch.org/vitality)

- Using input from your own congregation and samples from other churches, write the first draft of a behavioral covenant as team. You may want to include an over arching scripture and/or a scripture for each point. Keep it simple and to one page. Do not go over seven or eight statements. Less is more. While you are writing the first draft, guard against perfection in word-smithing.
- Bring the first draft to the second meeting of the Vitality Team for presentation and discussion.
- Revise the behavioral covenant based on the whole team discussion.
- Present the behavioral covenant to the elected leadership and make revisions.
- Work with the communications team regarding presentation, form and unveiling.
- Present the behavioral covenant to the congregation.
- The pastor may want to do an eight week series on the behavioral covenant.
- Embed the behavioral covenant into the normal and natural life of the church.
 - Put the behavioral covenant on the wall in the office.
 - Read it before most congregational business meetings, leadership team meetings, staff meetings, etc.
 - Include it in the new member's packet and questions for membership.
 - Ask small groups to read it from time to time.
 - Do a bulletin insert each quarter.
 - What other ways can you think of?
 - Live it!
- Tweak the behavioral covenant every six months to a year. This is a dynamic, ongoing process!
- Some churches use the term "relational" covenant. Determine the word usage that works best in your setting.
- Send a copy of your behavioral covenant to Daniel Booker, Coordinator for Congregational Vitality (daniel.booker@covchurch.org). Share the wealth of your experience so that other ECC churches can benefit!

Vitality Team – Ministry Description

Finding Our Biblical Story

Purpose:

To discern how God is at work in our congregation by tapping into a Biblical story and using it as a frame of reference.

Key verse:

Jeremiah 33:3

Bible Study:

Study Romans 15:1-6. What are some biblical stories that God has used in your own life to provide endurance and encouragement? Why is story so powerful in shaping our attitudes and actions? What are the benefits for our congregation in connecting to a Biblical story?

Key Question:

What Biblical story best describes our current reality and the challenges before us?

Rationale:

The Biblical story helps us to see ourselves in light of the Scriptures. It provides a means of interpreting how the Spirit is moving in this current season of life and ministry together. The story helps us to see ourselves in light of God's larger plan throughout history. Through the story, God gives us endurance, encouragement and understanding.

Ministry Description:

- Recommend a process (see below) to the elected leadership. It is **not** the responsibility of the Vitality Team to discern the Biblical story. Others are invited into the process.
- Implement the process.
- Report back to the Vitality Team and the elected leadership after the story is discerned.
- Get the word out to the rest of the congregation.

Creating the experience:

- Select a two to three hour block of time.
- Invite 20 people to participate.
 - Use the following criteria for invitations:
 - Spiritually mature and discerning
 - Workable knowledge of Scripture
 - Good understanding of the church's history
 - Team player
 - Makes sure there are a few members of the Vitality Team and elected leadership present.
 - Key influencers
- Communicate the agenda and proceed.

Sample Agenda

- Welcome/introductions/refreshments
- Cast the vision for finding our Biblical story.
 - Refer to the scriptures above.
 - Share an example from your own life.
 - Ask others to reflect on their own experience when a Biblical story really influenced their attitudes and actions.
- Give an example for the church.
 - One church discerned that the story of Mary and Martha was appropriate for them. The church was embroiled in conflict. Half the church was full of “Mary’s” and the other half was full of “Martha’s.” People began to see themselves and their situation in light of this story. God used the power of the living word to bring understanding, forgiveness and healing.
- Pray for wisdom and guidance.
- Give directions:
 - Take 45 minutes to be alone with God and to search the scriptures.
 - What Biblical story best represents where we are as a church right now and how the Spirit is moving among us? Or, What Biblical story best represents our current reality and the challenges before us? Write this framing question (or a similar one) on a flip chart.
- Dismiss the group for 45 minutes.
- Take a 10 or 15 minute break, then return to the large group.
- Each person then has five minutes to share which story they sense God has led them to.
 - Explain why this is a significant story for the church right now.
 - Assign a time keeper so the meeting does not stall.
- Do not allow others to comment on each story.
 - Move through the process, person by person. You may want to take a short break half way in between.
- Record responses on the flip chart.
- After each person has shared, pray again...asking God to lead the group to the one story that seems good to everyone.
- Come to a consensus about the one story.
 - Do not vote. Simply discern as a group where God is leading.
- Pray again, thanking God for leading the group in this discernment process.

- At the close of the meeting, ask people to keep the story confidential until it can be shared with the Vitality Team and elected leadership.
- Share the story with the Vitality Team and elected leadership for confirmation.
- Creatively communicate the story to the congregation at large. Work with the Communications Team on how to do this effectively.
- Keep in mind that this story is relevant to the church's current season of life and ministry. In a year or two, repeat the process to stay nimble and responsive to the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 43:18-19).

Vitality Team – Ministry Description Communication

Purpose:

To keep everyone up to date with the work of the Vitality Team.

Key verses:

Proverbs 12:28, 16:21-24, 22:11, 25:11

Bible Study:

Study Acts 15:22-35. How did the early church communicate a difficult decision? What were the dangers inherent in the decision? In the communication? What do we learn from this passage about effective communication of our Vitality process within our church family?

Key Question:

Are we saying the same thing often in many different ways?

Rationale:

A disturbing, and potentially debilitating, area of church life is communication. A proper understanding of the word is to seek knowing things in common, or achieving equivalency of meaning. Failure to move toward this is a key impediment to effective ministry. Don't assume everyone knows what you know. Be clear. Be concise. Be compelling.

Ministry Description:

- Recruit a team of 2 to 3 people to serve on the communication team. Find people who are well connected and positive about the church. Include one person who is skilled in graphic arts, writing, etc.
- Determine a communication plan to keep the congregation informed of the Vitality Team's progress.
- As you consider this plan, ask questions like:
 - How does communication work best at our church? Give examples. What do we learn from those successes?
 - Where has communication failed and broken down recently at our church? Give examples. What do we learn from those experiences?
 - Which groups within our church need good communication on what we are doing?
 - How can we set a good example of effective communication patterns?
- Consider the following means of communication:
 - Set up a Vitality Booth in the narthex area
 - Schedule Town Meetings to inform the congregation
 - Emails
 - Face to face updates to church's leadership and staff
 - Newsletter articles
 - Announcement during the worship service
 - Twitter

- Signs
 - Interviews
 - Website
 - Send an update report to the small groups once a month
 - Bookmarks
 - Bulletin insert
 - Power Point, especially before and after service
 - Tables/displays
- Access your current communication protocols and maybe even create new ones.
 - At the end of each Vitality Team meeting, take a few minutes to agree on the updates that will be communicated to the congregation. Make sure everyone from the Vitality Team is on point with the same message.
 - Be positive and optimistic when sharing updates either upfront or “one on one.” It is not just what you say, but how you say it.
 - Bring a report of your communication plan to the next Vitality Team Meeting. Make mid course corrections. What are the questions people are asking? People really do want to know how the Vitality Team is progressing. What are we learning about effective communication within our church?
 - At the end of the process, report to the elected leadership with discoveries about how communication works at the church. What recommendations can you give to improve communications in your church?

Additional Questions to consider:

- Are we current in all of our communications?
- Do we communicate on multiple levels?
- Are we saying the same thing often and in many different ways?
- Do we understand the need for “transparency” in communication (telling as much as we can about everything without violating any personal confidences)?
- Are we using stories, color and visuals?
- Are people encouraged to share their stories and given guidance on how to present them?
- Do all ministry leaders and pastoral staff have a common understanding and agreement on these matters?
- What feedback mechanisms do we have, or can put into place, to ensure the quality of our communication processes?

Additional processes to employ:

- Be sure that your website is current, visual and easy to navigate.
- Make all printed material consistent in style; i.e. mission, vision, values, goals, fonts, logos, etc. are the same across all publications and storytelling. This creates alignment.
- Keep announcements sharp and ministry related.
- Have competent ministry “story tellers” relate their involvement, motivation and impact.
- Use ministry corners, hallways or tables, with people and materials, to highlight current activities.

Vitality Team – Ministry Description History

Purpose:

To unlock the radical life giving stories from the archives of our church that will encourage people to boldly move forward into God's future.

Key verses:

Deuteronomy 32:7, Psalms 77:11-20, 105:5, 143:5. What is the positive function of memory in the process of vitality? What is it that we need to guard against? (Ecclesiastes 7:10)

Bible Study:

Study Acts 15. How did the religious background of those in the Jerusalem church impact its current situation?

- What did they leave in their past?
- What did they take from that past?
- How did that help bring revitalization to their vision for God's work?

Key Question:

What from our history will inform, inspire and direct our revitalization efforts?

Rationale:

Someone has said that "those who neglect the past are doomed to repeat it." Howard Hendricks recently wrote, "...if your memories are bigger than your dreams, you have already begun to die." It is important to keep these thoughts in balance. We should know what has happened so we don't make similar mistakes, but so we can also capture the attitudes and actions that provided energy and vision at significant times. Concurrently, we can't be so nostalgic that we can't move ahead. We can achieve balance by using our understanding of the past to propel us into the future.

Ministry Description:

- Recruit a team of 2 - 3 people to serve on the history team. Look for people who have a long history with the church or those who generally like history.
- Reflect on the following questions
 - When and how did we begin?
 - How has our community and our world changed since then?
 - What do we see on the horizon?
 - What individuals, other churches and/or the conference birthed the vision?
 - What world/societal events may have been influential in our beginning?
 - What were some significant church and societal events along our journey?
 - What principles from our history can serve as building blocks for the future?
- Create a timeline of events for the different decades of your church. See the following example (extend the line in either direction as necessary). You may want to draw pictures or write captions under each decade depicting what was happening.

1960_____1970_____1980_____1990_____2000_____

- Study the past of your church by:
 - Reviewing key documents or news clippings
 - Identifying key artifacts
 - Conducting oral interviews with those who have been here for a long while
 - Conducting oral interviews with those who have left but were influential in the early years
 - Discovering times the church made courageous and sacrificial decisions
 - Contacting Phil Anderson at North Park Seminary for any interesting tidbits of historical importance in light of the larger Covenant.

- What must be ‘taken’ from our church’s past to inform the work of revitalization? How will this be done?

- What must be ‘left’ in the past due to its potential to distract us from God’s future? How will this be done?

- Develop a design (timeline, montage, etc) that highlights and utilizes the inspiring parts of our past in our planning for vitality.

- Present findings to a future meeting of the Vitality Team.

- Create an archives ministry in your church. Contact the ECC Resource Center for a brochure on how to start an archives ministry. You may want to appoint a historian who will continue to do research. Perhaps you could give the historian a mailbox slot in the church office. Make it a ministry! Consider setting up a room dedicated to archives. First Covenant Church in Minneapolis, MN has an excellent archives room.

- Remember that the key to an effective history team is not just “discovery,” but how those good stories become part of our collective memory and current language of vitality. Work with the communication team in getting the word out regarding these stories.

Vitality Team – Ministry Description Internal Assessment

Purpose:

To get a “read” on the current reality of the congregation.

Key verses:

Proverbs 27:3-4, John 8:32, Romans 12:3-8, Revelation 2-3

Bible Study

Study Acts 17:10-15. What is the internal assessment that Dr. Luke makes about the Berean church? In what ways is the Berean church a healthy missional church?

Key Question:

Who do we already have on board to walk with us into God’s future?

Rationale:

Demographics focus, in general, on vital statistical information which can help an organization accurately assess the current reality. The following information will provide some ideas to assist you in determining just what you have in reliable internal resources. This is an important building block for moving into the future.

It is often easier for churches to tell the truth about Jesus than it is to tell the truth about themselves. Holding up the mirror to our church is never easy, but it is necessary if we are to travel this pathway of vitality, for there is no vitality without reality. It is normal and natural for churches to have strengths and weaknesses. As Brennan Manning is fond of saying, “God’s grace meets us as we are, not as we should be.”

Keep in mind that as the church continues to walk the Congregational Vitality Pathway, PULSE will provide a much deeper internal assessment of the congregation. Your job is not to create and distribute your own survey, but to simply get a “read” on the current reality of your congregation. You may not get to everyone, but just to enough people to form an accurate picture of your congregation and trends.

As you work on your internal assessment, it is important to realize that this kind of data gathering is a crucial part of the strategic planning process. You can’t change what you can’t measure. This initial “read,” in addition to the deeper diagnostic results from PULSE, will contribute to the formal strategic planning process later on. For now, this initial data will help get you directed in the right way and to identify other key people who have passion, vision and energy for the revitalization process.

Ministry Description:

- Recruit a team of 3 to 4 people to serve on the internal assessment team. Look for people who are spiritually mature and well connected within the congregation.

- Create a plan to do an initial read on the congregation.

- Determine what kind of information you are looking for. For example:
 - Average age of the congregation
 - Average Sunday attendance and membership patterns for the last 5 years
 - Giving patterns for the last 5 years.
 - Regular attendees who are not members
 - People who indicate their intent to be part of the future
 - Membership roster
 - Percentage of regular attendees to members
 - Giving per member (financial stewardship patterns)
 - Current financial position
 - Visitor retention rate (Number of visitors minus back door loss plus people who stick)
 - Where did people self identify the church during Veritas? (healthy missional, stable, critical moment or at-risk)
 - What is the trajectory of the “X”?
 - What is the level of VIM? (vision, intention and means)
 - What are two or three ministries our church does really well?
 - What is the gift mix and passion of the pastor? Of the congregation?
 - How does our church rate according to the ten healthy missional markers?
 - Percentage of people involved in small groups or some other form of discipleship?
 - Percentage of people involved in serving within the church?
 - Percentage of people, from the church, serving in the community/world?

- Determine how you will gather this information. For example:
 - One on one conversations with key people
 - Home group meetings, Focus group interviews, and/or Town Hall meetings
 - Appreciative Inquiry sessions:
 - ¶ What is it about our church that drew you here?
 - ¶ What are things that our people routinely identify as our strengths?
 - ¶ What are the things that our church does really well?
 - Interviews with five new families to our church:
 - ¶ What drew you?
 - ¶ What caused you to stay?
 - Exit interviews with five families who have left our church over the past year:
 - ¶ What went into your decision to leave?
 - ¶ What was true about our church when you first came that was not true when you left?
 - ¶ What do you think we need to do to become more vital in our spirituality and outreach?

- **Other questions to consider during one on one interviews or focus groups:**
 - In reflecting on your time here, when were you most engaged? What did you do?
 - Who else was involved?
 - What did you hear, feel and experience? What were some results?
 - What are the most important contributions that the church has made to your life? What happened?
 - Who made a difference?
 - What had the impact on you?

- What are the most significant ways you contribute to the life of the church?-gifts, talents, attitudes, areas of service? Examples?
 - When have you experienced the most significant personal spiritual growth through the ministry of this church?
 - Have you seen a season of corporate spiritual growth within the church? Describe.
 - Who was helpful as a mentor? Coach? Encourager? What were their characteristics? What did they do?
 - Is there something that makes our church unique?
 - When are we at our best?
 - What is the one thing we have to make sure we continue to do?
 - As you envision the future, what are 3 hopes you have for this church?
 - If these become realities, what would our church be like in 3 years?
 - What is your view of whole-life stewardship?
- Compose a 3-5 page report on your internal assessment research. Present it to the Vitality Team. Remember, this report is preliminary! Your church will later take PULSE, a more thorough and in-depth internal assessment.

Vitality Team – Ministry Description External Assessment

Purpose:

To get a solid handle on the community around us.

Key verses:

1 Chronicles 12:32, Luke 10:29-37, John 4:35-36

Bible Study:

Study Acts 17:16-34. How did Paul assess this setting of Athens? What did he learn about it that instructed his approach to ministry? What was true of this group of people? What bearing did that assessment have on Paul's ministry to them? What is here to guide us in our own external assessment?

Key Question:

Do we know our neighbor and how to communicate the love of Christ in a way that makes sense to them?

Rationale:

God has strategically placed your church in a particular setting. There is a mission field all around you. There are people in your community that God wants to reach through the ministry of your church. It's been asked before, "If your church suddenly disappeared, would anyone in the community even notice? Would anyone care?" Demographic information can lead to divine connection as the Holy Spirit leads and guides. What does it mean to be the hands and feet of Jesus in your community? Where can your church really make a tangible difference for Christ in your community and connect people to the Gospel in word and deed? We often make assumptions about who is in our community, but these assumptions may not be accurate. You may be surprised by what God reveals through this "needs assessment" of your community.

Ministry Description:

- Recruit a team of 3 to 4 people to serve on the external assessment team. Look for people who are spiritually mature and culturally connected to the surrounding community. Make sure to include someone who is analytical.

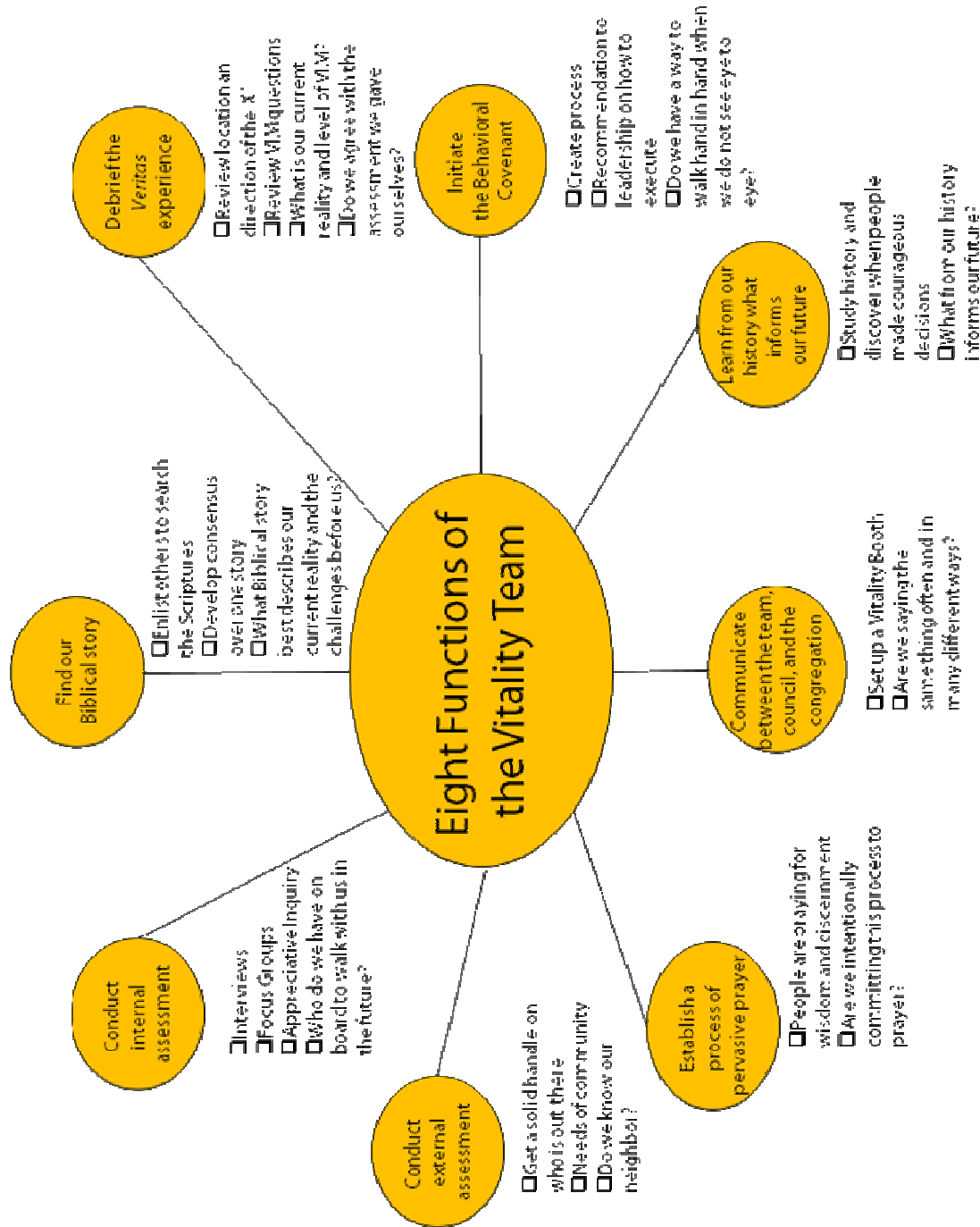
- Design your own research component to get some firsthand information on the ministry target area of your church: Interviews, focus groups, surveys, local government demographical studies, etc.

- Go to community agencies: police and fire departments; emergency medical responders-if different from the fire department; hospital emergency rooms, public school vice principals, social service agencies. The following questions are pertinent to the various public and social service agencies:
 - What recurring patterns of behavior, or calls that you are receiving, do you see?
 - What could a local church do to be helpful in responding to some of these needs?

- Connect with other local churches/pastors. Use the following questions:
 - What are some areas of ministry in the community to which you are responding?

- What are you doing?
 - Would you welcome some collaboration?
 - Is there something you can't do that another church could consider?
- We strongly recommend using resources from MissionInsite (www.missioninsite.com) and Compassion by Design (www.compassionbydesign.org). These tools will sort the data for you and help to make missional sense of the community. Much of the work is already done for you. However, nothing is as good as person to person interviews with people in your own community.
 - Ask questions like,
 - What are the needs of our community?
 - Who are our neighbors?
 - What are the 'touch points' for the gospel in our setting? (consider Acts 17)
 - What is outside our church?
 - How has the neighborhood changed?
 - Are we aware of what we could do to connect, or reconnect, with the changing needs that are out there?
 - Who is out there?
 - With whom do we have contact?
 - Do people know we are here?
 - What are the recurring issues (needs) that people are experiencing?
 - Can our internal strengths build a bridge to some of the people and their needs?
 - Compose an external assessment report that speaks to the issues of the church's desire to be revitalized.
 - Compare the findings from the internal assessment team with the findings of the external assessment team. How does the demographic makeup of your church compare to the demographic make up of the community around you? What observations can you make from this comparison? What opportunities do you see?
 - Work with the internal assessment team to suggest changes that would bring alignment between the gift mix and passion of the pastor, the gift mix and passion of the congregation and the felt needs of the community. (See Vision Intersection Profile in Veritas)
 - Bring a report of your progress to the next Vitality Team meeting.

Eight Functions of the Vitality Team



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Congregational Vitality Ministry Resources

<p>website & re:vive blog</p>	<p>Vitality is nothing less than a spiritual awakening in Christ. It is not about sustaining and maintaining; it's about thriving, growing and depending on God to lead us deeper in Christ and further in mission. Our hope is that every Covenant congregation becomes a healthy missional church. By healthy we mean pursuing Christ. By missional we mean pursuing Christ's priorities in the world.</p> <p>For Information and various downloadable resources pertaining to Congregational Vitality visit www.covchurch.org/vitality . Also check out the re:vive blog (blogs.covchurch.org/revive) for more stories and insights on congregational vitality.</p>
<p>Veritas</p>	<p>Veritas: Telling the Truth about Congregational Vitality is a workshop designed for pastors, chairpersons and other key leaders in the church. We will discover together the marks of a healthy missional church and the four types of established churches in the Covenant. We will then look at "next steps." The purpose of the workshop is to remind people that God is in the resurrection business and that He is pulling for you and your church to overcome. It is a great way to get the conversation going and/or to take it to the next level. Whatever your current state of health, take heart! Jesus loves your church. His desire is that your church be fully awake and alive in the Spirit.</p>
<p>EPIC</p>	<p>Veritas provided the language. EPIC: Empowering People, Inspiring Change provides the how-to. As a follow-up workshop, EPIC talks about the spirituality, chemistry and strategy of leading healthy missional change, and equips leaders with the necessary tools. EPIC also explores the inner life of the leader and how to be a non-anxious presence while leading through the turbulent waters of change. EPIC does not tell churches what to change, but how to change... and how to change in a way that is civil, compassionate, and Christ-honoring.</p>
<p>CO-OP</p>	<p>The purpose of CO-OP: Coaching of Pastors is to assist Covenant pastors in developing the skills necessary to lead their church to its full kingdom potential through pastor coaching. CO-OP helps the pastor lead strategically and organizationally. The pastor receives guidance on how to turn vision into reality. CO-OP does not compete with the core training of pastoral arts in preaching, teaching, and caring. Rather it focuses on leadership areas that pastors often seek for supplemental training.</p>
<p>PULSE</p>	<p>PULSE is a vitality assessment survey centered on the "10 Healthy Missional Markers" for Covenant Churches. PULSE provides a deeper diagnostic using Veritas language. It also measures the vision, intention, and means of the local church. Analysis of attendance and financial records of the church are also presented. The survey can be taken by every attender of the church and is available online or in paper form.</p>
<p>Navigate</p>	<p>The purpose of Navigate is to help established churches find their way to becoming healthy and missional in a post modern, post Christian world. This is accomplished by the Holy Spirit empowering congregations as they walk the Congregational Vitality Pathway. Navigate accelerates the process by catalyzing resources on the denominational, conference and local levels. Navigate is a "one-two-three" strategy consisting of one national gathering, two conference cluster gatherings and three local church follow up visits. Navigate is by invitation of the Conference and ECC.</p>
<p>Vitality Facilitator Network</p>	<p>The Vitality Facilitator Network is a consortium of regionally based trained facilitators. Congregations desiring to move beyond the Veritas workshop and into the long-term work of Congregational Vitality may partner with a facilitator as a follow-up to the Veritas workshop. The Vitality Facilitator works directly with the vitality team. For more information on how to connect with a Vitality Facilitator, contact your conference staff person.</p>
<p>Living Legacy Coaching</p>	<p>While our prayer for every church is to become a healthy missional church, we recognize that there comes a time when the members of a church discern that it may be God's will to conclude the ministry. Such a decision is full of pain and a deep sense of loss. However, it can also be celebrative and redemptive, leaving a wonderful legacy. The Living Legacy ministry offers real time legacy and legal coaching to pastors and congregations as they proceed through the last stages of ministry life.</p>

Congregational Vitality Pathway

