

7 Healthy P's of a Vital Congregation

"A Vital Congregation is a "Praying Congregation"

PRAYER

"Pray without ceasing." (1Thessalonians 5:17)

Do you keep a running conversation with God all day long? Prayer is necessary for the existence, continuance and well-being of a church. Praying and praising are indispensable and essential practices in worshiping and serving a Mighty God whose vitality is unlimited. How are children and youth involved in worshiping and praying in your church?

1. Prayer is a priority in a vital congregation church because it is at the heart of worship. Prayer, a gift from God, deepens our relationship with the Father, exercises our faith in Jesus Christ and sets a path for righteous living by the power of the Holy Spirit. In our worship service, prayer can extend beyond just sitting for the invocation, the prayer of illumination and prayer for the people. In the Presbyterian Church, prayer may involve kneeling, bowing, standing and lifting hands. Each one of these actions is a means to glorify God. In a vital congregation, each action is accepted without judgement.
2. Prayer is a deep inner call of the pastor and he/she places it as an immediate response and not an afterthought or a delayed time when needed. As followers of Jesus, it is indisputable that prayer is an essential ingredient to the Christian life. For people in the church who are entrusted to lead others, it is even more critical for prayer to be a part of their spiritual DNA. Without God's prayer and God's constant guidance, how can we be confident that we are leading, teaching and heading in the right direction in ministering to others? In a world where prayer is desperately needed, prayer teams are being organized in churches and the pastor is not the sole prayer warrior. Teams are praying various types of prayers. According to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), there are many types of prayer:
 - Prayer of adoration
 - Prayer of Thanksgiving
 - Prayer of Confession
 - Prayer of Supplication
 - Prayer of Intercession and
 - Prayer of Prayer of Dedication
3. Prayer is a process and not an event. God works through the prayer process to extend our vision; to give us a stronger appetite to be fed the Word, to increase our faith and to give us what is needed to build the Kingdom of God. Prayer is a necessary communication on a regular basis with God, the Father; God, the son; and God, the Holy Spirit. If there is no prayer request for anything, there should be a prayer of thanksgiving. If there is no need for prayer for delivery of sickness or pain, there should be a prayer of praise. If there is no need for prayer for peace, there should be a prayer of adoration and thanksgiving. There is always a need for prayer!

4. Prayer, as an organized and structured ministry, is one of the most important and impactful ministries of a congregation seeking vitality. Can you guess why? It is because Jesus is the Head of the Church (Ephesians 1:22); (Colossians 1:18). In Isaiah 56:7, we read these words, "My House shall be called a House of Prayer." Therefore, if prayer is to be an organized structured ministry, it does not mean that only the minister should pray. Rather, it means people of the congregation have to be equipped, empowered and encouraged to pray continually as a spiritual lifestyle and not just as a once-in-a-while prayer time when something happens. Pastoral leadership is crucial in the commitment and support of a prayer ministry, not leading it always, but recognizing and acknowledging its privilege and power.
5. Prayer is necessary because the battles that churches fight are spiritual, and it is through prayer that solutions are sought through the spiritual realm. When you pray, you enter into a heavenly realm where you get a different perspective—a divine perspective. Prayer offers access to your needed spiritual weapons and a notice of authority to pray with perseverance. This point is expressed in Ephesians 6:18 for all saints: We are to pray "at all times" and with all perseverance and petitions for all the saints. We should have a running conversation with God all day. That's praying without ceasing.
6. Praying to become a vital congregation church needs an essential key called UNITY. Members of the congregation must want to have Jesus as the Head of the Church and be willing to accept that He said His House shall be called a 'House of Prayer.' Why? It is because the Church is a place of Satan's attack and he does not want God's Kingdom to outgrow his kingdom. Thus, he will do anything, with anyone and at any time to undermine the unity and solidarity of the saints. This action is very evident when churches begin to embrace change and opportunities for growth.
7. Prayer is both majestic and mysterious, majestic because it's exalted; mysterious because it's difficult to understand fully. Faith in God; His timing, His will and His way will lead to a strong and vital congregation. Strong faith is needed in becoming and remaining a vital congregation because God will be constantly doing a new thing as proclaimed in Isaiah 43:19, "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" Staying engaged in a healthy 'P' called prayer will open your eyes, ears and heart to perceive new things that lead to vitality in the church. Reflective Questions: How are the children and youth a part of the new thing that is springing forth in your church? How does the church measure children's understanding of prayer and how to pray?

PRAISE

"Praise God in the sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heaven!" (Psalm 150:1)

Praise is an important element of worshiping the God who created us, other creatures and all surrounding creations. Perhaps this is why Psalm 150:6 tells its readers, "Let everything that has breath, praise the Lord." The operative words in the Scripture are ***everything that has breath praise the Lord (NIV)***. Do we use our breath on a daily basis to praise the Lord? This verse is also inclusive of children. How do we teach our children and youth about the importance of praising God?

Sunday school is a great way to educate our children and youth about praise. Educating children and youth also includes helping them to understand the meaning of the words we sing in our songs so they will come to know God more fully and draw closer to HIM. Children are attuned to the lyrics in rap music and other secular music that don't promote God's love. Vital congregations seek to promote music and dance as teaching methods to help children and youth learn about God's love for them (us) and our need to praise him.

Vital Congregations make a concerted effort to educate children with reading materials that promote God's work in our lives, special App's, music, videos, or liturgical dance to help them get excited about God and the importance of praising Him. While the church has a role in teaching children to pray and praise, the major role begins in the home.

The impact of music in a child's life is powerful. In a study conducted by the Institute Marques, it was found that fetuses as young as 16 weeks old responded to music and moving their lips, supporting the belief that learning begins in the womb. Could praise music and praise dance in churches be a way of inspiring our children and youth? Could praise music and praise dance be a way of helping children and youth maintain involvement in the church and give more time and attention worship?

Seven Reasons We Should Praise!

Reason One: God gave us His Son, Our Savior and the Holy Spirit. Praise God for the salvation he has provided for us. Praise be to our God **(Psalm 92:1)**.

Reason Two: In love and obedience to the Lord, let everything that breathes praise the Lord. **(Deuteronomy 19:9)**.

Reason Three: God is not just good; "He is great and greatly to be praised." **(Psalm 145:3)**

Reason Four: Revelation gives this reason to praise: "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by Your will, they existed and were created." **(Revelation 4:11)**

Reason Five: “It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you. He will never leave or forsake you.” (**Deuteronomy 31:8**) Praise Him for being with us.

Reason Six: Our Holy Bible tells us that all of creation is commanded to give praise to God. (**Psalm 148:1-13**)

Reason Seven: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to Sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.” **Ephesians 1:3-6.**

PURPOSE

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” (Act 2:42)

Have you ever given serious attention to the purpose of church? Do we find ourselves going to church out of habit, tradition or purpose? Could the purpose of going to church be to continue a tradition from our family? When we revisit the purpose of church and why we go to church, responses may begin to revitalize, enrich or renew ways to vitalize existing congregations and invite others to come.

The Book of Acts, 2nd chapter, verse 42, offers purposes of going to church: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship. It also includes two more important purposes and that includes “the breaking of bread” and prayer. In this one verse, we find four purposes for attending church:

- To learn from the apostles’ teaching
- To have fellowship with one another
- To have communion, “the breaking of bread” (The Lord’s Super)
- To pray

Rick Warren, Pastor and Author of the book The Purpose Driven Life, offers these purposes for attending church:

- For Worship
- For Fellowship
- For Discipleship
- For Ministry
- For Mission

Warren suggests that all of these five purposes are derived from the Great Commandment (Matthew 22: 37-40) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

Presbyterians believe “the mission of God in Christ gives shape and substance to the life and work of the Church. In Christ, the Church participates in God’s mission for the transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God’s love, offering to all people the grace of God at font and table, and calling all people to discipleship in Christ (F.1.01).

One of the essential purposes of the church is to **provide for the needs of its members** (Acts 20:34-35; Romans 15:26). Other scriptures that cite why it is important to understand the purpose church.

1. “Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.” ~Ephesian 4:14
2. The church is to be a place of fellowship, where Christians can be devoted to one another and honor one another. ~Romans 12:10
3. We are to instruct one another. ~Romans 15:14
4. We are to be kind and compassionate to one another. ~Ephesians 4:32
5. Another important purpose of the church is to fulfill the Great Commission as Jesus commanded. ~Matthew 28:18-20.
6. Most importantly, we are to love one another. ~John 3:11
7. Christ calls the Church into being, giving it all that is necessary for its mission in the world, for its sanctification, and for its service to Go. Christ is present with the Church in both Spirit and Word. Christ alone rules, calls, teaches, and uses the church as He wills.
~F-1.0202, The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA)

PLANNING

“The plans of the diligent lead to profit.” (Proverbs 21:5)

Has it ever occurred to you that church planning should be directly connected to the vision of the church? It’s actually the planning process that turns the vision of the church into reality and application, ensuring greater profit. The planning process takes both small and giant steps to make things happen through the work of ministry teams.

When churches intentionally plan, it helps map out strategic spiritual steps to achieve its vision and mission. The planning team, the church's session or any ministry team should think of their work as a partnership between the Triune Team: God, the Father, God the Son and God, the Holy Spirit. When groups operate in partnership with God, they are more likely to be more deliberate about doing their best to achieve success in the church where Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church. They are also more likely to have greater achievement because their work is fueled through a channel of supernatural interventions and discernments.

When ministry and leadership teams recognize their limited capabilities and God's unlimited possibilities, then they utilize both proactive and reactive measures to keep members from becoming inactive. Being proactive is working and praying together to envision ways to make things happen God's way. Being reactive is being watchful while waiting for God to reveal His way, but simultaneously stepping out in faith to take proactive measures to avoid members from becoming inactive during the planning process.

Taking proactive measures may include what is known as SWOT (Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats)

- **Strengths:** What areas of ministry in your church are unique and different than surrounding churches?
- **Weaknesses:** What or how many ministries in your church are lagging in energy and measurable accomplishments?
- **Opportunities:** Through a neighborhood analysis, what community needs are waiting to be identified or served by your church?
- **Threats:** Through a neighborhood analysis, what type of conditions can you identify as potential hazards or problems to your church environment or to your evangelism plans?

Seven (7) Reasons All Church Ministries Should Engage in Effective Planning

1. Planning helps your church stay faithful and focused.
2. Planning is a matter of intentionality and stewardship.
3. Planning **facilitates ministry communication, vision-sharing, mission coordination and team member interaction.** These collaborative approaches give energy and strength to a solid plan for growth and development. Children and youth should be actively included.
4. Planning allows team members to list out specific steps for accomplishing the mission of the church by developing goals and objectives.
5. Planning gives clarity and directions for the future of the church.
6. Planning allows roles and responsibilities to be transparent and assists with accountability and support for monitoring progress.
7. Planning is a means of honoring the importance of God's work that keeps the doors of the church open for the community to come in the church and for the church to go into the community. *"Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed."* (Proverbs 16:1-3).

There is an old adage that says, “If you fail to plan, you plan to fail”. Whether in business or in the church, this is a true statement. For this reason, churches must plan and be trained in developing a well-defined vision, mission and core value statements. Churches can also set the direction for mapping out the steps for how the vision and mission can be accomplished by setting goals and objectives which can lead to a spiritual growth strategic plan for the church.

PERFORMANCE

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31)

Performance in the church or on your job should be done to the glory of God. Performance in the church could feel more compelling because it aims for a spiritual high performance because it is done for a High Performing God, a God who is performing high for us at all times. Leaders and all congregations all should desire to be a team powered by the Holy Spirit and led by the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, to accomplish all that God has planned for our churches as a whole.

Kingdom building is the ultimate and paramount goal of Christians. We represent the Gospel of Christ to so many people, so Kingdom building is a forever goal until eternity. If Jesus is the Head of the Church and we say we worship Him, pray to God in His name and sing “He is worthy to be praise, why would we think of doing just a regular kind of performance for a high performing God?

Vital Congregations recognize and honor the opportunity to give God their best in performing His work. For this reason, Vital Congregations are moving from committees to teams in an effort to increase the ideas of serving people and decrease the thoughts of sitting around the table talking about it. To see how Robert C. Crosby, author of The Teaming Church, differentiates between committees and teams, [click here](#).

The team approach to ministry allows for greater performance and higher impact in efforts to build the Kingdom of God. All ministry teams should seek to be high performing teams. High Performing teams have special traits and approaches to their work.

High Performing Teams:

- Model the Fruit of the Spirit in their personality and interactions with others.
- Focus on God’s supernatural work ethics where prayer is the steering wheel that guides the team’s work. God’s work in the church is geared toward Kingdom Building. The team’s work points to long range plans for building God’s Kingdom and making disciples as the Great Commission instructs each one to do.
- Engage and dedicate quality time to produce results which are extraordinary. Teams are encouraged by the scripture, Colossians 3:23 that speaks with these words: “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.”

- Has responsibilities for each team member with clearly defined roles to help the team to maximize productivity which in turn, minimizes conflict. There is an expectation for everyone to play a key role in a collective process for the high performance for results.
- Work as servant leaders to create, serve and spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ with vitality and joy.
- Have leaders who follow the principles of Jesus.
- Have leaders who provide direction, clearly define goals and outline the steps needed to achieve without being a boss or one who seek to micromanage others. Rather, the leader fosters a trusting environment for all to communicate effectively with respect for all.

How do your ministry teams align with the 7 approaches to for high performance?

PROVISION

If you were asked what your greatest need is, what would your answer be? Would it be for a house, a car, friends, more money or would it be for better health? Any of these could be quite legitimate. People have various needs and various thoughts on how their needs can be provided. Scripture tells us that our greatest need is God as found in Matthew 6:33, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." If we have God in our lives as our greatest provision, the other things will come.

Perhaps as churches are re-creating, re-defining, re-thinking and re-establishing in-house worship and other means of carrying out ministry work, maybe we need to consider giving more thought to what God gave for us as our ultimate provision. The ultimate provision God gave us is Jesus. We as Christians depend on Jesus to give us the desire to share with our neighbors and community. Vital Congregations seek to provide service, shelter, food, to the unchurched, to the hungry and the thirsty. Vital Congregations seek ways to provide social and spiritual values.

Vitality is more likely to increase when congregations put their faith in Jesus to provide all needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Vitality is also more likely to increase when the congregation puts their faith in Christ Jesus because God commissioned Himself to care and provide for us. He will supply our needs as we take giant steps to go out and make disciples, sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

List in priority, 7 provisions of your greatest needs for creating greater vitality in your congregation. Pray about each one. Prayer is an open acknowledgement of God's power to give you the provisions you need (Philippians 4:6). When you pray, you will be demonstrating your reliance and dependence on God for your requested provisions.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

PEACE

“As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15).

Peace is a state of being. Peace is a place. Peace is a need, and peace is a want. A dictionary would say peace is freedom. Another way to see peace is as a person. The person is Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Peace is so important that God wants us to seek and pursue peace (Psalm 34:14).

There are times when we are in a situation that we just don't know what to do. It appears that the enemy is trying to destroy the church, our home or our community. It is most important to keep our eyes on God, to be at peace and to watch Him tackle the enemy. 2 Chronicles 20:12 says it this way:⁻¹² *Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.” Keep your eyes on God.*

TV celebrity known as Mr. Rogers (Fred Rogers) was an ordained minister of word and sacrament for the PC (USA) and is a notable public figure whose work around peace and reconciliation are worth keeping in our memory bank. Rogers was also a pioneer in the world of Christian education and formation of young children who advocated for peace (Presbyterian Mission Agency).

When we see church attendance declining, less youth and young adults coming to church, and we don't know what to do, just look to Jesus, the Prince of Peace. If we allow these situations to rob us of our peace, we can become paralyzed, unable to embrace new ideas and new opportunities to serve.

If the church becomes paralyzed to embracing change, the effects will be felt in our witnessing to others. If we accept God's sovereignty, we will find a peace unlike you have never experienced. If we try to make human sense out of everything that is happening in the world, it is not going to match our human logic. God has empowered us to serve and to go out and make disciples in spite of our circumstances. He has equipped us with spiritual gifts to do His work. He has given us a vehicle called faith that will take us on a long journey. Let's step out in faith and go out in peace to serve a world that desperately needs our help and God's peace, peace that surpasses all understanding.