

Vital Congregations Team

Presbytery of Hudson River

Purpose: The Vital Congregations Team is one part of the larger Healthy, Vital Communities of Faith initiative of Hudson River Presbytery. The purpose of the Vital Congregations Team is to facilitate and oversee the use of the Holy Cow Congregational Assessment Tool by local congregations and to assist those congregations in acts of discernment and follow-up actions after an interpretation has been completed.

What does a Healthy, Vital Community of Faith look like?

The answer to this question may vary from congregation to congregation depending on the community context of each congregation. Historically, within Protestant theology, the Marks of the Church are those things by which the True Church (Vital) may be recognized. The three marks are: the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and church discipline. More recently the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), in its Vital Congregations initiative suggests that there are seven marks of a vital congregation. (*Immediate Toolkit for Vital Congregations*, January, 2018. Theology, Formation and Evangelism Office of the Presbyterian Mission Agency of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

They are:

- 1) *Lifelong Discipleship Formation* vs. complacent “Christian” piety; simply teaching good morals; offering the latest programs
- 2) *Intentional Authentic Evangelism* vs. “Jesus freaks”; “Christian” hypocrisy; a committee responsibility
- 3) *Outward Incarnational Focus* vs. inward institutional survival; closed communities of assimilation/exclusion
- 4) *Empowering Servant Leadership* vs. the pastor’s job; monopolized leadership; hiring the young, energetic pastor
- 5) *Spirit-Inspired Worship* vs. self-gratifying worship; stale ritual divorced of meaning; consumer entertainment worship
- 6) *Caring Relationships* vs. any other social club; facades, hypocrisy and judgments of the “church” and “religion”
- 7) *Ecclesial Health* vs. unhealthy dysfunction; toxic environments; obsolete and irrelevant buildings

Use of a Congregational Assessment Tool

Hudson River Presbytery voted to make the Holy Cow, Inc. Congregational Assessment Tool (CAT) the assessment tool of choice within our presbytery and for smaller congregations, the Conversations assessment offered by Holy Cow. (See www.holycowconsulting.com/congregations). It is our hope that all of our congregations would at some point go through an assessment process. The purpose of the process is to enable congregations to discern what God might be calling them to in the future.

Assessments are required for churches that are going through a pastoral transition. The Committee on Ministry will be the primary resource for such congregations, but will work in cooperation with the Vital Congregations Team.

Any congregation is welcome to go through an assessment process at any time, assuming that they are willing to pay for the expenses involved. It is our hope that congregations will share a summary of their findings with the Vital Congregations Team and the presbytery as appropriate.

What is the CAT?

The CAT is a customizable assessment instrument which church members complete online that can help leaders:

- Measure the level of satisfaction and energy in the congregation.
- Identify the critical success factors for improving organizational climate.
- Pinpoint the strengths of the congregation's culture.
- Discover where members would like to go in the future.
- Gauge readiness for change.
- Uncover potential resources the church may be missing.
- Prepare for a search for the next pastor.

The CAT is a customizable instrument. To the standardized benchmarked assessment, you can add up to two supplemental modules which the church chooses and add up to five additional questions specific to the local church.

The CAT is benchmarked with all of the other thousands of churches that are in the Holy Cow database who have participated in the CAT.

Who pays for this?

All congregations participating in a CAT or Conversations assessment are asked to pay for the assessment portion of the expenses. The cost of the assessment is based on your average worship attendance: \$430 (35-149 persons in worship), \$530 (150-499 persons in worship). The cost of the smaller congregation Conversations assessment is \$125.

The presbytery, through the VC Team, after approving the congregation's participation in the process, will pay for the cost of the interpretation of the assessment, which will normally be done in person with a consultant. The presbytery will pay for one in person visit with the consultant for the interpretation. If a congregation would want further visits with the consultant, they would need to negotiate that directly with the consultant. Note that dates for the consultant's visit must be coordinated through the presbytery, as the consultant will most likely be working with more than one church during their visit to our presbytery.

Again, please note that any congregation who is willing to bear the entire expense of both the assessment and the interpretation is welcome to engage Holy Cow consulting to purchase the assessment and make arrangements for its interpretation. The only request of the VC Team is that such congregations would share a summary of their findings with the Team and the presbytery as appropriate.

How do we arrange for an assessment?

Churches desiring to do an assessment, or who are required to do an assessment by either COM or the Grants Committee, should contact either [Susan De George via] the presbytery or the chair of the Vital Congregations Team, [John Miller]. The church will then be put in contact with our consultant to arrange your assessment. The time to take and then process an assessment is usually 6-8 weeks.

A liaison from either COM (if it is a church in transition) or from the Vital Congregations Team will be assigned to work with and walk with the congregation through this assessment process.

Desired Outcomes

The Vital Congregations Team has a deep desire to see the use of assessment as something much more than simply the collection of data. The reports and data that the church will receive back

from Holy Cow can seem overwhelming, which is why the VC Team believes that having a well-trained interpreter/consultant is so vitally important. The data received may be used in a variety of ways.

For congregations going through a transition that COM has asked to take the assessment, the data will be helpful to that church as it seeks to describe itself in the materials that will be prepared for calling the next pastor.

Moving Forward

The VC Team doesn't want to see churches use this assessment, and then, following the interpretation, simply have the information "sit on a shelf." It is our stated goal to help congregations, once they have done their interpretation, to decide what the next steps in the discernment process will be for the congregation. This will vary from church to church.

It is expected that congregations will take at least one of the possible next steps:

- Work with the liaison from the VC Team or COM who would continue to meet with the leadership of the church for a defined period of time as they move through a discernment process which points them to where God is calling them to be at work in the world.
- The congregation can choose to engage a paid church consultant to help them in this same discernment process.
- With the assistance of the VC Team, the church leadership can engage in a coaching process. The coach works with the pastor and session/leadership to assist the pastor in leading the congregation through the discernment process to concrete plans for ministry. There is funding available from the presbytery for this coaching process.

End Goal

The hope of the Vital Congregations Team is that the work of this team will make a significant contribution to the life of Hudson River Presbytery by having us live out the words of Ephesians 4:

"¹¹The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ."