



## Accepting the Challenge

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Rachel Yates

We covet your prayers. Starting February 15, the Small Church Vitality project kicks off. Nine of our congregations under 125 members accepted the invitation to be part of this project. Our courageous nine are Forest Park, Good Shepherd Trinity, Living Hope, Christ, Greenfield Avenue, Vernon, Faith, Calvary, and Faith Springs.

The Small Church Vitality project includes 6 sessions over 9 months, with each session lasting 1.5 days. The congregations are going to take a deep dive into topics like discipleship, mission, evangelism, conflict resolution, leadership, and worship inspiration. The point is not necessarily to increase the *viability* of the church – measured by budgets or membership – but to increase the *vitality* of the church. Using data from their individual Holy Cow! assessments, each congregation will be able to focus on what drives their members' satisfaction and energy. As a result, vitality will look different for each congregation; we don't use a predetermined measuring stick to judge vitality.

The sessions will be led by a mix of Presbytery leaders and others from across the denomination who are skilled in particular topics. They will be interactive, so that each congregation can grapple with the topics for their own situations.

And there will be homework! In the weeks between sessions, participants will practice what they're learning. When we gather again for the next session, we'll share our challenges and observations. In our connected denomination, we have the opportunity to walk together and work together around the most difficult issue of our time: how to be vital congregations for our members and our community?

I call these nine congregations courageous because they are committing significant time to look at their futures through the lens of vitality. They know that the future they envision can't be fashioned through quick fixes, like launching a new mission program or resurrecting Vacation Bible School. It's not dependent on getting the perfect pastor to save the church. It's not about chasing after the unicorn of young families.

Instead, it will require us to challenge our assumptions about why we “do church” and how we “do church” and even where we “do church.” It will challenge us to look at our individual spiritual practices, as well as our collective practices. We'll be uneasy and stretched and skeptical. God willing, we'll be inspired and encouraged and open.

We are grateful for the investment of time and spirit by these nine congregations.

So, we ask your prayers. Though the project is tailored to small congregations, their learning will benefit all of us. Vitality measured by the marks of discipleship, inspired worship, ecclesial health, evangelism, leadership, and mission is not the exclusive domain of small churches. Ultimately, we all need to work at these. Please pray for Spirit to guide our sessions and to open us to the new thing that God is doing in our midst. Pray that we will have the patience and energy to try out what we're learning and that congregation members will welcome the work of their leaders as opportunities for spiritual growth. Pray that fear will dissipate, so that each person and each congregation can boldly test the limits of what it means to be God's church in this time. Amen!