



Something New
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Mitten trees, puffer coats, stocking caps. Our Christmas season is often a time for gathering and gifting cold-weather gear. At the same time we deck the halls with boughs of holly, we deck ourselves out with wool socks and scarves bearing the logos of our favorites sports team. (Because our Presbytery footprint goes north toward Green Bay and south toward Chicago, I dare not guess which team!).

As Christians, we also clothe ourselves with behaviors and actions that equip us for ministry. The cross, baptismal font, and communion table are all visible signs of our beliefs and the sacraments. We might display the seal of the Presbyterian Church (USA) for denominational affiliation. Our street signs usually proclaim a message of welcome, and our websites or Facebook pages give glimpses of the people behind the church walls. Hopefully they also include the time of worship on the home page – you might want to double-check that.

Studies done across various Christian denominations have named the marks of vital congregations – the cold weather gear, if you will, that readies us for health, relevance, and vibrant ministry. The Presbyterian Mission Agency did such an assessment several years ago and put together a resource to help us focus on each of those marks of vitality. Because building ministry vitality is one of the prongs of the Matthew 25 commitment we made, the Presbytery Council is offering us a deep dive into those marks of vitality for the next two years. If you attended the November Presbytery Gathering, you got a preview.

The list of the seven marks of vitality might feel natural in some respects (Caring Relationships and Spirit-Inspired Worship), and it might stretch us in other ways (Authentic Evangelism, Outward Focus, and Lifelong Discipleship). We could find ourselves agreeing that there is room for improvement in certain areas (Ecclesial Health and Empowered Leadership). These 7 marks will be a two-year focus for us starting in the new year, with each mark featured at a Presbytery Gathering. Then between meetings, we will learn and practice with those marks.

We kick off the new year with Caring Relationships, to be formally introduced at our February 19 Presbytery Gathering. If you're ready to get started, however, don't feel like you have to wait! Whether you are in congregations or engaged in other forms of specialized ministry, these last few years have depleted us. Caring and compassion are essential to our vitality and restoration, so your leadership looks forward to how we will show care for self and care for others in the coming year. See you in 2022!

