

## The Acts 16:5 Initiative

... the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily.  
Acts 16:5, NRSV

God has a transformational future for our congregation - and for each of us personally. The Acts 16:5 Initiative of our Presbytery is designed to stimulate conversation, imagination, and new directions in the vitality of our shared Christian experience.

We understand the truth of the words of W. Edward Deming, "Every system is perfectly designed to achieve the results its gets." If we are fully satisfied with the life of our congregation as it is, there is no need to think about a transformational future. However, if we want to grow in the vitality of our worship, our fellowship, and our discipleship, as well as in our missional impact on the surrounding community, then we need to think in terms of ministry design - how do we honor the work of our present ministries and members while creating the new to reach new people?

The Acts 16:5 Initiative does not offer a simple checklist of things to do in order to grow congregational vitality. Rather, it offers a theology of transformational ministry, essential Defining Practices, and a wide variety of potential "next steps" that a congregation may take. Since every congregation faces different issues and possibilities, the Acts 16:5 Initiative involves a great deal of freedom for each pastor, leader, and team in discerning appropriate next steps.

There are a great many ways the Acts 16:5 Initiative may be used to encourage our ministries, such as:

**New Expectation** - The Acts 16:5 Initiative understands how important it is to show honor and appreciation for past and present ministries and members of our congregation and, at the same time, to be filled with the expectation that God has a new vision and a new transformational future for us. "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland." Isaiah 43:19

**Defining Vision** - We will be encouraged to clarify our "Defining Vision" - the vision that shapes and defines what we are seeking to do by God's grace. We will put the essence of our congregational vision into a single sentence, although there may be additional supporting material. We will then encourage every ministry in the life of the congregation to center itself around our congregational vision as well as around their unique ministry vision.

**Defining Practices** - We will identify the practices that we want to define our ministries and personal lifestyles, such as the practices of bearing witness, prayer, and the study of the Word. We will have fun learning new ways to be the people of God and to do the work of the people of God.

**Personal lifestyle** - Ministry is first of all a lifestyle to be lived (by each one of us) before it is a program to be run. The Acts 16:5 Initiative encourages each of us to become intentional about growing in faith and in our practices of the faith (what are often referred to as "spiritual disciplines.")

**Missional Endeavor** - Congregational life has a way of being self-absorbing as we work to sustain the programs and ministries that we who are current church members enjoy. While affirming the present ministries that we appreciate, we also want make a "missional" impact on the surrounding community with the Good News and the compassion of our Lord. This means learning new ways to "reach" the uninvolved and the uncommitted to the faith, to draw them in and to "grow" with them as followers of our Lord. The Acts 16:5 Initiative encourages the ministries of your congregation to become missional in practice.

**Congregational lifestyle** - In addition to missional endeavor, the Acts 16:5 Initiative encourages imaginative thinking about several areas of congregational lifestyle including worship (services that "engage" the mind and spirit), fellowship (small groups and congregational celebrations), discipleship (growing true disciples), leadership (imaginative, high initiative, and permission-giving), and ministry mobilization (spiritual gifts discovery and service).

**Action Learning** - Every congregation faces adaptive challenges - problems that never seem to be resolved and possibilities that are rarely realized, challenges such as growing worship attendance, reaching the under 39 year olds, and growing true disciples. The Acts 16:5 Initiative teaches the exciting Action Learning process that enables new learning and fresh, imaginative thinking to lead to new solutions and new ministries.

As we move through the next two years, the Acts 16:5 Initiative will encourage us to ask key questions of ourselves, such as:

What are we asking God to do?

What vision defines our ministry?

What process do we use to address adaptive challenges?

Who cheers us on?

### **The Transformational Strategy of the Acts 16:5 Initiative**

Our Presbytery leadership has endorsed and is supporting the Acts 16:5 Initiative. Many congregations are joining in the Acts 16:5 Initiative and there will be a great deal of mutual support and many new ideas being exchanged among us. God is doing something new and it will be exciting to be a part of it. The Vital Churches Institute will conduct a major training event every six months for two years to impart material about transformational ministry and offer additional support as well. On our part, we will trust our Lord to bring about actual transformation and new directions among us. We will seek ways to show honor to those who already serve among us and to listen to the Spirit for new vision and direction.