

Exploration the Meaning of Church Vitality



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Church Vitality



- **A Church Case Study**
- **What do we mean when we say “church vitality?”**
 - What is the church? What is vitality?
- **Exercise: Take the church’s vital signs:**
 - Church as the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)
 - How do we measure the vital signs of this body?
 - ✦ Traditional Measurements of Church Success/Vitality
 - What impacts the Church’s vital signs?
- **Who makes a church or faith community vital?**
 - **Lessons from Exodus**


Signs of Church Renewal

Dianna Butler Bass



- Hospitality
- Discernment
- Healing
- Contemplation
- Testimony
- Diversity
- Justice
- Worship
- Reflection
- Beauty

A Community of Faith, Hope, Love & Witness (F-1.03): Bonhoeffer on “Community”



“The church really is ‘Christ existing as community.’ How they all become one and yet all remain themselves, how they are all in God and yet each is separate from God, how they are all in each other, and yet exist for themselves, how each has God entirely and alone in the merciful dual loneliness of seeing and serving truth and love, and yet is never lonely but always really lives only in the community—these are things it is no longer given us to imagine. We walk in faith. But we shall see not only God but God’s community too. We shall no longer merely believe in its love and faith, but see it.”

--Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Communion of Saints*

A Community of Faith, Hope, Love & Witness (F-1.03): “Community”



“The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more everything else between us will recede, and the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is alive between us. We have one another only through Christ, but through Christ we really do have one another. We have one another completely and for all eternity.”

--Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*

Discussion Question: Christian Community



- **How do you experience community in the church?**

A Community of Faith



Take away certainty as the foundation of Christian community, and we are left with faith: faith in the incarnate person of Jesus Christ.

(Paradoxy)

The Church is to be a community of faith, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life.

(Foundations of Presbyterian Polity,

F-1.0301)

A Community of Hope



Take away the security of organization as the primary preservation principle of Christian community, and we are left with hope: the hope of an organic, spiritual community that is yet to emerge.

(Paradoxy)

The Church is to be a community of hope, rejoicing in the sure and certain knowledge that, in Christ, God is making a new creation. This new creation is a new beginning for human life and for all things. The Church lives in the present on the strength of that promised new creation. *(F-1.0301)*

A Community of Love



Take away power and control as the binding force of Christian community, and we are left with love: the love of Christ experienced in common worship and fellowship.

(Paradoxy)

The Church is to be a community of love, where sin is forgiven, reconciliation is accomplished, and the dividing walls of hostility are torn down.

(F-1.0301)

A Community of Witness



“The Church is to be a community of witness, pointing beyond itself through word and work to the good news of God’s transforming grace in Christ Jesus its Lord.”

F-1.0301

Open to the Guidance of the Holy Spirit (F-1.04)



- **Continuity & Change**--As Church seeks reform & fresh direction, it looks to Christ who goes ahead of us & calls us to follow him (F-1.0401).
- **Ecumenicity** (F-1.0402) & **Unity in Diversity** (F-1.0403)

Reformed “Spirituality”: Scottish Council of Churches (1977)



Spirituality is “an exploration into what is involved in becoming human.”

“Spirituality is an attempt to grow in sensitivity to self, others, to non-human creation, and to God who is within and beyond this totality.”

1977 Scottish Council of Churches

Openness: “A New Openness” F-1.0404

Faith, hope, and love . . . sound familiar? Christians have long seen the wisdom of ordering their individual and interpersonal lives by these three words from the apostle Paul (see 1 Cor. 13:13). The more the church breaks free from the grip of these old ways of viewing the world, the freer the church will be to live into these words in its corporate life.

(Paradoxy)

As it participates in God’s mission, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) seeks: a new openness to the sovereign activity of God in the Church and in the world, to a more radical obedience to Christ, and to a more joyous celebration in worship and work; a new openness to see both the possibilities and perils of its institutional forms in order to ensure the faithfulness and usefulness of these forms to God’s activity in the world
(F-1.0404)

Chapter One: Congregation & Membership



“The congregation is the church engaged in the mission of God in its particular context. The triune God gives to the congregation all the gifts of the gospel necessary to being the Church. The congregation is the basic form of the church, but it is not of itself a sufficient form of the church. Thus congregations are bound together in communion with one another, united in relationships of accountability and responsibility, contributing their strengths to the benefit of the whole, and are called, collectively, the church.” *G-1.01*

Love and Trust (G-1.0102)



“The polity of the Presbyterian Church presupposes the fellowship of women, men and children united in covenant relationship with one another and with God through Jesus Christ. The organization rests on the fellowship and is not designed to work without trust and love.”

How do we foster and build this love and trust in our church?