



# EQUIPPING FOR... LEADERSHIP

Produced by Canadian Ministries

## Leading Congregations to Vitality

*“So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily.” — Acts 16:5*

**T**his issue of *Equipping for Leadership* will encourage reflection on the meaning of congregational vitality. The Canadian Oxford dictionary definition of “vitality” is “liveliness, animation; the ability to sustain life.” Some of the most common synonyms are “energy, drive, passion, life, spirit.”

### Prayer

Life-giving, life-sustaining God, we have found new life in you, in Jesus, in the Spirit; we long to share the good news of your love and your hope with our neighbours. We know everything is possible for us as your people, alive in you, as a community of faith. We are ready to listen to you and to one another. We are ready to plan together, respectfully and prayerfully. We are ready to act with love, to build your realm of abundant life for all. Speak to us, guide us, and strengthen us to live as vital communities, actively leading others to experiences of your peace and justice. Amen.



Central Grey Bruce Presbyterian Cooperative Ministry.

### Reflection #1

1. What do you mean when you say an organization is “vital” or shows “vitality”?
2. Reflect on congregational life. What are the qualities that show vitality in a congregation? How do you think these qualities can be nurtured and maintained in a church?
3. Read “A Model for the Vital Church in Acts 2:42” and discuss your agreement or disagreement that congregational vitality depends on these four activities.

### A model for the vital church in Acts 2:42

Excerpts from the June 2016 blog posting “4 Keys to a Vital Congregation” by Christopher Clarke, minister of Duncan PC, B.C., available at <https://standrewsduncan.org/2016/06/06/4-keys-to-a-vital-congregation/>

*The vital church devotes itself to the teachings of the apostles.* When a group of Christians plumbs God’s word for revelation, not to just confirm what they already know, but to *really* learn more about God and about the readers, good things happen. People come to realize deep truths, they see how it all fits together, they learn to defend their faith and confidently explain it to those who might challenge them, and more importantly lovingly teach to those who are earnestly seeking. We try to teach clearly and helpfully with applications for everyday life. Scripture describes a Jesus who spent a lot of time teaching. It is no surprise then that the doctrine is important in vital churches.

*The vital church devotes itself to fellowship.* People spend time together, learning about each other, learning to love one another. Fellowship, the “hanging-out” time we spend, permits us to begin practicing the long list of “one-another” passages that Jesus taught. Christians build each other up, they hold each other accountable, and they offer a shoulder to cry on and a voice to cheer with. They pray together and promise to pray for one another. Fellowship is where the real needs come to light, it’s where the masks come off and the defenses are left behind. Fellowship makes us outward looking as a community and as individuals. We host garage sales and don’t worry about how much money comes in, we host game nights, movie nights, knitting circles, etc. We just want to spend some time together; it’s nothing fancy or elaborate, but it’s fun and it’s meaningful. Jesus spent a lot of time hanging out with his closest buddies, is it any wonder then that hanging out is an important aspect of vital churches?

*The vital church devotes itself to eating together.* This isn’t only communion, though it certainly includes the sacramental life. Our communion service is always followed by a luncheon where the majority of the congregation will head downstairs and chat over a simple meal. Teens play soccer out one door, kids run about being kids, surrogate grandparents spoil them and make sure they get plenty of dessert, parents console one another, people offer babysitting services, prayers, food, talk about sports, boats, and fishing. Food helps the people to linger and in the lingering relationships are built, plans are hatched, events are dreamed up...so we also host barbecues, pot-lucks, and smaller gatherings with food every chance we can. We even make up reasons to have such events because we know that they are powerful and, as Kennon Callahan would suggest, people just like such events; they are fun, carefree and easy. The early church clearly ate together a lot. It is no surprise that eating together as a church is important to a vital congregation.

*The vital church devotes itself to prayer.* The early church did it; the middle church did it; we better be doing it; and all of us hope that the future is home to prayerful people (which is a big part of why people

are worried about the health of the church). We pass a microphone around and people offer requests for prayer and praises for answered prayers; it’s part of our offering. This allows us to be vulnerable with one another (a huge benefit in itself), but it also permits us to pray for the deepest felt needs within our community. We also begin each week with a prayer meeting at 9 a.m. on Tuesdays. The church is God’s church; God loves it and promises to care for it. It is then no surprise that prayer is a big part of vital churches.

### Reflection #2

1. Describe your experiences of discernment in congregational life.
2. What potential do you think spiritual practices of discernment might have to help a congregation increase its vitality?
3. Read the article “Spiritual Discernment and Congregational Vitality.” Discuss your agreement or disagreement with this as an approach.

### Spiritual discernment and congregational vitality

Excerpt from the *Abstract and Conclusion of Spiritual Discernment as a Foundation for Congregational Vitality* (unpublished thesis, 2015) by Tim Archibald, minister at Kings PC, New Minas, N.S. For more information contact Tim at [kingschurch@ns.aliantzinc.ca](mailto:kingschurch@ns.aliantzinc.ca).

In response to the steep decline in Canadian church vitality, and in light of the emphasis on a prayerful approach in Christian history, the focus of this thesis is to examine the hypothesis that if the leaders of a congregation undergo a process of prayerfully discerning and articulating together God’s vision and purpose for it, the congregation will become tangibly more vital.

A survey of both Old and New Testaments reveals four key components that are necessary for biblical discernment: 1) a desire to listen for God’s voice 2) a receptive heart to hear and take it in 3) the will to respond and act on God’s will 4) the ready self-surrender of our gifts in community and service. Core spiritual practices of discernment in these four biblical areas were identified, observed in onsite research at a growing Presbyterian ministry in Pennsylvania, and then adapted to design the discernment process

that was tested at Kings Church in Nova Scotia. The discernment process consisted of eight elements: Prayer Group, Five-Day Silent Retreat, Four-Week Study Group on Discernment for Elders, Four-Week Worship Series, Congregational Discernment Event, Discernment Retreat for Elders, Two Follow-up Discernment Meetings for Elders, Leader Survey and Focus Groups.

Quantitative and qualitative data from the spiritual vitality survey and two elder focus groups indicated that, on average, elders grew in spiritual vitality by 39% following the leadership discernment process. Men averaged a higher degree of spiritual growth than women. New elders grew in vitality the most. The qualities of spiritual vitality that grew the most were listening, flexibility/openness, faith and humility. Elders described substantial deepening of relationships with God, with each other and with others in the congregation. The discernment process led to hearing a new vision of ministry for Kings Church and increased spiritual vitality in the congregation as a whole. All components of the discernment process were deemed essential by the elders; prayer, however, was considered to be the great integrating and connecting force that drew together all the various components.

### Reflection #3

1. What role has your church building played – or could it play – in fulfilling the vision for your congregation's life and presence in the community?
2. Read the article "The Church Building and Congregational Vitality."
3. Do you agree or disagree that Central PC, Vancouver, is using its building to ensure it continues to be a vital church? Explain.

### The church building and congregational vitality

Jim Smith is the minister at Central PC, Vancouver, B.C. He can be contacted at [revjim@centralpc.ca](mailto:revjim@centralpc.ca). This article is available at <http://henriquezpartners.com/work/central-presbyterian-church/>

Central Presbyterian Church (CPC) has been rooted in the West End neighbourhood since the City of Vancouver was incorporated in 1886. The vital

community hub currently hosts three congregations that cater to over 500 members – CPC, Galilee Korean Presbyterian Church, and Christ Alive, a community church ministering to the GLBTQ community – as well as numerous activities, outreach programs, and organizations, including a Montessori preschool and a daycare. The church's aging 1975 facility, which is in constant use from 6 am to 7 pm, seven days a week was inhibiting CPC from meeting growing needs of the community and needed an upgrade. Faced with a lack of available funds, the church needed an innovative solution to continue serving the neighbourhood and the city at-large.

The CPC redevelopment spearheads a unique model of partnership with the church as co-developer. Along with development partner Bosa Properties and Henriquez Partners Architects, CPC will bring Vancouver's West End a facility capable of accommodating a growing community and a religious sanctuary that meets the spiritual needs of modern-day congregants. It will also infuse a neighbourhood facing a shortage of rental stock with 45 units of non-market rental housing for seniors, to be run by CPC's nonprofit housing society, and 168 units of purpose-built market rental housing.

The new building design, targeting LEED Gold certification, consists of a residential tower situated above a podium housing the CPC sanctuary, community spaces and a commercial retail unit. Fritted glass on portions of the building associated with the church will create a reflective, translucent skin that invites visitors, distinguishes the worship space and creates a dramatic effect when illuminated at night. Wood interior finishes and increased transparency of the church entry will allow the sanctuary to be visible from the street, emphasizing this welcoming effect. Three floors of affordable housing will occupy the floors above the church, and the top 15 floors of the tower will house market rental units.

### Reflection #4

1. What have been your experiences of shared leadership in a congregation? Or in an initiative shared with another congregation?

2. How do you think a model of shared leadership might support vitality in congregations?
3. Read “Cooperative Ministry and Congregational Vitality.” Consider and discuss the planning process that would be necessary to create this sort of ministry.

### Cooperative ministry and congregational vitality

Tim Ferrier is the minister of Central Grey Bruce Presbyterian Cooperative Ministry, Chesley, Ontario, a ministry that currently receives a Renewing Ministries Grant made possible through *Presbyterians Sharing*. Tim can be contacted at [revtimothy@bmts.com](mailto:revtimothy@bmts.com).

On Sunday May 22, 2015 the Presbytery of Grey Bruce Maitland held a service of recognition, celebrating the launch of the new Central Grey Bruce Presbyterian Cooperative Ministry, and recognizing and confirming the ministry team of the Rev. Timothy Ferrier as the called minister and the Rev. Dr. Randy Benson as stated supply. The choir loft at Geneva Church in Chesley was filled to capacity as 33 voices, the combined choir of the new “Co-op”, led the congregation in worship and praise. There was a shared sense of excitement and enthusiasm as the four congregations of St. Andrew’s in Chatsworth, Latona in Dornoch, Geneva in Chesley and St. Andrew’s Southampton set out on a new path together to discover new ways to “be the church” in our small towns and rural communities, giving thanks for the opportunity for re-birth and new life in our congregations.

After months of planning, negotiation and much prayer, the Cooperative was ready to begin its work together. The Cooperative Council, with two representatives from each congregation, provides a channel for communication, coordination and joint-planning. All decision-making continues to rest with the respective Sessions. While the Cooperative Council was busy working out administrative details such as worship schedules, communication strategies and a joint calendar, council members also moved quickly to explore how we could develop our ministry for children and youth. By mid-June, youth leaders from Dornoch held the first event for youth, ages 10-14, from the four congregations. There was also

### What is Cooperative Ministry?

Cooperative Ministry pools together the individual strengths and resources of each congregation in the cooperative for shared ministry, while allowing for each congregation to maintain their own unique character and identity. The result is a vital ministry that allows struggling congregations to re-energize and re-connect with the Spirit that calls them to be a place where Christ’s love is made known in their communities.

a successful family day at Huron Feathers at the end of July. Plans are underway for future events this season that will provide our youth with an opportunity to grow in Christian community with one another. The Co-op is also discerning ways to strengthen relationships among our congregations. In August, over 80 people gathered for a wonderful outdoor service and corn roast at Latona. Our congregations have agreed that we will worship together to celebrate special events such as anniversary services.

As we approach the six-month point in our new ministry, the feedback from our congregations is positive and encouraging. We still have much to do together. During year two we will continue with lay leadership training around worship, as well as pastoral care. The Co-op will also introduce a renewed emphasis on stewardship and explore new opportunities for ministry within each of our local communities. Within our presbytery, the Co-op provides a working model for how the church can be present in small towns and rural communities, enabling us to live into our vision and mission: “A living lighthouse to the world, rooted in Christ, loving God, loving others and sharing the good news!”

### Canadian Ministries wants to hear from YOU!

What parts of this resource are most useful? Share your story of leadership and congregational vitality. Recommend a resource! Make a suggestion or ask a question!

Contact us at [canadianministries@presbyterian.ca](mailto:canadianministries@presbyterian.ca) or call 416-441-1111 or 1-800-619-7301 Ext. 271. Find us on Facebook at [facebook.com/pconnect](https://www.facebook.com/pconnect).