RE:Vitalty – Practical Steps for Revitalizing Congregations

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Step 1. Embracing that “Revitalization Is About Vitality”
What Is Revitalization?

Not bringing life to a dead church, but amplifying the life of a living church.

• Where the Word is proclaimed in purity and truth and the Sacraments rightly administered, there is vitality
• How do we increase that vitality among ourselves and share it with others?

Christ is the only true Light ... wherever He shines and is confessed, there is life and salvation.

Martin Luther (LW, 22:67)
What Is Revitalization?

Not a work that we do using human methods, but a work that God does through us in Word and Sacrament.

- Using 1st Article gifts to improve our “planting and watering”

- What earthly gifts can we employ to gather others into the Word and Sacrament ministry of our congregation?
What Is Revitalization?

Not a “new way of being church,” but being the church we are in new ways.

- Being who we are as Lutherans in doctrine and practice as we engage the culture in creative ways

- Who in our community does not know the Grace that we enjoy as Lutherans?

And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

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Why Revitalize?

Several practical reasons, but one overriding reason: The Church is the Bride of Christ worthy of our efforts to support, sustain, and preserve her wherever she exists, especially under the Cross.

... we want to acknowledge and honor as the true bride of Christ those who remain faithful to His pure Word and have no other comfort for their hearts than this Savior, whom they have received and confessed in Baptism and in whose name they have partaken of the Sacrament. These are the true church ... Outwardly they may be scattered here and there, but they meet in the words of the Creed: “I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ, our Lord, who was born, suffered, and died for us on the cross.”

Martin Luther (LW 24: 310)
The Apostle Paul’s 2nd and 3rd missionary journeys were focused on Revitalization.

Acts 18:22-23

22 When [Paul] had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch. 23 After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.
Revitalization Calls for Repentance

“Repentance” in the sense of:

• Turning away from what is causing decline
• Turning toward what brings greater vitality
• And, yes, confessing our sins of neglect, self-centeredness, etc.

“‘I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.’”

Rev. 3:1-3
Step 2. Determining “Where Are We ... Really?”
Why Assess Ourselves?

Assessment is the first step in taking effective action

- Proper diagnosis for the proper remedies
- Self assessment tools for congregations to minimize need for outside assistance

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of Him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. I know your works …’”

Revelation 2:1-2
What Is Self-Assessment?

The congregation’s use of objective measurement tools without outside assistance to determine its stage of vitality

- Initiated by the congregation
- confidential “snapshot”
- Not a “grade”
- A reliable answer to
  “Where are we ... really?”
Benefits of Self-Assessment

Unlimited - Not constrained by the capacity of outside help

Cost Effective - No consulting fees, travel costs, etc.

Non-Threatening - Congregations initiate, conduct, review assessment, and control results

Objective – Not dependent on how people feel about things
Stages of Congregational Vitality

An objective means of determining a congregation’s stage of development or decline

- A snapshot of the congregation’s current status
- Guides revitalization efforts
- Not a “scorecard” or “grade” of the congregation, pastor, or members

“Wake up, and strengthen what remains ...”
Revelation 3:2

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Step 3. Training for Action
Training Objectives

Not simply education – Training and Equipping that lead to active Witness and Outreach

- **Witness**: Individuals sharing God’s Word in the context of their everyday lives
- **Outreach**: Congregations extending Word and Sacrament ministry “beyond current and usual limits”

*Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.*

Proverbs 9:9
**Self-Assessment**

- Connect To Disciple (Congregational Outreach)
- Joining in God’s Mission (Strategic Planning)
- Shepherding the Strays (Inactive Members)
- Members of One Body (Assimilation)
- For the Love of Our Neighbors (Community Connections)
- Gracious Hosts (Ministry to Guests/Visitors)
- Revealed to Children (Outreach via Children’s Ministry)
- Beyond the Classroom (Outreach via Education Ministry)
- One Flock, Many Sheep (Holistic Group Ministry)
- As Iron Sharpens Iron (Conflict Resolution)

**Action-Oriented Training**

- Video-based Instruction
- Adult Learning Activities
- Experiential Learning
- Prompted Journaling
- Strategic Coaching

**Outreach-Integrated Witnessing**

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*Every One His Witness* Evangelism Program
Revitalization Training Approach

1. Video-based Workshop

- Standardized instruction presented by Subject Matter Experts
- Led by trained and certified facilitators
  - Provide human interface
  - Manage presentation
  - Answer (or refer) questions
2. Adult Learning Activities

Appropriate activities to reinforce the presented material
• Moderated by the facilitator

Group Discussion
Group Project
Role Playing
Revitalization Training Approach

3. Experiential Learning

Doing what has been learned in an actual or simulated environment

- Observed, supported, and evaluated by the facilitator
4. Prompted Journaling

Capturing what is learned and experienced in writing by responding to related questions

- During training sessions
- After training sessions

“I write because I don't know what I think until I read what I say.”

Flannery O’Connor
Revitalization Training Approach

5. Strategic Coaching

- Develop and implement an action plan to put what is learned in training into practice in ministry
- Coaching to aid with the implementation of the newly learned skills
  - Trained and certified volunteers serve as coaches
Step 4. Go Beyond “Current and Usual Limits”
Outreach

The collective efforts of believers who are gathered into a local congregation to engage people outside of the Church with the intent and desire to include those people in the spiritual life of their congregation.

Outreach is the work of the Church gathered.
Outreach revolves around the question:

“How do we extend Word and Sacrament ministry to people outside of our congregation?”
The Focus of Outreach

- On doing the right things
  - “planting”
  - “watering”
- Not on producing (or forcing) the desired results

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

He who plants and he who waters are one ...

1 Cor. 3:6-8a
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Evangelistic Outreach Strategy

- Find creative ways to interact with people who are outside of the Church
- Invite and encourage people to join us in Word and Sacrament
- Be present with, become involved with, and effectively engage the people with whom we make connections

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The dynamic equivalent of “disciple” in Wittenbergese was simply “believer” [Gläubiger] or “listener” [Zuhörer] or “child in the congregation” [Pfarrkind]. Some in our day may protest that “believer” is something less than a disciple, only the starting point. But Luther, Melanchthon, their students, and their students’ students believed that if you trusted in the Lord above all that he had made, you would do what the logic of faith makes inevitable: those who have been buried with Christ and raised with him walk in his footsteps.

Robert Kolb
“Discipleship in the Lutheran Tradition”
Concordia Journal, 2012

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Step 5. Do What We’re Meant to Do
Witnessing Is All About Jesus

... coming to, being present with, delivering, and making people whole through His Church

... this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 3:8-10
We live on earth only so that we should be a help to other people. Otherwise, it would be best if God would strangle us and let us die as soon as we were baptized and had begun to believe. For this reason, however, He lets us live that we may bring other people also to faith as He has done for us ... Everything then should be directed in such a way that you recognize what God has done for you and that you, thereafter, make it your highest priority to proclaim this publically and call everyone to the light to which you are called.

Martin Luther  
*Sermons on 1 Peter, 1523*  
Cited in *The Church Comes from All Nations*, p. 20
God has set you in the places, with the people, and at the times for you to be His witness.

But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost [of sinners], Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

1 Timothy 1:16
Our Vocations Provide Us with the Relationships for Witnessing

- **Family**
  - Immediate family
  - Extended family
  - Family friends

- **Occupation**
  - Co-workers
  - Clients/customers
  - Fellow commuters
  - Associates
  - Suppliers

- **Neighbor**
  - Social contacts
  - Teammates/coaches
  - Community leaders
  - Neighborhood families

- **Church**
  - Visitors/guests
  - People being served
  - Evangelism contacts
  - Members’ families and friends
Witnessing: More than Telling, Connecting

Believers are meant to be in fellowship with Christ and other believers.

4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:4-5
We All Need the Church

The Church is the steward of Word and Sacrament – the Means of Grace

... the Holy Spirit effects our sanctification through the following: the communion of saints or Christian church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. In other words, **He first leads us into His holy community, placing us upon the bosom of the church, where He preaches to us and brings us to Christ.**

*He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother.*

— Cyprian (c. 200-258 AD)

_Large Catechism Third Article_
Witness Extends the (Out)Reach of the Congregation

Members engage and interact with people in their everyday lives who are outside of the church’s sphere of influence
“Every One His Witness”

LCMS Evangelism Program

- Centered in Vocation
- Relationship-based
- Uses the LASSIE approach
- Uses Luther’s Small Catechism for content
- Leverages contemporary training methods and technology
15 [I]n your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet **do it with gentleness and respect**, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

1 Peter 3:15-16
For more information about RE:Vitality and Every One His Witness, visit:

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