**Vitality Team Proposal:**

**Proposal:**

In order to refocus the Mission Table to be a group working on Congregational Vitality, in keeping with the emphasis of the ELCA, I propose that the Mission Table be renamed the “Vitality Team”.

“Congregational vitality” is another way of describing strengthening congregations – the 5th benchmark of the Montana Synod. The Vitality Team, (with the support of Bishop Crist and approval by the Synod Council) over the next nine months will introduce and encourage congregations to engage in a Synod-wide focus of “Dwelling in the Word” and “one-to-one” conversations.

* Dwelling in the Word is engaging with a Bible passage in deep listening and conversation with others in small groups in congregations, councils, other meetings, Bible Studies, etc. The Vitality Team would encourage the use of one or two passages that the whole Synod reflect upon over the course of the next months (through the Epiphany season and then another passage through Lent and Easter.)
* Congregations (and their leaders) would also be encouraged and trained to use the practice of one-to-one listening. A “one-to-one” is a conversations to listen to and draw out a person to get to know them, to hear and stay attentive to what the person has to say through intentional focus on the person and what the person is sharing. It is a way to practice aspects of congregational vitality through engaging in life-changing relationships with others. To truly listen and hear another is to offer a gift that is immeasurable.

The practices of Dwelling in the Word and “one-to-ones” would help to focus energy first as a Synod on a life-changing relationship with God and with one another.

In this next year, The Vitality Team and I will encourage congregations to intentionally focus on these practices. To engage in these practices in congregations throughout the Synod will enhance the vitality of congregations and is a manageable and realistic practice for congregations. It also gets to the heart of helping congregations focus on the importance of relationship with God, one another and the world through repeatable and realistic practices that have the opportunity to shape life in congregations and faith communities.

Around the ELCA, Synods (along with the work of the DEMs) are engaging congregations in work to refocus and revitalize congregations to be more intentional centers for mission and ministry, reflecting the love and grace of God that we receive through Jesus. As the Montana Synod is in a period of transition before the election of a new Bishop, these practices will be helpful to encourage deepening faith and witness and strengthening congregations to witness to life-changing relationships with God, one another and the world.

My goal is also to engage the Vitality Team to begin to plan a process for a number of interested congregations to enter into a more intentional way of working to be a vital congregation by fall of 2019. I anticipate that with the work that a number of other Synods have begun, we here in Montana will be able to adapt and tweak a couple of models from other Synods so that over the next several months we will be able to be ready to introduce and encourage these congregations to begin a process of moving into more intentional growth of congregational vitality.

Submitted by

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