

Congregational Ministry Snapshot and Ministry Plan

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.”

1 Corinthians 12:12

Why:

We are a connectional church. We support one another in discerning God’s call for us as individual congregations and as a presbytery. Presbytery has a role as a conversation partner in the congregation’s discernment. As Paul asserts in 1 Corinthians 12, individual Christians and churches makes up the Body of Christ. Each is connected to the other, and when all the parts are strong and healthy, so is our expression of the Body of Christ. We are in this together.

What and when:

Every three years, as part of the traditional triennial visit process in which a congregation receives a visit from the presbytery, the presbytery and the Session will work together to mutually agree on a Ministry Snapshot and a Ministry Plan for the congregation. Also, every church will conduct a thorough review of its ministry every nine years or when an interim occurs between calls, (unless one had been completed in the past three years).

Who:

Triennial visits are conducted by the Committee on Ministry which sends a small group of visitors to the Session of the congregation.

Definitions:

Ministry Snapshot – This is a picture of the current situation of a particular church. Created by the congregation, it is reviewed by the Session and part of the Triennial visit process with the Presbytery (COM) representative. The goal is to have a Ministry Snapshot approved by both the Session and affirmed by the COM representative. The Ministry Snapshot guides the development of the congregation’s Ministry Plan. ~~The Ministry Plan with the support of the COM for the congregation (e.g. funds from Trustees, approvals from COM.)~~

Ministry Plan – This is the outline of a plan for the mission and ministry of the congregation based on the Ministry Snapshot and the discernment of God’s call to the congregation in dialogue with God and supported by the Presbytery. The goal is to have the Ministry Plan **affirmed** by the COM on behalf of the Presbytery to open the channel to the Presbytery’s **financial support through the grants and loan process**.

B.A.T. – The Building Assessment Tool was created by the presbytery’s trustees. It helps a church take stock of its finances, building, and property. It consists of an online Building survey, an online congregational Financial Health Assessment, a building inspection, a NYSERDA audit, and a review of the church’s annual report. Cost: free

Modified B.A.T. – Consists of only the online Building survey, an online congregational Financial Health Assessment, and a review of the church’s annual report. Cost: free

C.A.T. – The Congregational Assessment Tool is a very effective tool that uses a detailed survey of church members to learn about a congregants’ feeling, preferences, commitment levels, etc. It includes a consultant from the Samaritan Counseling Center who makes an in-depth presentation of the findings and some recommendations at a meeting of the full congregation. Cost: for a church of less than 50 members, about \$500; for a church of 50 – 100 members, about \$1000.

Pneumatrix – A powerful assessment tool that investigates both the church and local community. The congregation will be assigned an Adaptive Change Coach by COM. This process will take one year. Cost: Negotiated with COM.

Assessment Toolbox – This is a collection of useful assessment tools created by Albany Presbytery which provide thought-provoking questions to help a congregation consider its current ministry (Ministry Snapshot) and calling for the years ahead (Ministry Plan). Each one can be conducted in a short-period of time and designed to help the Session see the congregation from a fresh perspective. Items 1. Congregational Census and 2. Church Life-stage are considered essential to the

process. Congregational teams can choose either the 3. Time and Energy Assessment and 4. Marks of a Vital Church Review to accompany them. Another option is to suggest to COM a different tool that a congregation has discovered or created and wishes to substitute in place of items 3. and 4. Cost: free

The Assessment Toolbox includes:

1. **Congregational Census** – This is a new tool created by Albany presbytery to represent the engagement and commitment of a church’s congregants in a way more specific and helpful to a Ministry Snapshot than the Membership Rolls. To complete this census, a small group within the congregation (e.g. the Teaching Elder if present, the Clerk of Session, and another knowledgeable member) is chosen by the Session to review the Membership Rolls, the Church Directory, and other lists the church may have to create a census of congregants in the following categories:

- Engaged congregants: How many people participate on at least a monthly basis in worship, Bible study or Christian education, or volunteering in the congregation? (This number may include both members who have joined the church and friends of the church.)
- Engaged children and youth: How many young ones who participate in one of the above areas on at least a monthly basis?
- Financial support only members: How many people participate only by giving financial support? Of these, how many are local and how many are outside the local area?
- Disconnected local members: How many people are on the membership rolls who live locally but are not “engaged congregants” or “financially support only members”?
- Disconnected non-local members: How any non-local people are on the membership rolls who are not “engaged congregants” or “financially support only members”?

Why? It is essential to a Ministry Snapshot to understand the different ways people are connected to the church. This is the basis for a realistic Ministry Plan.

2. **Church Life-stage** – This is terminology developed by the Presbytery of Albany to describe and categorize in a general way the stage of congregational life in which a congregation finds itself. As part of the Ministry Snapshot, the Session and the Presbytery must ultimately come to agreement of the Church Life-stage.

A simple way to engage this activity is to place the bell curve figure below on newsprint. Invite everyone to place an “x” as to where they believe the church is on the congregational lifecycle.

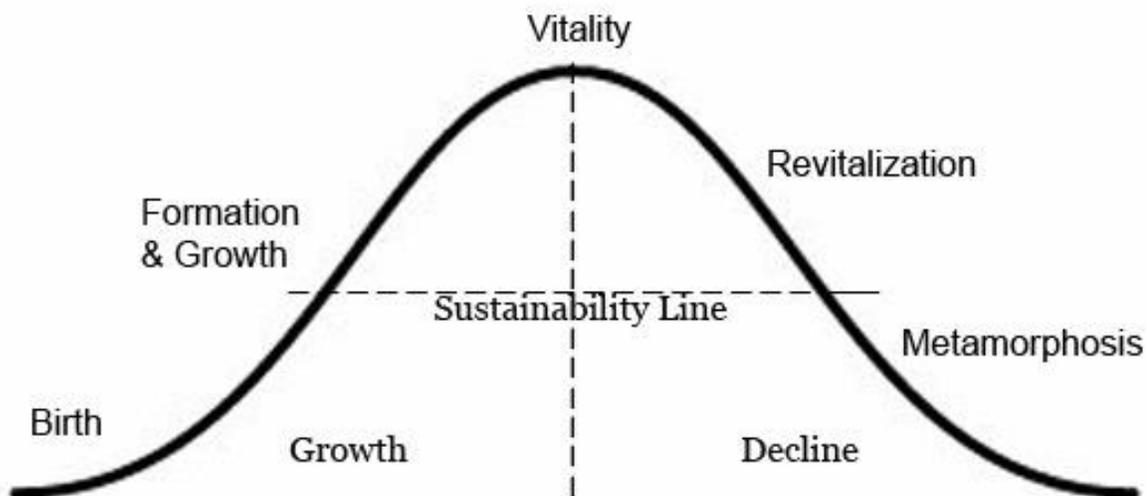
Life-stages:

- **Birth**: A tenuous, but exciting time when a new community is being launched.
- **Formation and Growth**: A time of building community and developing ministry focus. New ideas are encouraged as there not a lot former ways and traditions with which to contend.
- **Vitality**: The Ministry Snapshot reflects a congregation that is in the midst of implementing a Ministry Plan that is being fruit. It’s ministry is both sustainable, growing, and vital.
- **Revitalization**: The Ministry Snapshot reflects a congregation that is stable in its current ministry, but needs a rethinking of its Ministry Plan to be vital and sustainable into the future. This congregation is stable in many ways but is undertaking some significant efforts to reach Vitality. *Need from Presbytery*: spiritual and practical support in making a discerning and implementing a Ministry Plan focused on revitalization.
- **Vitality**: The Ministry Snapshot reflects a congregation that is in the midst of implementing a Ministry Plan that is being fruit. It’s ministry is both sustainable, growing, and vital. *Need from Presbytery*: spiritual and practical support in implementing its present Ministry Plan and watching for when it is time to update this direction.
- **Metamorphosis**: The church is in a time of radical transition. It recognizes that a major transition is needed as a way of being a congregation. This stage may involve a fundamental death and resurrection plan.

Examples of this stage:

- Transitioning from a traditional Teaching Elder to a Commissioned Ruling Elder
- Leaving a building to move to another location
- Merging with another PC(USA) or Formula or Agreement congregation
- Closing a congregation

Need from Presbytery: spiritual and practical support in making a fundamen-



tal transition.

Congregational Lifecycle Figure

3. Time and Energy Assessment - Very simply this tool has your church's assessment team review the church's calendar for the past year. Divide a sheet of paper into three columns. Label the columns - 1. Fundraising, 2. Ministry to Church, 3. Mission beyond church. Now list in each column those events held in the past year according to the column. For example, Rummage sales and Fund-raising dinners go in column 1; Educational events including Sunday school go in column 2; Volunteers in the Food Pantry or mission trips go in column 3;

Once the year's events are listed in the appropriate columns, the team can attempt to estimate the volunteer hours invested in each activity. For instance, how many people worked how long at the church dinner along with preparation time; roughly

how much time was spent by teachers in class plus preparation; how many people plus hours were spent at the food pantry. These obviously will be “guesstimates.”

Total the amount of hours in each column. How do they compare? Are you happy with the amount of time and energy your church spends in each category?

4. Marks of a Vital Church - This consists of a listing of markers consistent with those of healthy and growing churches. The markers are both qualitative and quantitative in nature. No church will answer “yes” to every item, but hopefully your leadership team can affirm a majority of the items. Of those that are not reflective of your situations, which ones might the church choose to work on in the next year? Try to select items from each area. Develop a ministry plan for each item.

Developing a Ministry Snapshot

There are basically two tracks for developing a Ministry Snapshot.

First, every nine years or during an interim time between pastors, a congregation will engage in a thorough assessment of their overall ministry every nine years or during an interim time between pastors. The reason is that we live in a rapidly changing world, and the ministry strategies of year’s past may not be as effective as they once were. The Ministry Snapshot in this nine year review is designed to consider every aspect of the church’s life.

Second, the Triennial visits will undergo a serious overhaul and a briefer form of Ministry Snapshot and Ministry Plan will ordinarily be conducted when the longer review mentioned above is not taking place. The Triennial visits are now designed to help the congregation to develop a reasonable picture of itself in the short run. They can be conducted relatively quickly, yet can be quite insightful.

There are two options offered for these Triennial review assessments. *Option A* involves the session or congregational leadership team electing to use the

tools provided in the COM's "Assessment Tool Box" described above. *Option B* involves the congregation conducting the modified B.A.T., the Census, and the Life[stage] process, as well as an assessment tool that they have discovered, (instead of one of our two options). This tool will need to be approved by COM.

When the assessment tools are completed, the Session needs to review the findings and send a short narrative report summarizing the Ministry Snapshot to the COM. They can now develop a Ministry Plan.

Developing a Ministry Plan

Once a congregational leadership team has engaged in the appropriate Ministry Snapshot tools listed above, it should have a reasonable idea of what its Growth Areas are. Some may be of the technical change variety, such as a leaky roof that needs to be patched. Most will probably involve the church engaging in an adaptive change, such as working on becoming more inviting and welcoming. Adaptive changes take time to implement, but are vital to congregational health.

How much goes into the Ministry Plan depends on the nature of the items involved. We advise only trying to improve one or two "adaptive change" goals at a time as each one involves significant diligence and attention to evolve for the long haul.

We encourage the leadership team to engage a "congregational coach" to help it develop a workable strategy forward and to help the church be accountable to itself. Compensation for a congregational coach can be funded by a grant in partnership with COM.

Presbytery also empowers the Ministry Plan of the congregation through financial support (e.g. grants and loans through the Trustees) and clergy support (e.g. approving clergy calls, assisting in pastor searches.)

The Committee of Ministry of Albany Presbytery wants to work with your congregation to strengthen your church. When the churches of the presbytery are strong, so is the Presbytery as a whole.