



Application for Vitality Initiative – Fall 2021

Application Deadline – June 1, 2021

Fall 2021 Cohort congregations to be named by June 20, 2021

The Nebraska Synod's *Vitality Initiative for Congregations* is rooted in the conviction that any congregation earnestly seeking to discern, explore and innovate has the potential to increase its vitality. Congregations participating in the initiative will engage in learning on congregational vocation, discernment, theological and biblical grounding, spiritual practices, institutional memory and storytelling, culture change, local asset mapping, listening and imaging together that will culminate with a significant congregational experiment flowing directly out of the discernment process.

Each congregation will create a leadership team, consisting of five to ten individuals, to serve as the congregation's working group. To enhance learning, leadership teams from each congregation will meet on a regular basis with teams from other congregations. Using a cohort learning model, they will be provided resources to help them assess their vitality, discern their vocation, become equipped and strengthened for change and engage the community in risk-taking experimentation.

At times we overlook the diverse gifts and expertise found in our congregations and communities. The congregation will be best served by a leadership team representative of the whole congregation and community. Team members bring with them diverse stories, networks, perspectives and experiences. When inviting members to serve on the leadership team consider gifts, passions, gender, ethnicity, experiences in the congregation, occupation, networks, economic perspective, family demographics, generational representation (i.e., Silent Generation, Baby Boomer, Gen X, Millennial, Gen Z) and years in the community. The leadership team of five to ten members should include the pastoral leader and at least one member of the council. The application is to be completed by the leadership team.

Application Instructions

Each member of the congregation's leadership team should complete the Vitality Initiative Quick Check section of the application individually with the freedom to answer honestly from their perspective. Tabulate the results from the Vitality and Sustainability sections and average the scores. Use the averaged scores to complete the Balancing Vitality and Sustainability section.

The Capacity for Change and Risk-Taking sections require the full team's participation as you discern and generate your responses. Use additional pages for your responses and send as a PDF attachment with the Vitality Initiative Quick Check form.

Vitality

A vital congregation is one that lives out God's mission in their part of the world. These congregations connect with God, each other and the world. The following questions can help your congregation determine its current vitality (mission orientation).

	Poorly		Somewhat		Great	
How well do these phrases describe your congregation?	1	2	3	4	5	Copy number from column
<i>Example</i>			X			3
Worship nurtures people's faith						
Deepens people's relationship with God						
Has a clear sense mission						
Excitement exists about the congregation's future						
Always ready to try something new						
Acts as a positive force in the community						
Works for social justice/advocacy						
How well does your congregation...	Hardly at all		Well		Very well	
Incorporate new members into congregational life						
Seek out and use the gifts of members of all ages						
Build strong, healthy relationships among members						
Manage disagreements in a healthy and respectful manner						
Address social concerns (helping those in need)						
Equip members to share their faith with others						
Interact with the local community						
Help members live out their faith in daily living						
Total all rows						
Vitality Score: (Divide total by 15)						

Sustainability

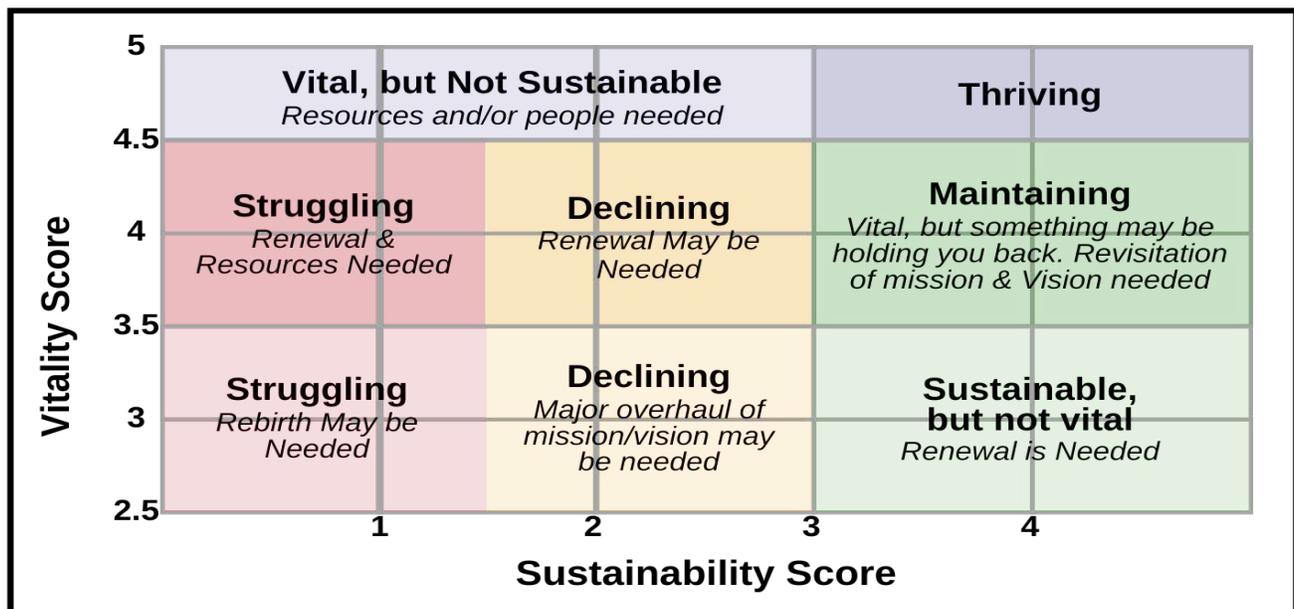
God inspires congregations for mission and blesses them with resources for ministry. The two clearest measures of a congregation's ability to sustain ministry are money (to pay staff, fund ministries and maintain facilities) and people power (to engage in ministries). Use the following questions to estimate your sustainability.

	No Longer Sustainable	Declining but still sustainable	Maintaining	Growing or Increasing	Copy number from left
	1	2	3	4	
People Power Enough people with energy to lead and participate in worship & ministries					
Financial Resources To pay for facility, staffing, ministries, etc.					
Write the lower of these two numbers here:					

Since both people and financial resources are necessary for sustainability, the lower number represents the "weakest link" in your congregation's sustainability chain.

Balancing Vitality and Sustainability

Use the following chart to mark where your congregation falls in the matrix. Find your sustainability at the bottom and move up until you are level with the vitality score from the first page. The placement on chart **estimates** your congregation's most likely vitality/sustainability balance. This is not a perfect measure because these categories overlap some in real life.



A congregation needs to be both vital and sustainable in order to be thriving.

- Vital congregations that are declining in sustainability may not be able to continue God's mission in their setting.
- Sustainable congregations that aren't vital aren't living out God's mission for them in their setting.
- Sustainable congregations that are declining in their vitality may be experiencing a disconnect from what God's mission is for them in their setting.

What are your congregation's strengths and challenges?

Capacity for Change & Risk-Taking

Working together as a team, answer the following questions using additional pages as needed to accurately reflect your congregation. Lengthy responses are not necessary; honest responses are expected.

1. The year 2020 was filled with a multitude of unexpected challenges for congregations. Reflect honestly on how the year went, where you are now and wonderings about where you might be going next.
2. Apart from those made necessary by the pandemic, what was the last significant change or experiment your congregation undertook?
3. Share an experience of your congregation taking a risk on behalf of the greater community you serve. What were the outcomes of the congregation's actions?
4. What are the most significant challenges to innovation and experimentation in your congregation? What resources, gifts or capacities does your congregation already have to address these challenges?

Congregational Leadership Team

List the members of your leadership team and their contact information including name, cell phone (or home phone if they don't have a cell phone) and email address. In addition to contact information share why each person was invited to serve on the leadership team.

Examples:

Mildred Smith is a Baby Boomer, has been a key leader with our women's organization, served on the school board for many years, owned and operated her own community business for 35 years, is a life-long member of the congregation, has served as council president and treasurer, is everyone's adopted grandma and is known for her honesty and big picture thinking.

David Perez's early years were spent in Mexico City with his extended family. His father's work took them to many locations around the world which has given him a unique world view. He is Gen X, bi-lingual, married with an eleven-year old daughter, a creative writer, new to the community, teaches at the high school and is a strong integration link for first generation Latinx families in our community.

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Send applications electronically in PDF format to vitality@nebraskasynod.org by June 1, 2021.