

7 Marks of Vital Congregations (even during Covid-19)

Mark #3: Outward Incarnational Focus

Share in reading aloud the entire scripture texts and quotes below:

Deuteronomy 10:12-13, 11:18-21 “ . . . what does the LORD require of you? Only to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, and to serve the LORD . . . ”

Matthew 25 “Be prepared (25:1-13). . . put your resources to work (25:14-30) . . . live out your faith through actions (25:31-46)

“Outward Incarnational Focus” is outward exploration, awareness, and focus on neighbors and neighborhoods. Beyond relationship with those who are like us, the incarnate Christ dwells among the lowly and least, the stranger and the suffering, the marginalized and majority. This focus stands against inward institutional survival and closed communities of assimilation and exclusion.-PCUSA Office of VCI

The stranger is not simply one who needs us. We need the stranger if we are to know Christ and Serve God in truth and love. Hospitality means inviting the stranger into personal space (physical of awareness/concern). Our private space is then enlarged and gives us a chance to see our own lives through different eyes. –John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality, Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission.*

Every congregation is both called and sent; the call gathers us to hear, understand and accept our vocation, which is that we are sent into the world for the sake of the gospel. As against of God’s reign, churches engage the people and powers of their context.-Mark LauBranson, *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership.*

Sample Reflection and Discussion questions:

- 1) Revitalizing requires adjusting to new circumstances.
What parts of the scripture and quotes above speak to your experience of “Outward Focus” during the pandemic?
- 2) What evidence do you see in our congregation of turning inward instead of outward in our different ministries? Has this changed during the pandemic? How? What prevents you from going where God may send you? What tempts you to focus inward?
- 3) In what ways does or could our congregation focus more on those people who are not participating in our fellowship? How do you feel about those who might tune in virtually to worship, but not come to our facility following the pandemic?

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