

Seven Marks Bible Study

for John Calvin Presbytery

Week 1 March 1, 2022

Lifelong discipleship formation

Scripture Acts 2:42-47

Overview

“Lifelong Discipleship Formation is about daily life. It’s about how we claim and proclaim our identity as followers of Christ. It’s about how we practice our faith; how we grow in faith, cherish faith, and share faith in the world. Beyond mere words, how do people know we are disciples of Jesus Christ? No matter the age, it’s about daily seeking and living in relationship with the living God. We are called to be righteous, to seek justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God. Thus, Lifelong Discipleship Formation is about how we live into that right relationship with God, with all God’s people, and all of creation. It’s about growing in the community of God’s grace, the church, and interpreting faith in our everyday life; confronting brokenness and sinfulness when we fall short of the glory of God and shining a bold light of Christ for all to see. Lifelong Discipleship Formation requires an awakened and engaged commitment to God, and to all people whom Christ loves. It is about the call to daily take up our cross and follow Christ.” (from the Immediate Toolkit)

As you journey through this first week of Lent, we invite you to reflect on your own discipleship formation. These questions and prompts may help.

How does your daily living reflect your relationship with God?

How do you engage difficult questions of faith and interpretation of scripture?

Does your church help you in growing deeply in relationship with Christ?

The following are the objectives for this mark listed in the Immediate Toolkit. How do you see these objectives being met in your congregation?

- An intentional plan for discipleship formation of all ages; from the cradle to the grave theology (including, but not limited to, family systems and intergenerational discipleship where applicable).
- A regular practice of Bible Study, prayer, and other spiritual habits, inside and outside where we gather
- Church teaches rituals and faith traditions, biblical literacy and spiritual practices to all members.
- Church equips and empowers all people to interpret faith in daily life. It engages in, not hides from, difficult conversations of society and cultures today. (i.e., sexism, racism, classism, ageism, and all other “isms” that divide).
- Fostered environments of diversity which help enhance and deeply enrich Biblical study, worship, and communal life

Scripture: John 4:1-41

Overview

“Evangelism is simply sharing the Good News. It is authentic and it is intentional, not merely expressions of kindness or good moral ethics. We all have Good News to share in our lives; it is a part of our identity. And when we share this news, it is with intentionality and with people with whom we have relationships. We don’t have to be trained to share the good news of a new job, baby or puppy! We simply share what is beautiful and dear to us. Therefore, evangelism must be connected to lifelong Christian formation. It is through intentional spiritual practices in the faith community that we meld God’s story with our story, and we share that story with people in our daily lives.” (Immediate Toolkit, 24)

As you journey through the season of Lent, we invite you to reflect on how the marks of vitality play out in your life. These questions and prompts may help.

How would you share your story of faith with someone you didn’t know?

How do you see your story melding with God’s story?

The following are the objectives for this mark listed in the Immediate Toolkit. How do you see these objectives being met in your congregation?

- To recognize that all disciples are called to Evangelism, not just committees and leaders; it is an authentic part of their life
- To empower and equip all people to enter relationships unashamed and unafraid to share the Good News
- The church recognizes that evangelism should be need-based (meets needs of un-churched/ de-churched)
- The church develops practices for people to share their story and give witness to Good News in their lives

Scripture: Romans 12:1-21

Overview

“If discipleship formation is about learning/ understanding/living the Good News, and authentic evangelism is about intentionally sharing the Good News in relationships, then outward incarnation is about not limiting where and to whom we share the Good News. Outward incarnational focus is about being the gathered community of Christ sent out! We go not because we have a strategy for new membership; we go because we have a Savior who commanded us to be on God’s mission. We go because God’s saving love in Christ, cannot be inwardly contained in our buildings when we live with neighbors in need and a hurting world. The Good News is meant to transform and transcend. The church is meant to be a beacon of Christ’s grace, justice, freedom, and love. Outward incarnational focus means we daily take up our cross and follow to the marginalized of society, the poor among us, the suffering and sick, the stranger and enemy, the down-trodden and “the least of these.” We do not just focus on bringing similar or like-minded people inside to assimilate to our way of doing things; nor do we just go to people and places that are familiar and comfortable. Outward incarnational focus, requires an emboldened faith, that goes because Christ is already present, and calls us to join.” (Immediate Toolkit, 24)

As you journey through the season of Lent, we invite you to reflect on how the marks of vitality play out in your life. These questions and prompts may help.

How would you imagine “an emboldened faith” to look in your life?

Where have you met the living God in your daily life?

The following are the objectives for this mark listed in the Immediate Toolkit. How do you see these objectives being met in your congregation?

- Conduct community analysis to ascertain the needs, fears, hopes, and pressure points in the community, so that the church’s ministry and mission can address them.
- The church practices genuine hospitality (more than being warm and friendly, it is about attempting to anticipate the needs of others; practicing inclusion; stepping out of the comfort zone; loving and nurturing others; it’s about them, not you)
- Join on Christ’s mission with the lost, weak, suffering, lowly, least, marginalized, oppressed, outcast; working towards forgiveness and reconciliation
- Faithful engagement in rich relationships of all diversity
- Church becomes a living being sent to follow the Spirit and join where Christ is already present; not still/static

Scripture: John 13:1-20

Overview

“All people of God, in the image of Christ, are given fruit of the Spirit and spiritual gifts meant for building up the Church. In this way, we are all called to serve the Lord, to do our part in membership of the body of Christ. Every part is necessary. Every part is valuable, and every voice is important. Every person should be equipped, nurtured, and supported to use their gifts to glorify God, through servant leadership; not just cliques of powerful people or continual burnout of the same leaders. In keeping with true discipleship formation, churches are called to help all members to be empowered to use their gifts in servant leadership. And, God calls and equips some for the particular task of pastoral ministry, which must be cultivated, nurtured and trained. Ministry can never be about a single pastor, but it is about identifying, equipping and empowering those servant leaders God puts in our midst.” (Immediate Toolkit, 25)

As you journey through the season of Lent, we invite you to reflect on how the marks of vitality play out in your life. These questions and prompts may help.

How does it feel when you are not able to share your gift with your congregation?

How would you imagine servant leadership to look in your context

The following are the objectives for this mark listed in the Immediate Toolkit. How do you see these objectives being met in your congregation?

- The church encourages members, when appropriate, to be “ministers” (priesthood of all believers)
- The congregation provides tools and a healthy environment to train and support leaders
- The staff and other leaders model servant leadership principles
- Develop methods in which voices, ideas, opinions are shared; people are empowered in their faith
- Congregation assists people in discerning spiritual gifts for use in service to church and community

Scripture Hebrews 4:9-5:10**Overview**

“Spirit-Inspired worship is a gift of God’s wonder! Six days we labor and toil, and on this Holy Sabbath day we get to come into the presence of God; we get to encounter the awesome mystery of the God who longs to be known in relationship with us. We worship, because through prayer and supplication, through the Word proclaimed and the sacraments celebrated, through the songs of praise and passing of peace — God meets us there. Worship is our lifeline to the Holy God. Our worship should be active participation into the living relationship with the triune God; thus, all should feel welcome and have a place. Worship should challenge, teach, transform, convict, and call us into deeper relationship with God and one another; not gratify our comforts and entertain our desires. Worship is an encounter with God that we understand and do not understand. It is an act filled with mystery and awe, but in worship we have the opportunity to express our deepest desires to God and listen for God’s voice. In worship, we also experience the call to serve and be in mission.” (Immediate Toolkit, 26)

As you journey through the season of Lent, we invite you to reflect on how the marks of vitality play out in your life. These questions and prompts may help.

How does worship draw us deeper into relationship with God?

What part of worship challenges or transforms you?

The following are the objectives for this mark listed in the Immediate Toolkit. How do you see these objectives being met in your congregation?

- Prayerful discernment of members actively participating in all aspects of planning and leading worship
- There is thoughtful and sound biblical preaching
- Intentional worship does not cling to rituals, but is open to filling sacred space with new rituals
- Engages all people, of all diversity, and enables them to be active participants in the experience
- Creates space for peoples’ stories; not afraid of silence
- Communal connectivity to one another, and connection to God
- Challenges and sends the people of God beyond their pew into daily life
- There should be awe, expectation, and anticipation in coming into the presence of God

Scripture: Galatians 6:1-10**Overview**

“Caring relationships seems an easy mark of vitality. We all want a place to belong; people who care about us. Many congregations would argue: “this is why we come together; we welcome and care for each other.” Yet, caring relationships in Christ requires true agape love; a sacrificial, self-emptying, perfect love. Although we are imperfect, it is about striving to see all people the way Christ sees them; not from judgments or preconceived perceptions. It is about helping walk with others, responding to their needs, desiring their well-being. It is about walking with people in tragedy, and rejoicing in their triumphs. Caring relationships of God is about allowing people to be real in their stories, without hiding or holding back, and loving every imperfect part of them. Church should be the one place where the God who already knows, encounters our honest confession, and allows us to give testimony. It should be the place where conflicts are confronted, crucial conversations of forgiveness and reconciliation are had, and people of God are transformed by agape-love.

Caring relationships is about vulnerability and trust. It is about meeting all people of God where they are, and sharing our One Savior, Jesus Christ. Caring relationships don’t come through hospitality and welcoming committees, they come through a carefully cultivated environment that is genuine and sincere in being the household of God.” (Immediate Toolkit, 27)

As you journey through the season of Lent, we invite you to reflect on how the marks of vitality play out in your life. These questions and prompts may help.

How have you seen agape-love transform a life?

What are some ways you can encourage deepening your caring relationships at church?

The following are the objectives for this mark listed in the Immediate Toolkit. How do you see these objectives being met in your congregation?

- Cultivates an environment of true caring relationships through genuine opportunities to share testimony
- The church seeks to strengthen ties within the household of God; fostering relationships between demographics, with members on the margin, people who are missing or who have been hurt
- The church seeks to build and rebuild relationships of conflict or strain; clear process of conflict resolution
- The church develops caring relationships in the neighborhood and community (i.e. other churches, community organizations, health and human services, advocacy groups, presbytery)
- Evaluate and envision ways of sharing the love of Christ in new relationship

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:13

Overview

“Ecclesial health is about: 1) Why we gather as a church community 2) How we practice being church together. It is about whether our mission, vision, and values match up with the ways we live together. It requires continual attentiveness, awareness, and assessment in asking “are we who we say we are?” And more importantly, “are we who God is calling us to be?” Prayer and discernment are at the heart of ecclesial health! There are several factors to ecclesial health: prayerful discernment, decision-making process, health of pastors, stewardship of budget and resources, clarity in mission and ministries. Ecclesial health is about the people of God having a clear purpose; all people are stake-holders invested in being a part of this community of faith. There are shared core values, a clear mission, and commitment and loyalty to the life we gather in as church. Yet, they also know that this is a living faith. So, they dare to dream and understand that change is inevitable. With ecclesial health, there is joy and gratitude in coming together; people, not programs or properties are valued. People gather and are sent to be Christ’s Church.” (Immediate Toolkit, 27)

As you journey through the season of Lent, we invite you to reflect on how the marks of vitality play out in your life. These questions and prompts may help.

What do you think of when you think of a healthy church?

What are some core values your congregation holds, in your opinion?

The following are the objectives for this mark listed in the Immediate Toolkit. How do you see these objectives being met in your congregation?

- A communal life centered on prayer and discernment of God’s will
- Clarity in Vision, Mission, Core Values; budget reflects these core principles
- Continual attentiveness, awareness and assessment to mission and practices of being church
- Pastor(s) and staff are regularly evaluated using best practices
- Pastor(s) and staff, all servant leaders, are nurtured and supported in health; clear expectations
- Stewardship and tithing are taught year-round; accountable giving in gratitude
- Transparent in spending; continual discernment of budget sustainability
- All are stakeholders, committed to fiscal responsibilities, active participation, and necessary voices in envisioning, dreaming, and decision-making