

Task Force B on Congregations of the Diocese of New York

Characteristics of Viable Congregations

Viability characteristics are those elements of congregational and diocesan life that are considered basic and essential. They represent the fundamental obligations and responsibilities that each congregation undertakes as a constituent part of this diocese.

- Essential leadership positions (wardens, vestry, treasurer, clerk) are filled and have regular turnover per parish bylaws.
- Clergy and staff salaries and pensions are paid in a timely manner and meet at least minimum diocesan recommended compensation levels.
- The congregation is current with its financial obligations, including payment of the full assessment or has appealed the assessment to the Diocesan Adjustment Board or the Trustees. (Parishes may appeal the decision of the Adjustment Board to the Trustees).
- There is an annual giving (stewardship pledge) program.
- A parish financial budget is prepared annually.
- Church properties (buildings and grounds) are free of major defects or these are being addressed.
- The congregation files an annual parochial report and a yearly audit and/or a modified audit report.
- There are parish bylaws that are reviewed at least every three (3) years.
- All clergy and appropriate lay persons have received Safe Church training.
- The congregation pursues “stewardship” in a holistic way to include its financial and environmental dimensions, i.e., the stewardship of God’s creation.
- The vestry pursues environmental stewardship in relation to church buildings with regard to both energy efficiency and the transition to renewable energy.

When Congregations are at risk: *For to your faithful people Oh Lord, life is changed not ended*

In consultation with the Bishops, Diocesan Staff and other members of the Diocesan leadership, churches that recognize themselves in a status that is both static and unsustainable will determine if:

- The mission and ministry is best served moving into partnership with other congregations either as 1) an area ministry of churches in partnership sharing clergy and program, or 2) as a multi-campus church, (one church, one budget, multiple locations) 3) rebirth as a new community or other alternative structure.
- Gather churches in various stages of risk to share their experience and seek ways forward.
- Ongoing financial support based on demonstration of increased vitality, viability and sustainability.
- For churches identified as strategic to the larger ongoing mission of the Diocese strategies be developed to expand its viability. Strategic presence: provides care and is a sustaining presence to the community, a valued partner in mission with Diocese, faithful witness actively extending the love of Jesus Christ.
- In partnership with Diocesan leadership if a congregation determines that the mission of that congregation is completed in that area, at this time, a clergy person be assigned to assist the parish through the grieving and closure process, the congregation’s mission be celebrated, the building and assets allowed to transform into new mission and the people released into new ministry in the churches of the Diocese for care, nurture and new ways forward in faith. (For further reflection and potential action see the proposed Canon for Imperiled Congregations.)

Healthy Churches have programs and procedures for: Invitation and Welcome, Communication, Mission Discernment and Accountability, Education/Formation for Discipleship, Fellowship, Worship, Stewardship, Leadership Development, Outreach, Vital Community Connections, and understand they are Gifted for Ministry and are resourced in many ways.

Five Best Practice Strategies to encourage congregational growth and vitality in the Diocese of New York:

Get People Moving:

- Continue the Indaba process of hospitality, fellowship and strengthening on a Triennial schedule as a festival experience of the Diocese to build understanding of our shared common experience.
- Congregations to engage with the Canon for CVD using the Renewal Works process or some other mission reflection tool to build a local strategic plan for vitality and viability.

Embedding Scripture and Christian Formation in all activities

- Congregations focus on the spiritual growth of members moving from questioner/seekers to Christ centered disciples building capacity for congregational health, and sustainability.
- Training for the apostolic evangelism taking the good news of Christ in word and deed out into the world, and ongoing evangelism and conversion of life for new disciples in churches.
- The Diocese engage in annual common scripture reflection chosen by our Bishops to shape our mission and common life together.

Creating Ownership

- Churches throughout the Diocese engage in a re-visioning of resources, people, assets, buildings using tools/processes offered by ECF, Holy Currencies of Kaleidoscope Foundation, or other tool.
- A data base of volunteer ministry resources available throughout the Diocese. All people of the Diocese encouraged to give five hours of gift work a year to another congregation to build up the body of Christ.
- Diocesan wide training for lay/ordained leadership in Essential/Fierce Conversation to speak the truth in love, identify, take responsibility for change in congregational culture to empower viable futures.

Pastoring the Community

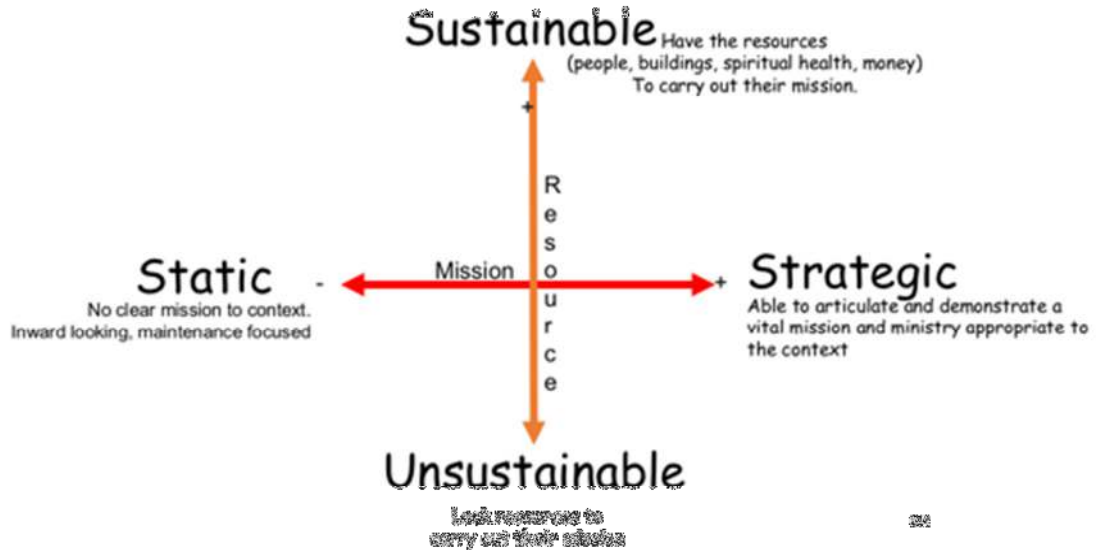
- Training in community organizing skills to discern/build new mission in partnership with the surrounding communities. Provide a steady presence with open doors,
- Identification/outreach to emerging groups in parish locations, build invitation/welcome, bridges of hospitality to Latino/ethnic/language communities in changing neighborhoods.
- Build a Latino leadership group to foster collaboration, revitalize Latino churches; sharing retreats, outreach, training with the Academia Ecumenical Lideralgo and other initiatives.

Building up leaders, nurturing the leader's heart.

- Clergy offered ongoing training/coaching through the Canon for Ministry office in effective congregational leadership, preaching, self-care, developing goals for growth and leadership capacity.
- A revitalized recruitment and investment in non-stipendiary Deacons.
- Annual trainings for Laity in church governance/administration given by qualified presenters for Wardens, Church Secretaries and Clerks of Vestry through the Canon for Ministry.
- The Canon for Ministry office to offer annual training for Licensed Lay Readers in the offering of Morning Prayer and are available for worship leadership in the absence of a priest.
- That recruitment and formation for ministry include the skills and capacity for apostolic ministry expressed in strategic growth, church planting, and the skills of evangelism.

The graph below is a tool to help think through the current status of your congregation.

Sustainable & Strategic



All churches encounter some form of static or unsustainable common life or find themselves ready for a new cycle of growth in our lives together. Take a moment to think about where your congregation might be in relation to the above graph. Take a breath and listen with us to where the Spirit is leading.