



**“You Are Vital!”:**  
*An Invitation to the Vital Congregations Initiative*

August 30, 2021,

To The Members of the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta,

As a Matthew 25 Presbytery, we invite you to a deep dive opportunity on the first of the three initiatives – Congregational Vitality. This is an invitation for all chartered churches and new worshiping communities interested in engaging in covenant relationship with God and with one another, as we share in the vision for Vital Congregations:

***By the power of the Holy Spirit, and in authentic relationships with mid councils, we seek to equip, nurture and support church leaders to empower their congregations to renew, recover and live more fully into faithful discipleship to Jesus Christ.***

The Presbytery of Greater Atlanta invites you to join in the Two-Year Vital Congregations Initiative. The purpose of the Vital Congregations Initiative is to work alongside leaders of existing congregations (chartered and new worshiping communities), in a process that seeks to help assess, discern, and live into transformative actions that increase vitality. Through intentional spiritual practices and relational connections, this two-year process takes us deeper into following Jesus Christ, making disciples, and being the vital community of Christ throughout particular communities and the world.

We invite you to review the Seven Marks (see below), share the vision among your leadership, and prayerfully submit a Letter of Intent. In your letter, please let us know what attracts you to the initiative, what you hope to gain out of this experience, and the date your session approved participation in the initiative. Submit letters via email to [ep@atlpusa.org](mailto:ep@atlpusa.org)

We ask that you join us for our invitational and informational VCI Zoom gathering on either Tuesday, October 19 from 10-11:30am or Saturday, October 23 from 10-11:30am. Please watch for our October Newsletter for the forthcoming Zoom registration link. Please feel free to contact Rev. Aisha Brooks-Johnson or your congregational consultant if you have additional questions.

Blessings and deep peace,

Rev. Aisha Brooks-Johnson





**Vital**  
Congregations



# Seven Marks of Vital Congregations

1

## **LIFELONG Discipleship Formation**

*vs. Complacent “Christian” piety, simply teaching good morals, or offering the latest programs.*

*“The righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness of God based on faith.” (PHIL. 3:9B)*

- From the cradle to the grave seeking to be formed for right living with God and with all people.
- Faith — seeking understanding, cultivating wisdom, and actively following Christ. It is not an extra-curricular activity nor merely head-knowledge.
- Discipleship awakened and engaged in issues facing today’s culture: injustice, inequality, divisive segregation, oppression, suffering, abuse of creation.
- Discipleship formed and strengthened in the community of Christ and permeates daily practices and daily living.

2

**Intentional Authentic Evangelism** vs. “Jesus freaks”; “Christian” Hypocrisy; A committee.

*“We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God.” (2 COR. 4:7)*

- Intentionally sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, not just acts of kindness.
- Authentically sharing Christ because it is intrinsic to self-identity; overflow of Christ in our life.
- Relational, not programmatic or systematic

3

**Outward Incarnational Focus** vs. Inward Institutional Survival; Closed communities of assimilation/exclusion.

*“The gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (MATT. 7:14)*

- Outward exploration, awareness, and focus on neighbors and neighborhood.
- Beyond relationship with those who are like us, the incarnate Christ dwells among the lowly & least, the stranger & the suffering, the marginalized & majority.
- Missional focus on where Christ is already living and present and calling us to dwell.

4

**Empower Servant Leadership** vs. the Pastor’s job; monopolized leadership; hiring the young energetic pastor; burning out good volunteers.

*“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers.” (MATT. 9:37–38)*

- Identify, nurture, support the use of spiritual gifts of all people to serve; not monopolized cliques of power.
- All voices and people are necessary, and it is noticeable when people are absent/missing.
- Nurture and encourage those specifically called and gifted for pastoral ministry.

<p><b>5</b></p> <p><b><i>Spirit-Inspired Worship</i></b> vs. <i>Self-gratifying worship, stale ritual divorced of meaning, or consumer entertainment worship</i></p>	<p><i>“These people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote.” (ISAIAH 29:13)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worship is about God. We get to come on holy ground, encounter God, and experience wonder.</li> <li>• Worship is active participation in the living relationship of the triune God, thus all should feel welcome just as they are to come.</li> <li>• Worship challenges, teaches, transforms, encounters, convicts, and sends people out different.</li> </ul>
<p><b>6</b></p> <p><b><i>Caring Relationships</i></b> vs. <i>Any other Social Club; façades, hypocrisy, and judgment of “church” and “religion.”</i></p>	<p><i>“By this everyone will know that you are disciples, if you have love for one another.” (JOHN 13:35)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing in God’s true agape moves us beyond half-hearted programmatic participation, lukewarm faith, and pretending.</li> <li>• Instead of a closed, judgmental community, people find freedom to share stories, encounter the Savior, and ask for help.</li> <li>• Welcome and hospitality are not left to a committee, but, imperfectly, we strive for all people find identity, purpose, and belonging in the household of God.</li> <li>• Confront conflict, seek reconciliation in all divisions, find ways to embrace all diversity, seek to be peace-makers and bridge builders together.</li> </ul>
<p><b>7</b></p> <p><b><i>Ecclesial Health</i></b> vs. <i>Unhealthy dysfunction; toxic environments; obsolete and irrelevant buildings</i></p>	<p><i>“The body does not consist of one member but of many. God has so arranged the body that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.” (1 COR. 12:14, 24B-25)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of: Why we are a church community? How are we a church community in practice? Prayer permeates all life together.</li> <li>• Clarity in mission, core values to ministry, passion and joy in being the church. Our budget reflects these values, vision, and ministries.</li> <li>• Fiscally responsible — stewardship and tithing are taught, transparency in spending, continual assessment/discernment of a sustainable budget.</li> <li>• All are aware of how decisions are made, stake-holders in the process and procedures, valued voices in the envisioning, open to changes, continual assessment of the “why” and “how” we are church together.</li> <li>• Nurturing and supporting the health of pastor(s), staff, and all called to lead; fighting against burnout.</li> </ul>