

From the Office of Vital Congregations

TRINITY PRESBYTERY PASTOR COHORTS RECOGNIZED FOR A SUCCESSFUL FIRST YEAR OF A TWO-YEAR VITAL CONGREGATIONS INITIATIVE

A special service of recognition was held during the culmination of the professional and spiritual development session of the Vital Congregations pastor cohort meeting at Queens Memorial Church in Newberry on January 8, 2019. Pastor Cohorts, having completed the first year of the vital congregations two-year initiative were presented certificates of appreciation for their participation and dedication.

Receiving certificates and recognition from Rev. Dr. Kathryn Threadgill, Rev. Dr. Danny C. Murphy, Dr. Phyllis W. Sanders and Rev. Dr. Chris Denny were Rev. Dr. Jeri Parris Perkins, Rev. Kevin Cartee, Rev. Dr. Hampton Hunter, Rev. Julie W. Bird, Pastor James Blackwelder, Rev. Dr. Mike Bragan, Rev. Jana Creighton, Elder Yvette Howard, Rev. Alice Odell, Elder Virginia Peterkin, Rev. Dr. Robert Scotland and Rev. Dr. David Torrey. These pastors and elders have invested much time and energy into learning the Seven Marks of a Vital Congregation and numerous other researched-based practices and skill-building activities with an uncompromising commitment to teach God's Word, to pray faithfully and to grow in discipleship.

In January of 2018, the Vital Congregation Initiative was introduced to Trinity Presbytery. Pastors listened and eleven of them boldly stepped forth in faith to begin the journey to vitalization. Knowing that this initiative was not a program or a quick-fix solution to the national crisis in church attendance and outreach ministries, and knowing that they may face some opposition, these pastors and elders saw this initiative as an opportunity to embrace change and transformation. They seized the opportunity to learn, share and create new practices for increasing vitality and growth, following Jesus Christ, with an intentional and authentic focus on what He calls and expects of His Church.

The pastor cohorts recognized that the challenges and dynamics of change would create mixed emotions: joy, anger, fear, happiness, anxiety and hope. Yet, they did it anyway. As a result, they are among leading pastors in the denomination's five participating presbyteries who are pioneers in making a difference in 21st Century service and servanthood, serving inside the church to reach outside to the community.

The pastor cohorts from the upstate area and Columbia came together on January 8, 2019, in a joint professional and spiritual development training session to work, learn and celebrate their achievement together. During this training and celebration session, pastors discussed, reflected on, and reminded everyone of three major calls to congregations and pastors:

1. We are called to connect to Christ, Church and Community.
2. We are called to use our gifts in service to others.
3. We are called to be present with people and God in the world.

These pastors are looking through different lenses after a year of intense efforts to meet each one of the three calls. They studied scripture beyond preparation for their sermon. They increased their prayers beyond worship service, and they engaged in building relationships beyond those with their congregations. Trinity Presbytery commends the work of these pastor cohorts.

*The Office of Vital Congregations is now blessed with volunteers to assist with the increased work of Vital Congregations. The volunteers are called the V's (**Valuable, Vital Congregations Volunteers**). This team assists with training materials, professional and spiritual development logistics and others areas of support. The **V** team members are Elizabeth Bronson, Elaine Hunter, Lisa Mallory and Judy Murphy. This team desires to create a positive climate and path for pastor cohorts to travel up victory lane. We appreciate their service and their sweet spirit in providing their service to God and to the Office of Vital Congregations.*