

VITAL SIGNS OF PARISH HEALTH

VITAL SIGNS
AND METRICS
INTRODUCTION

*in the Episcopal Diocese
of Washington*

THE WORK OF
PARISH
REVITALIZATION
www.edow.org



SEVEN VITAL SIGNS



The revitalization of our parishes is a fundamental goal of the Diocese of Washington's Strategic Plan. In an era of swift and constant change, we acknowledge a need to implement a church revitalization strategy that leads to healthy, thriving congregations throughout the diocese, reversing the trends of decline. In support of that goal, leaders from across the diocese worked together to identify seven key markers that indicate the relative health of a parish - what we are calling the **Vital Signs of Parish Health**. Underpinning those vital signs are concrete metrics that will help parish leaders identify, track, and begin to engage areas of parish life that may need attention.



**COMPELLING
MISSION & VISION**



**CLEAR PATH OF
DISCIPLESHIP**



**FAITHFUL
FINANCIAL
PRACTICES**



**INSPIRING &
CAPABLE
LEADERSHIP**



**WELCOMING &
CONNECTING
MINISTRIES**



**UPLIFTING &
INVITING WORSHIP**



**BLESSING OUR
COMMUNITY**

As you familiarize yourself with the seven vital signs, please note that they are all important, with no single sign holding greater or lesser significance. You might find your parish is healthy in four or five of the areas, while also identifying one or two where opportunity for strategic effort exists. Using the vital signs as a tool will help you pinpoint both the challenges faced by your parish and its greatest strengths.

The Vital Signs of Parish Health and their associated metrics are not a pass/fail test, implied criticism, or a method for comparison among parishes. They are a useful way to engage the question of where to go next in your ministry efforts. They are a diagnostic to help identify parish health, and a springboard into action when your parish leadership is ready to address challenges. The vital signs and metrics constitute a hopeful and constructive resource as you pursue a faithful response to God's call.



A CLOSER LOOK AT THE VITAL SIGNS



Compelling Mission & Vision. A healthy parish has a clear understanding of its mission, states the mission clearly, and creates ministries which align to that mission. The mission is shared and supported by all levels of ministry leadership, lay and ordained.



Clear Path of Discipleship. A healthy parish has a path of discipleship for members of all ages and stages of life. This discipleship path is clearly articulated, has multiple on-ramps, and provides growth opportunities for all to engage in formation and ministries.



Faithful Financial Practices. A healthy parish utilizes financial best practices such as transparency, on-time reporting to the diocese, and forecasting sustainable budgeting. Finances are a faithful conversation, understood as Christian stewardship and formation.



Inspiring & Capable Leadership. A healthy parish invests in continuing education, training, and rest for its lay and ordained leaders, who are nurtured, valued and appreciated.



Welcoming & Connecting Ministries. A healthy parish is intentional and strategic about welcoming guests; it is prepared to invite and provide next step connections. Guests are valued. Welcoming ministries are dependent on the leadership of active lay members.



Uplifting & Inviting Worship. A healthy parish gathers for worship that engages people with inspirational experiences and relevant teaching; it engages and offers full participation to all. While shaped by our Episcopal ethos, worship expresses the cultural and ethnic heritage of members and the surrounding community.



Blessing Our Community. A healthy parish advocates for and partners with the local community and other organizations. This engagement focuses on the welfare of our neighbors and justice initiatives such as food scarcity, racial inequities, and immigration concerns. The parish is invested in the health and well-being of its local community.



Questions: Looking at the Vital Signs of Parish Health, what surprised you? Which feel like a point of opportunity for your parish and leadership? Do any of the vital signs resonate with you as one of your parish's strengths?

FIFTEEN METRICS



As we discerned how best to measure the vital signs, we narrowed our focus to this list of fifteen significant metrics. Some support a single vital sign while others support several. These are the data behind the vital signs. Having concrete metrics allows us to break the hold of inaccurate perceptions we may carry, and protects us from purely subjective measurement of the vital signs. The metrics don't tell the story of a parish and should never be seen as qualitative; they are quantitative indicators.



- ASA & Increasing Worship Attendance
- # of First-Time Guests
- Ave. Parish Age vs Community
- New People in Our Database
- % of Laity in Ministry/Service
- % of the Parish in Faith Formation
- Sacramental Commitments
- Increasing # of Pledge Units
- Community Engagement
- Ratio of Leaders to Attendees
- Involved in Spiritual Practices
- Engaged with Diocesan Initiatives and Work
- Involved with Continuing Education
- Growth in Skills & Abilities
- Increasing Giving to Expenses

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE METRICS

ASA & Increasing Worship Attendance. What are the attendance trends in raw numbers for a parish? This metric helps us track Uplifting & Inviting Worship and Welcoming & Connecting Ministries.

Number of First-Time Guests. Statistical studies have shown that in order to support growth, a parish needs to annually welcome as many first-time guests as they have in average Sunday attendance. This metric helps us track Uplifting & Inviting Worship and Welcoming & Connecting Ministries.

Average Parish Age vs. Community. This metric looks at the average age of parishioners in comparison to the local community, but also invites us to look at comparisons in other ways such as economics, cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, and more. This metric helps us track Uplifting & Inviting Worship and Welcoming & Connecting Ministries.

New People in Our Database. Are we making new contacts? Are we engaging guests in such a way that we retain them and see future connections with them? This metric helps us track Uplifting & Inviting Worship and Welcoming & Connecting Ministries.

Percentage of Laity in Ministry/Service. Does the parish have a growing percentage of members involved in ministries serving both the parish and the community? This metric helps us track Welcoming & Connecting Ministries, Clear Discipleship Path, Blessing Our Community and Faithful Financial Practices.



A CLOSER LOOK AT THE METRICS

Percentage of the Parish in Faith Formation. Looking at the percentage of the parish involved in formation activities helps us track Clear Discipleship Path and Inspiring & Capable Leadership.

Sacramental Commitments. Measuring our sacramental commitments like baptisms and confirmations helps us track Clear Discipleship Path.

Increasing Number of Pledging Units. Does the parish have a growing number of households pledging financial support? This metric helps us track Faithful Financial Practices and Clear Discipleship Path.

Community Engagement. In what and how many ways is the parish involved with community partners, advocacy and justice issues? This metric helps us track our Blessing Our Community.

Ratio of Leaders to Attendees. This metric measures the impact of lay ministry by determining the ratio of parishioners active in leading ministries against those participating. This metric helps us track Inspiring & Capable Leadership.

Involved in Spiritual Practices, Involved with Continuing Education and Growth in Skills and Abilities are all metrics which help us track Inspiring & Capable Leadership. They measure if leaders, lay and ordained, are engaged in sustaining spiritual practices for themselves, and if they are seeking opportunities for continuing education and improved leadership skills.

Engaged with Diocesan Initiatives and Work. This metric identifies if the parish has engaged with the diocesan Strategic Plan, opportunities for strategic work with partners like The UnStuck Church Group, and is deepening its commitment to racial equity and justice work. This metric helps us track Compelling Mission & Vision.

Increasing Giving to Expenses. Does the parish budget reflect a sustainable amount of operating expenses being supported by plate and pledge giving? This metric helps us track Faithful Financial Practices.



Questions: Looking at the metrics we identified, what surprised you? What would you add? What have been the most challenging metrics for your parish to track and adapt within our current pandemic activities? Who in your parish do you think should be keeping tabs on these metrics to record, capture and share the trends?