

What Is Congregational Development?

Congregational development is the development of congregations of all sizes, locations, and conditions into more

- Faithful
- Healthy, and
- Fruitful

Communities of faith that are

- focused on their unique purpose as congregations to be local expressions of the body of Christ: With God's help, to gather people, deepen people's engagement with their baptismal identity and purpose, and send them into the world as witnesses to and agents of transformation;
- connected to and expressive of the best of their unique ecclesial tradition, ethos, and character;
- self-renewing and responsive to the challenges and opportunities before them by building their internal capacity;
- working toward greater sustainability and integration in terms of a "fit" between the elements of their organizational life (identity, ethos and spirituality, vision and goals, leadership, resources, organizational culture, size, property, relationship to context, partnerships, etc.);
- fostering a culture of transparency, collaboration, listening, trust, courage, forgiveness, openness, and flexibility in which the congregation is discerning a path forward guided by the Holy Spirit and in which the congregation has a greater sense of choice.

By "faithful" we mean:

A congregation's commitment to the practice of a Christ-centered, baptismal faith in its communal life and a congregation's clarity about and focus on its core purpose (Gather-Transform-Send model) within a larger understanding of the mission of the Church. A congregation's ability to form Christians to embrace and develop their ability to be courageous, persevering, truthful, joyful, hopeful, compassionate, forgiving, and justice-loving.

By "healthy" we mean:

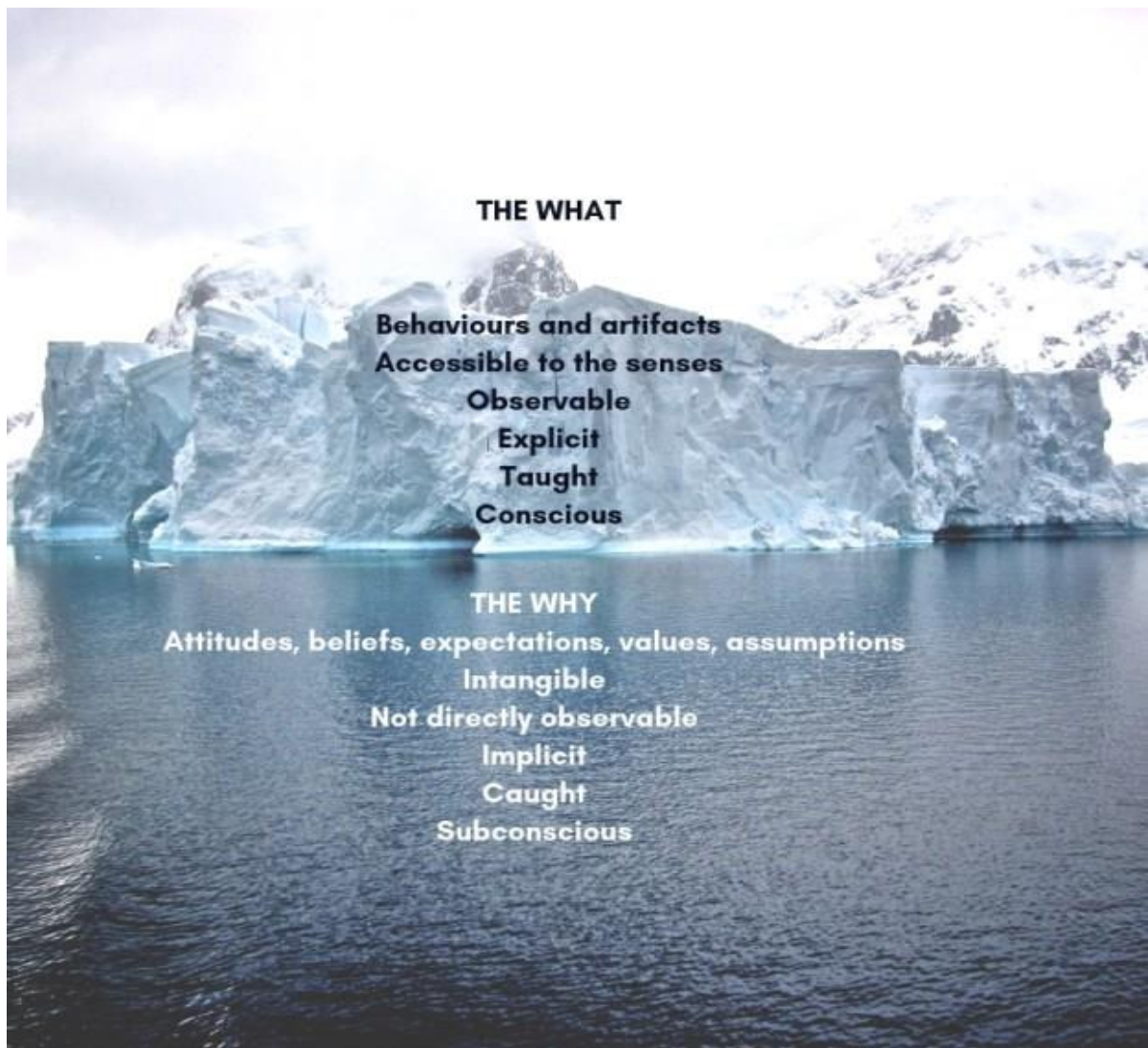
The ability of a congregation to focus on and strengthen the fundamental processes of nurturing Christians (adults and children) in the faith as understood in the best of an Episcopal/Anglican tradition. The ability to engage important questions and issues and, as appropriate, to include as many people as possible in its listening, discernment, and

decision-making processes. The ability to navigate conflict and welcome differing experiences and perspectives. The capacity for responsiveness and flexibility in its internal life and in responses to its context.

By “fruitful” we mean:

Structuring meetings, processes, and other efforts in a way that produces or leads to fruitfulness. Fruitfulness in a congregation does not mean that the congregation will never fail! It means that the congregation will do its best to make productive use of the time, the skills, and the gifts of those involved in the congregation’s work and that a congregation will continually learn as it goes about how to do this better.

Congregational Development efforts often find that they **must engage what is “below the tip of the iceberg** (taken from *The Cultural Iceberg*, adapted by Sheri L. (2016) from work by Edward T. Hall (1976).



Congregational Development is both about identifying what to place at the center of focus and activity and about **energizing** individuals, groups, teams and the entire congregation to move toward (to develop) itself in particular areas. Over time, congregational development is about **developing capacity in the congregation** to function in a more faithful, healthier and more fruitful way. Capacity-building takes training, practice, and learning from experience.

The Faith X Congregational Vitality Assessment (CVA)

The CVA a research-based, online diagnostic tool designed to provide a congregation with an assessment of its Vitality (how healthy it is) and its Sustainability (whether it has the people, financial, and contextual resources necessary to survive).

The CVA single congregation assessment can be completed by a single congregational leader or a representative congregational leadership group (the latter is preferred).

The CVA measures 11 areas of congregational vitality, including:

1. Vision, Mission, and Discernment
2. Lay Engagement and Empowerment
3. Context Awareness and Inclusion
4. Change Readiness
5. Dealing with Differences and Conflict
6. Worship
7. Spiritual Life
8. Formation, Education, and Training
9. Outreach
10. Leadership and Organization
11. Stewardship.

The CVA also measures internal and external congregational sustainability.

Learning from Colleagues (Dioceses of Atlanta and Michigan) Doing Research into Congregational Vitality and Viability

Viability is defined as long-term sustainability as expressed in attendance/participation, financial stability and integrity, property leveraging and solid administration.

Vitality is defined as the experience of congregational life that is transformational for congregants, supported by organizational practices and leadership that lives itself out by having a positive impact on the world.

5 Components of Vitality (based on literature review and diocesan learning)

Inward

1. Transformational Experience
 - Worship
 - Formation
 - Community

Inspirational (organizational)

2. Clear identity and purpose

3. Team leadership
4. Discernment practices

Outward

5. Impact
 - Neighborliness
 - Justice
 - Witness

Their Overall Learning: Vitality and Viability do not correlate, that is, a congregation can be vital and not be viable. A congregation can be viable and not be vital.

The implication is that congregations (and the diocese) **must cultivate Viability and Vitality at the same time.**