**Final Report from the Congregational Vitality Task Force**January 21, 2015

The Congregational Vitality Task Force was established in May, 2014, by Bishop Hanley under the direction of the Rev. Sara Fischer, Canon for Congregational Development. The Task Force met a number of times through January, 2015, and engaged the diocese as a whole in conversation through several on-line surveys and two exercises during diocesan convention. The data gathered, plus numerous individual conversations throughout the diocese and informal research into the work of others outside the Diocese of Oregon, has significantly informed our process and its outcomes.

**Objectives of Congregational Vitality Task Force:**

Develop language that will

1. Define “congregational vitality”

2. Raise the bar for health and sustainability

3. Inspire congregations to be the best they can be

4. Serve as markers with which to measure congregational aims when making programmatic decisions at a diocesan level

5. Be disseminated through the congregations and leadership bodies of the diocese such that all feel that we are moving in the same direction

**Four Marks of Vital Congregations:**

In the Diocese of Oregon, vital congregations exhibit the following recognizable characteristics:

* *Sacramental Hospitality*: A vital congregation practices sacramental hospitality by directly connecting our worship of Christ as gathered community with serving Christ in the wider world. Vital congregations practice sacramental hospitality in and beyond worship
* *Joyful Leadership*: Vital communities are lead with commitment and joy
* *Formed in Christ*: Vital churches encourage and help members to become more Christlike
* *Mission in the World*: Each vital congregation is known for a particular mission or gift

**Vital Congregations: Four Marks and how to recognize them**

1. A vital congregation practices sacramental hospitality by directly connecting our worship of Christ as gathered community with serving Christ in the wider world.
   1. The preaching gives examples and encouragement for an ever-deeper connection between worship and daily life
   2. Intercessions during the Sunday liturgy and actions during the week reflect a dynamic connection with the concerns of the world
   3. Small group bible study deepens participants’ connection to the Gospel
   4. The same attention and concern is given to outreach as to worship
2. A vital congregation has lay and ordained leaders who are committed, motivated, and joy-filled
   1. Leaders courageously call people into deeper commitment to the Risen Christ
   2. Clergy and laypeople help each other discern where the Spirit is calling them as a community
   3. Laypeople and clergy try new things and take risks
   4. Clergy and laypeople create a learning culture such that a congregation knows when it is doing its work well and when it is not
   5. Lay and ordained leaders are always nurturing new leaders
   6. Leaders share power in ways that involve many people, with clear lines of responsibility
3. A vital congregation creates community that leads its members to grow spiritually by becoming more Christ-like
   1. Individual members can identify a clear or growing sense of mission in their daily lives.
   2. Respect for diverse gifts is evidenced by the offering a variety of growth opportunities for people of all ages and stages of life
   3. Both lay and clergy actively assist in identifying gifts and providing opportunities to use gifts
   4. Every ministry group exists not for itself but for the wider mission of the church. Ministry groups are periodically evaluated against the wider mission.
4. A vital congregation is known beyond its own membership as having a particular mission or gift.
   1. Church members collaborate with people within the congregation and the wider community through service, crossing traditional boundaries of age, class, race, and language.
   2. The congregation makes building and grounds available to wider community uses
   3. The congregation intentionally embraces its strengths, engaging strengths and resources in service to Christ, rather than hiding them under a bushel or safeguarding them for congregation members alone.

**Vital Congregations: Sustainability**

While our conversations, observations, and feedback-gathering work around the diocese did not explicitly include language about sustainability, we believe that sustainability is inseparable from aspects of vitality. In our work as a task force we have drawn, from the language above, these conclusions about sustainable communities of faith:

Sustainable communities of faith are

1) *Financially sustainable*: they are solvent and up to date with property maintenance

2) *Emotionally sustainable*: lay and ordained leaders are energized by the work and ministry they do.

3) *Spiritually sustainable*: the wider world is glad of the community of faith's presence in their community as the community of faith shares the grace they have received from God with the world in which they live.