



# Vital Passions, Holy Practices

Dear Congregational Leader,

Discovering and putting into practice spiritual gifts and passions is one of the most exciting adventures a person can have with God, an experience even more meaningful when undertaken by the faith community as a body. *Vital Passions, Holy Practices* has been designed to do just that, as participants come together in triads or small groups for:

- Shared studies of biblical texts that outline the role of spiritual gifts within the church
- Gifts assessment, combining the results of a self-assessment with responses from observers selected by each participant
- Personal reflection on passions, with affirmation from group members

After the small groups have explored the scriptures and each one's gifts and passions, the gifts of individuals as well as of the congregation as a whole will be considered. By exploring the work of the Holy Spirit individually and as a community, personal and congregational transformation are sure to follow!

Materials for *Vital Passions, Holy Practices* consist of this brief leader sheet with guidelines for beginning and concluding the process, as well as a workbook for each participant. In the workbook you will find notes on the importance of paying attention to gifts and passions, and how this discernment process can enhance the vitality of our congregations. Lectio divina-style Bible studies are followed by assessment tools, and the workbook concludes with suggestions for next steps in putting gifts into practice for fuller, richer ministry within and outside the congregation.

This leader sheet is available at no cost, and will be shipped with the workbooks or may be downloaded online. Workbooks may be purchased through Brethren Press ([www.brethrenpress.org](http://www.brethrenpress.org)); discounts for multiple-copy orders are available.

Combining group discernment of gifts of the Spirit with passions—through exploring questions such as where, how, and with whom are we called to serve—rekindles our sense of purpose and mission as a community. Enjoy the journey—we look forward to hearing where your path takes you!

In Christ's peace,

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## Preparing for the journey

Congregational commitment depends a great deal on the commitment of leadership to this important project. Here are some suggestions for how your church leadership can support a successful process:



- **Communication**—Ensure that everyone understands what this journey involves. Have a clear response to the question “Why are we doing this?”. Communicate in multiple ways (letters, emails, newsletter, information in the bulletin, skits and announcements during worship, etc.).
- **Collaboration**—Be sure this is a congregational decision. If people feel their voices were heard in the decision-making process, they will be much more likely to fully participate. Be thoughtful about choosing the best time to begin the process. Put as many ongoing congregational commitments as possible “on hold” during this time (approximately 60 days) to free up time and maximize participation.
- **Congregational involvement**—Encourage all to participate, with a goal of at least 25% taking part. Consider personally inviting some of the more reticent members to participate. Prayerfully create triads / small groups\* of no more than five (5) people to walk this journey together, discouraging (but not prohibiting) the inclusion of family members or those who are already well acquainted in the same group. Encourage all regular attendees over the age of fourteen to participate.
- **Choose small group leaders**—While much of each group’s work will be self-guided, leaders are needed to help with things like scheduling and facilitating meetings. As people indicate their interest in participating in the process, ask if they might also be interested in offering this level of leadership, or recruit people for this role.
- **Commitment**—Plan a kickoff gathering, explaining the steps in the process.
  - Encourage all participants to review the full workbook before beginning. Gifts assessments from outside observers, for example, should be requested soon after the process begins.
  - Review the covenant for respectful communication found on page 7 of the workbook.
  - Be sure all participants have a basic understanding of the practice of lectio divina, on which the Bible studies are based.
  - Encourage creativity. As people reflect on their gifts and passions, have them consider not just existing ministries, but their dreams for the faith community.



- **Corporate worship**—Throughout the journey, plan to focus worship around the scripture texts and themes of the discussion questions included with the four Bible studies.
- **Celebrate**—Plan for a celebration at the completion of the process. People will be excited about their participation, and want to know what will happen next. See the Stepping Forward section in this document for ideas on activities to include.

*\*If you are using this resource as a part of the Vital Ministry Journey, small groups may remain the same, or they may be re-formed.*

## On the journey

Part of the fun is feeling excitement build as the Bible studies and conversations move forward. Check in with the small group leaders regularly to see how things are going, and find ways to briefly share these updates with the congregation. Periodic check-ins will provide a way for you to offer reminders of “homework” assignments and to be sure that the process is completed within your planned timeframe. Encourage small group leaders to share any questions or problems they encounter so that everyone’s journey is a positive and helpful experience.

The key to the success of this journey is, of course, what happens next. While the small groups are meeting and assessments being conducted, leaders should spend a significant amount of time planning for the next steps. The following section offers some thoughts on how to proceed; consider these in the context of your congregation and local community so that when the small group process has been completed the next phase begins seamlessly.

## Stepping forward

Remember that the key element of this journey is *community*. As this process concludes and individual assessments are reviewed, what are the implications for your congregation? What do the newly-discerned collective gifts and passions of the community imply about congregational direction and mission?

As you review the results of these assessments, the goal should not be primarily to “fill slots” in existing ministries. That may be one result, but think beyond your current ministries; think beyond your congregation. Look carefully at the gifts and passions of the people, and consider what ministries might be offered—or modified, or even discontinued.

So how do we move forward?

- **Begin with passion**—During your wrap-up celebration create a game or other fun activity that results in people gathering in groups based on their interests and passions.
  - Organize it so that people can move from group to group—many will have interests in more than one area.
  - Be sure leaders at all levels participate.
  - Watch new relationships develop!
- **Encourage communication**—Find ways for these newly formed relational groups to brainstorm about how their shared interests might become ministries.
  - Designate a group of coaches or other leaders to offer guidance.
  - Help the groups understand how their respective gifts might be used together to form a plan for sustainable ministry.
  - Know that help is available from Congregational Life Ministries staff.
- **Worship together**—Just as when you began this journey, focus worship around the creative process involved in combining passions and gifts for vital ministries.



## A few final thoughts.....

The results of this journey may show that no one in your congregation is particularly passionate about an existing ministry. Use this time to prayerfully consider if all current ministries should continue, at least in their current structure. Be creative!

Individuals, especially those who have struggled with how their gifts might be used in and through the church, may participate in this process as a way to become more meaningfully involved. To that end, it is critical that *each* individual's gifts and passions are acknowledged in some way. The person who participates with hope of better connection may (understandably) assume there is no place for her in this congregation if she never hears another word about how she might now serve.

Congregations are not static, of course. As people come and go in the future, consider how to use at least parts of this process to accommodate such changes. When the woman who ran the Christmas bazaar for decades is no longer able to do so, do you automatically find a replacement for her, or do you reassess the gifts of the congregation and see if a new ministry might emerge from a change in practice or leadership? When a very gifted couple joins the congregation but their gifts don't seem to match any of your existing ministries, might you consider modifying or creating a ministry to use these gifts with which God has blessed them?

We hope this is an exciting step forward for everyone. Enjoy the journey, with blessings as you continue the work of Jesus in your congregation, community, and world.

