

The Acts 16:5 Initiative - Overview

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The churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers. Acts 16:5 (NIV)

The need for congregational transformational change and missional endeavor

At the most recent General Assembly, John Detterick made this telling observation: presbyteries are the fulcrum for renewal in the PC(USA). We agree. Our conviction is that *no structure or body is more strategically positioned to shape congregations for mission than a presbytery.*

Congregations are at the heart of the mission God gives in Christ: they and their members are on the front lines of mission in the communities within the bounds of every presbytery; they are *the* crucial source of finances and people for mission in the presbytery, in their communities and, indeed, across the whole church. When congregations are not shaped by God's mission, missional resources dry up, witness to the gospel is unclear at best, real community needs go unaddressed, and the body of Christ in the region begins to wither. What presbytery can be healthy and vital without vital congregations whose very identities and actions are shaped by mission?

We know the place from which we start. Many congregations are enjoying wonderful vitality. At the same time, however, a large number of congregations are at a numerical plateau or are declining on almost any measure one chooses. In the next four years, the PC(USA) is projected to lose some ten percent of its members. And yet many congregations and presbyteries are engaged in missional transformation and there is a growing passion across the church for new vision and fresh hope. We do not buy the idea that the mainline church has no future. People everywhere in the church are hungry and eager for a new thing.

We long for our churches to be vital, vibrant, full of life and vigor. Growing a vital church is always the work of God in our midst. It can be an extremely demanding and often challenging task for the people of God.

The transformational congregation finds ways to honor its people and the ministries they have loved while changing how it shapes its ministry to enable its people to change as they grow as disciples of our Lord.

The missional congregation gains the attention of the people of its community, engages them with the whole of the gospel - the love *and* justice of God in Christ - grows with them in the faith, and sends them to serve.

What happens when we have no transformational vision for our presbytery and for the life of our congregations? We tend to keep things just the way they are. We do only what is necessary. We make few sacrifices and settle for tradition and repetition. We say

"things are good enough for me." However, there is no such thing as keeping things the same. We either grow or decline, increase in vitality or die. Our vision looks behind us to stagnation or forward to life.

The Acts 16:5 Initiative offers a venue in which the presbytery invites interested congregations to engage in a deliberate process of congregational transformation and missional engagement. The emphasis is simultaneously communal (serving the congregation itself) and missional (reaching the surrounding community and world). Pastors and congregational leaders are encouraged to develop a coherent, biblically-grounded approach to transformational congregational life and to design transformational ministries specifically appropriate to their congregations.

For congregations enjoying present health and momentum, the Acts 16:5 Initiative offers a variety of ways of enhancing and expanding what is already happening. While the Act 16:5 Initiative is not about "redevelopment" per se, it does provide strong support for congregations whose ministries would benefit from new enthusiasm and vitality.

Church size is not a factor. The principles of transformation and missional endeavor may be applied in a great variety of ways whether the congregation has a thousand people in worship or one hundred or even ten. One of the strengths of the Acts 16:5 Initiative is that we typically see a quarter or more of the congregations in a presbytery get involved so that the Initiative helps legitimize missional plans, visions, and changes – since it isn't just one congregation but "a lot of us in this together." This has meant that both congregations are encouraged in transformation and missional endeavor and the entire culture of the presbytery is as well.

For a congregation, the aim of the Acts 16:5 Initiative offers:

1. Means of designing ministry appropriate to the specific needs of the congregation and the needs of the surrounding community.
2. Ways to review and to affirm each congregation's past and present ministries while simultaneously designing a ministry for the future.
3. Guidance and support in the process of congregational change and transition.
4. A two-year or three-year period to permit the process of transition to get underway.

The Acts 16:5 Initiative offers presbytery staff and leadership a means of offering coaching and leadership and of legitimizing the changes that transformation will necessitate. Rather than offering a set "program," the Initiative develops skills necessary for the design of ministry appropriate to a given congregation's needs.

For a presbytery, the aim of the Acts 16:5 Initiative offers:

1. Means for presbytery leadership to offer direct coaching, leadership and resourcing of pastors and congregational leaders seeking to move their congregations forward.
2. Means of legitimizing congregational change.
3. Means of offering both accountability and support to pastors.

4. The opportunity to apply the principles of transformation and missional engagement to the life of the presbytery itself.

Process

The Acts 16:5 Initiative process combines intensive instruction with ongoing personal counsel and encouragement to pastors and congregational leaders. This enables congregations to reflect on their present vision and practices and to effectively introduce new vision and practices. The Vital Churches Institute partners with the Executive Presbyter, members of the presbytery staff, and members of the presbytery in a coaching role that offers content, encouragement and counsel to those who want to see their congregations grow in vitality by God's grace.

The Acts 16:5 Initiative involves leadership at several levels

1. The Pastor and Session of each congregation will be asked to agree to a two-year or three-year process of ministry assessment and the development of new ministry to move the congregation forward.
2. The Pastor and an Acts 16:5 Team of three to six participants from the congregation will be asked to attend five equipping events in the two-year process (two Seminars and three follow-up Gatherings) and seven equipping events in the three-year process (two Seminars and five follow-up Gatherings). This team will meet regularly during the year to engage in the ongoing process of assessment, ministry design, and leadership. Using the materials from the equipping events and additional readings, the Pastor and the Acts 16:5 Team will work with elders and other congregational leaders to develop and implement specific ministry proposals appropriate to the needs of the congregation and opportunities in the community.
3. The Pastor will be asked to meet four (minimally) times a year with other pastors in a cluster representing five congregations for the purpose of mutual encouragement and accountability in the development of transformational and missional endeavor. Members of the presbytery staff may participate in these clusters as coaching leaders and/or resource people.
4. The Acts 16:5 coaches from the Vital Churches Institute will lead the two major equipping seminars and three (or five) follow-up gatherings, provide materials for each participant, and be available, by means of email, to every participant. The Acts 16:5 coaches will provide additional materials directly to pastors during the two or three-year sequence.
5. Essential to the effectiveness of the Acts 16:5 Initiative is the leadership offered by presbytery staff and the presbytery's Acts 16:5 Leadership Team. The Acts 16:5 Initiative offers presbytery leadership a means of encouraging pastors and their congregations and legitimizing the transitions in congregational life that transformation will involve. Significant participation in the initial event, Seminar 1, will not result from response to a brochure but by personal invitation from the

presbytery Acts 16:5 Leadership Team (staff and presbyters). Leadership from the presbytery is essential in the placing of pastors in Acts 16:5 clusters and in encouraging them to follow through with transformational ministry design and implementation.

How the Acts 16:5 Initiative Works

All pastors in the presbytery along with teams of three to six persons per congregation and presbytery staff are invited to attend the introductory Acts 16:5 Seminar 1. This two-day event is designed to be both a “launch” event for the Acts 16:5 process and a “stand alone” event.

It serves as a launch event in that attending congregations will be invited to continue in the Acts 16:5 process and make the two-year (or three-year) commitment if they so choose. Attendance at this initial event permits each pastor and congregational team to make an informed decision about the process.

This seminar also serves as a “stand alone” event for those attending congregations that choose *not* to make the two-year (or three-year) commitment. They will receive a great deal of material that they may apply on their own to their congregational life – as is typical when a pastor and church members attend most seminars in congregational life today.

Two or Three-Year Format

Our goal is not to think of the Acts 16:5 Initiative as “a two-year program we do and then we move onto the next program.” The Acts 16:5 Initiative is a launch pad and prelude to “the ongoing implementation of ministry design practices that will lead our congregations and the presbytery itself into permanent ongoing practices of transformation and missional engagement.”

Two years is minimal time for a pastor, Session, and other leaders to begin to orient the life of the congregation in transformational and missional endeavor. For reasons of scheduling, finances, or other matters, some presbyteries will choose the two-year format. The Acts 16:5 Initiative in its three-year format provides additional material and support to help congregations continue to make transformational changes. The presbytery determines the length of format before beginning the process.

Two-Year Schedule

Acts 16:5 Initiative Introductory Seminar 1 – Develop a Defining Vision (two days)

Module 1: Awaken a New Expectation

Module 2: Develop a Defining Vision

Module 3: Identify Defining Practices

Module 4: Practice Ministry Design

Module 5: Ministry Design Using Action Learning

Module 6: Design Transformational Missional Endeavor

Congregations commit at this point to the entire two-year Acts 16:5 Initiative process.

Acts 16:5 Six-Month Gathering I (one day)

Review of Seminar 1

Module 7: Design a Transformational Ministry of Fellowship

Acts 16:5 Seminar 2 - Design a Transformational Ministry (two days)

Module 1: Move to Ministry Design

Module 2: Design a Transformational Ministry of Worship

Module 3: Design a Transformational Ministry of Discipleship

Module 4: Design a Transformational Ministry of Leadership

Acts 16:5 Six-Month Gathering II (one day)

Module 5: Design Transformational Ministry Team Leadership

Module 6: Design a Transformational Session

Acts 16:5 Six-Month Gathering III (one day)

Module 7: Design a Ministry Mobilization Endeavor (the ministry of sending)

Three-Year Schedule

Added to the two-year schedule are the following Gatherings and Modules although additional material can be developed in response to the particular needs of the presbytery and its congregations.

Acts 16:5 Six-Month Gathering IV (one day)

Module 8: Design a Transformational Ministry of Stewardship

Module 9: Ministry Design - Intensive design of disciple-making and missional ministries

Acts 16:5 Six-Month Gathering V (one day)

Module 10: Ministry Design - Intensive design of disciple-making and missional ministries - continued from Gathering IV

Module 11: Staying the Course - Rooting the process of ongoing transformational and missional design in the life of the congregation

To support the Acts 16:5 Initiative Vital Churches Institute offers:

1. Delivery of the one and two-day seminars/gatherings every six months.
2. Materials for the pastor/point person and team of two to six from every congregation to include Manual 2 and a variety of handouts. Books and PowerPoint slides will also be provided to every pastor/point person.
3. The monthly email letter "Initiative" that reinforces various Acts 16:5 Initiative concepts.
4. Copies of the PowerPoint presentations for all of the modules.
5. Unlimited email interaction between the pastors and congregational leadership teams and presbytery leadership with Vital Churches coaches.

6. Access to a new Acts 16:5 website that is to come online late in the fall of 2006 with a variety of downloads and resources for those engaged in the Acts 16:5 Initiative.
7. Counsel and encouragement from a Vital Churches Institute coach to the coaches of the pastor clusters.
8. Counsel and encouragement from a Vital Churches Institute coach to the presbytery staff and leadership in developing the Acts 16:5 Initiative in their presbytery and in ways to apply the Acts 16:5 Initiative concepts to the presbytery itself as well as within its congregations.

The Acts 16:5 Initiative - Summary

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The Acts 16:5 Initiative

- Invites congregations to engage in a deliberate process of transformation.
- Assists congregations in developing a coherent biblically-grounded approach to transformational congregational life.
- Assists congregations in the design of specific transformational ministries. Rather than offering a set “program,” this initiative supports the design of ministry appropriate to a given congregation’s needs.

Acts 16:5 Initiative – Transformational Strategy

- Trusting God to bring about transformation and growth in faith and in numbers.
- Learning and applying a transformational vision for ministry through the process of Ministry Design by Alignment.
- Using the Action Learning approach to address complex issues (including objectives that are set, opportunities that present themselves, and obstacles that arise).
- Becoming a learning organization that is capable of continuous change.
- Offering ongoing training, support, and accountability.

Acts 16:5 Initiative – Structure

- Pastors and Sessions commit to lead transformation in dependence on the Holy Spirit.
- Congregational Acts 16:5 Leadership Team – the pastor and six others.
- Presbytery Acts 16:5 Leadership Team – to lead, encourage, and legitimate change.
- Congregational and presbytery-level Action Learning Teams.
- Acts 16:5 pastor’s cluster groups of five to seven pastors meeting as an open-group Action Learning Team.
- Support from the Vital Churches Institute: Seminars, Gatherings, email, phone calls, additional material.

Factors Influencing Transformation

- A passion for transformation.

- A biblically-based Defining Vision.
- Ministry design processes.
- Leadership.
- Relationships and accountability.
- Time.

Costs

1. Acts 16:5 Initiative Introductory Seminar I (2 days)

- \$3000 seminar fee
- \$20 per person materials fee
- ravel/lodging/meal costs for two Vital Churches Institute coaches

The presbytery will provide participants a light lunch and coffee/tea/soda for breaks.

The cost of the event plus overnight lodging for the participants may be born by the participants and/or subsidized by the presbytery.

The Acts 16:5 Initiative Introductory Seminar I fees are irrespective of the number of attendees (except for the materials fee).

2. The Acts 16:5 Initiative Two-Year and Three-Year sequence which include the various Seminars and Gatherings and additional materials: \$1,380 per congregation per year (15 congregation minimum)

3. Travel/lodging/meal costs for two Vital Churches Institute coaches at each Seminar/Gathering

As in the case of the Introductory Seminar 1, this cost may be subsidized by the presbytery. This is \$100/month per congregation with no presbytery subsidy and \$50/month per congregation if the presbytery contributes half. A presbytery may offer support on a sliding scale based on the size of the congregation. Each congregation's participation in financial support of the cost of its involvement in the Acts 16:5 process contributes to that congregation's ownership of the transformation process.

Some synods offer financial support for presbytery-wide transformational events.

3. Additional consulting/teaching days (\$1500/day plus expenses) during the two-year or three-year sequence may be arranged to include:

- a. Time with presbytery leadership involving the presbytery staff, Council, and the leadership core of the Committee on Ministry. The Acts 16:5 process can be implemented only at the congregational level. However, if transforming congregational life is to be a major emphasis of the presbytery, then involvement of the leadership of the presbytery in transforming presbytery life offers essential support for congregational transformation. Such a segment added to this proposal would involve 2 to 4 days, or as needed, over the course of the two or three years.

- b. One-day seminars on specific areas of transformational ministry such as preaching, small group life, short-term mission teams, and congregation-based community outreach events and repeats of the Acts 16:5 Initiative Seminars 1 and 2.

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