Key Characteristics of Congregations Experiencing Growth
A Summary report by The Rev. Canon Jason D. Lewis
For the leadership and congregations of the Diocese of Kentucky

A summary of the 2014 News Facts report on Episcopal Church growth and decline (http://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/documents/new_facts_on_growth_2014_final.pdf). This summary has been prioritized to focus on those characteristics that are under a congregation’s direct influence (unlike setting, demographic make up, location, etc.) such as, identity, worship, and program, and upon those changes that can be effected by leadership.

(1) **Purpose-Driven Growth** - Important to the growth profile of a congregation are the religious character of the congregation and its sense of mission and purpose. Churches that are clear about why they exist and what they should be doing are most likely to be growing congregations.

(2) **Spiritual Vitality** - There is a strong relationship between growth and the sense that the congregation is “spiritually vital and alive.” This relationship is central to whether a congregation is actualizing its unique purpose—doing that thing that congregations are more able to do than any other organization in society.
(3) **Willingness to Change and Adapt** - Congregations themselves are in constant flux as people join, become active or inactive, give birth, drop out, move away or die. Vital organizations are those that adapt and adaptation requires change. Congregations who say they are willing to change to meet new challenges also tend to be growing congregations.

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![Chart: Percent of congregations growing](chart1.png)

**Our Congregation is Willing to Change to Meet New Challenges**

- Disagree: 7%
- Unsure: 11%
- Agree: 22%
- Strongly Agree: 36%

(4) **Engaging and Vibrant Worship** - Congregations that describe their worship as “vibrant” are more likely to experience growth. “Exciting” worship is strongly related to the growth of Episcopal churches, Roman Catholic parishes and conservative evangelical churches—but not other mainline churches. In the Episcopal Church, characteristics such as joyful, exciting and a sense of expectancy tend to go together. Such worship is open to the Spirit of God and is necessarily different each week.

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![Chart: Percent of congregations growing](chart2.png)

**How well does “Vibrant and Engaging” describe your worship service with the largest attendance?**

- Not at all to Slightly: 7%
- Somewhat: 8%
- Quite well: 24%
- Very well: 30%
(5) **New Member Recruitment** – There is a very strong relationship between recruitment activity on the part of members and growth. Where “a lot” of members are involved in recruitment, 52% of congregations are growing. By contrast, where very few members are involved in recruitment, hardly any of those congregations are experiencing growth. Growing congregations are more likely to engage in a variety of recruitment-related activities.

(6) **Follow Up and Care** - The strongest relationships with growth is how many visits or phone calls church leaders make to visitors, prospective members, and newcomers to the community. Few people decide to join a parish or become regular participants after one or two initial contacts, so to help transition people from visitor or prospect to member follow-up contacts are essential. Congregations that follow-up on visitors through mail, phone calls, emails, personal visits, mailed materials, etc. are those most likely to grow.
(7) **Active Involvement in Special Fellowship Events** - Vital, growing Episcopal congregations are strong, welcoming communities which thrive through the active involvement of members and potential members. A central component of community development is special events and fellowship activities. These can vary greatly in content and frequency.

![Bar chart showing percent of congregations growing based on frequency of fellowship activities](chart1.png)

(8) **Updated Website and Communications Media** – A web site that is regularly updated and whether more active means of electronic communication are used are connected to growth. The effect of technology for communication is cumulative. The more things done to communicate what a church is doing, the more it is likely to grow. Churches that use many kinds of platforms (6 or more) are most likely to grow.

![Bar chart showing percent of congregations growing based on number of newer technologies used](chart2.png)

“Congregations grow (and decline) for many reasons and it is not possible to examine them all. Also, growth occurs for different reasons within different contexts. Here we look only at the national, gross picture. The relationships are instructive, but there are different avenues for growth and vitality—not just one.” - New FACTS 2014 Report, page 30