

10 Things You Should Know about the Vital Church Initiative (VCI)

1. **What is VCI?** The Vital Church Initiative is a process of renewal for growing healthier, more vital, fruitful, missional congregations in the Michigan Area of the United Methodist Church. Through shared learning, nurture, support and accountability, VCI helps the local church become more effective in creating systems to care for, train and mobilize its current membership to reach out to new people with the Good News.
2. **Why should Dixboro Church be part of VCI?** Our District Superintendent, Mark Spaw, see great potential in our congregation and recommended us for VCI. While we are not in crisis (in fact, there are many great things happening here), Dixboro Church has plateaued or declined for the last 20 years. VCI will help us reverse that trend by equipping us to do a better job living out the Great Commandment (Love God, Love Neighbors) and the Great Commission (Make Disciples of Jesus Christ).
3. **VCI will Empower & Equip our Congregation with tools needed to live into our vision.** Like most churches with a history of plateau or decline, currently 80% of our ministry is being accomplished by 20% of our congregation. To maximize our impact in the community and experience growth in faith and service, we will need to equip and mobilize our ENTIRE congregation to Connect (with God and others), Grow (in faith and numbers), and Serve (as God's hands, feet and voice in the world). *Numbers 4-6 below are ways VCI can help us live into our church's vision to "Connect. . . Grow. . . Serve"*
4. **VCI is encouraging us to become more intentional about helping people CONNECT.** A vital, growing congregation plans for ways to help people connect deeply with God through passionate worship. A healthy congregation draws a wide circle of welcome and creates opportunities for people to build life-giving, healing relationships with one another.
5. **VCI will help us develop an intentional pathway for GROWTH.** Spiritual growth doesn't happen by accident! It takes active participation in worship, fellowship, small groups and acts of service. And when people are growing spiritually, the church usually experiences numerical growth as well. As new people come to us, we'll need a plan to help them "plug in" so they become an important active part of the Dixboro Church family.
6. **VCI is challenging us to discover new and creative ways to SERVE.** Inwardly-focused churches eventually become dying churches. Loving one another is a good and needful thing, however, it is possible to "love one another to death." A healthy, vital church is outwardly-focused – to serve the needs of their community and the world beyond. Our VCI learning has already given rise to new outreach initiatives (e.g. Mission Immersion Sunday, First Responder's Picnic, Community Easter Egg Hunt) and we look forward to many more opportunities to serve.
7. **VCI encourages us to discover our spiritual gifts and use them to build God's Kingdom.** Every person has a special gift to serve the Body of Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, God works through us in special ways to show love in the world. (For more information read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.) *Discover your spiritual gifts at the Town Hall Meeting on April 30th if you would like. The VCI Team will provide you with an inventory that helps you reflect on your spiritual gifts and how you can use them to better serve God.*

8. **VCI is helping us discover who our neighbors really are.** Through VCI, Dixboro Church has access to a detailed demographic study called MissionInsite. Here are a few things we learned about our community (3 mile radius of the church building):
- They are mostly Caucasian (70%) with some diversity (13% Asian, 10% African American, 3% Latino)
 - They are relatively wealthy: Median household income is \$117,600 with only 5% below poverty level
 - They are highly educated - 55% have Bachelor's or post-graduate degrees, 80% are white collar professionals
 - The population has increased by 5% since 2016 and is expected to stay constant (< 5%) for the next ten years. We are in a very stable community.
 - Family size is constant at 2.7 people with 90% of families with children having two parents. Families with school-aged children are declining – a trend which is expected to continue over the next 10 years.
 - The average age is expected to increase by 7 years over the next ten years.
 - Our aging population may be receptive to secular and spiritual outreach (e. g. travel, financial, health, community)
 - People in our community are not particularly religious and a significant number are unchurched:
 - 30% are conservative Evangelical Christian
 - 43% consider themselves spiritual
 - 20% consider it important to attend religious services
 - 14% consider faith to be important
 - Most of our neighbors prefer electronic forms of communication (exception being the 70+ group)
- What's the point? Dixboro Church sits in the middle of a mission field – and there is much opportunity for us to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed with our neighbors.***

9. **VCI reminds us, “If you're not growing, you're dying.”** Just as the human body begins to decline and die when it ceases to grow and mature, so the Body of Christ will die if it ceases to grow, develop and respond to the needs of each new generation. That said, growth requires change and the climate of change may create discomfort, anxiety and fear. Consider the following: *“For a seed to achieve its greatest expression, it must come completely undone. The shell cracks, its insides come out and everything changes. To someone who doesn't understand growth, it would look like complete destruction.”* (C. Ocelli). As our congregation puts our learning into practice and moves forward into the future God envisions for us we will need to be creative, flexible, patient, gracious, willing to risk and fail, and full of faith that we are growing Christ's church for the future.

10. **The VCI process is bathed in prayer.** *“A Growing Church is a Praying Church.”* The privilege of prayer is God's gift of grace to us. Through it, we open ourselves to loving Him and allow Him to love us. Similar to turning on an electric light switch, the switch itself doesn't create electrical current. The switch provides the means for the current to flow. That's how prayer blesses us. Our prayers of praise, thanksgiving, confession, intercession, and petition for our congregation and its mission in the world flow to God and develop deep spiritual roots to nurture us. In order to accomplish all that God intends for Dixboro Church to become and to do, we must grow in our commitment to prayer. *Prayer is the fuel that keeps the fire of the Holy Spirit burning brightly.*

Join us for a Town Hall meeting on April 30th at 11:30 am in Fellowship Hall. We will reflect on these “10 Things,” receive your feedback and discuss phase 2 and 3 of VCI.