



Vital Signs: A Pathway to Congregational Wholeness

Dan R. Dick

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Like many mainline denominations, The United Methodist Church is ailing. Declining membership, worship and Sunday school attendance, outreach and giving - all troubling signs. In an age of megachurches, "Ten Steps to ..." congregational self-help programs point to models that might not be in the church's best interest. Following the suggestions of this new conventional wisdom may reverse the trends and attract thousands to highly entertaining services (bolstered by a strong budget and marketing plan) led a charismatic pastor, but is that the true picture of a vital church? Could it be that our measure of success is wrong? Could it be we're diluting the real mission of the church? Advocating Christianity "Lite?" For more than six years, Dick has visited, studied, surveyed, consulted with and analyzed 700+ congregations across North America to better understand effective structures, processes, leadership and systems for spiritual formation and development. The critically acclaimed result is *Vital Signs*. "Where the formation of faith is concerned and spiritual development and Christian community is the point, qualitative measures are most important," he says. "Bigger says nothing about faithful, and active says nothing about effective. The value of our ministry is judged by the impact it makes on people's lives." From Dick's research emerged clear identifiers of four church types: decaying, dystrophic, retrogressive and vital. With candor Dick describes each, including examples of communities within the types. While reading about these types may be painful, the intent is to provide tools to move toward vitality. "Making church easy is the opposite of making the church faithful," Dick writes. "Vital churches challenge us to remember that the church is God's, not ours, and being Christian disciples is more involved than simply believing in Jesus as the Son of God. ...To be the church for the world requires that we become vital." Though this study is based on United Methodist churches, its lessons are relevant for all congregations. Help yours become transformed into a community that works - hard - together to engage in courageous ministries of witness!

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