



## The What

**ACTS for Vitality** is a journey intended to help congregations renew their vitality. It was developed within the Sierra Pacific Synod for congregations of the Sierra Pacific Synod.

We intentionally spell ACTS in all-caps. It is an acronym for the things that happen on this journey:

- Adapting
- Connecting and/or Collaborating
- Transforming
- Sustaining

We take our inspiration from Acts 2:42-47:

*<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (NIV translation)*

Grounded in scripture, transformational ministry is always part of the story of the disciples and apostles throughout Christianity. ACTS for Vitality is an opportunity to go through this

covenanted and intentional vitality journey with other congregations, learning from and with one another.

## The Why

Our goals are to:

- Stir up and sustain the life-giving mission and ministries of congregations centered on relationship with God, with one another and the world.
- Develop and discover new ways of discipleship (followers) and apostleship (witnesses) for the 21st Century church.
- Increase relational connections, collaborations and visibility of congregations in evangelism and justice work in their respective neighborhoods.
- Prioritize the gift and challenge of authentic diversity as a faith community.
- Strengthen relationships among congregations and Lutheran (and Ecumenical) collective action in their communities by overcoming silos and walls of isolation.

## The How

As with any journey, it is a matter of getting prepared, setting out, and then moving beyond once the journey is complete.

### Discerning and Covenanting

A congregation prayerfully decides whether to join in the ACTS for Vitality journey. They go through a discernment process, aided by the Synod ACTS for Vitality Team. There is an orientation session to explain the journey and to aid with next steps. There is an assessment of a congregations' openness and readiness to participate in the journey. Once they have decided to continue, the congregation forms a small **Congregational Vitality Team** of four to seven leaders, whose gifts complement one another. The congregation makes a covenant between themselves and the Synod.

While in this process, congregations may know of other congregations in similar circumstances as their own. They are encouraged to invite these other congregations to join them in this journey.

### The ACTS Journey – Cohort and Workshops

The congregation's team joins a **cohort** of teams from several congregations. The teams in the cohort then support and hold one another accountable as they participate in the journey.

Over a period of 18 to 24 months, the cohort meets for a series of seven workshops. Each workshop consists of a three-hour session, held on a weekend, once per quarter. Workshops will be held on-line or in-person, depending on the pandemic situation.

Each workshop is structured like a worshipful time together: Word, Meal, and Sent.

- Word: Workshops begin with dwelling in the Word, learning and reflecting on new faith practices.
- Meal: Then there are interactive presentations and discussions on the topic of the day.
- Sent: Finally, participants are invited to practice in their settings what they have learned.

Workshop [topics](#) relate to one another, like a spiral, moving through listening to God in scripture, in our congregation, and our neighborhoods, discovering our role as disciples and apostles, discerning how we participate in God's plan, developing vital and sustainable congregational partnerships for mission and ministry.

During the journey, congregations will have access to skilled, trained, and dedicated coaches. Rostered leaders are also encouraged to become coaches.

During workshops, congregational teams will learn vitality tools and be trained in planning and implementing short- and long-term innovative outreach. They will learn how to reach out to new people, becoming good neighbors and bold followers of Jesus Christ. Congregations will be equipped for sustained response to injustices, with a commitment to authentic diversity.

### **Staying connected and mutually accountable**

Completing the workshops is not a "graduation." Our hope is that each congregation has experienced transformation, and is ready to write their own chapter in the Book of Acts. But the congregation does not do this alone. Our hope is the relationships within the cohort and the wider community become mutually nurturing and sustaining.

### **What Does It Cost?**

Each congregation who will participate contributes \$500.00.

ACTS for Vitality is a testament that we truly a church together. This initiative is in partnership with the whole church: churchwide, synod and congregations. Our Synod receives financial support through the Synod Vitality Grant as seed money, which defrays some of the cost. It also receives leadership support and training from churchwide and other synods who have similar vitality initiatives.

### **Workshop Topics**

The table below summarizes the topics covered in the workshops.

## THE ACTS JOURNEY

WORKSHOP / GATHERING S	THEMES	OBJECTIVES
Orientation	<i>Meeting with Council &amp; Pastor of a Congregation</i>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Introduce ACTS for Vitality</i></p> <p>Support the leadership in their discernment to fully participate in the ACTS for Vitality Journey.</p> <p>Share pertinent document: ACTS for Vitality Congregational Assessment, Roadmap, and Covenant</p> <p>Survey, Introduction to Organizational Change, Recommendations in Building ACTS for Vitality Congregational Team Leaders.</p>
1	<i>Invitation to Relationship as a Community</i>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Launch of ACTS for Vitality Cohort</i></p> <p>Begin a collaborative and transformational relationship vital in the 21st Church</p> <p>Introduce and grow in listening to God, to one another and the world with attention to Authentic Diversity.</p> <p>Nurture relationship as a cohort (ACTS) and congregational team (local).</p> <p>Strengthen Lutheran Identity and ecumenical relationships.</p>

<p><b>2</b></p>	<p><i>Listening to God in Scripture and Prayer</i></p>	<p><i>Begin writing their story as a chapter in the Book of Acts</i></p> <p><b>(Re)claim a missional and evangelical identity.</b></p> <p><b>Grow in faith by deepening spiritual practices to ground their work going forward.</b></p> <p><b>Equip participants with listening skills that include identifying filters and biases.</b></p> <p><b>Discern culture of congregation through identity mapping.</b></p>
<p><b>3</b></p>	<p><i>Listening to God in the Congregation</i></p>	<p><i>“What is God already up to here?”</i></p> <p><b>Identify milestones that have helped construct congregational identity. Which milestones are missing? Which voices are missing? Which voices are being listened to?</b></p> <p><b>Discover who the congregation is in-depth and what the values/ priorities are. Bring in annual report and mission/vision statements.</b></p> <p><b>Discern markers of Congregational Vitality.</b></p>
<p><b>4</b></p>	<p><i>Listening to God in the Neighborhood</i></p>	<p><i>“What is God already up to here?”</i></p> <p><b>Identify the “neighborhood(s)” through demographics and civil society partners. Which milestones are missing? Which voices are missing?</b></p> <p><b>Map assets. Develop neighborhood timeline and one-on-one questions.</b></p> <p><b>Develop an appreciation of the neighborhood. Census/demographics. Neighborhood listening.</b></p> <p><b>Connect spiritual life (collective and individual) to the lives of people living nearby.</b></p>

5	<i>Discovering Who We Are as Disciples, Apostles, and Neighbors</i>	<p><b><i>Bring Christian and Adaptive Leadership</i></b></p> <p>Reflect on the multiple relationships (God, congregation, neighborhood).</p> <p>Determine how the communities (congregation and neighborhoods) align or not.</p> <p>Introduce tools for creative solutions.</p> <p>Implement Design Thinking for creating a three to six month Vitality Plan.</p>
6	<i>Discerning How We Participate in God's Plan for the Future</i>	<p><b><i>New realities and challenges as disciples and apostles</i></b></p> <p>Construct a holistic and courageous Vitality Plan, disrupting the status quo. Leading change.</p> <p>Strategize and problem-solve for sustainability and new vision/mission.</p>
7	<i>Developing Sustainable Congregation and Cohort Partnerships of Mission and Ministry</i>	<p><b><i>Closing and Sending: Empowered and Sent</i></b></p> <p>Analyze existing collaborations in the community and cohort collaborations thus far.</p> <p>Envision and build up new collaborations to transform the communities.</p> <p>Anchor transformative plan into congregation's culture.</p>
Transitions to further the journey	<i>Sent for the sake of the World: nurtured and invited to life giving relationships</i>	<i>Celebrate disciples and apostles doing God's work in the world</i>

**Rolling the credits**

We had some excellent help putting together these workshops and the curriculum behind them. Thanks to our consultants:

- Dr. Kyle Schiefelbein-Guerrero, Steck-Miller Assistant Professor of Worship and Liturgy, United Lutheran Seminary, Philadelphia, PA
- Dr. Carol Jacobson, Associate Professor of Practical Theology, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley, CA
- Rev. Teresita Valeriano, Director of Evangelical Mission and Assistant to the Bishop, Sierra Pacific Synod, Alameda, CA
- Rev. Dawn Roginski, United in Grace Lutheran Church, Vallejo, CA
- Dave Daubert, DMin, PhD., Day 8 Strategies, Congregational Vitality Consultant

## Want to know more?

Check out our presentation on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3szpkH51960>)  
Or, contact one of the members of the ACTS for Vitality Team:

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