

**Characteristics of Thriving Congregations Who Soar with Faith**

We have high expectations concerning thriving congregations. We would agree with the statement by management guru Jim Collins: “No matter how much you have achieved, you will always be merely good relative to what you can become. Greatness is an inherently dynamic process, not an endpoint.” (Jim Collins, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, 2005, p. 9)

We believe thriving is about soaring with faith beyond good toward the full Kingdom potential of a congregation. This addresses excellence in Christian ministry and not just a church growth or church health strategy. Among the many characteristics of Thriving Congregations, these ten stand out:

**1. Thriving Congregations have clarity of mission, purpose, values, and vision.** They have clarity and deep ownership throughout their congregation of their eternal mission, everlasting purpose, enduring core values, and empowering vision. They are captivated by God’s empowering vision for their journey forward.

**2. Thriving Congregations align their ministry with their mission, purpose, values, and vision.** They willingly align everything they do with their understanding of their mission, purpose, core values, and vision. Efforts are made to lift up those programs, ministries, activities, and processes that create this alignment, and to re-evaluate anything that does not to determine if they are essential or if they can be eliminated to free resources for more focused ministry.

**3. Thriving Congregations are focused on who they are called to serve.** They are focused on their community context or the people groups they feel called of God to serve. If they are called to serve their community context they seek to understand and strategize effectively for their community. If they are called to serve various people groups, then they seek to understand the demographic, lifestyle, and spiritual needs of these people groups.

**4. Thriving Congregations are focused on Christ-like faith formation.** They have a faithful, effective, and innovative focus on encouraging Christ-like spiritual formation. They have a clear discipleship process that helps people – who are members, who are connected with their congregation, or who are a focus of the congregation’s external mission – to mature as disciples.

**5. Thriving Congregations have high expectations of ministry leaders connected with their congregation.** They have high expectations for current ministerial and lay leaders and the emerging next generation of lay leaders that they are active in worship and spiritual development, connected with a community of people within the congregation, developing as Christian leaders, have discerned God’s call on their lives, and actively engage in ministry that reflects their calling and leadership skills.

**6. Thriving Congregations continually connect people with Christ and their congregational family.** They intentionally and regularly connect new people with their congregation such as people seeking a spiritual connection with Christ, people new to the Christian faith, children born into and growing up in the congregation, and those people connecting with their congregation by transfer from another congregation.

**7. Thriving Congregations are places of great community life.** They are known as a place with great, open community where new people can easily find a connection with other people, where people grow deep in their relationships with one another, and where there is proactive care for their spiritual, social, physical, and other life needs. Church is, indeed, the true third place for people with home and work being the first two.

**8. Thriving Congregations have great worship of God.** They have inspiring worship which helps people connect with and praise our Triune God. Their music, order of worship, proclaimed word, and sense of the presence of God’s Spirit all add to the quality of worship. Their congregation is known in their community context as a place of great worship which celebrates and praises our Triune God.

**9. Thriving Congregations have healthy systems and structures.** They are known as a place of health. Their fellowship is positive. Their spiritual processes are life-giving. Their structures and decision-making empower people to soar with faith as they live out their spiritual calling, life skills, and personal preferences. They celebrate the diversity of spiritual gifts, life skills, age generations, and church backgrounds. They work through their differences in healthy ways.

**10. Thriving Congregations invest generously in their ministry.** They have many generous people who faithfully give their tithes and offerings. They spend a minimum of one-third of their income from the congregation on programs, ministries, and activities focused on new or current people connected with the congregation, plus on missional efforts outside the congregation in their community context and beyond to the world. No more than two-thirds of their income is spent on personnel and facilities. This allows them to focus financial resources on a lay-empowered ministry that builds a deeper sense of discipleship throughout the congregation and can empower prophetic ministry in their community context and the world.