

# Why the Acts 16:5 Initiative?

Think of the many aspects of your congregation's life today that you appreciate. Further, imagine your congregation becoming even more engaging in its worship, more fruitful in growing disciples, more effective in developing dear friendships, and more adept in serving its community.

The *Acts 16:5 Initiative* is a three-year process designed to offer a variety of ways to enhance and expand upon what is already happening among you. It will stimulate conversation, imagination, and new directions in the vitality of your congregation. It will offer you new ways to grow in your own spiritual life.

We understand the truth of the words of W. Edward Deming, "Every system is perfectly designed to achieve the results its gets." To grow in the vitality of a congregation's worship, fellowship, and discipleship, as well as in your missional impact in the surrounding community, requires us to think in terms of "ministry design" – shaping what we do to make difference in the lives of people.

## The Goals of the *Acts 16:5 Initiative*

1. To experience Acts 16:5 in our day: "Day after day the congregations became stronger in faith and larger in size" (The Message).
2. To inspire a new imagination for what God may do among you and through you.
3. To offer a clear theology for and practice of a disciple-making, transformational, and missional ministry.
4. To enhance and expand what you are already doing that is encouraging people.
5. To offer encouragement and coaching appropriate to each congregational situation.

The *Acts 16:5 Initiative* does not propose a simple checklist of things to do. Rather, it suggests a wide variety of practices and practical "next steps" that a congregation may take. Since every congregation faces different issues and possibilities, the *Acts 16:5 Initiative* offers a great deal of freedom for each pastor, leader, and team in discerning appropriate next steps. Some thirty-five presbyteries and hundreds of congregations have experienced the *Acts 16:5 Initiative* with twenty presbyteries engaged in the process at this time. We know remarkable things can happen when a pastor and other leaders of good will in the congregation enter a deliberate period of reflection concerning their future.



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*-Acts 16:5 The Message*



People sometimes wonder if their congregation is “ready for transformation.” There is no “ready!” We all start where we are, warts and all, earnestly seeking counsel from one another and the blessings from our Lord. We start from where we are and literally, “take the adventure our Lord has for us.”

William Barclay wonderfully translates Philippians 3:12, “I press on to try to grasp that for which I have been grasped by Jesus Christ.” This is what we will seek to do together through the process of the *Acts 16:5 Initiative*.

### **The Transformational Strategy of the *Acts 16:5 Initiative***

The *Acts 16:5 Initiative* is a presbytery-wide process of enhancing congregational vitality. As many congregations join in the *Acts 16:5 Initiative*, there will be a great deal of mutual support and many new ideas exchanged. God is doing something new, and it will be exciting to be a part of it. The Vital Churches Institute will conduct a major training event every six months for three years to present material about transformational ministry and offer additional support as well. The Presbytery and participating congregations will trust our Lord to bring about actual transformation and new directions. We will seek ways to show honor to those who already serve among us and to listen to the Spirit for new vision and direction.

### **The Structure of the *Acts 16:5 Initiative***

- The *Acts 16:5 Initiative* is an initiative of the local presbytery in cooperation with the Vital Churches Institute and the leadership of both organizations will offer counsel and encouragement throughout the process.
- Each Pastor (or CLP) and Session are asked to commit to lead transformation in dependence on the Holy Spirit. The Session seeks to be “permission-giving,” open to new ideas and directions, while sustaining its overall responsibility to watch over the life of the congregation.
- Each pastor will lead an *Acts 16:5 Initiative* Vision Team of up to six people that reports to the Session. The team is encouraged to meet regularly to consider ways to apply the concepts of the *Acts 16:5 Initiative*. In congregations with limited leadership, the pastor may meet regularly with a couple of elders to think through the *Acts 16:5 Initiative* concepts that would be most helpful.

- Twice a year the Vital Churches Institute will conduct a formal one-day training event on some facet of vital congregational life such as growing in missional fruitfulness, worship development, discipleship growing systems, and the growth of a great congregational spirit.
- Each pastor will be invited to be a part of an *Acts 16:5* cluster group with four or five other pastors. These are not merely “support groups” although they do offer mutual encouragement. Their specific aim is to help one another think more imaginatively about their ministries and next steps with the affirmation helpful in following through.

### Vital Churches Institute Support of the *Acts 16:5 Initiative*

- Delivery of one-day training events every six months.
- Materials for the pastor/point person and team of up to six people from every congregation. Login access to a website with the PowerPoint, videos, and other downloads.
- Unlimited email interaction between pastors, congregational leadership teams, and presbytery leadership with Vital Church Institute coaches. Counsel and encouragement from a Vital Churches Institute coach to the coaches of the pastor clusters.
- Counsel and encouragement from a Vital Churches Institute coach to the presbytery staff and leadership in developing the *Acts 16:5 Initiative* in their presbytery and in ways to apply the *Acts 16:5 Initiative* concepts to the presbytery itself as well as within its congregations

### Leadership

**E. Stanley Ott, Ph.D** is the president of the Vital Churches Institute. As a pastor he has over thirty years of pastoral experience experiencing firsthand the challenges and blessings of the transitional congregation that moves to new vitality. He has taught principles of congregational vitality, transformation, missional endeavor, and leadership throughout the United States and abroad. His publications include *Twelve Dynamic Shifts for Transforming Your Church*, *Transform Your Church with Ministry Teams*, and *The Vibrant Church: A People-Building Plan For Congregational Health*. You may contact Stan at [stan@vitalchurches.com](mailto:stan@vitalchurches.com) or on Facebook by friending E. Stanley Ott.

The Vital Churches Institute team includes several pastors as teachers and coaches who will work with you.



## Feedback on the *Acts 16:5 Initiative*

**Pat Clark** – Pastor, St. Stephens Presbyterian Church, Houston

*Acts 16:5* gave us hope for reversing our trend of declining church attendance and is the most user friendly of all the transformation programs out there. It helped clarify who we are and what we are about, gave us tools for evaluating what we are doing, and built spiritual practices into the DNA of the life of St. Stephens. The year before we began not one person joined our church. With *Acts 16:5*, we began to receive new members, and that has continued. The spiritual energy rose in our congregation.

**Malcolm McQueen** – Pastor, John Calvin Presbyterian Church, San Antonio

I believe our congregation is, generally, a healthy one. However, we are not as faithful to the Great Commandment and Great Commission as we need to be. Perhaps like you, we continue to wrestle with changes in culture; how to reach the unchurched; how to grow spiritually; how to be faithful to our traditions while not allowing those traditions to become roadblocks to what the Spirit desires to do through us. Our Session feels this *Initiative* is Biblical and faithful to our Reformed Tradition. As a result, we signed on and continue to participate in this adventure believing the Spirit will use it as a process to encourage and strengthen us for more faithful ministry.

**Michael Kruse** – former chairperson of the General Assembly Mission Council

As someone who has read tons on congregational transformation and as someone who has consulted and participated with struggling congregations, I come with some skepticism toward transformational programs. My impression is that VCI has incorporated the best from previous transformational efforts and fills a critical gap with the development of a cohort of congregations who go through the process together with periodic input by a coach over an extended period.

**Debbie Rundlett**, General Presbyter, Muskingum Valley, Ohio

Stan and his team are all seasoned practioners who live what they teach. They know from experience that transformational ministry does not happen in calm and quiet. They have been through the Refiner's Fire and know the gift born of challenge. In short, they are people of faith and have been tried and found true.

**Sam Marshall**, Executive-General Presbyter, Salem Presbytery, North Carolina.

I've been very pleased to participate in the *Acts 16:5 Initiative*. In my perspective, it is the most well-planned congregational transformational option (highly detailed step-by-step instructions, yet offers a lot of "adaptability" regarding the size and structure of a congregation); and it excels at providing a relational/discipleship-focused modeled. I highly recommend *Acts 16:5*. Stan and his team are great resources for pastors/congregations who may get "stuck" recycling answers that just don't work in today's context. This program requires commitment and persistence – It's not a quick fix. Stan is very realistic in saying that three years into the process, people begin to catch on...but it may take 5-6 years to transform the "system" as it (to use Stan's words). I hope you will take the plunge! We've had about 30 churches (from 50 members to 1100 members) participate – with truly transformational results!

**Betty Meadows**, General Presbyter, Mid-Kentucky Presbytery, Louisville

The *Acts 16:5 Initiative* has given the 20 participating congregations in Mid-Kentucky Presbytery hope FOR transformation, and transformation is not easy. When the teams gather for each seminar, the energy in the room is palpable. Energy begets energy and hope abounds. It is exciting to see so many engaged in this transformative process that is lead by the risen Christ.

**The Acts 16:5 Initiative IS the fuse that ignited transformation within our presbytery!**

-Mike Cole,  
Executive Presbyter,  
New Covenant Pres-  
bytery, Houston, TX