

# What is Sustainability in the Local Church?

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Tangier Island is losing up to 16 feet of coastline every year.





The island will be uninhabitable within 20–30 years...



... and below water in 50 years.





Many churches today are like Tangier Island;  
We're losing churches on the margins.



Are we this committed?



# Our sustainability is dependent upon our relationship with our Creator

Psalms 104

**Bless the LIVING GOD, O my soul.**

**O LORD my God, you are very great.  
You are clothed with honor and majesty,  
wrapped in light as with a garment.**

**You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,  
and plants for people to use,  
to bring forth food from the earth,  
and wine to gladden the human heart,  
oil to make the face shine,  
and bread to strengthen the human heart.**

# Sustainability as a System

- Sustainability means a system has the capacity to remain stable with the external environment and at the same time the capacity to continuously reconstruct its inner coherence.
- We remain a relevant witness in the community while constantly re-creating who we are internally.



# What feeds the system?

- People
- Ideas
- Time
- Money
- Other material resources

# Lincoln Congregational Temple UCC

- Founded in 1869 by free blacks and recently freed enslaved people
- Staging ground for the 1963 March on Washington
- 1990 to 2010, African American residents plunged from 65 % to 29 %
- Young white millennials flooded into the community
- No Parking signs





# A Thriving & Sustainable System

**When a system meets the expectations (subjective and objective) of its members with quality, efficiency and reliability, it gains fidelity and commitment from members, which in turn results in sustainability.**

# How do we remain open to understanding our system?

- Transform our

Judging Question: Why are they saying that?

- To a

Learning Question: What can I learn from that perspective?



# How do we move forward?

- PAY ATTENTION TO THE HOT SPOTS
- STORIES SHAPE CULTURE
- GOD IS FULL OF SURPRISES

# PAY ATTENTION TO THE HOT SPOTS

- I remember when these classrooms were....
- I remember when it was an honor to be on Consistory
- I remember when parents....
- Every fall we have problems with...



# What does the Congregation measure?

## LAG Metric

something has already happened by the time you get the data

- Nickels & Noses - by the time you count, can't change anything

# What does the Congregation measure?

## LEAD Metrics

indicators that leaders set and that have the potential for changing the lag metrics

- What is one thing the church is going to do on Sunday to make visitors feel more welcome?
- How often? Who? When?
- How many times in the course of the year does the church equip, inspire and support people to share their faith story?
- How often? Who? When?



# STORIES SHAPE CULTURE

Well crafted stories motivate people to act

- David Kelly – We're a church that knows how to dig deep.
- We'll try anything at least once!
- It would be wonderful to have walking paths in our woods.

# Appreciative Inquiry

- **Best Experience:** Reflect on your entire experience with your congregation.
- Recall a time when you felt most alive, most involved, spiritually touched, or most excited about your involvement.
- What do you think is the core value of your church?
- What values give life to your congregation.



# STORIES SHAPE CULTURE

- Is this the story we mean to be sharing?
- Is our story big enough and inclusive enough to welcome others?
- Do we need to create a new future story?

# METRICS WITH CLEAR GOALS AND PURPOSE INSPIRE MINISTRY

- **Strategic goals free us from what we did last year**

- **Assessing Investments**

  - Where is it most difficult to recruit leaders?

  - What can you let go?

  - What are the committees people do not want to sign up for?

  - What practices or habits are outside of your values?



# METRICS WITH CLEAR GOALS AND PURPOSE INSPIRE MINISTRY

- What is the focus for this year's goal?
- How can these goals be owned by the congregation?
- What stories will motivate?
- Where will those stories be told to increase momentum?

# CREATING ALTERNATE REVENUE STREAMS

- HCUCC – rental income, memorial gifts, cell tower
- Episcopal Congregation – restaurant
- Movement Church – business partnerships

# GOD IS FULL OF SURPRISES

- How many God moments are people naming each week?
- How many spaces or places that foster vulnerability are available each month?
- Where can people ask their God-questions?



# A Theology of Death & Resurrection

- Die daily to who we are
- Empowerment of others (not self) is our life
- Acceptance of risk is normative
- Theology is not just knowledge, but practice
- Hold tight to Christ with an open hand for everything else.

~Neil Cole