

Revitalization Initiative vs. New Beginning Summary

The Revitalization Initiative can be compared to the New Beginnings Program in many ways. While they are similar in their goals and even many of their recommended process steps, there are fundamental differences which are important.

Goals

First, they both have a goal to assist churches in assessing themselves in the context of their environment/community that enables them to recognize their strengths and the reality of their current life, and then discern a bold new direction for their future that is relevant to them and their community.

Relationship Building

While both New Beginnings and the Revitalization Initiative provide opportunities and process for engagement and relationship-building, the Revitalization Initiative is deliberate in making relationship a primary goal, specifically between pastors and congregations as well as between the Presbytery and pastors.

Tools and Resources

The Revitalization Initiative includes year-two tools, coaching, and instruction beyond the discernment of the bold new direction; it includes a helpful pathway to help drive implementation and action. Similar to the Revitalization Initiative, New Beginnings provides a rigorous roadmap to get congregations through the often difficult and sometimes joy-filled process of self-assessment, taking them on a journey of what they do well together and when they were at their best to help the congregants discern a bold new direction that will enliven and drive energy in the church; both use AI (Appreciative Inquiry). However, New Beginnings leaves the church at the doorstep of a new way of being together, with the sometimes overwhelming task of determining how to bring the vision to reality.

Pastor Support

The Revitalization Initiative includes pastor cohorts which are meant to support each other and drive creativity. This is a critical element that can help colleagues brainstorm and think more innovatively together. New Beginnings expects pastors to support the process with innovative and open thinking, yet very little time is spent helping pastors identify how they themselves may be stuck in the status quo, a requirement before they can effectively move others toward a new direction. New Beginnings leaves it to each leader to pro-actively reach out to colleagues for support and/or ideas. Pastor connection didn't happen consistently at Newark, and there was resistance to scheduling "more meetings" in the pastors' over-scheduled calendars. Both initiatives provide opportunities for one-on-one coaching; with more availability and structure for use in the Revitalization Initiative; however, not all participating pastors took advantage of this service in the New Beginnings program.

Preparation and Discernment

New Beginnings includes preparation for change as well as more discernment time. The New Beginnings process includes a number of early communications to church leaders outlining the program and inviting them to a "Come-and-See" meeting for all congregations. At that meeting, congregations are asked to engage in a discernment process and to determine how God is calling them to participate. Pre-work to engage the churches early and gain buy-in is outlined in New Beginnings, i.e., the Newark Presbytery implementation committee reached out to each church with a protocol of questions and answers to ensure that each church knew of the meeting, had an

understanding of the program, and to encourage their participation and discernment. I have not seen a plan for pre-engagement and discernment for congregations in the Revitalization Initiative pilot description.

Presbytery Commitment

Because the Revitalization Initiative is relationship driven, it requires more commitment and involvement of the Presbytery leaders to review reports and to walk with congregations in their discernment journey to include connecting regularly with congregations. New Beginnings does not require presbytery action beyond approval and identification of the implementation committee.

Positives of the Revitalization Initiative

- The Revitalization Initiative is more comprehensive in its implementation instruction and provides more tangible tools/resources than New Beginnings.
- Pastor cohorts provide support and drive creativity and energy among colleagues.
- The Revitalization Initiative provides access to ongoing coaching for pastors and congregations.
- There is a deliberate emphasis on relationship with key connections built into the Revitalization Initiative between pastor and congregations as well as between pastor and presbytery.
- The Revitalization Initiative has more accountability for both the participating congregations and the presbytery through reporting and participation together.
- The Year 2 Revitalization Initiative tools may compliment the resources of those congregations in the midst of implementing their New Beginnings decision.

Potential Challenges of the Revitalization Initiative

- The Revitalization Initiative requires a significant time commitment by pastors and presbytery leaders.
- Many congregations, especially the New Beginning participants, have been through significant assessment processes and will be resistant to duplication of effort. A readiness dialogue may be helpful, as all churches are not starting from the same place; this may mean customizing parts of the initiative to meet them where they are.
- The involvement of the presbytery may be perceived as oversight and control which may be seen as a negative by congregations that do not trust the presbytery due to historic precedents.
- The Revitalization Initiative may be seen as a way to dissolve small congregations, especially if participation is perceived as required.
- The Revitalization Initiative has more accountability for both the participating congregations and the presbytery.
- The language in the Revitalization Initiative materials may be perceived as academic or “corporate”; therefore, concluding that the initiative is not rooted in the reality of the churches.