

## Church Growth and Evangelism

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Under the steady leadership of Connie Moser, our focus this year was largely on helping ourselves and the member churches of the Vermont Conference to figure out what "Church Growth" really means.

In a time when the size of our congregations is often stagnant and sometimes shrinking, it's easy to fixate on how to fill the pews, the collection plate, and the various committee assignments necessary for any church to function as an instrument of God's presence in the world. Yet this definition of 'church growth' often seems to create frustration, misdirected effort, and even a sense of despair – among present worshippers and newcomers alike. Such despair welcomes neither the Holy Spirit nor the stranger.

So we began our work this year by inviting churches throughout Vermont to be in touch with us and tell us stories about growth in their congregations, however they chose to define it. We encouraged churches to tell us about growth in spiritual vitality as much as, if not more than, increases in the size of their Sunday worshipping crowd.

Response to this request was modest, but it did give us an idea for how to proceed with our work. As we mulled over our own definitions of church growth, we decided to hone in on examples of the Spirit at work in congregations, and to offer a workshop at Annual Meeting that will tell a handful of stories of this Spirit already at work, and will invite other stories from participants. We're calling this workshop "Learning Where the Spoons Are."

We hope, at this workshop and beyond, to begin a conversation about surprising events that are happening in churches around Vermont, and describing ways that other churches can grow these ideas in the context of their own congregational life. Simply put, we sense that when worship communities find new ways of welcoming people into their midst, the Holy Spirit has already begun working to nourish growth and is freed to work even further. When the stranger learns where the spoons are in the church kitchen, the Holy Spirit sets the table for a feast that can lead... who knows where?

We humbly suggest that "Spoon buttons" will be THE memento from this year's Annual Meeting.