

## Frequently Asked Questions



### How did the Matthew 25 vision come about?

The 222nd and 223rd General Assemblies (2016 and 2018) challenged the PC(USA) to embrace Jesus' call in Matthew 25:31–46 to take our living faith into our communities and the world. As a Matthew 25 church, we are called to live out true discipleship by acting boldly, compassionately and fearlessly serving people who are hungry, oppressed, imprisoned or poor. We joyfully share this vision and invitation with you!

### What exactly do we have to do to become a Matthew 25 congregation or mid council?

To some degree, many churches are already doing the work of Matthew 25. We hope that by partnering with mid councils and congregations, we can together multiply and intensify our loving commitment to radical and fearless discipleship. The first step is simply to sign up to become a Matthew 25 church or mid council at [pcusa.org/matthew25](http://pcusa.org/matthew25).

When you sign up, you will be asked to embrace one or more of the three areas of focus — building congregational vitality, dismantling structural racism and eradicating systemic poverty.

Then as you live out your commitment, we ask you to share the story of impact that your pledge has made: how your congregation has changed, how you've discovered new passions and vitality, how your members have been re-energized as disciples ... so like in the early church, your renewed faith will fan the flames and encourage other congregations to also embrace our common mission.

### How do I share our story of impact?

Visit the Matthew 25 website at [presbyterianmission.org/matthew-25-sharing-our-stories/](http://presbyterianmission.org/matthew-25-sharing-our-stories/). The form will prompt you for photos, videos and other content that will bring your story alive. You may be contacted by the Presbyterian News Service for more information.

### Does my church still have to sign up to be a Matthew 25 congregation if our mid council has already signed on?

Yes. When a mid council signs on, they are committing to help spread the invitation. Their goal is to have 20% of the congregations in their presbytery or synod sign on. So it is important that each congregation make that commitment themselves. You can do that at [pcusa.org/matthew25](http://pcusa.org/matthew25).

### Why is the goal to sign up 20% of all congregations/mid councils as Matthew 25 churches?

Twenty percent is the social science benchmark for success in any project. It is the tipping point that causes an idea or practice to spread and result in a movement.

### What is congregational vitality all about?

Vitality isn't a number. It's not about how many members you have, or how large your budget is, or even how many baptisms you celebrate each year. Rather, it's a mindset and commitment to re-energize and live out your church's faith in your community and the world. Vitality is a passion for following Jesus—growing in faith and discipleship, embracing people beyond your church walls, working for justice and reconciliation, and serving your neighbors in need. It's a way of life that sees with Christ's eyes and uses your collective gifts to really make a difference. Of course, every community is different and faces its own challenges. Growing in vitality always requires prayer and discernment to figure out how you are called.

We believe that "Where Christ is, there is the true Church" (F-1.0303). Matthew 25 shows us that Christ is with people who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, or in prison. If we wish to serve Christ, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) must be with these same people in our witness, work, and worship. In this mission we encounter Christ, the life of the world, and congregations find true vitality.

### If my church is participating in the Vital Congregations pilot program, aren't we automatically a Matthew 25 church?

The Vital Congregations initiative is one way a congregation who has committed to becoming a Matthew 25 church can address the issue of congregational vitality. However, it is important that each congregation make the commitment to be Matthew 25 congregations themselves. You can do that at [pcusa.org/matthew25](http://pcusa.org/matthew25).

### **The text of Matthew 25 doesn't explicitly mention racism. How does the focus of dismantling structural racism fit in?**

In Matthew 25 Jesus addresses the nations and focuses on “the least of these,” revealing his concern for groups of people who experience marginalization because of how others respond to their most basic needs—food, water, clothing, welcome, healing, and freedom. Harsh judgment is pronounced on those who lack compassion and fail to act justly towards people who are marginalized. Today in our country people of color are among the most marginalized communities because of racism. Studies on racism reveal people of color are disproportionately impoverished, imprisoned and denied access to economic and educational benefits enjoyed by white Americans. It is also worth noting that the Greek word for “stranger” in Matthew 25 is *xenos*, the root of our word “xenophobia,” meaning hatred or prejudice toward people from other cultures or countries. Racism violates God’s command to love one another. Matthew 25’s principle to treat marginalized people with love and justice is the basis for the lofty goal to dismantle the sinful practice of systemic racism. When you embrace anti-racism work, you are pledging to stand up and find inspired ways to chip away at this terrible injustice in our world.

### **What does “systemic poverty” mean?**

When we describe a problem as systemic, we mean that it pervades our entire culture and is deeply ingrained in the structures of society. In our country, people who are poor tend to stay poor because the deck is stacked against them at every turn. To embrace the Matthew 25 vision to eradicate systemic poverty means that we aspire to address the root causes of poverty in our communities and world. For example, many churches have food pantries and that is a much-needed blessing for their members and communities. However, to address the root causes of poverty, we must work at what is creating the situation of poverty and hunger to begin with – the laws and policies that are unjust and exploitative of people who are poor. It means combatting greed. It means tackling injustices in housing, health care, education, access to food, environment, zoning and many other issues. It means appealing to legislators, community leaders and visionaries to make a difference. It means boldly standing up for people who don’t have a powerful voice themselves. Again, Jesus urges us to open our eyes and hearts — and then take action.

### **Is Jesus talking about systemic poverty in Matthew 25, or just ordinary acts of kindness?**

The prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures demonstrated a clear concern for condemning and correcting unjust systems. Jesus stands firmly in this prophetic tradition when he expresses his solidarity with people who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, or in prison. Furthermore, in this scene of final judgment, Jesus is addressing the “big picture”—all the nations and peoples of the world; in this context he would seem to be referring not only to individual actions, but to larger social structures that affect people who are poor.

### **We are already very busy and active in our community. Why should we sign up for “one more thing”?**

Very simply, there is power in unity. By accepting the Matthew 25 invitation, you are helping to strengthen the work and witness to Jesus Christ in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and you help us become a more unified and relevant presence in the world. The Matthew 25 vision also demonstrates our understanding as Presbyterian Christians that we are “saved to serve.” By committing to become a Matthew 25 church, you are responding to Christ’s urgent call to be a church of action, where God’s love, justice and mercy shine forth and are contagious. Our re-energized faith can unite and connect all Presbyterians for a common and holy purpose to continue the mission and ministry of Jesus in the church and in the world.