

Mission trumps size

By [L. Gail Irwin](#)

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Many of us might assume that a church with only 32 members automatically qualifies as a “struggling church,” or even a dying church. But in the case of [St. Mark’s Episcopal Church](#) in Keansburg, New Jersey, many of us would be wrong.

St. Mark’s housed a non-profit meal program out of their building for years, but when Hurricane Sandy hit, and the electricity went out, the program was unable to continue. Members of St. Mark’s came down to the church after the disaster and found hungry people at their door.

At that moment, they demonstrated that they are a church with a vital mission.

They took the thawing food out of the church’s freezers and started cooking for anyone who showed up. From there, a new meal program was born, as volunteers returned or showed up for the first time, to help feed their devastated community. Today, they serve breakfast and lunch every day, about 5,000 meals a month. A nurse, social worker, and crisis counselor visit regularly. And they also gather for weekly worship, healing services, and monthly “Recovery Eucharist in the AA tradition.”

Most of St. Mark’s members are over the age of 70, but the congregation has welcomed in outside assistance, including other churches and Scouting groups, who come in to help them carry out their mission.

A few things worth noting in this story:

- It reminds me that a disaster often gives us the urgent ability to respond to a crisis with compassion, and can become a wake up call about whatever true mission a church is called to carry out
- A small group of people may not be able to do it all on their own, but with coordination and delegating, any size group can have a significant impact on the world.
- A church full of 70-year-olds can be a vital church! And with the changing demographics of our country, we are going to have to stop assuming that churches need big Sunday Schools and youth programs in order to be vital. Vitality is not limited by age or size, but only by our ability to respond

creatively to what the Holy Spirit is doing around us.

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