Reflections on understanding a living and vital faith

In Mark 12:28 Jesus is asked by a scribe: “Which commandment is first of all?” Jesus responded with “the Lord is one,” and went on to say, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). These words are very similar to those that served as Israel’s central confession of faith (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Joshua (22:5) later reminded the people of Israel to observe these words. With this text as a guide, how do we begin to explore the ways we will nurture a living and vital faith in each person and the congregation?

Within the work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, congregational vitality is defined as “communities of Jesus where there are life-changing relationships with God, one another and the world.” These are three important dimensions of our work together. But it is the way in which we bring our heart, soul, mind and strength into our life and work that shows how the light of Christ shines in and through us. Our heart is the way we feel and sense God’s presence in and through emotions. The soul is our mindful awareness of the presence of God within us and the world. This awareness encourages us to find meaning and purpose in life, both individually and as a community of faith. The mind is how we learn our beliefs, perspectives and practices that shape our understanding, knowledge and expressions of faith. And strength is the way we use our abilities, passions and skills to shape and live a life of faith.

The vitality of our faith as Christians, and as a church in the Lutheran tradition, finds meaning and purpose in Jesus’ words from Mark 12:30. As we engage our strategic directions for the future, we find both power and insight by reflecting on what brings us vitality. Please consider the following:

Heart
- When are the times you feel or sense God is present?
- How are these experiences different when you are with others rather than alone?
- How do these emotions bring vitality to your faith and relationship with God?

Soul
- What Scripture passages give you an awareness of life or “living faith”?
- How does this awareness of a living faith help you find meaning and purpose in life?
- What about your life experiences brings a sense of vitality to your faith?

Mind
- What motivates you to continue growing in your relationship with God?
- What have you found helps you learn more about God?
- Where do you find vitality through your learnings and spiritual practices?

Strengths
- What God-given abilities, passions and skills have you discovered in your life?
- How does your faith guide you in using these?
- What about using these abilities, passions and gifts gives you vitality?

May your responses to these questions help you gain new insight and vitality into your relationship with God, each other and the world.
**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.**

*Mark 12:30*