



Congregational Vitality Assessment: Can it help our congregation?

The Congregational Vitality Assessment is a tool to assist congregational leadership to identify areas of strength and areas of opportunity with the hope of becoming a more vital congregation. This assessment or survey gathers information, offers analysis, and provides a foundation for missional planning.

What's a "Vital Congregation?"

Vital congregations bear witness to God's transforming power. This is what the assessment attempts to capture by inviting participants to share their perceptions of how the congregation is connecting with God, with one another, and with the world.

Vital congregations are vibrant and friendly, open and welcoming. God's presence is tangible. There is a sense of movement outward, bearing God's good news into the world. Driven by a strong sense of purpose, individuals are encouraged to support each other by nurturing one another's faith development. People are encouraged and empowered to share their gifts both within and beyond the congregation. As they work together to further God's mission, disagreements are handled in a respectful manner, often strengthening the congregation.

How is the assessment given?

There are three sections to the survey: Connecting with God, Connecting with One Another, and Connecting with the World. It includes a number of questions about the congregation: how it serves members, visitors and the community through worship, prayer, faith formation, outreach, etc. There are also questions about the individual completing the survey (e.g. "I am growing in my faith" "my spiritual needs are being met" "my frequency of church attendance" etc.) Visitors are invited and encouraged to respond as well. Most questions ask participants to rate the questions on a scale from 1 (lowest) through 5 (highest).

The survey may be taken either online or on paper; you must choose according to your congregation's needs. The online version has the option to offer further written comments and feedback, so that individuals can share additional information, as well as any bright spots that other congregations may want to try. Unfortunately, the two survey methods cannot be mixed at this time.

The survey usually takes around 10-15 minutes to complete. Your Director for Evangelical Mission (DEM) and Renewal Team members will shepherd this process from "sign up" through the feedback sessions with your congregation.

Quotes from congregations of the Upstate New York Synod who have taken the assessment:

"Wow-- I loved this experience! No one has ever asked me about my prayer life before!"

"The survey really made me think-- and pray! Had to really consider my own growth in faith and the ways our congregation equips us all to make a difference in the world."

"Taking the Congregational Vitality Assessment was a profound experience for me. I feel that my voice was really heard and listening to all of our voices will definitely make a difference."

What happens once the survey is completed?

Congregations submitting their surveys online simply provide a link, participate, set the “end date” and need do nothing further. Congregations using paper surveys send the completed copies directly to our Churchwide Department for Research and Evaluation. Once received, statisticians Dann Taylor and Linda Bobbitt will review the information and compile a 12 page analysis and report. The report describes how people responded to each item, interprets the data, asks questions and then offers suggestions for action.

Within a few weeks of submitting the survey results, this written report is sent to your DEM. If there are questions or concerns, the DEM contacts Dann or Linda for further clarification. Your DEM will then share this information with a trained interpreter(s). These persons will share the report with you and your council, helping to interpret the report and serve as a resource for next steps.

The results will also be combined with the results from other congregations around the ELCA for further statistical analysis. Any reports using this data will remove all information that may identify an individual congregation.

How can the results be used?

This survey provides insights into the vitality of a congregation by collecting the many voices of its participants. The results compile all these voices into a picture of the congregation, providing a solid foundation on which to move forward. The most important impact of the Congregational Vitality Assessment is how leadership uses and follows up on the results.

Quote from member after receiving the results in a congregational meeting:

“Outstanding!! Looks like we are really ready for the next chapter in our mission. I can see the hand of God leading us to deepen our mission in this neighborhood.”

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Ways to use the results include:

- Identification of specific areas of strength and growth
- Motivation for initiating intentional discernment of next steps
- Information to assist in asset mapping and area strategies
- Indication of “readiness for renewal” processes
- Insight into the correlation of spiritual growth and conflict so that both may be addressed
- Discovery of commonalities and differences among congregations working to partner in new ways
- Catalyst for constructive conversations among leadership and congregation
- Groundwork for holistic mission planning/strategic planning
- Affirmation of ongoing congregation mission planning and programming

What’s this going to cost?

The Upstate New York Synod is presently a “test” synod for this instrument; there is no charge to the congregations for this assessment. Your mission support dollars have paid for the survey and its development— this is an example of your mission support in action!

How do we begin?

Once your Congregation Council has discussed taking the survey, decided on a date, chosen a methodology (online or paper) and a “roll out” process (i.e. announcements, bulletins, newsletters, etc.), you may contact your DEM and/or your Conference Dean to sign up.

Your Director for Evangelical Mission is the Rev. Judith VanOsdol who will coordinate with Deans and your area Regional Renewal Team. Her email: jvanosdol@upstatenynod.org.