

Vital stats, vital congregations: Go beyond M&Ms

By Lisa Smith Fiegel, DEM

“Members and money. That’s all churches care about, that’s all churchwide cares about.” This sentiment goes around, and, while it’s certainly not true, it’s hard to find ways of evaluating ourselves beyond the M&Ms (members and money).

Enter the Congregational Vitality Project. Started as a pilot program in a few synods across the country, this tool of evaluating a congregation’s health has made its way onto the Annual Congregational Report survey (AKA parochial report, AKA Forms A and C) that congregations complete early on every calendar year about the year before.

This year, the annual congregational report is new and improved and takes you way beyond M&Ms. The report will ask 15 new questions about your congregation’s vitality. You’ll see the following new questions on the report this year:

How well do these phrases describe your congregation?

1. Worship nurtures people’s faith
2. Deepens people’s relationship with God
3. A clear sense of mission
4. Excitement about the congregation’s future
5. Always ready to try something new
6. A positive force in the community
7. Works for social justice/advocacy

How well does your congregation...

8. Incorporate new members into congregational life
9. Seek out and use the gifts of all ages
10. Build strong, healthy relationships among members
11. Manage disagreements in a healthy, respectful manner
12. Address social concerns (helping those in need)
13. Equip members to share their faith with others
14. Interact with the local community
15. Help members live out their faith in their daily lives

You could just answer these questions by yourself for the report or use a small group. Or you could take it to the next level (go beyond!) and use it as a springboard for real conversation about the present and future of your congregation. It’s energizing to talk together about where your congregation shines and where God is inviting you to grow more deeply and intentionally. Here’s how you can prepare for the new congregational report and encourage good conversation in your congregation.

- 1.) Invite and encourage people in your congregation to answer the 15 questions. Pass out a copy as a survey for a couple of Sundays upcoming. The survey and a discussion guide can be [found here](#).
- 2.) Have a conversation with your congregational council or other small group about your responses to the 15 questions (see discussion guide link above).
- 3.) Use what you learned about your congregation as a basis for your mission goals and plans for the year. You can always invite your director for evangelical mission to work with you on this process!

For more background on the Congregational Vitality Project, [visit here](#) or contact Rev. Lisa Smith Fiegel, director for evangelical mission, at alaskadem@gmail.com or 907.272.8899.