

## Check-up

This simple assessment is designed for congregational leadership to quickly identify strengths and challenges as well as next steps. It should be filled out by individuals first, and then discussed by a group. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers. Leaders should expect to hear differences and honor them all because all experiences are valid. As you listen to each other, also listen to what God is saying and doing in your midst.

### Vitality

A vital congregation is one that connects with God, each other, and the world to live out God’s mission. The following questions can help your congregation determine its current vitality.

	Poorly		Some what		Great	
<b>How well do these phrases describe your congregation?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	Copy number from column
<i>Example</i>			X			3
Worship nurtures people’s faith						
Deepens people’s relationship with God						
Has a clear sense mission						
Excitement about the congregation’s future						
Always ready to try something new						
A positive force in the community						
Works for social justice/advocacy						
<b>How well does your congregation...</b>	<b>Hardly at all</b>		<b>Well</b>		<b>Very Well</b>	
Incorporate new members into congregational life						
Seek out and use the gifts of people of all ages						
Build strong, healthy relationships among members						
Manage disagreements in a healthy respectful manner						
Address social concerns (help those in need)						
Equip members to share their faith with others						
Interact with the local community						
Help members live out their faith in daily lives						
Total all rows						
Vitality Score: (Divide total by 15)						

## Factors that Impact Vitality

The following areas are known to impact a congregation's vitality.

1. **Show how each domain impacts your congregation.** Mark levels for each domain in the Impact column.

5= **Strength:** This is such a strength that it will help the congregation through tough times

4= **Helpful:** this is helping or strengthening vitality. It is something you do well.

3= **Neutral:** this is not having a significant impact on vitality (positive or negative)

2= **Risk Factor:** this is hurting vitality but is not critical. It is something for which we compensate.

1= **Barrier:** this is keeping the congregation from vitality. It must be changed before meaningful progress can occur. A barrier might be a lack of something (e.g. vision, leadership, trust, resources) or the presence of something harmful (e.g. conflict, isolation, and dysfunction).

2. **Place an X by the domains where you spend most of your time and energy working intentionally.** Only mark areas where you can name concrete action being taken.

Domain	Definition	Impact	Intentional Activities
<b>God's Presence</b>	Leaders experience God's active presence in the congregation. Leaders can articulate how God shows up and works in and through the congregation and its people.		
<b>Mission/ Purpose</b>	The congregation has a clear understanding of God's larger mission and the purpose for their church in this time and place. The congregation can articulate that purpose and has a specific plan to implement.		
<b>Leadership</b>	Pastor, lay leadership, and unofficial leaders- Their skills, personalities, overall health (physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, etc.) are strong and match the current mission.		
<b>Relationships</b>	Relationships among leadership, pastor & staff, and the congregation create loving community with good communication. People work together respectfully through disagreements.		
<b>Attitudes/ Culture</b>	Mission orientation (Mission is the driving force behind everything the church does.), willingness to change to achieve mission, sense of ownership, belonging/ commitment, level of engagement, and interest in embracing local community		
<b>Local Context</b>	Congregation is an important part of and partner with the community where it is located.		
<b>Resources</b>	Money, facility, equipment, technology, and people power support missional activities		
<b>Governance &amp; Admin</b>	Decision making, administration of finances, and personnel management support missional activities		
<b>Programs</b>	The things a congregation does, it does well. May include: worship, fellowship, faith formation, prayer, youth/ young adult ministries, evangelism, outreach, stewardship, etc.		

Write the number of barriers (1's) \_\_\_\_\_

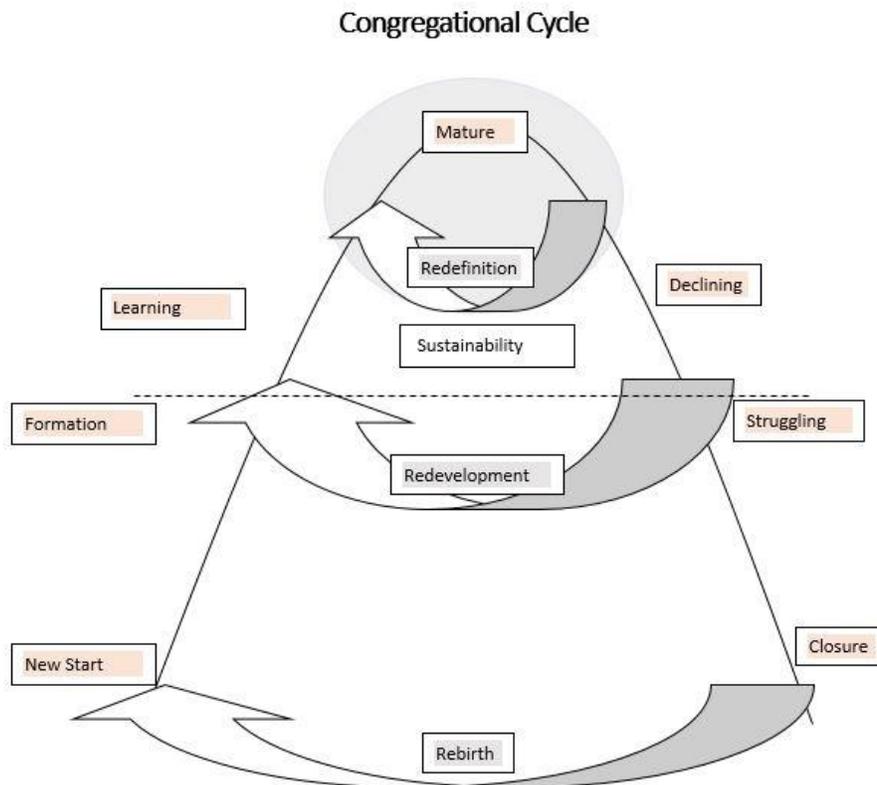
Write the number of Strengths (5's) \_\_\_\_\_

Write the number of domains with Intentional Activities. \_\_\_\_\_

Total Strengths + Activities \_\_\_\_\_

## Congregational Life Stage

Congregations go through developmental stages. Each stage has specific tasks and potential for either a positive or negative outcome. Vital congregations are those that reach a positive outcome for their life stage. Use the grid below to see where your congregation fits. The dotted line indicates a congregation's ability to sustain itself. **Mark your congregation's place.**



<b>New Start</b>	<b>Formation</b>	<b>Learning</b>
New worshiping community	Organized but not yet self-sustaining	Self-sustaining, growing and developing programs and systems
<b>Mature</b>	<b>Declining</b>	<b>Struggling - Closure</b>
May be growing but usually maintaining worship size. Cycle through periods of self-assessment, planning, change, stability, plateau, decline, new assessment, redefinition, planning, change...	Loss of members, energy, money. Loss of focus on mission, often stuck in old patterns and struggle to change. Often disconnected with local community. Sometimes in conflict.	Same as declining but no longer sustainable (money or people or both). Not enough resources or energy to continue or redevelop. Only option is to choose how to close. All congregations come here eventually.
<b>Redefinition</b>	<b>Redevelopment</b>	<b>Rebirth</b>
Revisiting mission/vision and how you live it out. Adjusting to changing community. (Part of mature cycle)	Major overhaul of mission/vision, leadership, culture, programs, etc. Feels like a different congregation.	Former ministry is ended. Resources used to start new ministry. May include consolidation or merger.

## Pulling it together

This section brings your answers from the first pages together to see what it means for you.

### Your overall vitality

Write the average score from the 15 items on page 1 \_\_\_\_\_.

<b>Struggling</b> <3..2	<b>Concerns</b> 3.5	<b>Maintaining</b> 4.0	<b>Moving Forward</b> 4.3+
----------------------------	------------------------	---------------------------	-------------------------------

Using the scale above, identify the word that best describes where your congregation scored (e.g. Moving Forward – Struggling)? Write that word in the line below.

\_\_\_\_\_

The word you wrote suggests whether your congregation is moving toward a positive or negative outcome in your life stage. Find the word you chose below and circle it. Which direction are you moving?

- Moving Forward – Positive outcome likely
- Maintaining – Could go either way
- Concerns – Leaning toward negative outcome
- Struggling – Negative outcome likely

### Life Stage

There are specific key tasks and critical activities associated with positive outcomes in each life stage. There are also common threats and critical barriers that lead to negative outcomes in each stage. The following pages show what you need to know about each life stage and help you compare where you are to where you need to be. Look up your life stage in the following pages to see where to focus energy to help you move in the right direction.

Write the name of the life stage you marked on page 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Go to the page with the life stage you marked and follow the instructions to see where you stand and what's next.

[Formation, Learning or Redevelopment p. 5](#)

[Mature or Redefining p. 6](#)

[Declining p. 7](#)

[Struggling or Closure p. 8](#)

Visit [www.CongregationalVitalitySurvey.com](http://www.CongregationalVitalitySurvey.com) for more information about this project. Talk with your synod's Director for Evangelical Mission (DEM) to learn more about vitality and to take a longer congregation-wide survey.

## Life Stage: Formation, Learning or Redeveloping

**Description:** New or renewing church gets organized and works to become missional and self-sustaining.

**Key Tasks:** Establish core theology Mission/Purpose. Articulate God active presence in day to day life. Develop the expectation that God regularly shows up and works in and through the congregation. Create a supportive community. Create a sense of team and communal ownership where everyone's gifts are known and used. Incorporate new members in leadership. Establish healthy mission focused culture that is eager to change to stay missional. Build relationships and partnerships within the local community for the sake of mission not just recruitment.

**Common Threats:** Fail to gain critical mass of resources or people, fail to create healthy community, Imprint a rigid culture focused on the needs of the founders rather than God's mission.

**Critical Barriers:** Lack of mission, no sense of God's presence, dysfunctional relationships, lack of partnerships with local community.

**Critical Areas for focused attention:** Mission & leadership. Moving toward sustainability is also critical. Programs, strong governance and administrative structures can come later.

### Potential Outcomes:

Positive Outcome	Negative Outcome
Grow into maturity with strong foundations	Fail to become self-sustaining or imprint rigid or founder centered culture= fragile

**How Healthy Growth Happens:** Activities in bottom blocks drive development of upper blocks. Growth happens on two tracks:

**Mission Track:** Establishing common mission and God's presence sets the tone for the congregation's culture and attitudes about themselves and their neighbors. Those attitudes lead to programs/activities in the community and the congregation.

**Leadership Track:** Encouraging and developing leadership skills in lay and rostered leaders plus building strong relationships creates positive energy which leads to improvements in how resources are managed and improvements in the resources themselves.



**List the areas you marked as barriers.** \_\_\_\_\_

If you have a barrier in mission, relationships or leadership, focus here first.

**List the areas you marked as current activities or strengths.** \_\_\_\_\_

If Mission and God's presence aren't among them, they should be. Constant articulation of mission and God's active presence is critical. Forming and renewing congregations need to work on both tracks at the same time to realize a positive outcome. How are you developing leadership and community? Consider where you are strong or working now. Are you working in the right areas?

## Life Stage: Mature or Redefining

**Description:** Mature congregations constantly go through a pattern of redefinition (innovation), stability/plateau, tension (as programs/processes no longer fit new environments), evaluation and then begin again with redefinition. As long as congregations continue this pattern while focused on God’s mission within their community, the ministry can be healthy indefinitely. Congregations that don’t, slip into decline.

**Key Tasks:** Maintain sense of God’s active presence and mission as the focus of ministry. Tell the congregation’s story as part of God’s story. Focus on making disciples. Maintain strong lay leadership, cycling new people into/out of leadership regularly. Adapt to changing conditions through technical and sometimes adaptive changes.

**Common Threats:** Unaware of God’s active presence in the congregation and the world. Become rigid, bureaucratic, inwardly- focused, unwilling to change or don’t think you need to change and get comfortable. Internal conflicts fester creating tension or apathy. Sometimes conflict breaks out in harmful ways.

**Critical Barriers:** Address any barriers (especially relational) before they send the congregation into decline.

**Critical Areas for focused attention:** Thriving mature congregations typically work intentionally in 6 or more domains simultaneously. Maintaining a missional focused culture and renewing resources (finances, facility, and people) are most critical.

### Potential Outcomes:

Positive Outcome	Negative Outcome
Remain stable and missional through generational and cultural transitions: Redefinition	Slip into decline

**How Congregations Stay Healthy:** Activities in bottom blocks drive development of upper blocks. This happens on two tracks:

**Mission Track:** Common mission and God’s presence sets the tone for the congregation’s culture and attitudes about themselves and their neighbors. Those attitudes lead to programs/activities in the community and the congregation.

**Leadership Track:** Encouraging and developing leadership skills in lay and rostered leaders plus strong relationships creates positive energy which influences resources and how they are managed.



**List the areas you marked as barriers.** \_\_\_\_\_

If you have barriers in the area of mission, God’s presence, relationships or leadership, removing them should be your top priority.

**List the areas you marked as current activities or strengths.** \_\_\_\_\_

Mature congregations need to constantly renew both tracks at the same time to continue having a positive outcomes. If lower blocks are strong, focus can be on the upper blocks. Consider the areas where you are strong or working now. Are you working in the right areas?

## Life Stage: Declining

**Description:** Losing members, money, energy, connection to community. Often a vague sense of mission.

**Key Tasks:** Reconnect with God’s active presence to renew God’s mission in the congregation and community. Reconcile conflicts, and fix resource and administrative problems.

**Common Threats:** Congregation remains focused on survival rather than mission. Congregation lacks sense of God’s presence and doesn’t trust God. Lack of clear vision and passion. Conflict tears it apart or apathy and low energy allows it to continue in decline. Loss of hope.

**Critical Barriers:** The presence of any barriers will likely lead to a negative outcome.

**Critical Activities/Strengths:** Declining congregations that had positive outcomes were usually intentionally working in at least 6 different domains at the same time. Most critical domains include relationships, culture, resources and administration/governance.

### Potential Outcomes:

Positive Outcome	Negative Outcome
Renewal and/or redevelopment	Become unsustainable

**How Change Happens:** Adaptive changes made in bottom blocks lead to changes in upper blocks. Change happens on two tracks:

**Mission Track:** Clarifying mission and God’s presence leads to changes in the congregation’s culture and attitudes about themselves and their community. This leads to new activities and programs in the community and the congregation.

**Leadership Track:** Strengthening leadership skills and building relationships leads to improvements in how resources are managed and improvements in the resources themselves.



**List the areas you marked as barriers.** \_\_\_\_\_

Address barriers in the following areas first: Mission, God’s presence, Relationships, Leadership.

**List the areas you marked as current activities or strengths.**

\_\_\_\_\_

Declining congregations need to work on both tracks at the same time to realize a positive outcome. Consider the areas where you are strong or working now. Are you working in the right areas?

## Life Stage: Struggling or Closure

**Description:** Congregation no longer has critical mass of people, energy or resources, to continue for long. Closure is the only realistic option.

**Key Tasks:** Let go of control and trust God's promises. Grieve, reconcile conflicts, celebrate life, and make administrative decisions. New ministry will spring from the remnant.

**Common Threats:** Denial, infighting, refuse to plan, fail to reconcile, resources wasted. Crisis or unanticipated expense forces closure.

**Critical Barriers:** Any barrier will likely result in a negative outcome.

**Critical Activities/Strengths:** Focus on God's continuing mission and God's presence. Work to resolve barriers to God's presence and heal broken relationships so that good decisions are made. Barriers associated with a lack of resources can be resolved by deciding to close before resources run out and a closure is forced.

### **Potential Outcomes:**

<b>Positive Outcome</b>	<b>Negative Outcome</b>
Holy Closure where the life and contributions of the ministry are celebrated and ended with dignity. Resources are used for new missions elsewhere and remaining people are now supported by other congregations.	Resources wasted, members' pain unresolved

**List the areas you marked as barriers.** \_\_\_\_\_

Struggling congregations often have barriers in multiple areas. Identify any that get in the way of making faithful decisions and address them.

**List the areas you marked as current activities or strengths.** \_\_\_\_\_

Focus on Mission, God's presence. Embrace God's presence in this time. Recognize that all congregations eventually come to an end. This is necessary for re-birth to occur. Trust that God's mission will continue. A decision to close so that resources can be used in new ways is a faithful decision that honor's and trusts God. Work with your denomination to identify steps you will take together through this transition.

Consider the areas where you are strong or working now. Are you working in the right areas?