

Annual Parochial Report Discussion Guide

This discussion guide is designed to engage congregational leaders in reflecting on the 15 new congregational life questions on the ELCA's 2016 annual report (#17 and 18). It can also be used to explore what God is up to in your congregation. Ask each participant to complete this worksheet individually. Then use the instructions on the back to facilitate discussion.

	Poorly		Somewhat		Great	
How well do these phrases describe your congregation?	1	2	3	4	5	Copy number from column
<i>Example</i>			X			3
Worship nurtures people's faith						
Deepens people's relationship with God						
A clear sense of mission/purpose						
Excitement about the congregation's future						
Always ready to try something new						
A positive force in the community						
Works for social justice/advocacy						
How well does your congregation...	Hardly at all		Well		Very Well	
Incorporate new members into congregational life						
Seek out and use the gifts of members of all ages						
Build strong, healthy relationships among members						
Manage disagreements in a healthy respectful manner						
Address social concerns (helping 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)						

Demographic Information: Tell us about yourself.

Your role in the congregation: Active participant Lay leader Rostered leader called here Visitor

Your age: under 18 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65-74 75+

Your ethnicity: White/Caucasian African American African National Amer. Indian/Alaska Native
 Asian Latino/Hispanic Arab/Middle Eastern Multiracial Other

Discussion Guide

A vital congregation may be any size or shape as long as it lives out God's mission by building relationships with God, each other, and the world. The 15 questions measure a congregation's vitality.

Before diving into conversation, it is important to state that there are no right or wrong answers. Each person will answer from their own unique perspective and all perspectives are valid. It is not uncommon for pastors and staff to have a different (often lower) perspective of a congregation's vitality. This may be because pastors and staff have a different background, expectations and experiences of the congregation. As you discuss people's ratings make sure to honor each perspective.

Begin by sharing how each person rated each item. This can be done verbally or by having each person make a mark on a common blank survey, flip chart, white board, etc. You may want to talk about each item as ordered in following categories.

Connections with God	Connections with each other	Connections with the world
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Worship nurtures faith• Deepens people's relationship with God• Clear sense of mission• Excitement about the future• Always ready to try something new	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build strong, healthy relationships• Seek out and use gifts of all• Manage disagreements• Incorporate new members	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A positive force in the community• Works for social justice/ advocacy• Address social concerns (helps those in need)• Interact with local community• Equip members to share faith• Helps people live out faith in daily life

Discussion

1. Consider ratings within each category. What are strengths and challenges? Where do you see God at work? What do the overall ratings say about the congregation's vitality?
2. Pick out items where people scored on either side of the 3 (some rating it high and others low). Have people from each perspective talk about what perception motivated their rating. (Sometimes people genuinely see things differently and sometimes they interpreted the question differently.)
3. Discuss where God is calling your congregation today and in the immediate future. If you don't know or don't agree, then discerning God's call is your first task. If you do know, identify any gaps between where you are and where you are called to be, and determine next steps.

Talk with your synod's Director for Evangelical Mission (DEM) to learn about discernment and find the best tools for your journey. Visit www.congregationalvitalitysurvey.com for a list of resources.

Instructions for completing the new ELCA Parochial Report items

In order to report your group's response on the parochial report, use one of the following methods:

1. Come to consensus about which response best reflects your congregation. Ask the person completing the parochial report to bubble in that response. –OR–
2. Create an average for each item using the 1-5 scale on the form. Round that number up or down to reflect the options on the parochial report 1 (poorly), 2, 3 (somewhat), 4, or 5 (great). Ask the person completing the parochial report to bubble in the rounded response. (Example: your group response average is 3.4 enter 3 (somewhat or well) on the form).

Optional: If you don't want to lose the details of your average scores, sign up for the free online survey at www.congregationalvitalitysurvey.com under Congregation Sign-in. Survey the entire congregation if you like. Type in each person's responses and the demographic data (to know whether your survey was representative). You will receive a report like the sample provided and the information will be stored online for future reference. Repeat the survey in future years to mark change.