

Research Strategies For Congregations

Tools for understanding the people in
your church and community



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Research Services
A Ministry of the General Assembly Mission Council
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
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For additional information about these strategies or about other services available to congregations, contact Research Services toll-free at 1-888-728-7228 ext. 2040, or by email to: research@pcusa.org

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to provide you with “do-it-yourself” research tools for positive church improvement. Congregations can use these tools to learn more about themselves and about their local community, as well.



This do-it-yourself approach to church home improvement is based on the concept of a “toolbox.” The toolbox concept begins with the premise that there is no single research tool for every research job. You wouldn’t build a fence using only a hammer—why work on church improvement without a full toolbox? Given this maxim, we recommend using several research strategies or tools for each project. This handbook provides a variety of tools for your toolbox.

Kinds of Information-Gathering Strategies



Quantitative strategies use numbers, charts, and figures to describe a person, place or thing. They measure the current state of things or quantify change. Quantitative analysis is more objective than qualitative analysis. Quantitative strategies in this handbook are marked by the graph shown to the left.



Qualitative strategies bring a balance to research by rounding out the story told by the numbers. Using qualitative techniques provides a more complete story about a person, place, or thing. Qualitative analysis looks at the present, sometimes takes historical events into account, and may look into the future. Qualitative analysis is more subjective than quantitative analysis. The Sherlock Holmes character shown to the left marks qualitative strategies in this handbook.

Using both kinds of information-gathering strategies will provide a richer and more complete end product. Also, some people in your congregation will feel more comfortable using and learning from qualitative tools and others will prefer quantitative tools. Try a mix of the two to ensure everyone can take part.

Think About the Basics



As you read through this Research Strategies handbook, think about the tools presented, and consider the following questions:

1. What is your objective in doing research or conducting a self-study?
2. Why are you gathering information?
3. Which set of tools will best help you acquire the information you want?

Need More Information?



We would be happy to talk with you about the tools in this Research Strategies handbook. For more information about these tools and about surveys we offer, please call Research Services, at 1-888-728-7228, ext. 2040 (email: research@pcusa.org) or visit our Web site at www.pcusa.org/research.

THREE BY FIVE SURVEYS



Use for: Gathering short answers to specific questions.

Time needed: 5 to 15 minutes to gather responses; 30 minutes or more to process responses.

Items needed: 3 x 5 cards, pens or pencils.

How to use: Pass out index cards—one per person—during worship services, a session meeting, or any congregational event, even a church supper. Ask one short, direct, focused question and have people write their answer on their card. (Keep it anonymous—No names on the cards!) Distribute and collect the cards at the same meeting or event. Don't let people take them home to fill out later, because you'll get very few back and this may result in a skewed or biased sample that will affect the accuracy of your results. You could even conduct your survey over several weeks, asking about different themes each week, such as: music; Christian Education; fellowship, etc.

Sample Questions

1. What are your three favorite hymns?
2. What are the three greatest strengths of this church?
3. What would you like to hear a sermon about?
4. What about the church or its members gives you the greatest joy or satisfaction?
5. What are the three greatest weaknesses of this church?
6. What are the three greatest concerns you have about this church?
7. What are the three greatest challenges facing this church?
8. List two community events in which you would like this congregation to participate.
9. Other than today, what is the last worship event you can remember?
10. How many times did you drive by the church this week?
11. Who first invited you to this church?
12. What are the three things you hold most sacred?
13. List a need that someone might have for which our church could help.

How to process: Examine each card and put similar answers together in a group. You could cut the cards apart so that each distinct response is on a separate section of card. Then put all similar answers in a pile or in an envelope. Develop a list with the answers and each time the same response is written, put a check by that response. Your final report should include the number of times participants gave a particular response and a general description of the themes revealed in the responses.

Adapted from: C. Jeff Woods, *User Friendly Evaluation: Improving the Work of Pastors, Programs and Laity*. Bethesda, Maryland: The Alban Institute, 1995.

TEN-MINUTE TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS



Use for: Gathering specific information from specific individuals in the congregation.

Time needed: 10 to 15 minutes per individual interview; One to two hours to process responses.

Items needed: Specific questions to be asked, volunteers to conduct interviews, a list of names and phone numbers of individuals to be interviewed.

How to use: The **10-minute interview** method involves doing short interviews with members of your congregation, either by phone or in person. The pastor, task force members, or session members can make a list of individuals you may wish to interview. The number of people to be interviewed depends on the topic and the size of the congregation.

The selected individuals should be as diverse as possible—including men and women, old and young, new members and long-term members, people who live nearby and those who drive some distance, etc.

Develop a list of several short questions that address the issues you're interested in. Divide the names of the selected individuals so that each volunteer handles a few interviews.

Tips for interviews: The interview should be relaxed, informal, and seem more like a conversation among friends.

Your introduction should be brief. Here's an example: "Hi! This is John Witherspoon from First Presbyterian Church and I'm on the Planning Committee. I'd like to talk with you for just a few minutes today about the church and ask you a few questions. Is that okay?"

The interviewer should record the individual's answers, but not write the individual's name or phone number with the answers—respect individual confidentiality. Be sure to thank the church member for his/her time at the end of your interview.

How to process: After the interviews have been completed, gather all the responses and look for common themes. For example, if your questions asked about the types of educational interests in your congregation, look for responses that fall into categories such as children's ministry, adult Bible study, or studies that deal with day-to-day life.

Write your report giving the general themes that you found in answers to your questions. Look for strengths in the answers, and report helpful suggestions. Do not use names or other personal identifying material when preparing your final report.

Adapted from: Herb Miller, author, parish consultant, and former editor of *Net Results*, 3805 94th Place, Lubbock, TX 79412-2993.

WALL OF WONDER



Use for: Affirming congregational identity and a sense of the congregation's continuity and history. Gathering collective memories about the church and helping members celebrate who they are.

Time needed: One or more hours. (Be generous—people like to keep going!)

Items needed: Butcher paper (about 20 feet long), markers of different colors, masking tape, a volunteer to record events and lead discussion.

How to use: Hang the butcher paper on a smooth wall. Draw a horizontal line from one end of the paper to the other, about half way down from the top of the paper. The line represents the years in the church's life. Label the line at the far left with the year the church was organized. Label the line at the far right with the current year. Mark off years on the line. For example, every yard could represent 10 years. If the church is very old, you may wish to have the first 100 years or so represented by a single foot of wall space, with more space to the right dedicated to more recent years.

The space above the line will be used to represent people or events *internal* to the church. The space below the line will represent people or events *external* to the church. For example, something like WWII or the closing of a local plant would appear below the line, but the start of a new pastor's call would be above the line. It also helps to use one color marker for people or events internal to the church and a different color marker for people or events external to the church.

Items to mark on the Wall of Wonder: Explain the purpose for the project. Ask each person to come up to put their name or initials on the line that represents the year they became a part of the congregation. Or have a volunteer do all the markings. Ask the people to share memories of the congregation as you work through the decades of time. Mark times when pastors arrived and departed and when important projects within the congregation took place. Below the horizontal line, note things happening outside the congregation that had an impact on the church (e.g., war, plant closings, new neighbors, etc.)

How to process: After the exercise is completed (or you run out of time!), ask people to make some initial observations about what they have produced. You may hear comments like: "I didn't realize we had so many pastors in the early years." "I didn't realize Pastor Smith [who was not well liked] got so much done!" "I didn't realize that the tough years for our church were also tough years for the community."

Newer members will gain a greater appreciation for the pioneers of the church and the legacy they left behind. Older members will gain a sense of how the church succeeded in meeting challenges in the past and will be encouraged that new challenges can also be met. Continuities in congregational priorities and identity will be discovered.

Adapted from: *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), edited by N. T. Ammerman, J. W. Carroll, C. S. Dudley, and W. McKinney.

MAPPING MEMBER NETWORKS



Use for: Getting to know each other and beginning to see the different needs and life-styles within the congregation.

Time needed: A minimum of one hour.

Items needed: A large sheet of paper and markers for each participant, a city or area map for each table of 6 to 8 participants, a volunteer leader to explain the exercise and read the mapping questions.

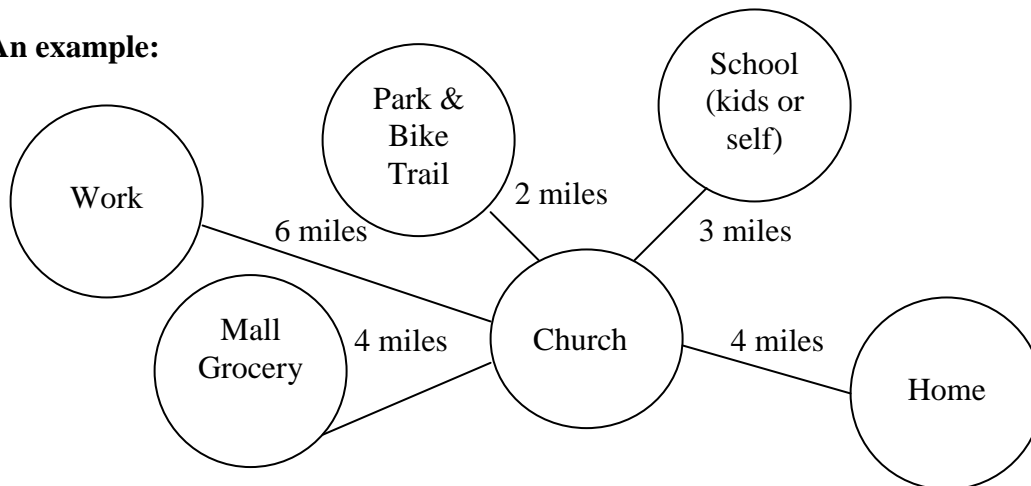
How to use: At a congregational event or other activity (e.g., church school class), divide participants into small groups of 6 to 8 people. Post city or area maps around the room or make one available at each table. Each person should have a large sheet of paper and a marking pen. First, ask each person to put a small circle in the center of the sheet representing the church. Next, ask them to draw a second circle on the sheet indicating where they live. This circle should be placed at an appropriate distance from the circle representing the church to reflect the real difference in miles. Continue by encouraging members to draw on their maps as you ask the following questions:

Where do you work? Attend school? Grocery shop? Purchase clothes? Volunteer?

Where do your clubs, Bible studies, or support groups meet?

Where do you and your family shop, exercise, relax, or visit friends?

An example:



How to process: When the maps are complete, give all participants an opportunity to compare maps. Look at similarities and differences in life styles and locations. How do these maps help you understand how other members are related to and involved in the congregation? What do the maps say about the community where the congregation is located? Understanding the different maps people have drawn will help the group understand how the congregation fits in the lives of participating members.

Adapted from: Developed by Nancy Eisland and initially described in her work, *A Particular Place: Exurbanization and Religious Response* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press) and also published in "Ecology: Seeing the Congregation in Context," *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998) edited by N.T. Ammerman, J.W. Carroll, C.S. Dudley, and W. McKinney.

IN-HOME MEETINGS



Use for: Gathering information about members' perceptions of, interest in, and goals for the congregation; letting members know they are being listened to; getting to know each other better.

Time needed: Time for socializing and discussion with each visit.

Items needed: Volunteers who are willing to host meetings, 8 to 10 members per host, a session member to attend each meeting (optional), guidelines for the meeting, and a set of three to five questions.

How to use: In-home meetings can be held over Sunday brunch or supper, or in the evening (with coffee and cookies offered). The specific time chosen for the meeting depends both on the social traditions in your area and the preferences of each host. It's best to let each host decide on his or her own schedule.

All members in the congregation should be assigned to one of the hosts, about 8 to 10 per host. The church office, session, planning committee, or church secretary can assign members to the various hosts. Couples are invited together. Individual hosts can decide about inviting children and youth.

Each host should issue personal invitations to members on his or her list by using written invitations or a warm telephone invitation. When inviting members to in-home meetings, describe them as a time to get together to talk about the state of the congregation. It is *not* a time to complain, but rather a time for members to think about themselves and their relationships with the congregation. Follow the invitations with a postcard reminder about a week before the meeting. Usually, only about 60% of those invited will be able to attend. Session members can also be assigned to the various meetings, though it is not necessary. If they attend, they can help the host summarize what was heard after the meeting. If not, the host will need to be able to report on the findings.

Guidelines and questions for the meetings: The meetings should be informal and unstructured, and plenty of time should be allowed for socializing before the discussion begins. Hosts should make it clear to the participants that the findings from these meetings will be shared, with whom they will be shared, and the goals for this exercise.

To spark discussion, the host might ask a few basic questions. These will vary depending on what you're interested in but they might be something like:

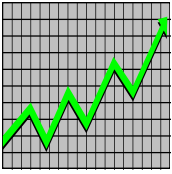
What do you see as the most positive aspect of the congregation?

What task do you think the congregation should accomplish in the next year?

How can we find more people who are willing to teach Sunday school?

How to process: All hosts and participating session members should gather after all in-home meetings have been held to discuss what they heard. Although each host will have heard different things, common themes will emerge. The results can be used for setting goals for the congregation, for development of future projects, and for support for existing ventures. If desired, a summary of the in-home meetings can be distributed to the entire congregation. Keep it positive, and leave out complaints that are not productive.

CONGREGATIONAL SURVEYS: THE U.S. CONGREGATIONAL LIFE SURVEY



Use for: Finding out who your worshipers are and what they value, considering new missions or programs, renewing or re-evaluating your strategic plan, to deal with change when your congregation is growing or declining, to get ready to call a new pastor, or to help a new pastor learn more about the congregation.

Time needed: 20 minutes in worship to hand out, take, and collect the survey.

Items needed: Survey and pens (they are provided in your survey kit).

How to use: Schedule the survey for a week that is convenient for your congregation. It's best to pick a week that is typical. Giving the survey on Mother's Day or on a holiday weekend, for example, wouldn't give you an accurate portrait if more visitors than normal attend or if many of your frequent attendees are away. The survey is designed to be given in worship. Congregations have found a variety of ways to do this. Many have found that it works well to set aside the last 20 minutes of each scheduled worship service to distribute the survey. Then worshipers can leave when they have finished. Our experience shows that if you let worshipers take the surveys home with them, few will return them. If you want information from those who are less active in the congregation, you will need to mail a survey to them.

Research Services, U.S. Congregations will provide all you need to conduct the survey—questionnaires, pens, and instructions. Contact us at least three weeks before your scheduled survey date to arrange for your materials. After you return your completed surveys, you'll receive results in about four to six weeks.

The survey is available in English, Spanish, and Korean. A Protestant and a Catholic version are offered. A sample of the Protestant version is shown on pages 9 to 12. (Do **not** copy this version, as it will not be read by the automated scanning equipment used to process completed surveys.)

What will we get when we participate? Your survey results will include:

- Two customized, color reports with detailed profiles of your worshipers—their involvement in the congregation and the community, what they value about the congregation, and their hopes for the future—and of your congregation—its unique strength compared to others of similar size and faith group.
- Two videos providing step-by-step instructions for interpreting the reports. They are designed to facilitate group discussion and help leaders identify congregational strengths.
- Two leader guides with many helpful ideas and tools for making the most of your congregation's reports.
- Two books summarizing the key national findings: *A Field Guide to U.S. Congregations: Who's Going Where and Why* (second edition) and *Beyond the Ordinary: 10 Strengths of U.S. Congregations* (both published by Westminster John Knox Press). (A third book, *Places of Promise*, also available from Westminster John Knox) examines congregational location. Download the free study guide on location at www.uscongregations.org/location.)

Where can I learn more about the U. S. Congregational Life Survey? For more information or if you're ready to get started, please call us toll-free at 1-888-728-7228 ext. 2040. You can also contact us by email at: uscongregations@pcusa.org or go to our Web page: www.USCongregations.org or read our blog: presbyterian.typepad.com/beyondordinary

The U.S. Congregational Life Survey

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

Your answers will be kept completely anonymous.

Fill in one circle per question unless instructed otherwise.

Please shade circles completely like •

You and Your Congregation

- How often do you go to worship services at this congregation?
 This is my first time
 Hardly ever or special occasions only
 Less than once a month
 Once a month
 Two or three times a month
 Usually every week
 More than once a week
- How long have you been going to worship services or activities at this congregation?
 Less than 1 year 6-10 years
 1-2 years 11-20 years
 3-5 years More than 20 years
 I am visiting from another congregation
 I am visiting and do not regularly go anywhere else
- Are you currently a member of this congregation?
 Yes
 No, but I'm in the process of becoming a member
 No, but I regularly participate here
 No
- Are you regularly involved in any **group** activities here? (Mark **all** that apply.)
 Yes, in Sunday school, church school, or Sabbath school
 Yes, in prayer, discussion, or Bible study groups
 Yes, in fellowships, clubs, or other social groups
 No, we have no group activities
 No, I am not regularly involved in group activities
- Do you regularly take part in any activities of this congregation that reach out to the wider community (visitation, evangelism, outreach, community service, social justice)? (Mark **all** that apply.)
 Yes, in evangelism or outreach activities
 Yes, in community service, social justice, or advocacy activities of this congregation
 No, we don't have such activities
 No, I am not regularly involved
- Do you currently have any of the following roles here? (Mark **all** that apply.)
 Member of the governing board
 Member of a congregational committee or task force
 Leading or assisting in worship
 Officer or leader of men's, women's, youth, or other group
 Choir member, musician, or choir director
 Sunday school, church school, or Sabbath school teacher
 Other role not listed here (specify): _____
 None
- To what extent do the worship services or activities of this congregation help you with everyday living?
 A great extent
 Some extent
 A small extent
 Not at all

About Your Faith

- How often do you spend time in private devotional activities (such as prayer, meditation, reading the Bible alone)?
 Every day or most days Occasionally
 A few times a week Hardly ever
 Once a week Never
- Over the last year, how much have you grown in your faith? (Mark **one** only.)
 No real growth
 Some growth
 Much growth, mainly through **this** congregation
 Much growth, mainly through other groups or congregations
 Much growth, mainly through my own private activities
- Which statement comes closest to your view of the Bible? (Mark **one** only.)
 The Bible is the word of God, to be taken literally word for word
 The Bible is the word of God, to be interpreted in the light of its historical context and the Church's teachings
 The Bible is the word of God, to be interpreted in the light of its historical and cultural context
 The Bible is not the word of God, but contains God's word to us
 The Bible is not the word of God but is a valuable book
 The Bible is an ancient book with little value today
 Don't know
- Do you agree or disagree with this statement: "All the different religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth"?
 Strongly agree
 Agree
 Neutral or unsure
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree
- Do you agree or disagree: "My spiritual needs are being met in this congregation or parish"?
 Strongly agree
 Agree
 Neutral or unsure
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree
- Which one of the following best describes your readiness to talk to others about your faith? (Mark **one** only.)
 I do not have faith, so the question is not applicable
 I do not talk about my faith; my life and actions are sufficient
 I find it hard to talk about my faith in ordinary language
 I mostly feel at ease talking about my faith and do so if it comes up
 I feel at ease talking about my faith and seek opportunities to do so
- Have you ever had a conversion experience or a moment of decisive faith commitment?
 Yes No Not sure

About Your Involvement

15. Are you involved in any community service, social service, or advocacy groups *not* connected to this congregation? (Mark *all* that apply.)
- Yes, social service or charity groups
 - Yes, advocacy, justice, or lobbying groups
 - No, I'm not involved with such groups
16. Would you be prepared to invite to a worship service here any of your friends and relatives who do not now attend a congregation?
- Yes, and I have done so in the past 12 months
 - Yes, but I have not done so in the past 12 months
 - No, probably not
 - No, definitely not
 - Don't know
17. In the past 12 months, have you done any of the following? (Mark *all* that apply.)
- Loaned money to someone outside your family
 - Cared for someone outside your family who was very sick
 - Helped someone outside your family find a job
 - Donated or prepared food for someone outside your family or congregation
 - Will vote or did vote in the 2008 presidential election
 - Donated money to a charitable organization (other than this congregation)
 - Worked with others to try to solve a community problem
 - Contacted an elected official about a public issue
 - Contributed money to a political party or candidate
 - Spoke at a decision-making meeting of the congregation
 - Went on a mission or service trip
18. How satisfied are you with what is offered here for children and youth (less than 19 years of age)?
- Very satisfied
 - Satisfied
 - Mixed feelings
 - Dissatisfied
 - Very dissatisfied
 - Not sure or not applicable
19. Do you have any close friends in this congregation?
- No, I have little contact with others from this congregation outside of activities here
 - No, I have some friends in this congregation, but my closest friends are not involved here
 - Yes, I have some close friends here as well as other close friends who are not part of this congregation
 - Yes, most of my closest friends are part of this congregation
20. Does this congregation have a clear vision, goals, or direction for its ministry and mission?
- I am not aware of such a vision, goals, or direction
 - There are ideas but no clear vision, goals, or direction
 - Yes, and I am strongly committed to them
 - Yes, and I am partly committed to them
 - Yes, but I am not committed to them
21. Which *one* statement best describes your involvement in the making of important decisions in this congregation?
- I have been given the opportunity and often participate in decision-making
 - I have been given the opportunity and occasionally get involved in decision-making
 - I have been given the opportunity but don't usually get involved in decision-making
 - I have *not* been given an opportunity to be involved and this is fine with me
 - I have *not* been given an opportunity to be involved and I am not happy about this
22. Do you have a strong sense of belonging to this congregation?
- Yes, a strong sense of belonging that is growing
 - Yes, a strong sense—about the same as last year
 - Yes, but perhaps not as strong as in the past
 - No, but I am new here
 - No, and I wish I did by now
 - No, but I am happy as I am
 - Not applicable
23. While you may value many different styles of music, which two of the following do you prefer in congregational worship? (Mark up to *two* options.)
- Traditional hymns
 - Praise music or choruses
 - Contemporary hymns
 - Other contemporary music or songs (not hymns)
 - Sung responsorial psalms
 - Classical music or chorales
 - Contemplative chants (Taizé, Iona)
 - Music or songs from a variety of cultures
 - Gospel music
 - No music or songs
 - Don't know
24. Do you agree or disagree: "In general, there is a good match between our congregation and our minister, pastor, priest, or rabbi"?
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neutral or unsure
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
 - There is currently no leader here
25. Which of the following aspects of this congregation do you personally most value? (Mark up to *three* options.)
- Wider community care or social justice emphasis
 - Reaching those who do not attend church
 - Traditional style of worship or music
 - Contemporary style of worship or music
 - Sharing in Holy Communion, Eucharist, or Lord's Supper
 - Social activities or meeting new people
 - Sermons, preaching, or homilies
 - Bible study or prayer groups, other discussion groups
 - Ministry for children or youth
 - Prayer ministry for one another
 - Practical care for one another in times of need
 - The congregation's school or pre-school
 - Openness to social diversity
 - Adult church-school or Sabbath-school classes

26. Before you started coming to this congregation, were you participating in another congregation?
 No, I've come here for most or all of my life
 No, before coming here I had not been attending any congregation for several years
 No, before coming here I had never regularly attended
 Yes, immediately prior to coming here, I was participating in another congregation
27. Before you started coming here, what type of congregation did you attend? (Mark only **one**.)
 Assembly of God Nazarene
 Baptist Non-denominational
 Catholic Pentecostal
 Episcopal Presbyterian
 Lutheran Seventh-day Adventist
 Methodist United Church of Christ
 Other (please specify): _____
 I did not attend another congregation before coming here

About You

28. In what year were you born? 19 _____
29. Are you: → Female Male
30. What is your employment status? (Mark **all** that apply.)
 Employed or self-employed **full time**
 Employed or self-employed **part time**
 Unemployed Full-time homemaker
 Retired Student
 Other (please specify): _____
31. What is the **highest** educational level you have completed?
 No formal schooling
 Primary school through 8th grade (K-8)
 Some high school
 Completed high school
 Trade certificate
 Associate degree
 Bachelors degree from a university or college
 Master's, Doctorate, or other graduate degree
32. What is your present marital status? (Mark only **one**.)
 Never married Separated
 In first marriage Divorced
 Remarried after divorce Widowed
 Remarried after death of spouse
 Living in a committed relationship
33. Do you have a spouse or partner who is also completing a survey here? → Yes No
34. What is your race or origin? (Mark **all** that apply.)
 Asian or Pacific Islander
 Black or African American
 Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
 Indian (American) or Alaska Native
 White or Caucasian
 Some other race (please specify): _____
35. Where were you born?
 In the United States
 In another English-speaking country
 In a non-English speaking country

36. Where were **your parents** born?
 Both born in the United States
 Only father born in the United States
 Only mother born in the United States
 Both father and mother born in another country
37. Where did you live when you were 5 years old?
 In the United States
 In another country
38. When you were 5 years old, was English your primary language? → Yes No
39. Which statement **best** describes the people who **currently** live in your household?
 I live alone
 A couple without children
 One adult with child/children
 Two or more adults with child/children
 Some adults living in the same household
40. What is the ZIP Code where you live?

41. About how much do you give financially to this congregation?
 I give 10% or more of net income regularly
 I give about 5% to 9% of net income regularly
 I give less than 5% of net income regularly
 I give a small amount whenever I am here
 I do not contribute financially here
42. Which of the following describes your total annual household income before taxes?
 less than \$10,000 \$75,000 to \$99,999
 \$10,000 to \$24,999 \$100,000 to \$124,999
 \$25,000 to \$49,999 \$125,000 to \$149,999
 \$50,000 to \$74,999 \$150,000 or more
43. How many people in your household (including you) are:
 Less than 6 years old?.....
 6 to 12 years old?
 13 to 18 years old?
 19 to 24 years old?
 25 years old or older?
44. How many people in your household (including you) participate here?
 Less than 6 years old
 6 to 12 years old.....
 13 to 18 years old.....
 19 to 24 years old.....
 25 years old or older.....
45. How many children of any age do you have, whether they live at home or elsewhere? Please write the number:

46. How many of your children of any age **live at home** with you? Please write the number: _____

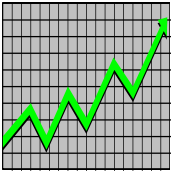
Some Final Questions

47. How long does it usually take you to get here?
 1-5 minutes 16-20 minutes
 6-10 minutes 21-30 minutes
 11-15 minutes More than 30 minutes
48. Compared to 2 years ago, do you think you participate in activities of the congregation more, less, or about the same amount as you did then?
 Participate more
 About the same participation
 Participate less
 Not applicable (been coming less than 2 years)
49. Have this congregation's leaders encouraged you to find and use your gifts and skills here?
 Yes, to a great extent
 Yes, to some extent
 Yes, to a small extent
 Not at all
 Don't know
50. How often do you experience the following during worship services at this congregation? (Mark **one** response in **every** row.)
- | | Always | Usually | Sometimes | Rarely |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| A sense of God's presence . | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Inspiration | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Boredom..... | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Awe or mystery | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Joy | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Frustration | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Spontaneity..... | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| A sense of fulfilling my obligation | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
51. Do you agree or disagree: "Only followers of Jesus Christ can be saved"?
 Strongly agree
 Agree
 Neutral or unsure
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree
52. Do you agree or disagree: "I have a sense of excitement about our congregation's future"?
 Strongly agree
 Agree
 Neutral or unsure
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree
53. Over the last two years, has there been any conflict in this congregation? (Mark only **one**.)
 No conflict that I am aware of
 Some minor conflict
 Major conflict
 Major conflict, with leaders or people leaving
 Don't know

54. Of the following, which **one** best describes your opinion of the future directions of this congregation?
 We need to get back to the way we did things in the past
 We are faithfully maintaining past directions
 We are currently deciding on new directions
 We are currently moving in new directions
 We need to rethink where we are heading
 Our future is very unclear or doubtful
 Don't know
55. Do you agree or disagree: "This congregation is always ready to try something new"?
 Strongly agree
 Agree
 Neutral or unsure
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree
56. To what extent does the minister, pastor, or priest here take into account the ideas of those who worship here?
 A great extent
 Some extent
 A small extent
 Not at all
 Don't know
 There is currently no leader here
57. Which of the following is the best description of the style of leadership of your pastor, minister, or priest?
 Leadership that tends to take charge
 Leadership that inspires people to take action
 Leadership that acts on goals that people here have been involved in setting
 Leadership where the people start most things
 There is currently no leader here
 Don't know
58. Do you agree or disagree: "God is directly involved in worldly affairs"?
 Strongly agree
 Agree
 Neutral or unsure
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree
 I don't believe in God
59. Do you agree or disagree: "God is angered by human sin"?
 Strongly agree
 Agree
 Neutral or unsure
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree
 I don't believe in God
60. Which of the following terms best describes your current stand on theological issues?
 Very conservative
 Conservative
 Right in the middle
 Liberal
 Very liberal

Thank you for completing this survey!

CONDUCTING A MAIL SURVEY



Use for: Finding out who your worshipers are and what they value, considering new missions or programs, renewing or re-evaluating your strategic plan, to deal with change when your congregation is growing or declining, to get ready to call a new pastor, or to help a new pastor learn more about the congregation.

Time needed: Time intensive—many hours during a 6 to 8 week period.

Items needed: Survey instrument, mailing list of all members and other attendees, cover letters, reminder cards, postage-paid reply envelopes, person to coordinate the survey and serve as contact for any questions, volunteers to stuff envelopes and open returned envelopes, data entry service, data analysis service.

How to use: If an in-worship survey doesn't fit your needs, a mail survey might be an option. Gallup has recently released an excellent guide for helping congregations brave enough to take this on (*The Gallup Guide: Reality Check for 21st Century Churches*, see Bibliography). Other excellent models of and suggestion for writing cover letters and reminders can be found in Don Dillman's *Mail and Telephone Surveys: The Total Design Method* (see Bibliography). These resources also address the need to send follow-up reminders to non-respondents. Without these, your response rate will be very low and your results may not accurately reflect your congregation and their opinions.

If your congregation has more than 300 members, you might want to draw a sample, rather than survey all members. We suggest seeking guidance on appropriate sample sizes if you are interested in looking at sub-groups within your congregation (for example, comparing new members to relatively long-term members). Grayson L. Tucker's *A Church Planning Questionnaire: Manual and Discoveries from 100 Churches* can help with this step (see Bibliography).

When the survey has been designed or selected, assign an ID number to each person to be surveyed. Enter each person's name, address, and ID number in a database or spreadsheet. You can then print mailing labels from the database. Print three sets of labels (one for the original mailing, and one for each of two reminders). Include the ID number on the mailing labels (all three sets), and number your surveys to correspond to these ID numbers. Assemble the mailing: cover letter, questionnaire (with ID), and postage-paid return envelope. Make sure that if Jane Doe's number is 12, she gets questionnaire number 12. If you are using labels, you will still have two sets after the mailing.

Check in questionnaires as they are returned. If you are maintaining a database, find the number of the returned questionnaire in the database and remove that name (or mark it as returned). If you are using labels, find the two remaining labels with the same number as the questionnaire and throw them away. Do not write the person's name on the survey—once returned, all completed surveys should be treated as confidential materials.

Two weeks after the original mailing, mail a postcard to all who have not returned their questionnaire. The postcard should remind them of the importance of their response and ask them to complete and return their survey as soon as possible. Provide a telephone number to call if they have misplaced their questionnaire and want another copy. If you are using labels, you will send this reminder to all individuals whose labels you have not yet thrown away. After the postcard reminder, you will have one remaining set of labels.

CONDUCTING A MAIL SURVEY (CONT.)

Continue to check in the returned questionnaires. About four weeks after the original mailing, check your response rate (divide the number of returned questionnaires by the total number mailed). If you have a response rate of less than 60%, you will want to send another reminder to all who have not returned the questionnaire. This time you should send a new cover letter, a second copy of the questionnaire, and a second return envelope. Number the questionnaires as you did for the first mailing, and use your remaining set of labels. Again make sure that the person with ID number 12 gets survey number 12.

About six weeks after the originally mailing, declare the response part of the survey closed, and send the surveys out for data processing or call our office for more information on data processing and data reporting.

When the results have been compiled, schedule a time when the survey committee, planning committee, or leadership board can meet to discuss the findings and their implications for the congregation's future. It's a good idea to share some of the findings with the congregation as a whole so they know their voices have been heard.

DOOR-TO-DOOR CANVAS



Use for: Learning more about the needs of your community and identifying what your church can do to help, helping members feel more comfortable about doing something that is new and sometimes difficult.

Time needed: About 15 minutes per interview; One to two hours to process responses in a group setting.

Items needed: 3 x 5 cards, brochures about the congregation (optional), three to five questions to ask neighborhood residents, volunteers to canvas 20 to 30 homes each, and neighborhood maps.

How to use: Make a list of three or four questions that the interviewers will ask people in the community around the church. Base the questions on what it is the congregation wants to learn about the community. Some sample questions may be:

What do you see as a main issue or need that concerns you in our community?

What can our church do to address these issues or concerns?

Is there anything you would be interested in working on?

What role, if any, do you think churches can play in helping enhance the quality of life in this community?

What exciting things are happening in the community?

Decide how many residents you should interview. This depends on the size of your community or the neighborhood where you want to minister, the size of your interviewing team, and the thickness of the soles of your shoes! At least 20 are needed to begin to identify themes in people's responses. Of course, more is better.

Church members can go alone or in pairs (if it makes them more comfortable) as they make door-to-door contacts. It is wise to prepare the interviewers for a high refusal rate: 9 out of 10 residents may not want to talk or answer questions. It is not uncommon to reach only 3% of those you attempt to contact.

Interviewers should carry 3 x 5 cards, rather than forms or papers that they will have to shuffle. It is easier for them and less threatening to the people they talk with. Only brief notes should be made at each home as residents answer questions. Later you can record some additional details about each conversation. Sometimes congregations using the door-to-door method leave a calling card with the church's name and address, but this is optional. Interviewers can also just give information about the church orally.

Here is a sample introduction for interviewers:

“Hello. I'm John Witherspoon from First Presbyterian Church at the corner of 10th and Main [or across from the Courthouse on the square—just a general description of the church's location]. We are trying to get to know our neighbors and learn more about the community.”

After the introduction, the interviewer can ask the questions that have been previously decided upon.

DOOR-TO-DOOR CANVAS (CONT.)

Your congregation may have already identified several ministry areas that members are interested in exploring (e.g., child care center, Meals on Wheels). In addition to some of the questions above, you could prepare a card that lists some of the programs, activities, or services your congregation is considering. Hand the card to the neighborhood resident and say:

“Here is a list of services our congregation is thinking about offering in our community. Is there anything on the list you or your family might be interested in using or participating in?”

How to process: After the interviews are completed, the interviewers look over the cards and compile the results by putting the same answers together in a group. A list could be made with the answers and each time a similar response is written, put a check by that response. Your final report should include the number of times a particular response was heard and a general description of the themes revealed in the responses. The interviewers can create a report or present the responses to the sponsoring group (such as the planning committee, etc.).

Adapted from: Phil Tom, Pastor of Immanuel Presbyterian Church, Indianapolis, IN, and co-author of *Handbook for Urban Church Ministries*. Covenant Bookstore, 3200 West Foster Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, 60625, 1996.

INTERVIEWING COMMUNITY LEADERS



Use for: Gathering information about the community; listening to and understanding what people are thinking and feeling about their community and their responsibilities in it; finding opportunities for community service.

Time needed: 30-60 minutes per interview; One hour or more to process and share responses.

Items needed: 6 or more community leaders and their phone numbers, volunteers to conduct the interviews, questions to be asked at interview, 3 x 5 cards on which to take notes during the interview

How to use: Select a variety of people to visit in both the immediate area and the larger community. You want to know how they are involved in the life of the community and what they think about it. Here are some suggestions of people your committee might interview. You will think of others. Some of them may be members of your own congregation:

Teachers	Community organization leaders	Young people
Judges	University professors leaders	Lawyers
Bankers	Chamber of Commerce staff	Sheriff or police
Mayor	Doctors and health care leaders	Labor leaders
Business leaders	Rural/urban development officers	Youth group leaders
TV and radio executives	Clergymen/church leaders	Small business owners
Newspaper staff	Directors of social service agencies	School administrators
Highway department staff	Farm organization leaders	Government leaders

The planning committee should develop general guidelines about the questions to be asked, but each interviewer should develop specific questions appropriate to the person being interviewed and the position he or she holds.

Assign volunteers to do the interviews singly or in pairs. The committee is to be concerned with why statements are made and what they reveal about the person and the community. They will try to get the “feel” of things from the perspective of the person being interviewed.

The Visit: Some of the leaders interviewed may be suspicious of the motives for the interview. It is important, in making an appointment and in opening the conversation, that the interviewer is able to give a clear reason for the interview:

“I am Mr. Smith from First Presbyterian Church. In our church we believe that it is our responsibility to know how our community functions and what problems and opportunities it faces. We would like to visit with you for about half an hour to find out *your* concerns about the community, what you see as the strengths of the community, and how the work you do fits in the community.”

Be sensitive to what is being said. Rephrase questions to flesh out the topic, but do not be confrontational during the interview. Try for specific answers. Take short notes during the interview or right after the interview is done. Five topics are usually helpful in conducting such interviews:

INTERVIEWING COMMUNITY LEADERS (CONT.)

Interview topic #1: The nature and content of the work the interviewee does

A comfortable way to start the interview is by asking the individual to tell what s/he does and how it influences the community. For example:

“As I said on the phone, our church is trying to get a better grasp of what goes on in important places in our community. We think we have a responsibility to know our community better. I would like to begin by asking you what the main responsibilities of this office are and what your part is in it.”

Ask about the objectives the person is working toward and what s/he regards as the major contribution of that office or organization. You might push this line of questioning by asking how this person or group is dealing with a particular need or issue about which you are already aware.

Interview topic #2: The problems s/he faces in doing the work

Inquire about the present problems being faced by asking questions such as: “What are the most serious problems which you have to face or that those who work here face? What keeps you from accomplishing what you are working for?”

Interview topic #3: The help that is needed and from whom it is needed

Question suggestions are: “Do you have any suggestions about how concerned church people can help? From what other resources is help needed? Are volunteers needed? Additional direct services? Better citizen understanding of issues?”

Interview topic #4: The major issues facing the local community

Try to learn the interviewee’s major concerns and insights about the community.

Interview topic #5: Strengths and opportunities available in the community

Ask what the interviewee sees as the community’s greatest strengths. Inquire about projects that are in place and working well, so the congregation will be aware of what is already being done in the community.

How to process: After a week or two of interviewing, come together as a full committee for reports and interpretation of what you have heard. Hear reports of all interviews conducted and the specific responses to questions that were asked. Look for common and conflicting themes. Record summaries on a chalkboard, whiteboard, or flip chart so that everyone can see the results.

INTERVIEWING COMMUNITY LEADERS (CONT.)

Discuss the interviews and what you heard further in light of these questions, or questions of your own:

1. Is it possible to discover God's creating, governing, and redeeming hand in what we have learned?
 - What people are being reconciled?
 - What provisions are being made for our daily lives?
 - What creative solutions to human suffering are being tried?
2. In what ways are we as a church being called to some prophetic action? Where are there wrongs about which we need to speak? Where did we discover conflicts or tensions that raise issues for us? Where is something right which we need to support? Where is there some inadequacy or poorly functioning part of our community about which we ought to speak?
3. What have we discovered so far to be the crucial and most pressing needs in our community, and what should be done about them?

Remember to keep adequate records of what you learn in your interviews. The secretary will want to keep the record in such a way that, when the planning committee begins formulating its concerns, it can look back on the data and use it in a meaningful way.

PRESENTATIONS BY KEY LEADERS



Use for: Learning more about the needs of the community, identifying ways the congregation can address some of the needs.

Time needed: Scheduled times for community leader presentations, an hour or more to process the presentations and prepare a report to share with the congregation.

Items needed: List of community leaders willing to speak about community issues, a volunteer to call speakers and schedule their presentations, announcements and/or notices to publicize the speakers' presentations.

How to use: Plan three to six sessions where a variety of speakers can make presentations. Some congregations schedule a once-a-month Sunday evening supper over a period of several months where these types of presentations can be made. Speakers can be booked one at a time, or several speakers on related topics can be invited to the same session for a panel presentation format. Two or three speakers in one session often works well because the discussion between the presenters generates additional energy and dialogue. Almost all speakers are pleased to make a presentation to a religious group because this opportunity is so rare. Also, they will be impressed that your congregation is serious about the task of becoming informed about community issues.

Some suggestions for possible presenters:

- Leaders in the public school system (e.g., the superintendent) are required to keep abreast of population shifts in the number of families with school-age children. They are often acutely aware of the needs of children in the community.
- Social workers are another group who are sensitive to emerging needs as they work closely with people in the community, people in the judicial system, or people being served by social service agencies.
- Judges, city planners, community organizers, real estate agents, and others have current insights about how an area is changing.

Some of these key community leaders may be members of your congregation. However, it is likely that they have never been asked to speak to a congregational group about their professional knowledge of the community. The critical question to ask each presenter at the end of each session is: "What can this congregation do to address the needs you have just identified?"

How to process: After the presentations to the congregation, a small group, such as a planning committee, could gather to process what was said, list the community needs mentioned, and write out suggestions for the congregation to address those needs. As in the presentation, the key focus should be on what the congregation can do to address community needs. A report, complete with suggestions, could then be presented verbally or in print to the congregation as a whole.

Web Sites for Congregations

<http://www.pcusa.org>

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), including Research Services (www.pcusa.org/research—see p. 23 in this booklet).

<http://www.USCongregations.org>

The U.S. Congregational Life Survey—a national and international study of congregations. The largest survey of worshipers in U.S. congregations. National results available on the Web site; any congregation can now take the survey.

<http://presbyterian.typepad.com/beyondordinary>

Beyond the Ordinary—insights into congregational life from the U.S. Congregational Life Survey.

<http://www.congregationalresources.org>

Congregational Resource Guide—the Alban Institute and the Indianapolis Center for Congregations team up to offer resources for congregations.

<http://www.alban.org>

The Alban Institute—a premier source of learning for congregations and their leaders.

<http://www.theparishpaper.com>

The Parish Paper—resources for congregations from Lyle Schaller, Herb Miller, and Cynthia Woolever.

<http://hrr.hartsem.edu>

Hartford Institute for Religion Research at Hartford Seminary—includes ordering information for *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*.

<http://faithcommunitiestoday.org>

Faith Communities Today (FACT)—the largest survey of U.S. congregations providing information on congregational life.

<http://religioninsights.org>

Religion Insights—a gateway to congregational resources and insights into religious practices from organizations and projects support by Lilly Endowment's Religion Division

<http://www.netresults.org>

Net Results—resources and ideas for church vitality and leadership.

<http://www.census.gov>

U.S. Census Bureau—the preeminent collector and provider of data about the people and economy of the U.S. The Census Bureau provides official information about America's people, businesses, industries, and institutions. To access information about your city, town, or state, click on the American FactFinder. Then, enter a city, county, or street address and click Go for information on that area. Census data are provided in tables and maps along with links to reports about the national results.

<http://www.thearda.com>

The Association of Religion Data Archives—find U.S. Census data and maps, information about the religious composition of your community from the Religious Congregations and Membership Study (RCMS), and other resources.

<http://www.electronicchurch.org>

The Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches—the single best source of information and statistics on religion in North America (published annually).

<http://pewforum.org>

Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life—promoting understanding of the issues at the intersection of religion and public affairs.

<http://www.louisville-institute.org>

The Louisville Institute—a Lilly Endowment program supporting those who lead and study American religious institutions.

<http://www.lifeway.com/menu/200767>

Lifeway Research—launched by Thom Rainer and Lifeway Christian Resources to assist and equip church leaders with insight and advice that will lead to greater levels of church health and effectiveness.

Research Services Web Site

The Research Services Web site can be found at: <http://www.pcusa.org/research>. Meet our friendly staff by clicking on Staff Listing. Other information provided on our site is outlined here:

Articles & Reports

- Presbyterian Panel Reports & Summaries
- Comparative Statistics (annual editions)
- Clerks Annual Questionnaire Report (annual editions)
- *Presbyterians Today* –Go Figure! articles written by Research Services staff
- Faith Communities Today—FACT
- Other research reports

Demographics

- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Neighborhood Demographic Reports (free online)
- Help using the Neighborhood Demographics Database

Help for Congregations

- Ten-Year Trends in Your Congregation (free online)
- Demographic Report
- Congregational Surveys
- *Beyond the Ordinary*—Insights into U.S. congregational life (blog)
- Research Strategies for Congregations
- RCMS Data (Religious Congregation Membership Study)

Presbyteries and Synods

- Presbytery Ten-Year Trend Report (free online)
- Demographics and Church Maps
- Program and Staff Evaluation
- Surveys and Evaluations
- Comparative Statistics

Statistics

- FAQ/Interesting Facts
- Presbyterian Snapshot
- Background Report from the Presbyterian Panel
- 10-Year Trend Report
- Comparative Statistics
- Clerks Annual Questionnaire Report
- Demographics

Services—Who We Are and What We Do

- Listening to the Church
- Research and Evaluation Expertise
- Genealogical Research (*not* offered by Research Services)
- Research Data
- Frequently Asked Questions

BUILDING A PLANNING COMMITTEE

Size:

- Ideal size is 5 to 7 persons, including the pastor
- Maximum size is 9 persons, including the pastor

People Not To Invite:

- People not good at decision making or unable to consider potential consequences
- People unwilling to change themselves or their church to accommodate the needs of other people
- People with “axes to grind” about their church
- The pastor’s #1 opponent
- People who want to go back to 1947, or whatever year is remembered as the favorite time in your church
- People too busy to be effective
- People who focus on managing the details instead of looking at the big picture

People To Invite:

- People who would be open to what God is calling your church to do and be about in the future
- People who understand your church’s strengths and weaknesses
- People who understand the “political realities” of your church
- People who can understand the value of open deliberations and the need for a system for keeping membership informed
- People actively supportive of the current pastor
- People willing to learn new things and think new thoughts
- People who have a “voice” back in the congregation and are listened to when they speak
- People who are willing to put time, energy, work, and prayer into this effort
- People comfortable discussing ideas (“purpose,” “role,” “mission”)
- People active as volunteers in the life and ministry of the church

BUILDING A PLANNING COMMITTEE (CONT.)

Who Should Be The Chairperson

- Not the pastor
- A person with a strong voice and credibility in the congregation who will be listened to when reports are offered

Should the Committee Be Representational?

- No
- Representational committees tend to behave like standing committees and function best when they are saying “no”
- “Participatory democracy” tends to substantiate the status quo

How Should the Committee Be Chosen?

- Options: By the pastor
By the governing board
By the governing board upon recommendation of the pastor
Other
- The committee needs to be formally identified and “commissioned” by the primary governing body of the congregation

Who Should the Committee Report to?

- To the primary governing board of the congregation
- To the congregation

Adapted from: Gil Rendle, parish consultant with Alban Institute, Bethesda, MD (www.alban.org)

OTHER RESOURCES AVAILABLE FROM RESEARCH SERVICES

Ten-Year Trends in Your Congregation:

The Ten-Year Trend Report provides data from your congregation's Session Annual Statistical Report for the most recent 10 years. The report presents trends for 36 variables (e.g., gains and losses by type, expenditures by type, and mission giving). (Available only for Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregations. Others contact your denominational offices for this information.)

It also features graphs of church membership, worship attendance, contributions, and church school enrollment over a 10-year period. (The data for your congregation can also be downloaded as an Excel spreadsheet for additional analyses.)

Available for free on the Web: www.pcusa.org/tenyeartrends

Hard copy of the Ten-Year Trends Report is also available from Research Services. Cost: \$35

Demographic Reports:

Research Services provides free online demographic information for the community around your congregation using data from the 2000 U.S. Census (and projections for future years). The Neighborhood Demographics Report presents color maps and charts showing results for your congregation's community. It includes information on the annual population growth, percentage of households with children, adult age distribution, housing types (owned vs. rental), education, household income, employment, race, ethnicity, and more for people living in the census tracts around your church.

You can zoom in and zoom out on the demographic map to obtain results for an area that is appropriate for your situation. The demographic report also shows the location of other PC(USA) congregations in your area.

Free on the Web: www.pcusa.org/research/demographics

Congregational Surveys:

Surveys can give your congregation: a picture of "who you are" (including age and marital status of members, average length of church membership, etc.), information about the strengths and priorities of church programs, and tools for strategic planning.

Research Services will analyze your congregation's responses and provide two customized color reports summarizing survey results. For information about costs and any other questions concerning the U.S. Congregational Life Survey, contact us by email to research@pcusa.org or call 1-888-728-7228 ext. 2040 or visit our Web site: www.USCongregations.org.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

- Step One:** What's going on in the church today? (A look at statistics and trends)
- 10-Year Trends
 - In-Home Meetings
 - Mapping Member Networks
- Step Two:** How has God blessed this church in the past? (Celebrating our history)
- Wall of Wonder
- Step Three:** What do you see as the strengths of this church? (Celebrating our life together)
- U.S. Congregational Life Survey
 - In-Home Meetings
- Step Four:** What are the three to five greatest needs to be met in our congregation? (Celebrating our life together)
- 10-Minute Interviews
 - 3 x 5 Surveys
 - U.S. Congregational Life Survey
- Step Five:** What are the trends that are taking place within this community? How do these trends affect this church? (Knowing our community)
- Demographic/Census Data
 - Interviewing Community Leaders
- Step Six:** What resources do we provide to support Presbyterian mission beyond this congregation? (Our connection to the community and the larger church)
- Door-to-Door Canvas
 - Church Membership Survey (other denominations)
- Step Seven:** Look for key words and phrases that describe *who* we are and *what* God is calling us to be and do. (Writing our mission statement)
- Step Eight:** If this congregation is to thrive (and not just survive), what are the most important issues facing us right now? (Looking ahead and setting priorities)
- Step Nine:** Who will lead us into the future? (Exploring pastoral leadership options)
- Step Ten:** What specific goals will we write for the next year? (Looking ahead to specific ways to implement our mission)

Adapted from: Doris M. Gebhart, former Associate Executive Presbyterian, The John Knox Presbytery, 1289 West Seminary Street, Richland Center, Wisconsin 53581-2033.

Stories from Congregations

A number of congregations have told us about their experiences using the tools in *Research Strategies for Congregations*. We would like to share with you some of the things we're heard.

One congregation looking for a new pastor decided to use the U.S. Congregational Life Survey to “*see where we stand as a congregation.*” After the results of their survey came back, the congregation held a potluck supper and studied the results together. The congregation as a whole came to realize that “*we really agree on so many goals for the church, we are united in most areas. The survey really helped us become a unified group.*”

A congregation of about 200 people was having difficult times deciding what type and style of music to use during worship. The music committee decided to hand out 3 x 5 cards one Sunday during worship. They asked each person to list their three favorite hymns or songs for worship. During the course of the coming year, every hymn or song that had been listed was fit into the sermon topics and sung in worship. The committee chairman reported that members were happy to be asked and looked forward to hearing their favorites!

The Christian Education Director of a fairly large congregation noticed that Sunday school attendance had been dropping for a while. The director and teachers decided to set up booths on a Sunday so that worshipers could examine various alternative curriculum packages that were under consideration. The next Sunday, 3 x 5 cards were used during the worship service so that people could vote on the alternative they thought would be best for the Sunday school. After spending much time and some money to set the classroom area up for the new curriculum, the congregation tried it for one year. The Christian Education Director reported that the new model works beautiful, attendance is up, teachers are happy, and “*parents really support it by bringing their kids—after all, parents helped determine what to do and I think they feel that they need to be supportive of their choices!*”

Another congregation was celebrating its 100th anniversary. As part of the weekend-long celebration, they created a Wall-of-Wonder. The mayor and other dignitaries were invited to take part in marking the history of the congregation. Members of the church and non-member community participants agreed that making the time chart really brought them together as a community. According to the organizer, the project helped everyone realize what an important part of the community the church was. Many people felt that it was a good way to teach the young people about the continuity and history of the congregation. Older worshipers liked to see how, when, and where their life contributions fit into the picture.

Thank you for your interest in *Research Strategies for Congregations*. We hope these strategies are useful to your congregation.

Happy Tooling!



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