

Tool #19: Congregational Surveys

A survey (distributed in church, online, mailed, or via telephone) can provide valuable information to the ministry development process. However, you must weigh whether this is the best option for your situation. A survey is useless at best--and a misleading distraction at worst--if not used and analyzed properly.

The advantages of doing a survey include:

- It provides concrete statistical information.
- It can confirm (or in some cases, challenge) common perceptions of the church and its ministry.
- It can be adapted to address the most pressing questions in your church context.
- It allows you to compare the activities and views of different groups of members (e.g., old and young).
- It (ideally) draws on a broad base of members that represents the diversity in the church.
- It gives members a chance to provide input into the ministry development process.
- It enables you to track changes in the congregation over time.

Disadvantages include:

- A survey takes an investment of time and energy, and may prolong the ministry planning period.
- Copying and distributing the survey cost money (especially if the survey is mailed out).
- If the survey is not written properly, if you are not able to get a sufficient number or sampling of responses, or if you do not interpret the results correctly, you could end up with misleading information.
- Inputting and analyzing the responses may require special computer software and know-how (or fees, if you use a professional consultant).
- Members may balk at being asked to complete a survey (especially if you do more than one).
- A survey provides you with information – but not the "so what." Unless you are prepared to analyze and act on the information, a survey is not a wise investment into fruitful ministry development.

Surveys to explore the congregational context for ministry might include these question areas:

- Beliefs related to evangelism and social ministry
- Satisfaction with the congregation's current ministries
- Personal involvement in ministry activities
- Motivation and obstacles to ministry involvement
- Desires, dreams and priorities for outreach ministry projects
- Availability, interest and giftedness for volunteer participation
- Assessment of church factors that help or hinder holistic ministry (e.g. conflict, leadership, organization)
- Indicators of spiritual vitality (prayer, Bible reading, church attendance, charitable giving)
- Demographic information (gender, age, education, residence, length of time in the church)

See Carl Dudley, *Community Ministry* (Alban Institute, 2002), pp. 95-103 for more discussion of surveys. If you opt to do a survey, you can create your own, or use existing models. Good sources include:

- *Church and Ministry Involvement Questionnaire*. Heidi Unruh and Phil Olson, *Becoming a Church That Makes a Difference CD-ROM Workbook*. Evangelicals for Social Action, www.esa-online.org.
- *Church Census*. Diana Garland, Center for Family and Community Ministries, www.family-ministry.org.
- *Congregational Self-Assessment*. James Furr, Mike Bonem, and Jim Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change Workbook* (Jossey-Bass, 2000). Leadership Network, www.leadnet.org
- *Parish Profile Inventory*. In *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, edited by Nancy Ammerman, Jackson Carroll, Carl Dudley, & William McKinney (Abingdon, 1998).
- "How Is Our Church Doing in Making a Change in Someone's Welfare?" In Amy Sherman, *The ABCs of Community Ministry* (Hudson Institute, 2001). Center on Faith in Communities, www.centeronfic.org
- *Natural Church Development Survey*. Church Smart Resources, www.churchsmart.com (fee for service).
- *Facing Reality: A Tool for Congregational Mission Assessment* by Thomas Bandy (Abingdon Press, 2001). Easum, Bandy & Associates, www.easumbandy.com

Also see the simple Survey of Community Ministry Interests, tool #20.