

I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and they know me. – John 10:14

WHY DO A MEMBER SURVEY?

Building a strong and vibrant congregation is not easy. Clergy, lay leadership, and staff face many challenges such as recruitment and retention, increasing attendance at worship services, offering effective religious education, providing creative programming, and the never-ending imperative of fundraising. As a leader in your church, you know that achieving a strong and spiritually rich religious community requires hard work, collaboration, and patience. However, the task can be eased by having relevant, timely information - by knowing the characteristics, needs and desires of your parishioners.

A well-done survey and skilled analysis of results provides a snapshot of your membership's views – not just the views of the vocal minority. It can be invaluable in assessing your congregation's needs and in planning to enhance church functioning. A member survey can help make participation in your congregation more spiritually, educationally, and socially rewarding.

Here are some questions that a congregation-wide survey can address:

General Evaluation

How are we doing as a Christian community? Are members generally pleased, or are there areas of dissatisfaction? What are our strengths and weaknesses? How can we build on our strengths? What should be improved?

Strengthening Critical Functions

What are members' views about worship services, religious school, nursery school, community service programs, charitable giving, and fellowship activities? What creative strategies can help?

Members' Characteristics

How well do you know your membership? What proportion is married with children? How many are retirees? How many are living alone? What type of work do they do? What are their religious backgrounds?

Recruitment and Retention

What are the church's main qualities that could be communicated to attract new members? How many families and congregants have been thinking about leaving, and why? (Having a reading of this critical indicator of the organization's health can be used to help reduce attrition.)

Engagement and Participation

How much do congregants participate in church activities? What are the best ways of stimulating a stronger sense of connectedness, especially among less active members, thereby increasing attendance, active engagement, and retention?

Strategic Planning, Initiatives, Expenditures, Staffing

What are members' preferences for new directions? What qualities are preferred in filling a key staff vacancy? How much support exists for proposed major expenditures such as building renovations or additions? (A survey can justify a policy or action by demonstrating its popularity, OR avoiding what could turn out to be unwelcome.)

Leadership - Membership Relations

Are relations between clergy/staff and members cordial and trusting? Do tensions exist that could emerge into serious problems if not recognized and addressed? (Survey findings can serve as an early warning system of simmering discontent.)

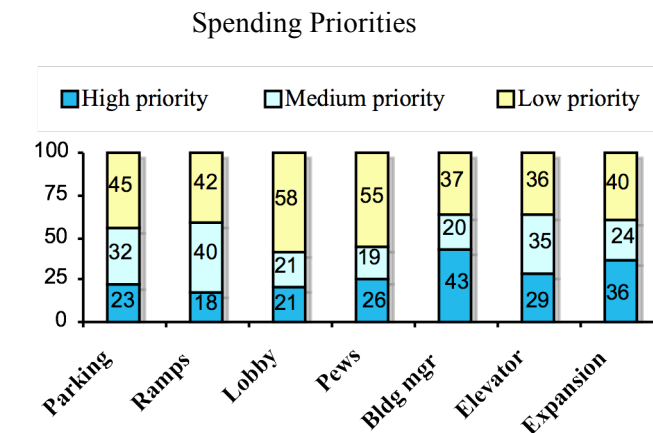
Communications

How much do members read church newsletters and bulletins? How often do they use its website or listserv? In what ways are these useful? What changes might increase usage?

Religious Beliefs and Commitments, Opinions on Emerging Issues

A confidential survey can profile members' beliefs about God, prayer, sin, morality, salvation and the afterlife; also, the extent of worship service attendance and other church involvement. A survey can measure how much parishioners are aware of, and embrace, key principles of the faith. It can be an effective tool for gauging the spiritual growth and maturity of your membership. Also, the congregation's opinions on church policies, programming, and governance.

Sample chart from a member survey report:



The **Congregation Surveys** service is a professional, customized research approach tailored to the specific interests and needs of your church – **not** a standardized, “off-the-shelf” tool. It consists of (a) initial discussions with leadership to identify researchable questions, (b) design and programming of an online questionnaire which is engaging and not burdensome to complete (with accommodation for those unable to take the survey by computer), (c) a proven approach to eliciting a strong response rate, and (d) a detailed summary of the results, with recommendations on church activities and operations to enrich members’ experience.

Sid Groeneman, founder of Groeneman Research & Consulting, has conducted surveys for non-profit groups and other clients for 27 years, including:

- AARP
- American Red Cross
- Aspen Institute
- Bethesda United Methodist Church
- Congregation Beth El (Bethesda, MD)
- Corporation for Public Broadcasting
- Hillcrest Baptist Church (Temple Hills, MD)
- Johns Hopkins University
- John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University
- National Cancer Institute
- Temple Sinai (Washington, DC)
- U.S. Dept of Health & Human Services
- U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum,
- U.S. News & World Report
- United Way of America



Before establishing Groeneman Research & Consulting in 2000, Dr. Sid Groeneman was Account Group Manager with a leading international marketing research firm, specializing in survey studies, where he directed more than 120 research projects for corporations, government agencies,

associations, philanthropies, research institutes, public relations firms and ad agencies. He has a Ph.D. in Political Science (Univ. of Minnesota). He has co-authored (with Dr. Gary Tobin) *The Decline of Religious Identity in the United States*.

In the words of Rev. Ron Foster of Bethesda United Methodist Church: *Dr. Sid Groeneman was a pleasure to work with. Not only did he develop a comprehensive survey instrument to help our congregation sort through some of our current and future needs, but he also presented our church leadership with insightful analysis of the data once it had been collected. Many church members and friends commented to me how they were happily surprised to see how professional and thorough the survey was and how easy it was to take online. If your congregation is in the midst of serious self-reflection about issues of identity and priority, Sid's services are a great resource.*

Thanks to technological advances, surveys can be carried out for a fraction of what it used to cost.

For more information or to arrange a no-obligation meeting:

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Congregation Surveys: Assess Member Needs and Enhance Church Functioning



**A customized service of:
Groeneman Research
& Consulting, Inc.**

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