



## INFORMATION SHEET

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*What is the U.S. Congregational Vitality Survey?*

*Congregational life is not simple. Our research demonstrates that all congregations have strengths. Further, congregations require multiple strengths to be effective. A congregation that excels in serving the community, but lacks any other strength is little more than a social service agency. A congregation that excels in providing a sense of belonging where people care for one another, but lacks other strengths, is little more than a social club.<sup>1</sup>*

### WHAT IS THE USCVS?

The U.S. Congregational Vitality survey (USCVS) is designed to help you understand the attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of worshipers and leaders in your congregations. This ecumenical instrument was created through a collaboration between sociologists, theologians, and Christian educators in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). We've been helping congregations from many denominations (Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists, and more!) measure their vitality since 2001.

The USCVS is designed to help a congregation assess its strengths based on seven marks of congregational vitality—discipleship, outward focus, evangelism, servant leadership, worship, caring relationships, and ecclesial health. The USCVS is not a test. There are no right or wrong answers.

### HOW DO I INTERPRET THE RESULTS?

About four weeks after a congregation returns its completed surveys, you will receive a Congregational Vitality Report. This report provides your congregation's scores on seven marks of congregational vitality, as well as results for all questions that measure each mark. Putting these pieces together lets your congregation see its unique strengths. It is up to you and others in the congregation to interpret the findings in light of what you know about the congregation—where it is located, how it is changing, and where it is going. We recommend each congregation dedicate a leadership meeting to reviewing the results together. Do not focus on the negative—celebrate your strengths. Your report will also include guidance for interpretation.

### WHAT IS THE BACKGROUND OF THE USCVS?

The USCVS is a substantially revised version of the US Congregational Life Surveys (USCLS) survey, which was offered to congregations for nearly two decades. Over 500,000 worshipers in over 5,000 congregations completed the USCLS between 2001 and 2018.

This new, third wave, addresses some issues with the previous survey by redesigning the questions to scales (the industry standard for creating indices) and by having a stronger theological grounding for the vital marks. It also works with new data—the most recent USCLS benchmark data was from 2008-2009.

In addition, in winter of 2018, tragedy struck. The servers hosting USCLS data and reporting functions crashed and we lost everything. Capacity to generate the old USCLS reports was lost.

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<sup>1</sup> From *Beyond the Ordinary: Ten Strengths of U.S. Congregations* (Woolever and Bruce, Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

## HOW DO THE 7 MARKS OF VITALITY DIFFER FROM THE PREVIOUS USCLS 10 STRENGTHS?

7 SIGNS OF VITALITY	RELATED USCLS STRENGTH
<i>lifelong</i> <b>Discipleship</b> <i>formation</i>	Strength 1: Growing Spiritually
<i>outward</i> <b>Incarnational</b> <i>focus</i>	Strength 6: Focusing on the Community
<i>Intentional, authentic</i> <b>Evangelism</b>	Strength 7: Sharing Faith Strength 8: Welcoming New Worshipers
<i>empowering servant</i> <b>Leadership</b>	Strength 9: Empowering Leadership Strength 3: Participating in the Congregation
<i>spirit-inspired</i> <b>Worship</b>	Strength 2: Meaningful Worship
<i>caring</i> <b>Relationships</b>	Strength 4: Having a Sense of Belonging
<i>ecclesial</i> <b>Health</b>	Strength 10: Looking to the Future

### Overview of how the new marks of vitality differ from the old strengths model

*Strength 5: Caring for Young People* is not present in the USCVS. A church can be vital but not have any youth or children—for example, a thriving congregation that meets in a senior living community or on a college campus. Therefore, this strength was not carried over into our measures of congregational vitality.

In the original USCLS, *Strength 8: Welcoming New Worshipers* was only one item – a measure of the percentage of congregation that began attending services or activities at the church within the last five years. This is a measure of church growth, which is conceptually distinct from vitality. Although we do include a question about whether current worshipers make an effort to make visitors feel welcome, we include it in evangelism because it is a bare minimum way to reach out to non-members.

Finally, the USCLS strengths *Empowering Leadership* and *Participating in the Congregation* included overlap—the former asks whether members feel empowered and encouraged to use their gifts, contribute their ideas, and take action, whereas the latter asks whether members do, in fact, get involved in the congregation by taking on leadership roles or contributing their ideas.