



UPWARD | OUTWARD | ONWARD

Discerning Our Future Together: A Congregational Assessment

Congregational Meeting Guide



Corps Ministries Department, Territorial Headquarters

The Salvation Army, Canada and Bermuda

Why have you been given this resource?

The Corps Ministries Department provides resources for the frontlines to support the mission of The Salvation Army. The *Discerning Our Future Together* guide is a basic three-step process for corps health discernment to initiate or support leadership discernment of action in the future.

If there is any way the Corps Ministries Department may be of service, please speak to your Area Commander or Divisional Commander or contact us at Territorial Headquarters or on the web (www.saministryresources.ca/contact-corps-ministries).

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2019

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING GUIDE

This guide is intended to assist the facilitator of the congregational meeting to guide corps leadership through the process.

Corps: _____

Date of Congregational Meeting: _____

Learning from the Congregational Meeting

The primary learning from the *Discerning Our Future Together* process takes place during the congregational meeting. It is from the interaction between people at the corps that the most congregational learning takes place (they hear each other respond to the different issues and raise their ideas or concerns), the facilitator can observe congregational dynamics, and encourage the leadership to reflect on the congregations' wellbeing to generate action steps for the future.

Recommendation: Take notes or assign a note-maker from your team¹ to record observations and questions for further investigation either during or immediately after the congregational meeting. This guide provides some key items to observe. Any notes you maintain should be kept for the purpose of enriching the corps leadership debriefing.

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¹ For the purpose of observing the congregational meeting your team could be made up of "outside" observers or specific members of the corps leadership who do not need to directly participate in the meeting. It may be helpful to position corps leaders at each of the tables to facilitate discussion and listen.



PREPARATION FOR THE CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

1. Ensure the leadership of the corps understands the *Discerning Our Future Together* process.
2. Determine the key dates for the process:

Date/Time	
	Information to the congregation about the <i>Discerning Our Future Together</i> three step process (online poll, congregational meeting, and leadership actions). An invitation to pray for the process should be included.
	Opening of the online poll (see Facilitating the Online Poll below).
	Closing of the online poll.
	Corps leadership review of the report from the online poll (at least two weeks after the closing of the online poll). See Appendix for a sample report.
	Corps leadership planning of the congregational meeting (length of time, breaks, food, et cetera) along with their decision making process and communication opportunities after the congregational meeting.
	The congregational meeting (minimum of 4 hours).
	Follow up meetings for the corps leadership.
	Possibly any additional congregational meetings deemed necessary for appropriate response to what was learned at the congregational meeting.

3. Ensure that the congregation is appropriately informed of the *Discerning Our Future Together* process. Engagement of the congregation is key.
4. Arrange with the Corps Ministries Department (corps_ministries@can.salvationarmy.org) at Territorial Headquarters for the online poll to be opened and closed on the appropriate dates. Provide the corps leadership with the internet address (URL) of the online poll. Request the community demographic report and basic PowerPoint outline for editing before the meeting.
5. Determine in advance of the congregational meeting how the leadership of the corps will be directly involved in the meeting and the decision-making process for follow up to the congregational meeting (approach to spiritual discernment, how decisions are made by this group, and communication strategy with the congregation (and possibly the community)).
6. Ask if there are any significant concerns or issues which may affect the online poll or congregational meeting (recent conflict, departure of prominent people, building projects). What cultural values within the corps (Bermudian, Canadian, Indigenous, or other cultures) may influence the use of the online poll and the format of the congregational meeting?
7. Encourage the corps leadership to consider any possible expenses or practical logistics (length of congregational meeting, how long to spend discussing each page of the report, food, etc.).

FACILITATING THE ONLINE POLL

Obtaining Online Poll Internet Address (URL)

The URL for the online poll should be requested by the Facilitator from the Corps Ministries Department (corps_ministries@can.salvationarmy.org). Please request the online poll *at least two weeks in advance* of the desired opening date.

Accessibility of the Online Poll

The online poll is designed with the intent that the whole congregation have input. This means that some people who have literacy, vision challenges, or problems accessing the internet may need assistance in order to participate. It is recommended that the youngest age for participants in the online poll should be that of junior soldiers. Local leaders should be encouraged to plan how to best promote and facilitate access to the online poll.

Receiving the Report Generated from the Online Poll

Approximately two weeks after the online poll has been closed, the Facilitator should request the *Discerning Our Future Together* report and basic template of a PowerPoint presentation² from the Corps Ministries Department (corps_ministries@can.salvationarmy.org). Please check the report for any inconsistencies in content or format. Consider questions which the people of the corps may have about the report and if there are any concerns, please contact the Corps Ministries Department (corps_ministries@can.salvationarmy.org) with your questions. A sample template of the report is provided in the **Appendix**.

Review of the Report with the Corps Leadership

Reviewing the report with the corps leadership in advance of distribution to the whole congregation can provide the opportunity to proofread, raise any questions leaders may have and consider the reaction from the people of the corps. Ensure that the leaders understand that the purpose of the report is to contrast the perceptions of the corps (from the online poll) with statistics collected by the corps to examine if there are any gaps in the effectiveness of ministry. The congregational meeting is a prime opportunity to hear the different voices of the congregation.

Distribution of the Report to the Congregation

It is recommended that the report be distributed to the congregation in printed form during the congregational meeting. The report is quite simple and should be relatively easy to interpret during the meeting. Providing the report during the congregational meeting allows any questions to be answered in the presence of everyone.

² The basic information for the congregational meeting will be included in the template but it will need to be developed for the presentation style of the facilitator and needs of the congregation.

FACILITATING THE CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

General Observations of the Congregational Meeting

- What are the observable demographics of the people in the meeting?
- Do people seem energized by being together? Is there laughter?
- Who offers to provide leadership? Who do people defer to?
- What reference is made to spirituality (belief and/or practice)? Do other people also share it?
- What appears to be the spiritual discernment approach assumed in the process?
- What are the questions or concerns raised by people?
- Did they receive an adequate response? If not, who will respond?
- Are statistics being accurately recorded? This can become obvious as the SAMIS sections of the report are discussed.
- What patterns are emerging? Any possible connections or correlations which should be examined further?

Step-by-Step Through the Meeting

With a larger group (more than a dozen) have them sit in table groups with their reports.

Open with introductions and prayer. Other forms of worship could be considered as well.

Explain the process of the congregational meeting. Provide an outline of the general flow of the meeting (when there will be breaks, et cetera). Encourage everyone to speak and reserve criticism of comments that are made to respect each person's contribution. There may be points of clarification which can be offered. Ask if there are any questions. Provide the reports.

Activity to start the report discussion – visual profile of the congregation. Ask everyone to raise their hands if they are:

- Born (place of birth):
 - In this city.
 - In this province.
 - In another province.
 - In another country (possibly specify continents or countries of origin).
- In the age range of:
 - Under 18 years old (teens/youth).
 - Between 19 and 29.
 - Between 29 and 45.
 - Between 46 and 60.
 - Between 61 and 75.
 - Over 75.

- Living currently:
 - In the same neighbourhood as the corps building? Within walking distance?
 - Within a 10 minute commute.
 - 10 to 20 minute commute.
 - Over 20 minute commute.
- *Optional questions:* 1st, 2nd, 3rd (or more) generation of Salvationist; how long they have been involved in any Christian congregation; how long they have been committed to Christian discipleship (identified as a Christian); 1st, 2nd, 3rd (or more) generation of Bermudan or Canadian; or mother tongue. Fun questions: sports team, type of pie, food preference, et cetera.

These questions help the people who have come to the congregational meeting to consider who they are and may serve as a contrast with some of the community demographics.

Page 1 [Spiritual Formation] – Suggested Questions for Congregational Meeting:

- 1.1 What does the poll of devotional activities tell us about discipleship?
- 1.2 What is the relationship between our spiritual practice and what we offer as a congregation to help people develop in their spiritual journey with Jesus?
- 1.3 Are our descriptions of Congregational Discipleship Activities complete?
- 1.4 What is positive about the discipleship opportunities we provide?
- 1.5 What is missing in telling the story of discipleship at this corps?

Observations from Page 1 Discussion:

- Does there appear to be a need for this group to go deeper in spiritual formation?
- Is there energy or enthusiasm about changing the current discipleship format in order to go deeper?
- Any specific suggestions, ideas, requests, or offers of leadership in an area of discipleship?

Page 2 [Growth & Belonging] – Suggested Questions for Congregational Meeting:

- 2.1 Anything surprising or interesting?
- 2.2 What is important to note about the trend in congregational participation or attendance?
- 2.3 How should we interpret the results of the “sense of belonging” question?
- 2.4 From the “word cloud”³ analysis, what seem to be significant themes in the prayers?
- 2.5 In your opinion, what are the major issues affecting congregational life? What is important to note about the congregation?

³ Word clouds in the report are created from the statements in the online poll by increasing the size of the words which were mentioned more frequently.

Observations from Page 2 Discussion:

- Belonging can be a very personal, “heart” issue – is there anyone who should receive some pastoral care following the meeting?
- What is the self-awareness of the congregation regarding the trend towards the future?
- Are some suggestions being generated about the future?

Page 3 [Stewardship/Volunteerism] – Suggested Questions for Congregational Meeting:

- 3.1 What was your understanding of “stewardship”?
- 3.2 How might we continue to increase the spirit of generosity?
- 3.3 What do you find interesting in this description of financial and time stewardship?
- 3.4 To what extent are people using their gifts and talents for meaningful service/ministry?
- 3.5 Are there any concerns or opportunities you could identify?

Observations from Page 3 Discussion:

- Are people generally aware of the financial situation of the congregation?
- Are people engaged in volunteerism? How so? How might that impact the future of the corps?
- Does anyone identify their employment as contributing to mission? How so?
- What language do people use to discuss these issues?
- What issues are identified which could be addressed in the future?

Page 4 [Evangelism & Community] – Suggested Questions for Congregational Meeting:

- 4.1 What is the relationship between our faithfulness (sharing our faith and prayer) and our fruitfulness (commitments to faith made in the congregation)?
- 4.2 What are the opportunities for positive spiritual conversations? How can we share the gospel?
- 4.3 How are connections made between community and congregation? How do healthy relationships form?
- 4.4 Anything surprising in the community demographics?
- 4.5 What can we observe from the “word cloud” analysis of the prayers of our people?
- 4.6 What are the opportunities for being a “transforming influence” in the community?

Observations from Page 4 Discussion:

- Is the congregation self-aware of how effective they are at engaging in evangelism (leading to discipleship)?
- Is there a “culture of invitation” or is evangelism considered a program/event?
- Are any new opportunities for positive interaction with the community identified?
- Any specific suggestions, ideas, requests or offers of leadership in the areas of community outreach and evangelism? If so, who will follow up on these items?

Page 5 [Congregational Vision] – Suggested Questions for Congregational Meeting:

- 5.1 On the poll, does the percentage of people who have been here for fewer than 3 years accurately reflect congregational life? If so, what might this mean?
- 5.2 How do your descriptions of the vision, mission, or goals (shown as a “word cloud” in the report) for the corps compare with the official statement?
- 5.3 In your opinion, what is the best way to demonstrate the vision, mission, or goals of the corps? What we say? What we do? How we budget/prioritize? What others observe about us?
- 5.4 Given the conversation we have had today, what is your sense of the future?

Observations from Page 5 Discussion:

- How is the percentage of people who have been there for less than 3 years interpreted?
- To what degree are the responses to the last question (5.4) a good, general summary of the conversations which have been taking place?
- Do expectations for the future seem reasonable given the reflection on the current state of the congregation and assessment of evangelism and discipleship?
- Is there any sense of a purposeful direction or plan of action?
- Are there any major congregational issues which might need to be addressed to allow for future development?
- Are there specific individuals identified who could contribute to the future of the congregation? Are they currently empowered/encouraged to do so?

Page 6

Optional: Facilitate conversation about the general comments. This will likely only be relevant if there is a predominant theme, a controversial issue or something surprising for the congregation.

🕒 Closing the Meeting

Optional: Host a “dream” discernment session (an additional 1-2 hours) where each table group shares dreams for future ministry opportunities. Those are written by the facilitator on flip chart paper as the table(s) shares their ideas with the whole group. Each person is given 3-5 stickers to highlight the dreams they would like leaders to look at closely and they place the stickers on the flip chart paper beside the dreams they have identified.

Ask whether there are any questions. The leaders of the corps should be prepared that one of the most likely questions will be, “What are the next steps?” Prayer reflecting the nature of the experience (typically thankfulness and blessing of the corps are appropriate).

FACILITATING LEADERSHIP TEAM FOLLOW-UP

Leadership debriefing questions (after the congregational meeting):

- What was interesting from the congregational meeting? Was anything surprising?
- How close is the alignment between congregational discussion of current activity and future possibilities and your perspective (or stated vision, mission, and goals) as the leaders?
- What would be helpful steps for the future?
- Who will take charge of ensuring the next steps are taken and progress is communicated to the congregation?

Optional: Offer accountability by checking in on a specific date to ask about progress.

RESOURCES FOR FOLLOW-UP

Annual Review

The Annual Review provides a planning process for the various leaders in the congregation for shaping the future of the corps. Goals set in the most recent annual review should be checked in light of the discussion and the upcoming annual review should reflect the results of this congregational meeting.

Conflict Management

If conflict is discovered, Divisional Headquarters may have specific resource people available. If not, the Area Commander or Divisional Commander can contact the Corps Ministries Department for references to people with experience working with the Territory.

Revitalization of Corps

Divisional Headquarters may have recommendations of process for revitalization and resources are available through the Corps Ministries Department (saministryresources.ca).

Stewardship Resources

The Corps Ministries Department provides resources on generosity (saministryresources.ca/stewardship).

Strategic Planning

The process can be as simple as determining the specific goal, making plans, and then taking action to achieve that goal. Divisional Headquarters may have recommendations of process. There are resource people available through the Corps Ministries Department for design or facilitation.

RATIONALE FOR *DISCERNING OUR FUTURE TOGETHER*

Biblical Reflection

In the Old Testament, the people of God participated in public events which addressed societal issues and confirmed their communal commitments to the Lord (see Exodus 24 as an example) or their acknowledgements of failings and brokenness (see Exodus 33-34). This pattern is repeated in the accounts of the history of their experience as the people of God; with public acknowledgement of the faithfulness of God, their failings, and their renewed commitments to live faithfully. In these stories, do the people of God always make good communal decisions? Not always ... one major, history-changing example was when they demanded a king which was described by the Lord (to Samuel) as: "Listen to the voice of the voice of the people in all they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" (1 Samuel 8:7). The "majority opinion" or the "loudest voices" are not always right and communal discernment requires spiritually discerning leadership.

An ongoing theme through Scriptures is the ability of God to redeem poor decisions of his people when poor direction is chosen. With regards to the institution of kingship into the social structure, there are multiple examples where God directed kings back towards faithfulness (sometimes through the unexpected and disruptive voices of the prophets) and supported their influence in leading people into devout, righteous living. In the gospels, Jesus made use of the concept or image of the kingdom (reign) of God to point to a better way of living life in relationship with God and other people. Jesus' teaching and way of life subverted the historic concept of kingship and many of the contemporary ideas of God's anointed one (the Messiah or Christ). God consistently invites us towards closer relationship, holiness and faithfulness.

In the early church, the introduction of Gentiles into the Jewish movement of those following Jesus created controversy (see Acts 10 and note Paul's arguments in Galatians). The process of the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) changed the course of Christianity. While sharing the gospel across cultural boundaries reflected the very old theme of God's blessing of "all the families of the earth" (Genesis 12:3), it required many practical changes to the practices of Jewish-Christian spirituality and created a new pattern for faithful discipleship which facilitated Jesus' call for his disciples to be his witnesses "...to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The central hope for good congregational process is to reach a point where we, too, can say, "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..." (Acts 15: 28a).

The decisions made at the council of Jerusalem were then intentionally communicated to everyone affected by the decisions. It took time to change attitudes and adjust to the "new normal" - note Paul's account of his discussion with Peter about eating with Gentiles (Galatians 2). The actions on the part of the leadership of the congregation *must* actually take place and there *must* be intentional communication with the congregation (and any affected members of the community). Lack of action or ineffective communication can erode trust and turn people against future congregational process. The development of more and more commitment and cooperation in discerning/accomplishing mission opportunities is essential for healthy congregations.

Guiding Principles for the *Discerning Our Future Together* (particularly the congregational meeting)

1. Worship and prayer are important for providing an appropriate spiritual context for reflection on our faithfulness, fruitfulness, and anticipation of how we can partner with God in mission.
2. Casual social interaction (breaks in the meeting and eating together) nurtures relationships.
3. Congregational participation can create ownership and momentum in a common direction.
4. Asking good questions is powerful (consider John Wesley's "21 Questions"). Responses to the questions create windows into the self-awareness, dreams, functional leadership and practices of the congregation. Observation of the interaction will provide more insight than a poll or survey.
5. Creating action from the discussion is essential.
6. Good communication increases congregational satisfaction, builds shared momentum and increases trust for future action. It is critical that it is demonstrated that "We did this because we heard that ... in the congregational meeting" for leadership integrity and future credibility.

Explanation of the *Discerning Our Future Together* Process and the Role of the Facilitator

The online poll is designed with the intent that the whole congregation have input. The general principle is outlined above (#3) with the understanding that the more people who participate, the more opportunities for hearing all the perspectives within the corps and engaging everyone in identifying key issues and solutions. The online poll⁴ contributes to the report which becomes the focus for discussion at the congregational meeting. The report is intentionally constructed to contrast the online poll questions (which are based on the perceptions of the respondents) and the congregational statistics which are collected by Territorial Headquarters.

The congregational meeting is the focal point for the *Discerning Our Future Together* process. It is through the discussion at the congregational meeting that the leadership of the corps will have opportunity to hear the different perspectives of people on the issues raised through the *Discerning Our Future Together* report. The discussion progresses through each page of the report to ensure that people are reflecting on many aspects of the life and witness of their congregation.

There are two key roles the facilitator will play in the *Discerning Our Future Together* process:

1. Ensure that the congregation is engaged in healthy discussion: encourage interaction with the data in the report through good questions and help them take note of insights they develop.
2. Work with the leadership of the corps to determine good action steps after the congregational meeting including how to communicate back to the congregation on the progress being made.

With "outsider" status, the facilitator can observe the interaction between participants and encourage discussion and discernment. The facilitator works to ensure there is a growing self-awareness of the whole congregation, any key issues in congregational life are considered, constructive options for next steps are developed, and the leaders are prepared to follow through with discerned actions.

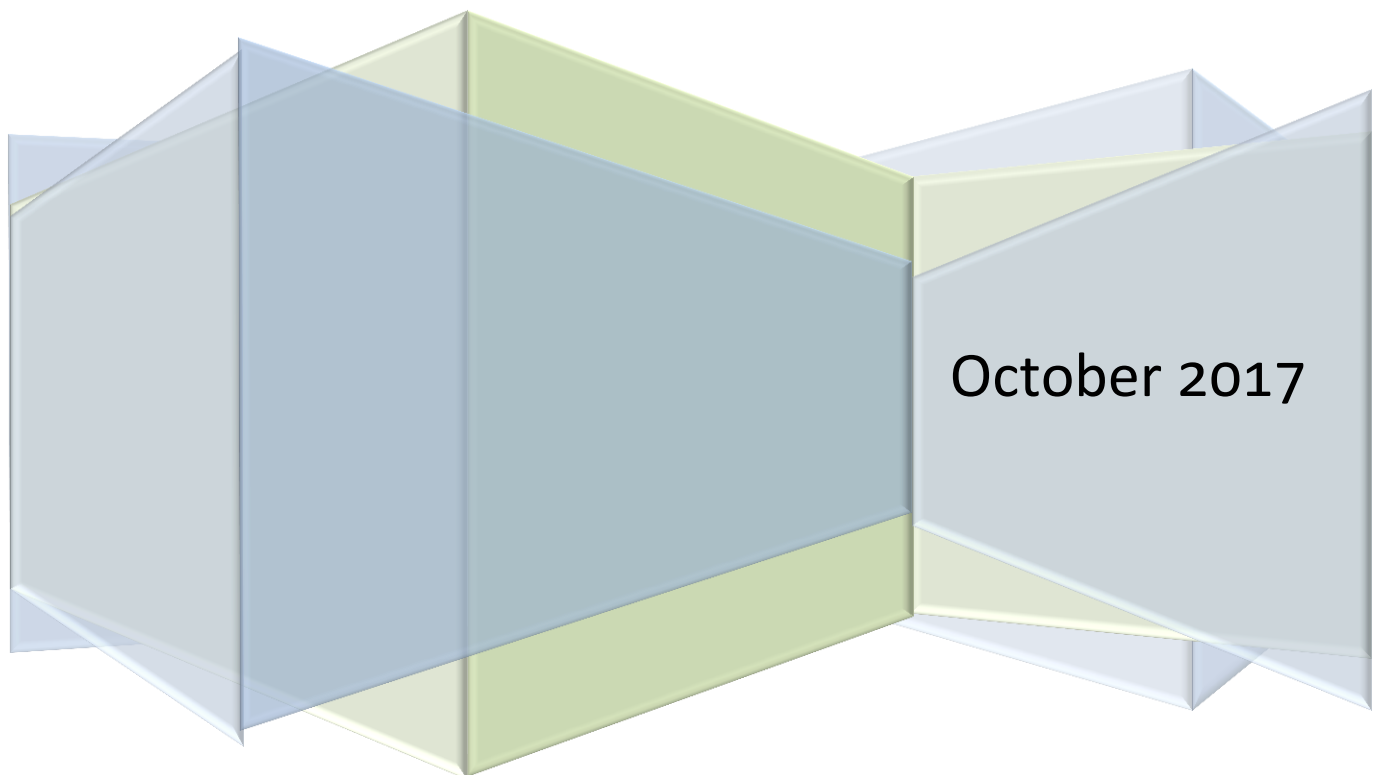
⁴ Specific questions on the poll are adapted from previously tested questions found in the Association of Religion Data Archives (thearda.com).



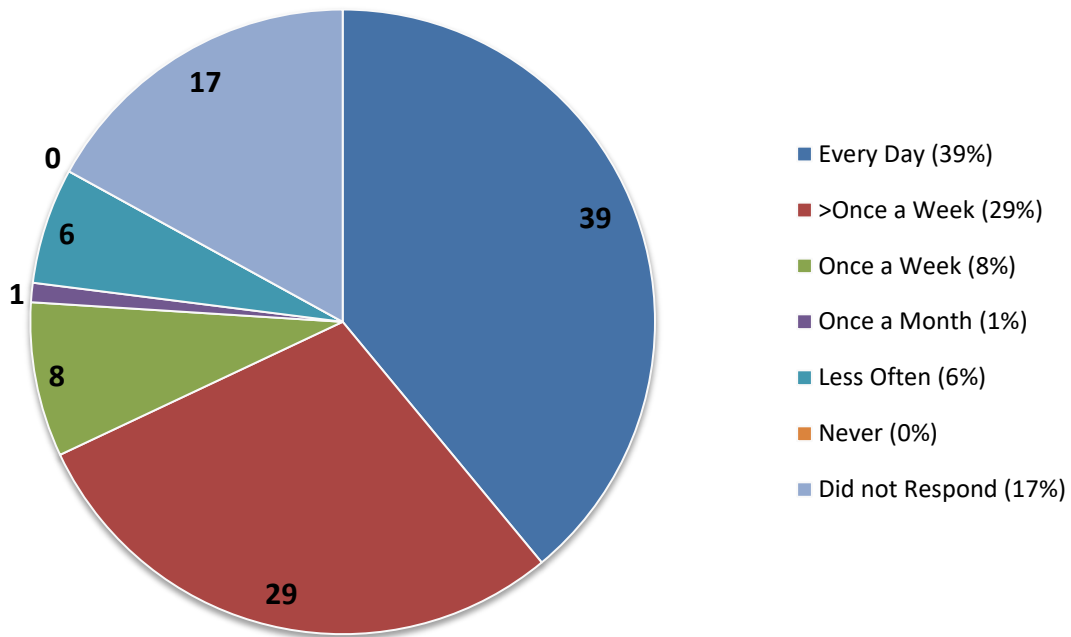
Community Church

Discerning Our Future Together Report

This report reviews what was learned from the 53 completed *Discerning Our Future Together* poll responses and compares those responses with documented information from the corps and the community.



How often do you personally spend time in private, Christian devotional activities (such as prayer, meditation, reading the Bible alone)?



Congregational Discipleship Activities identified in SAMIS:

Bible Study

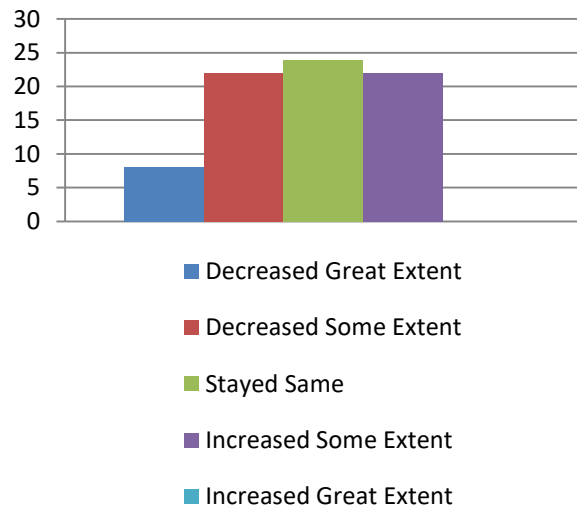
Youth Bible Study

Ready To Serve

Sunday School

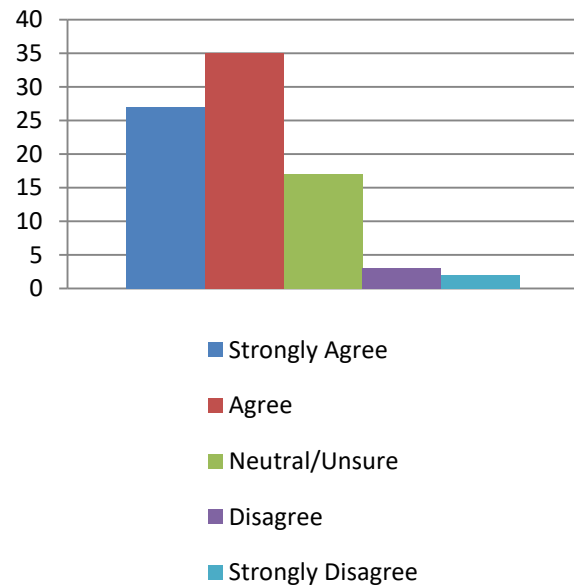
Not Actual Data
Sample Report Template

Percentage of *Discerning Our Future Together* poll respondents who say that the number of people who participate in any part of this congregation's ministry over the last 3 years has:



3% Attended less than three years
3% Don't know
18% Did not answer

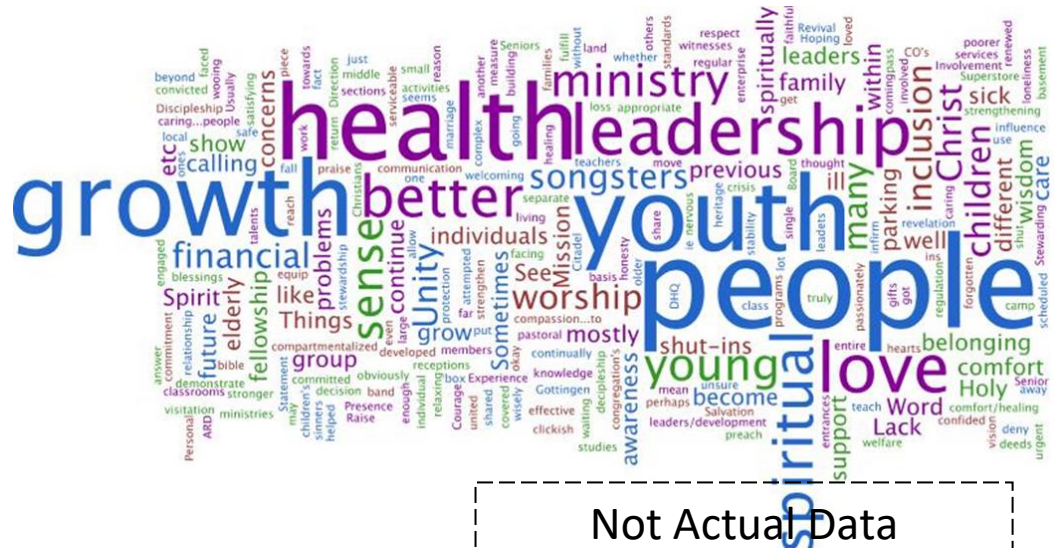
Percentage of *Discerning Our Future Together* respondents who agreed or disagreed with the statement: “I have a strong sense of belonging to my congregation.”



16% Did not answer

Average weekly worship service attendance	Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
	Attendance	67	70	71	70	73

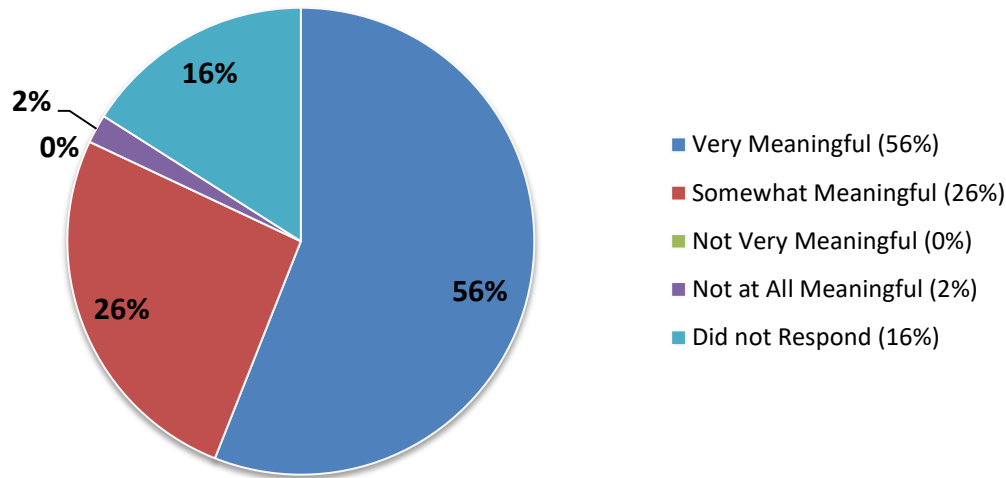
When you have personally prayed for your congregation, what have been some of the issues you have prayed about?



Not Actual Data

Sample Report Template

Percentage of respondents of the *Discerning Our Future Together* poll who responded to the statement: "Is the idea of stewardship..."

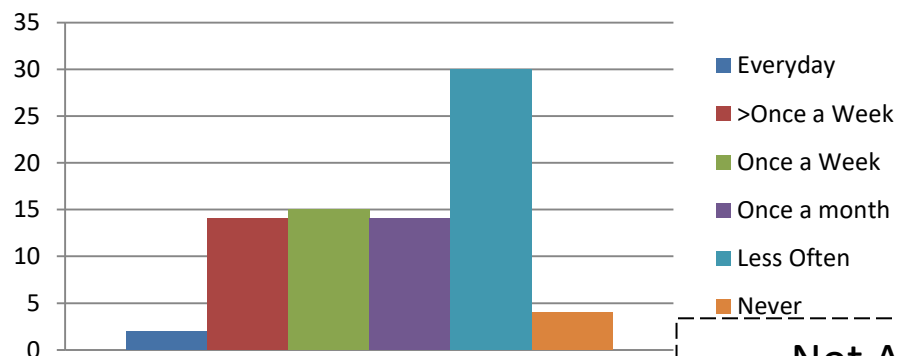


Congregational weekly giving (from the Finance Department at Territorial Headquarters):

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Amount	\$2,673	\$2,653	\$2,076	\$2,673	\$2,653
Average/Cartridge	\$38	\$37	\$31	\$38	\$37

Percentage of respondents of the *Discerning Our Future Together* Poll to the question:

"How often in the last 12 months have you volunteered in the community (with The Salvation Army or any other organization)?"



Congregational Service in the Community, as identified from SAMIS:

Community & Family Services

Community Care Ministries – Hospital and Private Home Visits

Red Cap Anger Management

Not Actual Data

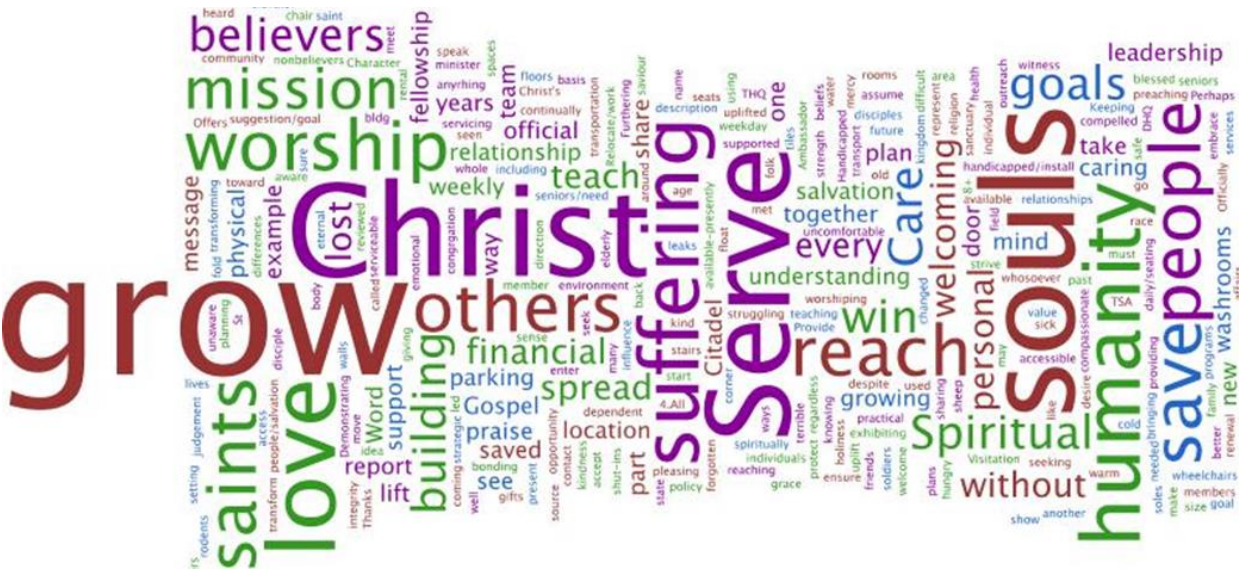
21% Did not answer

Sample Report Template

From the *Discerning Our Future Together* poll, the number (53) and percentage of respondents who indicated that they have attended the corps for less than three years:

Less than 3 years	2	4%
3 years or more	51	96%

Poll respondent descriptions of the vision, mission or goals for the corps:



Official statement of the vision, mission or goals for Community Church (from Annual Review):

The mission of Community Church is to share the love of Jesus, help people in need and be a transforming influence in our community.

Not Actual Data
Sample Report Template



Not Actual Data

Sample Report Template