



# Studying Your Reality— Where Are We Now?

Use the following detailed questions to explore the true contours of your congregational life—how you have embraced the margins, as a congregation and as a denomination; and how you have been less than radically welcoming, as a congregation and as a denomination.

The assessment presents questions for each of the five areas of congregational life: **Mission and Vision, Identity, Ministries and Relationships, Leadership and Feedback Systems, and Worship.** For each set of questions, feel free to engage others in the conversation: newcomers and old-timers, people from different cultural and class backgrounds, families and single people, those who hold power and those who are on the margins. In some instances (for example, when determining your identity versus the identity of your neighborhood), you might also pose the questions to local civic and community leaders.

The sets of questions are detailed and comprehensive, for the purpose of a thorough assessment. If your time is limited, or you are at the earlier stages in planning and discussion, begin with the central question and then look over the supporting questions and see which ones seem most relevant and urgent for your context.

## Your Mission and Vision

### **Central Question:**

*What is your congregation's stated purpose (mission) and what are the plans and future goals toward which you are actually moving (vision)? How do they differ from your dream? How do they reflect it?*

- What is your church's mission or vision? Is it publicly stated? Did the congregation have any input?
- What does it communicate about what you value and how you practice your values?

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- Does the mission/vision actually shape what you do and how you look as a community? Does it get preached? Do committees and leaders reference it as they develop programs?
  - What is already radically welcoming about your mission and vision? How can this positive experience equip you for the work ahead?

## Your Identity

### Central Question:

*What groups are part of your congregation? Your surrounding community? Which groups' voices and values most shape the life of the community? How does this differ from your dream? How does it reflect it?*

- Who are you? Take stock of the congregation's dominant races, ethnicities, linguistic groups, ages, sexual orientations, class backgrounds, regional affiliations, physical abilities, etc.
- Which group's voices and values have historically shaped your congregation and its practices? How? Ask the same question of your denomination.
- Which groups of people shape the congregation and its practices—who are the “insiders”—today? What is the story behind this pattern?
- Which groups have historically been on the congregation's margins, either inside or just outside? Why? What groups are on the denomination's margins?
- Which groups are inside the congregation but disempowered today? What is the story behind this pattern?
- Which groups of people are within a one-mile radius? Are they part of the congregation? If so, why? If not, what is the story behind this pattern?
- What is already radically welcoming about your identity? How does this prepare you for the work ahead?

## Your Ministries and Relationships

### Central Questions:

*What activities are you engaged in? What are your community and ministry relationships like? How do your ministries and relationships differ from your dream? How do they reflect it?*

- What ministries are you engaged in? Take account of pastoral care, evangelism, community service, justice ministries, community life, stewardship, Christian formation and external relationships.

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- What are the stated ministry goals? What are the implicit ministry goals?
  - Which groups tend to participate in which ministries? Are there some conspicuous patterns: groups who only work with each other, ministries that remain segregated along some demographic line? Why are these patterns present?
  - In your social ministries, who is serving and who is being served—in other words, are you “doing for” The Other or “doing with”?
  - Who are your ministry partners? How do you relate to your ministry partners—in other words, who holds the power to control your external partnerships?
  - What is already radically welcoming about your ministries and relationships? How will this prepare you for the work ahead?

## Your Leadership and Feedback Systems

### Central Question:

*Which groups tend to be in charge? Who makes decisions, and who has access to decision-makers? How do your leadership and feedback systems differ from your dream? How do they reflect it?*

- What are the key power positions in your congregation? In your denomination? What groups hold those positions?
- Are there power brokers beyond these posts? What groups hold that power?
- Whose leadership do people seem to gravitate toward and trust? Whose leadership is less trusted by the majority of members?
- What are the dominant styles and methods for leadership? What kind of leadership do people most trust? What groups are likely to exercise this kind of authority?
- What are the dominant expectations and requirements for leadership? Think about education, class, experience, longevity, conference attendance, etc.
- Who is being mentored or nurtured?
- Do your meeting times and locations exclude certain groups from taking part in leadership?
- Whose voice gets heard and honored? Who hears about and influences important decisions?
- Who is being left out of the leadership circle? Are there some common traits or assumptions about these people?
- What is already radically welcoming about your leadership and feedback systems? How will this experience prepare you for the work ahead?

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## Your Worship

### Central Question:

*Whose culture and values get expressed in worship? Who is not present or might not feel at home in your worship? How does this differ from your dream? How does it reflect it?*

- What is the lived purpose of liturgy and music in your congregation? What do people tend to experience, share, learn or encounter? Ask the same question of your denomination.
- What are the expectations regarding liturgy and music in your congregation? In your denomination? How should it be conducted? Who should be involved?
- How does worship look and feel? If there is more than one service, focus on the one that is best-attended or the one most of the church's key leaders attend. Whose cultural and aesthetic values shape the worship? Whose voice, image or presence shows up less often, if at all, in worship?
- Is your worship accessible to people who do not know your traditions? How would someone who is new to the church find out what words to speak, where to go to receive Communion, when or why to stand or sit or take part in other communal gestures?
- Do you have greeters? What is their purpose? How do they function?
- What is already radically welcoming about your worship? How will this prepare you for the work ahead?