


MOVING FORWARD

2:18

A 40-DAY
DISCERNMENT EXPERIENCE
FOR
CONGREGATIONS

SAMPLE
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*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths."*

Proverbs 3:5 - 6

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*"Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain."
Psalm 127:1*

Welcome to **MOVING FORWARD 2:18**,

Grace and peace to you who have decided to journey with your congregation through this time of discernment regarding God's calling for your church.

Throughout the study, you will be focusing on prayer, scripture study, and several activities designed to help your congregation discern God's will for your future.

As you engage the study, consider the following truths:

*Jesus Christ established the church for His purposes
(Matthew 16:18)*

*The Holy Spirit graces and equips each church to fulfill its unique calling
(1st Corinthians 12:4 - 7)*

*When we seek Him together, His presence is among us
(Matthew 18:19 - 20)*

May your efforts over the next few weeks be fruitful and may you come to embrace your church's role in God's kingdom more fully.



HOW THE STUDY WORKS

Your Commitment

Daily

Spend time in prayer and scripture reflection

Weekly

- Pray, meditate, and consider the weekly focus questions
- Complete the weekly homework assignment
- Meet with your group to discuss the insights gained from your activities

As your group meets, each participant will have the opportunity to share thoughts and insights on the week's material. Your group's responses will be recorded on your ***Church Profile Poster*** (page 10).

Your Church's Commitment

After the completion of the study, your group's ***Church Profile Poster*** will be given to the church's leadership. This group will then work together to compile the information and to prayerfully develop a vision and plan for your church to move forward based upon your responses.

If your church has multiple groups participating in the study, then responses from all groups will be used to develop these plans.

PRAYER AND DISCERNMENT EXERCISES

Prayer and discernment are the cornerstones for both our own personal journeys as well as our efforts as a group. If we hope for our understanding to be Spirit-led, we must make time each day to receive what God has for us.

Each week, you will find daily prayer exercises. You are encouraged to pray through one scripture daily instead of all in one sitting. In this way, you will develop a rhythm of listening for the Holy Spirit throughout your days, and hopefully, become more aware of the Divine Presence with you.

Included there are instructions for a Lectio Divina practice. This method of praying through scripture helps us to develop a practice of listening deeply to what God may be telling us.

Even if this practice of formal prayer times is new for you, try to follow the schedule for the duration of the study. There is space provided for keeping notes, thoughts, or ideas. By writing down those things that occur to you over time, you might be led to discern a pattern, or recurring theme.

If you would rather listen, or read the passages online, please try the free online website and app: www.biblegateway.com. As well, using your own Bible can also lead you to some wonderful encounters with the Spirit.

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| Mornings: | Begin each day with the provided scriptural reference. |
| Afternoons: | Take a few minutes to disconnect from the world. Look around and intentionally look for the presence of the Holy Spirit in your midst. |
| Before Bed: | Take 10 minutes and recount your day. Ask the Lord to show you where He was at work in your surroundings. Recall your activities. Thank Him for the grace He has bestowed upon you. Consider your scripture again. Do you have any more insights from the events of the day? |

LECTIO DIVINA

PRAYER & SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

Made popular by St. Benedict in the 6th century, Lectio Divina, *sacred reading*, is a centuries-old practice of meditating deeply on scripture and what it means for us personally. It is a powerful tool when used to open up the scripture for our daily lives.

The process includes reading a passage of scripture slowly, for four iterations. Following each reading, there will be questions for you to consider. Lectio Divina treats Holy Scripture as the living Word, instead of historical text to be studied. The goal is not be informed, but instead, to be **transformed** by our interaction with the Word and the Holy Spirit.

First Reading

1. What words or phrases stick out to me?

Second Reading

2. What images do I see?
3. What emotions do I feel?

Third Reading

4. What might God be trying to say to me?

Fourth Reading

5. How will I respond?

This form of prayer is best done in the morning. Doing so allows the words to sink into your soul throughout the day, allowing the Holy Spirit to continue revealing God's message long after you have completed the exercise. God's revelation is a mysterious phenomenon. Sometimes we hear or see with great clarity. Sometimes, nothing at all. And, other times, it could take days to receive a full image or word. Do not be discouraged. Just accept whatever comes to you with an attitude of thanksgiving and allow it to take shape in your soul. Allow the Spirit to lead you, and trust that your Creator is fully engaged with you.

"Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart..."

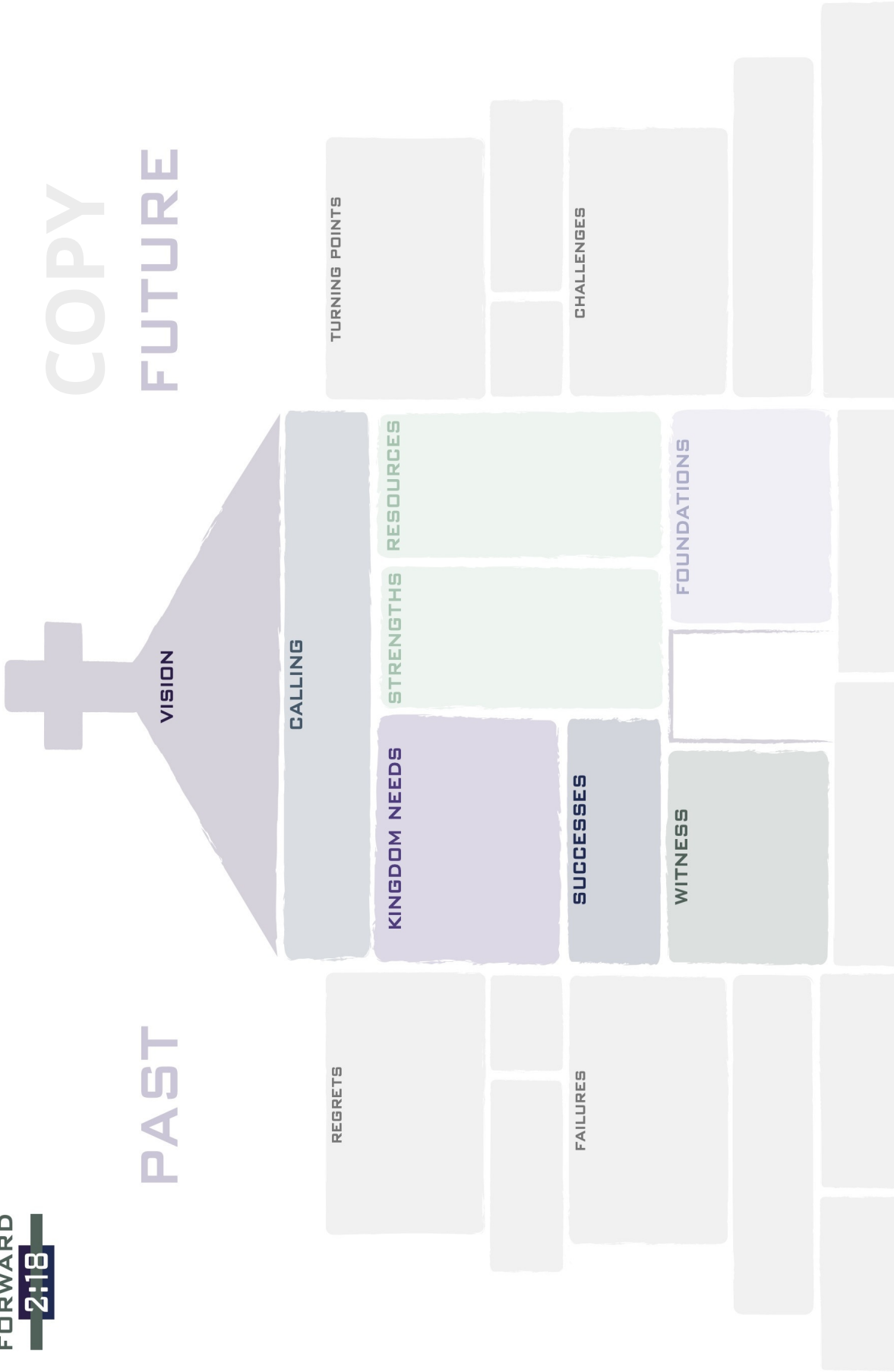
Jeremiah 29:12 - 13

OUR CHURCH PROFILE

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FUTURE



"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on solid rock." - Matthew 7:24

THE CHURCH PROFILE

Each week you will be engaging with the following questions. These questions are designed to help your church see where you have been, your current circumstances, and where God is leading you in the future. As a congregation, you will pray, think, and discuss what is most important to you.

As you consider these questions, use the graphic on the opposite page to record your insights. When your group meets, you will share your thoughts with each other, to be recorded on a much larger poster.

At the completion of the study, your group's poster will be used with all others by your church's leadership team to develop a vision and plan for moving forward. Through your participation, you will be a part of your congregation's discernment and decision-making process for the future. Your input matters.

OUR WITNESS

What are the beliefs, values, and message that God has entrusted our congregation to share with the world?

OUR PAST

Where have we failed in our witness?

What have we learned from our failures?

Do we have any regrets?
Things we wish we had done differently?

Where have we succeeded in our witness?

What have we learned from our successes?

KINGDOM NEEDS

Who needs us?

OUR PRESENT

What are our strengths?

What needs improvement?

How has God gifted and resourced us?

OUR FUTURE

How will we respond to God's call?

What needs to change?

What needs to stay the same?

What are our challenges?

How will we treat each other in disagreement?

OUR CALLING

Where is God calling us now?

WEEK 1

Please complete the homework in this section for your next session:

In consideration of this week's focus question, record your thoughts with each day's Prayer and Scripture Reflection.

This Week's Focus Question:

Why did God create the church?

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DAILY PRAYER & SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

"Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him."

And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

Acts 2:37 - 42



"Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."

Acts 2:43 - 47



"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Romans 12:1 - 2



"And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:18 - 20

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, now you have received mercy."

1st Peter 2:9 - 10

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HOMework

Think and pray deeply about the following question. Then write a statement that summarizes what you believe your church's unique witness to be.

Be specific: Is it an idea, an action, a belief system?

Be concise: No more than two sentences.

What is our witness?

What are the beliefs, values, and message that God has entrusted our congregation to share with the world?

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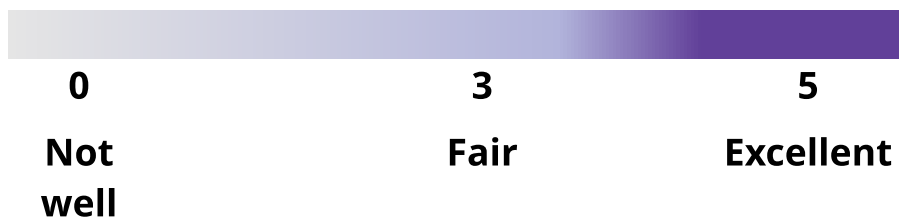
NOTES



MINISTRY ASSESSMENTS

In this section, you will assess the strength of each ministry area. This is not a criticism, it is building a collective vision of those things your church does well and those things that need improvement. This is the first step you will take in learning where God would like to see your future efforts focused. So friends, speak the truth in love.

In each ministry section, you will be asked questions. Grade your church using the 0 to 5 scale. 0 indicates that your church needs improvement in this area, 5 indicates that your church excels in this area.



Most questions are concretely-based upon activities or circumstances. However, the final question in each section measures your church's attitude toward this particular ministry area. Pray about this one. It will not be easy to answer, however, the answers to these questions will provide much fruit for the process.

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything."

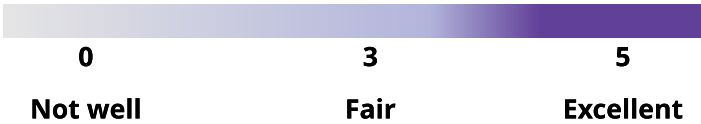
Colossians 1:15 - 18

The attitude question in each section is based upon this Scripture:

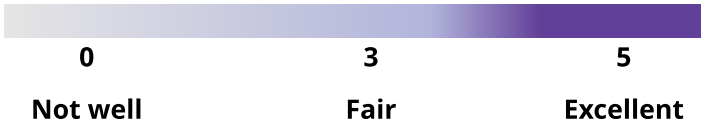
"Does our church recognize the lordship of Jesus Christ in this particular ministry? Do we intentionally seek His will and guidance in all our activities and decisions? How, exactly, are we doing that?"

WORSHIP

Do people expect to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit during our worship services?



Are our worship services designed specifically to bring glory to God?



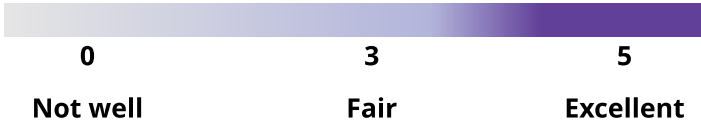
Is our worship setting comfortable?



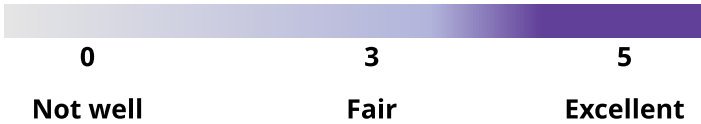
Are the sermons biblically sound? Do they encourage us in our spiritual growth?



Are the music, prayers, sacraments, and liturgies planned with excellence?

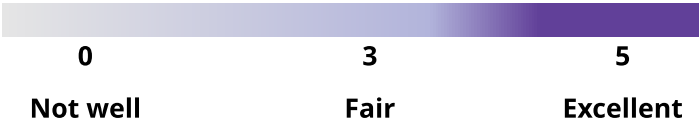


Our church's attitude:
Are we intentionally seeking the guidance of Jesus for our worship ministry?

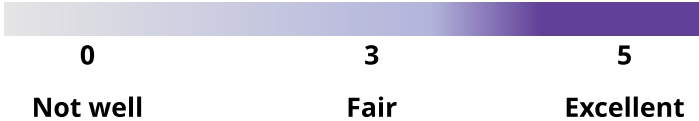


DISCIPLESHIP

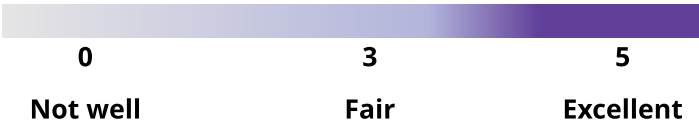
Does our church have an intentional plan for helping people grow deeper in their relationship with Christ?



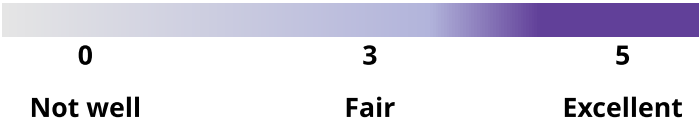
Does our church offer regular opportunities for people to experience Wesley's "Means of Grace?"



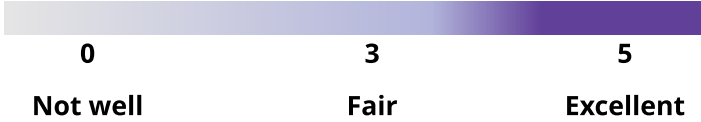
Does our church actively teach spiritual practices and disciplines?



Does our church have the means to accommodate all people who wish to participate in discipleship opportunities?

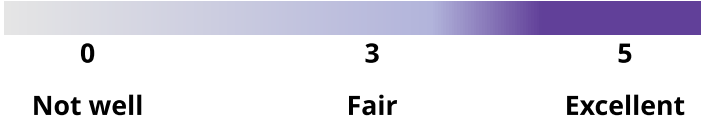


Are our members knowledgeable of their spiritual gifts? Are they serving based upon their individual callings and giftedness?



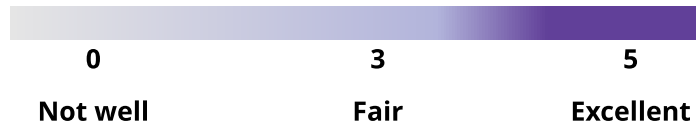
Our church's attitude:

Are we intentionally seeking the guidance of Jesus for growing disciples?

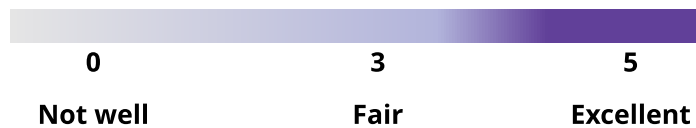


OUTREACH

Do we have an intentional plan for reaching the unchurched in our community?



Are our members equipped and encouraged to share their faith with people outside the church?



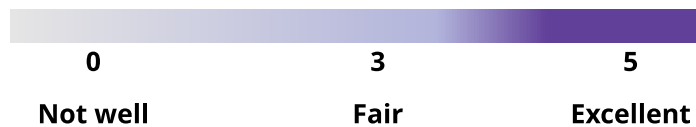
Does our church actively serve needs in our community?



Does our church offer events/programs that appeal to outsiders?

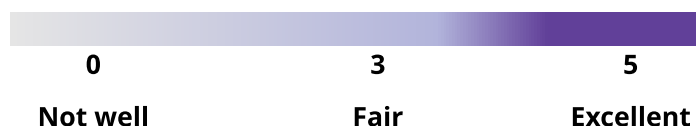


Are our members consistently inviting others to church?



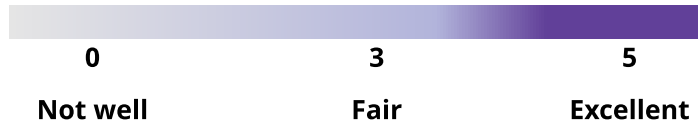
Our church's attitude:

Are we intentionally seeking the Lord's will in ways to connect with our community?

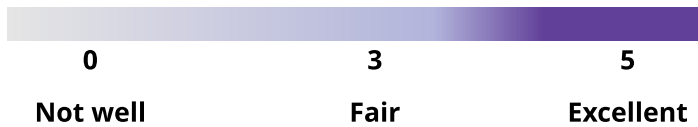


STUDENTS

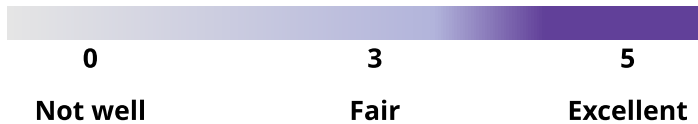
Does our church have a well-defined plan and educational goals for our students?



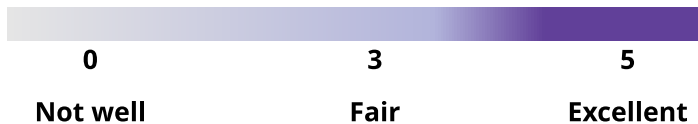
Following Confirmation, are our Confirmands continuing their faith journeys as part of our Student Ministry?



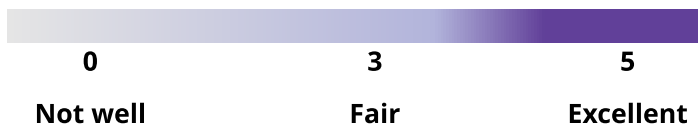
Does our Student Ministry prepare our students to continue their faith journeys after leaving home?



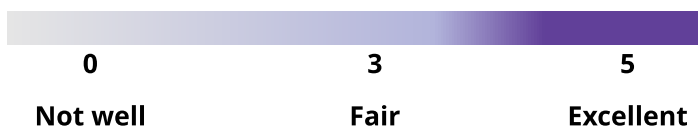
Is our Student Ministry Director well-qualified, well-trained, and adequately resourced to provide the discipleship experiences we want for our students?



Are our Student Ministry servants called, spiritually gifted, and well-trained in the areas in which they are asked to serve?



Our church's attitude:
Are we intentionally seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in how we approach Student Ministry?



MINISTRY ASSESSMENT SCORES

Return to each ministry assessment and find an average score for each ministry. You can do this by adding all scores on the page and then dividing by the number of questions. For example:

Total of all Scores in Worship: 22
Number of Questions: 6
Average Worship Score: 3.7

WORSHIP	_____
DISCIPLESHIP	_____
RESOURCES	_____
LEADERSHIP	_____
OUTREACH	_____
FIRST IMPRESSIONS	_____
CHILDREN'S MINISTRY	_____
STUDENT MINISTRY	_____
MISSIONS	_____
CONGREGATIONAL CARE	_____

As you record your scores, consider any areas that you rated very low, or very high. What was the basis of your decision? Make note of those issues on the next page and be prepared to share your thoughts in your next group meeting.

MINISTRY INSIGHTS

HOMESWORK

It is often difficult to see the world from a new perspective if we remain in our familiar settings.

Consider praying the prayer below each day and actively observing what God is revealing to you.

Below are some suggestions that might help you see the world from God's perspective.

"A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

Ezekiel 36:26

- Walk around your community, paying attention to the people and circumstances you encounter.
- Drive to areas of your community that you normally do not visit. What do you see? Take pictures of things that call your attention so that you can re-visit them during your prayer time.
- Watch your local news each day.
- Request a meeting with local government, school, and community leaders. Ask what the community's greatest needs are from their perspective.
- Speak to friends in other churches and service organizations. Ask about their activities. Do they need help?
- Look inside your church. Are the spiritual, physical, emotional, and relational needs of your own church family being well met?

Lord Jesus,

I want our church to follow You in all we do. You have gifted us and graced us to be a part of Your mission. Help me to see where You are at work, and where You are calling us to be faithful servants, stewards, and witnesses.

Give me Your vision. Break my heart where Yours breaks. Speak to each of us in ways that we can understand, that we might, collectively, discern Your will for us. And I will do my very best to be obedient to your leading.

In the name of Jesus I pray,

Amen



WEEK 6

Please complete the homework in this section for your next session:

As you pray through this week's scriptures, ask the Holy Spirit to help you with the answers to the focus questions.

We are all human. It is possible that you will hear things you do not agree with during these discussions. It is possible that decisions will be made by the larger body that you are not inclined to support.

How will you respond to each other when this happens? Will you continue to glorify God and love each other?

This Week's Focus Questions:

How will we respond to God's call?

What about our church needs to change?

What foundations of our church must remain the same?

What are our current challenges?

How will we respond to each other in disagreement?

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DAILY PRAYER & SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Romans 12:1 - 2

"Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

Revelation 2:7

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

John 14:15

"Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

Revelation 3:6

*"Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God."*

Matthew 5:9

"Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

Revelation 3:22

HOMework

In coming to the end of this discernment period, consider these focus questions and pray about them. Ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten you to His will for your church.

How will we respond to God's call for our church?

What is our next step?

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What are our challenges?

What is keeping us from fulfilling our calling?

*Record these as **Challenges** on the **Church Profile**.*

What needs to change?

Most things we do in church once had a good purpose. Sometimes, they outlive their fruitfulness. What ideas, activities, or systems inside our church no longer serve our calling? What needs to change, or even be eliminated, in order to be good stewards of God's resources and vision for our church?

*Record these as **Turning Points** on the **Church Profile**.*

What needs to stay the same?

Who are we? What are the activities, values, and beliefs that must remain the same for our church to retain our identity?

*Record these as **Foundations** on the **Church Profile**.*

How will we respond to each other?

How will we covenant to treat each other in the face of disagreement?