



APPLICATION TOOL 3

Investigating the Life of a Congregation

Theological Commitments

The first area of investigation focuses on the theological commitments of the congregation. This set of questions enable congregational leaders to delve deeply into the core beliefs, language, and actions that define the congregations' theology, mission and vision.

- Identify the primary names, images and metaphors utilized to describe God.
- Who is the subject of sentences when church leaders and members speak about ministry or actions taken or when they speak about God?
- How are God's presence and actions evidenced and expressed?
- How are "life in Christ," "discipleship" and "call/vocation" understood and practiced?
- What "urgency," "role" and "form(s)" does God's mission have in the life of the church and its ministry?
- What theological commitments are contained in the mission/vision statement of the congregation and of the youth ministry?

Qualities of Ministry

The second area of investigation focuses on the qualities of the congregation and ministry. This set of questions enable congregational leaders to delve deeply into the manner in which the people and congregation value youth ministry, the quality of their relationships, and the commitment and competence of their leadership.

- Search for indications of youth and youth ministry being a high priority in the congregation. For example, pay attention to facility, budget, leadership, leadership development, schedules, relationships, value placed on youth, the gifts youth bring to ministry, and so on.
- Investigate the role of the pastor(s) in developing and sustaining youth ministry in the congregation. Are there indications that the pastor(s) understand, value and support youth ministry through their particular role in the leadership of the church?

- Describe the qualities, types and dynamics of the relationships among the members of the congregation including the relationships with and among youth.
- Look for evidence regarding the congregation's or the youth ministry's sense of community. Develop a description of the values, practices and tone that shape the congregation's and youth ministry's sense of belonging and care for one another.
- Identify the cast of leadership involved in youth ministry. Include both clergy and lay, paid and volunteer, adult and youth. In each case chronicle the nature, length and quality of their leadership. Make note of any indications as to their education and training. Do they work as a team?

Contextualized Ministry Practices

The third area of investigation focuses on the contextualized ministry practices of the congregation. This set of questions enable congregational leaders to delve deeply into the particular ministry activities in each setting, with attention given to the way these activities have been adapted to their context and integrated with each other.

- Find any connections the youth ministry has with parents and families. Describe the ways in which the congregation and household work together to develop the faith and life of young people.
- Identify all the ministry practices utilized in the youth ministry. Consider any activity that engages youth and the congregation in relationships, study, prayer, mission, and so on. Look also, for those activities that seem to develop or support the youth ministry itself.
- Pay attention to the manner in which the ministry practices in the congregation are put together. Does there seem to be a pattern and purpose to their timing and relationship with one another? Are they adapted in any way that you can tell to the peculiar setting of the congregation and its people?
- How is your prayer life today? Consider the following questions:
 - When do you pray?
 - Where do you pray?
 - What do you do during your prayer time—e.g., read the Bible, contemplate, listen to music, be silent, or recite traditional prayers?
 - What do you pray *for* or pray *about*?
- How has your prayer life changed or grown or evolved over the course of your life? What was your prayer life like when you were a child? a teenager? a young adult? a midlife adult? an older adult? (Answer as many as apply to you.)
- Which prayer traditions have been helpful to you? How? When? Why, or why not?
- What new ways of praying have you tried? Have they been helpful? How? Why? Or why not?

- Has there ever been a time when you made no effort to pray and “gave things a rest,” either inadvertently or on purpose, in your prayer life? Why? What was this like? Looking back, can you see any benefits from this experience?
- Have you ever felt “stuck” in your prayer? When? How? What do you do about it?
- Has there ever been a time when you couldn’t pray, but felt sustained by the prayers offered on your behalf?
- Have you experienced any change in God’s faithfulness to you?
- Have you experienced any change in your faithfulness to God?
- When were the prayer times when you felt closest to God? Why?
- Would you say that prayer is an integral part of your everyday life today? Why or why not? If not, how could it be?