



# a new approach to church visiting process guide



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Christian Reformed Church  
**Pastor Church  
Resources**

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We welcome your comments. Call us at the office of Pastor Church Resources (616-224-0837 or toll free 877-279-9994). Email us at [pastorchurch@crcna.org](mailto:pastorchurch@crcna.org).

# Tab 1

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Spring 2018

Greetings, Friends:

One observation to be made in life and in the ministries of the Christian Reformed Church pertains to the intersection of tradition and innovation. Examples abound where a static adherence to tradition fails to keep pace with a changing environment. Examples also abound of new tools, techniques and programs that were begun with significant promise but have become dusty three ring binders in storage closets down the hall.

However, I am noticing that when long standing traditions are combined with up to date innovations, some very exciting dynamics begin to develop. Such is what I am observing with the long standing practice of church visiting and the emerging innovation of engaging congregations with a healthy church discernment process.

As you read the following guide to church visiting I hope you, too, are encouraged by the way in which the Healthy Church process can help the tradition of church visiting in the CRCNA become the covenantal, encouraging and supportive practice it was intended to be. This is not the only church visiting practice to be considered, but, from where I sit, it is a very hopeful practice for the churches and people of the CRCNA.

I trust the Spirit will bless each of you, your churches and classes as these approaches are practiced and learned from over the next few years. I also trust that you who agree to being church visitors will find this approach to be encouraging for your own faith as well.

In Christ,

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Spring 2018

Hello from Pastor Church Resources (PCR)!

My name is Dave Den Haan, and I have the privilege of serving the church as a ministry consultant with PCR. I would like welcome you to the important work of church visiting. I would also like to introduce you to this Church Visiting Manual and the new approach to church visiting that's described within it.

I remember participating, as a young pastor, in church visits in which significant time was spent making sure that the church books were in good order, that church meetings were held regularly, and that office bearers had signed the form of subscription. These may be important elements of a church's structure and organization, but they aren't the heart and soul of the church. More importantly, the focus on structure and organization sometimes kept us from discerning what God was doing and then following his lead.

The approach to church visiting that is described in this manual focuses on ministry fruitfulness. It fosters discussion about how God is at work within his church. It explores how the church is responding to God's leading. It celebrates ministry!

At the center of this process is a survey-based conversation in which eleven areas of church health are explored (see Appendix 5). This survey-based conversation is bundled into a three-step process (see "Guidelines for Conducting Church Visiting" in Tab 3, pages 1-2). As you might imagine, this three-step process requires time and energy. However, it has potential for significant conversations, the kind of conversations that often lead to deeper life and fruitfulness.

As you make use of this manual and then lead churches into this visitation process let us know your thoughts on how well the process works. Tell us how we can improve it and how we might help the church more effectively. We value your input!

Thank you for being part of this important work. Thank you for walking with us into this new approach to church visiting. And thank God, with us, for calling us to be his partners in the work of building the church.

Gratefully yours,

Dave Den Haan  
Ministry Consultant

# Tab 2

## **Framework and Expected Outcomes**

## **Framework and Expected Outcomes for Church Visiting**

### **Framework**

1. Church visiting will be conducted within a spiritual discernment framework with church leaders using self-assessment and action steps to aid in growing faithful disciples eager to serve Christ's mission in the world.
2. The process will be significantly modified and revitalized through the use of a Healthy Church Executive Survey (HCES) and appropriate follow-up by a church visiting team.
3. Each Classis will have within it a cadre of trained church visiting teams selected and supported by the classis. Each team will be expected to develop an on-going relationship with assigned churches by:
  - a. Being assigned to the same churches for multiple years.
  - b. Having no more than 2-3 churches per team.
  - c. Following a coaching approach within which there will be a pre-visit, a formal church visit, then follow-up and support through appropriate means.
4. Teams will receive training and be supported by appropriate regional and denominational personnel. Such training will include foundational coach training and training in use of the HCES and other appropriate assessment tools.

### **Outcomes Desired**

1. Revitalize church visiting within the context of classis – Use trained church visitors to develop and sustain an effective relationship that assists church ministry through a collaborative approach.
2. Conduct church visiting within a spiritual discernment framework - Help church leaders discern more clearly, through discovery and listening, what God is calling them personally and the congregation as a whole to be and do. Church visiting discussions will be conducted within a framework of spiritual discernment.
3. More purposeful action at the congregational level - Obtain greater clarity and consequently more purposeful action regarding individual and congregational discipleship, including self-assessment and action, as well as strengthening congregational ministry.
4. Foster continuing classical renewal by:
  - a. Encouraging clusters of congregations to share results and insights, and to work together at strengthening ministry;
  - b. Using aggregated and cumulative survey results to identify strengths to celebrate and challenges that classis can address to strengthen ministry for leaders and congregations.

### **Organization**

1. Church Visiting Teams
  - a. Assume transformation in the role of church visitors requiring specific training and support that can initially be provided by appropriate regional and denominational personnel.
  - b. Use ordained elder/pastor teams selected by classis that are willing to work in a collaborative way and receive the necessary training.

2. Assume limited number of congregations for each church visiting team, remaining with the same congregations for three-four years in order to build strong relationships.
3. Reporting/Follow-Up – Reports are prepared and shared with council and with the local classis as outlined in church order.
4. Church councils are encouraged to conduct the HCES each year to provide some trend information for comparison and to involve new council members.

#### **Church Visiting and Congregational Health**

1. Leaders are encouraged to consider engaging their congregation in a discussion using the Healthy Church Discernment Process (See #2 below). While the HCES is limited to 22 items, this approach does provide a way for congregations to learn the vocabulary and engage in discussions around issues of congregational ministry and personal spiritual practices.
2. A more robust and complete congregational involvement is available through the Healthy Church Discernment Process that uses a much expanded survey around the same eleven areas of church health. While this is a longer process led by a designated church team, it provides deeper insight into these areas with the potential to effect the deep change often required in congregational renewal.



# Tab 3

## **Conducting the Church Visit**

## **Guidelines for Conducting Church Visiting**

Church visitors are urged to make every effort to conduct their visits within a spiritual discernment framework by helping church leaders to see more clearly how God wants them to lead the local church. ***The desired result is that churches engage in purposeful conversations by using self-assessment and action steps to grow faithful disciple's eager to serve Christ's mission in the world.***

Normally there are at least three contacts with church leaders by the church visiting team. These are outlined as follows.

### **I. Guide to the Pre-visit**

#### **A. Outcome/Purpose of the Pre-Visit**

1. Provide overview of expectations.
2. Set provisional calendar.
3. Answer questions.

#### **B. Pre-Visit Attendees**

- A. Church Visitor Team.
- B. Pastor and one or two Council Leader(s) as desired.

#### **C. Lead time needed**

Schedule *the pre-visit four to six weeks prior to the church visit* to allow completion of the survey with results sent back and distributed to the council members one week prior to the church visit.

#### **D. Areas to Cover in the Pre-Visit**

1. Discuss the document "Framework and Expected Outcomes for Church Visiting".
2. Look over the structure, format and use of the Healthy Church Executive Survey.
3. Decision about who to involve. Assume all council members. Also could include staff and/or ministry leaders desired.
4. Establish survey launch window by setting dates for its opening and closing.
5. Help church leaders understand that the survey material is drawn from a congregational process called the Healthy Church Discernment Process that utilizes a much larger survey.
6. Show how the results are formatted and used. Provide a sample of the corporate and personal sections along with a sample chart of results.
7. Discuss which supplemental questions to use in the visit.

### **II. Guide to the initial council visit**

*Because of the nature of discernment and the time required (approximately 90 minutes), encourage councils to set aside the agenda of the regular council meeting or to schedule a special council meeting for this visit. The date has been set in the calendar of the Pre-visit.*

#### **A. Distribute results of survey and a copy of the-comments to all council members one week before the council visit.**

Ask council members to look over the results and to jot down some observations and questions for discussion at the council church visiting event.

**B. Conduct the visit (approximately 1.5 hours)**

While each situation is unique and may require adjustments, the following is a way that the visit may be conducted.

1. Prayer time (Lectio Divina or other – see Appendix 3 for sample) (20 minutes)
2. Presentation of survey results and the survey Q & A. Also include the Comments (these may need “cleaning” to avoid negative references to specific persons); one option would be to summarize what is important from them. (10 minutes)
3. Conversation #1: Do these results describe us accurately? Corporately and personally? (10 minutes)
4. Conversation #2: What do we need to celebrate in these results? And what do we need to pay attention to? (15 minutes)
5. Conversation #3: What’s next? (10 minutes)
6. If some Supplemental Questions have been pre-selected or other issues identified, discuss these at this time. See Appendix 10. (10 minutes)
7. Discuss the follow-up expectations; entertain questions (5 minutes)

**III. Guide in Conducting Follow-up**

*Church Visitors should follow-up around outcomes of the visit, encouraging, supporting and assisting council and pastor. While the amount and frequency of contact will vary, regular contact is encouraged. The goal is to build relationships and trust within a coaching framework. This can be done in a number of ways:*

1. As a face-to-face meeting with leaders and/or the council
2. With regular, perhaps monthly, phone calls, Skype, email, or texting to pastor and/or leaders

**Strategies** –Church Visitors are encouraged to challenge councils on the following items since communication with the congregation is the key to discernment and to moving forward.

1. How is council communicating with the congregation?
2. Have significant items:
  - a. Appeared in a church newsletter?
  - b. Been included in a regular email distribution?
  - c. Appeared in appropriate ways within worship services and/or addressed in ‘Town Hall’ forums?
  - d. Been integrated into council and/or church team agendas?

## **Church Visitor Coaching**

1. Coaching is a process of coming alongside a church to help them discover God's agenda for their ministry while also seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance to see that the agenda becomes reality.
2. The coaching relationship is a crucible that is safe, non-toxic and dependable where discussion of and implementation of change can take place.
3. A coach is not a problem-solver, teacher, advisor or expert. The coach's main purpose is to listen, to act as a sounding board and to raise awareness of the issues being discussed. A coach helps the church explore, discover and fulfill their God-given calling.
4. Since working through change can often be demanding, an important role of the coach is to provide encouragement and assistance if the process becomes stalled.
5. The key to effective coaching is first to listen and then to ask open-ended questions. Do not rush the process. It must be deliberate and thoughtful.
6. Finally, coaching must always have as its goal discerning God's preferred outcome not that of the participants.

## Bringing Together Church Visiting and Coaching

### Some Coaching Questions

After the Healthy Church Executive Survey (HCES) is completed and the data distributed to the council a concern for the church visitors is, “How can we help the council start with the right conversation?”

*Note: There may be some tension between HCES results and a council member’s opinion about what is the most important thing we should talk about.*

1. What question would you like to discuss which is related to the HCES results?
2. What do you see as your strengths? Challenges?
3. Which of your values are most evident in the HCES results?
4. What changes would you like to make?
5. Is this a roadmap for your future or a description of your past?
6. How will this take you where you want to go? What might derail this?
7. What congregational expectations can you most easily address?
8. What are the obstacles to a healthy future for your church?
9. What role do you as deacons, elders and pastoral staff have in helping to shape the future of your church?
10. Where is the sense of urgency in the HCES responses and additional comments?



# Tab 4

## **Using the Survey**

## Using the Survey

The Healthy Church Executive Survey (HCES) is an assessment tool designed to help church leaders gain a clearer understanding of how they view the spiritual health of their congregation and themselves. This survey is composed of 22 statements covering 11 areas of church health (see Appendix 5 for health area descriptions):

- Centrality of God's Word
- Kingdom Extension
- Loving Relationships
- Authentic Spirituality
- Transforming Worship
- Servant Leadership
- Generous Stewardship
- Disciple Making
- Mission and Vision
- Justice and Righteousness
- Children and Youth

Each health area is represented by two statements (see Appendix 6). Those who take the survey respond to all statements using these categories: definitely untrue, hardly true, somewhat true, mostly true, definitely true, and unsure. For each health area, one of the statements refers to the church and the other to oneself. In other words, the responses indicate how true the statements are about the church as perceived by those taking the survey and how true they are about themselves.

Survey results will be reported back to the council through the CV Team. These survey results, along with some open-ended questions, will serve as a basis for the initial church visit discussion.

It is recommended the survey be taken on-line. To make it available to a church, the CV Team will connect with Rodger Rice (see contact information in Appendix 1) and inform him that the church is ready to begin taking the survey. A unique URL or Internet link has been created for each church. The URL for the church will be conveyed to the CV Team working with that church. The CV Team will share the URL with council leadership. The survey Launch Letter template (see Appendix 7) needs to be modified for this church's use (inserting the correct URL). Finally, it will be distributed to everyone at the church who has been designated as a potential survey participant.

While it is preferred that the survey be taken on-line, if there are some who do not use the Internet, a hard copy of the survey (see Appendix 8) can be used to get their responses. The survey Launch Letter needs to designate the person to contact to obtain the hard copy. That person should also collect the hard copies that are completed and make sure that the responses are added on-line. This could result in violating the recommended anonymity of the survey, since someone in the church will see the written responses. However, since no name is attached to any survey, this risk is minimized. But this part of the survey should be handled with strict confidentiality so that trust is not violated.

**The survey for a particular church should be scheduled at least five weeks prior to the date of the initial council visit.** Conducting the survey will take a good two weeks and the Calvin Center for Social Research will need approximately two weeks to process the results and produce the reports for that

particular church. Plan on approximately four weeks between launch of the survey and receiving the survey results. The reports will need to be distributed one week prior to the church visit.

Council leaders should estimate the total number of potential respondents. Church visitors should aim for a 100% participation rate from invited respondents. This estimated number needs to be reported to Rodger Rice. He will use it to calculate the participation rate at any time while the survey is being taken. When participation exceeds 75%, he will consult with the CV Team about when to close down the survey for their church.

How will the leaders of a church use the results? Prior to the initial church visit with the council, the survey results should be distributed so that each council member may give some reflection on them and jot down his/her observations and questions to bring to the meeting.

There are two parts to the survey results: first, a set of bar charts showing the quantitative summary of responses to the 22 survey statements (see Appendix 9), and, second, a set of comments that were written at the end of the survey by respondents. While looking at the bar charts, the following questions might be asked:

- (1) What are the highest scored health areas and what are the lowest scored health areas?
- (2) How do your leaders perceive the church?
- (3) How do they perceive themselves?
- (4) How much consensus or diversity of opinion is there among your church leaders?
- (5) What do you see in these results should be celebrated?
- (6) What aspects of church life challenge you toward improvement?

The written comments can bring awareness of challenges not covered by the quantitative items within the survey. Look for themes or repeated comments that suggest new actions to take.

## **Suggested Questions to Ask of HCES Results**

As you examine the bar charts showing the results of the Healthy Church Executive Survey (HCES), use these questions to help draw out of the results observations useful for answering the question, “What is God calling our church to do at this time, given this information?”

1. What are the highest scored health areas and what are the lowest scored health areas?
2. How do your leaders perceive the church?
3. How do they perceive themselves?
4. How much consensus or diversity of opinion is there among your church leaders?
5. What do you see in these results that should be celebrated?
6. What aspects of church life challenge you toward improvement?

Comments from the survey will be compiled and provided as additional results. They can bring awareness of challenges not covered by the bar chart results. In these comments look for themes or repeated comments that suggest new actions to take.

# Tab 5

## **Appendices**



## Church Visiting Leadership Team Contact Information

The Church Visiting Leadership Team is responsible for the development, implementation and support of the Healthy Church approach to church visiting. The team also has responsibility to introduce classes to this option, provide training for church visiting teams and any needed ongoing support.

The team invites classes to request aggregate summary reports along with other pertinent information drawn from the surveys. This information can be of great value within the covenanting community of churches in identifying shared strengths to celebrate, as well as common challenges that could be jointly addressed.

To evaluate and improve the Healthy Church approach to church visiting, the team needs and encourages feedback. Therefore we welcome comments and may request evaluative information from churches and/or classes.

Below is the team's contact information.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Email</b>	<b>Phone</b>
Carl Kammeraad	carlkammeraad@gmail.com	616-581-1046
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Al Postma	apostma@crcna.org	519-865-0244
Jack Tacoma	jacktacoma@sympatico.ca	519-766-6066

## SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

A fundamental question of the Christian faith is:

### ***How can I/we understand and live the will of God?***

While we struggle to know and to live out the will of God fully and completely, we do live in the New Testament age with the Pentecost promise that we are able to be witnesses, led by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). This is a fulfillment of what Jesus said that He would do by sending a Counselor that will guide us into all Truth (John 16:13). Understanding and living the will of God means that we need to be led by the Holy Spirit.

What is true for the Christian personally is also true for the corporate body of the Church. We are the body of Christ led by the Holy Spirit. And the question is “How do we listen and how do we follow?” This requires discernment, a “sifting through” of our thoughts and plans, our ideas and our experiences together, prayerfully and carefully.

Oswald and Friedrich, in their book, *Discerning Your Congregation's Future* (Alban Institute, 1996), talk about the nature of discernment within the corporate body of the church. Below are some excerpts edited and organized for our purposes:

*“...No one person knows the will of God...We trust that when we are faithful and open, God's will is disclosed to us that we may follow...No one person can discern the will of God, but each of us can glimpse, an understanding of what God desires. By sharing these understandings in the community of faith, we can enable the wisdom and way of God to emerge among us. Through prayerful reflection and empathic sharing, we can let the Spirit move within us and among us to build a consensus about what is the will of God.*

*“Corporate discernment is, in almost every case, more reliable than individual discernment. “*

The authors do acknowledge individual prophetic voices that have been and still are used by God, but go on to say,

*“Even in such cases, however, individuals who believe they have been called to be prophetic voices need to test what they discern as God speaking a prophetic word through them with at least one other person who is judged to be a child and servant of God, a person faithful in prayer and scripture reading. (Therefore)...Unless you perceive and have confirmed that God is calling you as an individual to be a prophetic voice to a faltering community, as you begin to think about engaging in a discernment process, we encourage you to invite all your members to engage in the adventure with you.” (pp x, xi)*

For more on the matter discernment, read the “Preface” and “Introduction” sections in Oswald and Friedrich's book

## USING A DISCERNMENT APPROACH

The word “discernment” literally means “to separate or distinguish” (Latin *discernere*) or to “test in crisis” or “sift through” (Greek *diakrisis*). Someone has said it well that discernment is to “see from God’s perspective” or “seeking God’s heart.” It is first an “uncovering” or “discovery” process rather than a decision-making process. Listening comes first, followed by action.

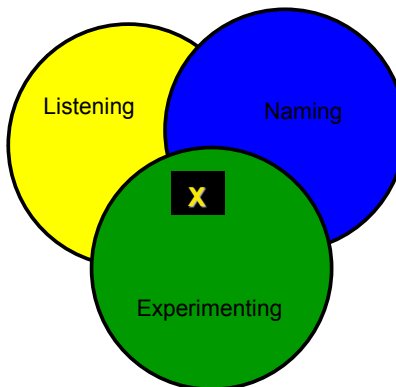
While discernment has several components, the common thread that winds throughout is one of listening and seeking God’s heart. These components have been described by Christians throughout the history of the church.

- *When seeking God’s heart personally or corporately, one must first pray to the point of dispassion.* Dispassion is simply praying for God to lead our church to the point when all who are involved in discussions and in the church can say to God about the future, whatever the future might be, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done.” It requires a church to reach a point of letting go of what each one holds dearest in human terms so that people no longer ask God for what they want, but ask God for “more of God.” When a church is ready to turn the church and its future over to God, it has reached the point of dispassion.
- *When seeking God’s heart, one must first assess before one can profess.* Knowing “who we are” precedes knowing “what to do.” This is very consistent with our Reformed confessions. The Heidelberg Catechism faces us with our sin and the only way of salvation before it invites people to grateful living. The Belgic Confession starts with broad statements of Biblical authority and the work of Christ before focusing on the identity and work of the church. In a discernment process, it is important to seek the opportunity to see reality – not in order to bolster one person’s or a group’s opinion or attitudes – but in an effort to see God’s sovereign hand more directly.
- *When seeking God’s heart, the priesthood of all believers requires that we not only look to God directly for illumination, but also access human gifts and abilities.* God has gifted his people to build his body for effective ministry. In discernment, we access those gifts by talking communally with each other about what God has been teaching us, saying to us, and showing us in order to hear the voice of God.
- *When seeking God’s heart, one must ultimately step out in faith.* God’s people have rarely seen God act without first depending on him in faith. God promises that he will act, but he also responds to our faith. This is the nature of a God of story. God, who is the Author of the salvation story, asks his characters to trust him. He does so knowing full well that we only see what is happening in “chapter 6” while he already knows what will happen in “chapter 9.” God asks us to step out in faith.

These actions may sound familiar since they are often taught or alluded to in personal spirituality and prayer literature that challenges people to look for God’s will in their personal lives. A church, however, faces a communal moment as it seeks to find new ways to live into and express God’s salvation story together.

The four “seeking God’s heart” components listed on the previous page can be diagrammed as three intersecting and interactive, not necessarily sequential circles.

- Listening carefully and prayerfully to God, to one another and to the community in which God has placed that congregation.
- Naming realities about themselves and the community. Here is where a tool such as the Church Visiting Survey can be very valuable in inviting people into a conversation around what they report as their own personal and their church’s realities.
- Trying new and different things *in faith*. The word “experiment” is used purposely, since while a church must take action, it also must be able to say without sense of failure that some things it attempted simply did not work. A church continually “tests the spirits” communally to see where God is at work, to discover how they can partner with Him most effectively personally and corporately. It requires stepping out in faith to try new things, and the courage to let go of some “old things” if they no longer are effective. This is throughout, a “discernment” process.



### THE TENSION BETWEEN URGENCY AND REFLECTION

One of the challenges for leaders is to take the necessary time to prepare for a focused discernment process. Often it simply not the mindset when a council is involved in church visiting. Unfortunately, leadership may not be aware of some of important things that can be celebrated as well as some of the significant challenges that should be addressed.

On the other hand leaders may feel that some things are not as they could be or should be, and often is a vague uneasiness hard to identify, let alone take any meaningful action. Or there may be enough uneasiness to result in a tendency to “do” something, or have someone help them “fix” whatever is wrong. However, it is important that leadership spend time in the discernment process, including time to “spiritually and physically listen” before taking action.

Whatever the situation, one of the first steps is to create a safe and supportive setting in which important matters of leadership and ministry can be named and discussed. Church visiting, if done within this framework, can be vital in helping a council identify and to work through how they can deepen their own spiritual journeys, name realities and identify courses of action important in the ministry of the congregation.

## THE VITAL PLACE OF PRAYER

Again, some good words from Oswald and Friedrich:

*“...The etymological basis of the term “discernment” comes from the Greek word that means, “to sift through.” ...It is simply impossible to do spiritual discernment if we do not pray, that is consciously seek to find God. Prayer is making yourself present to God within me and around me...We pray in order to become open to God. And when we bring openness, a freedom, to our prayer time, then we are able to adopt an unconditional attitude, ‘God when you show me a direction to follow, I will say ‘yes’ no matter what the cost.’ ...*

*“...Discernment does not mean that we simply go along with the prayer... Discernment means just the opposite. Our real work is praying prior to our board work, with the rest of the meeting flowing out of that. What follows prayer is not so much a reasoned approach to things as a genuine listening to one another, being open to a solution to an issue that is not very rational, but that instead just feels right to the entire group present...*

*“...As we try to discern the will of God for our congregation, our focus will not be on doing the rational, prudent thing but rather on doing the faithful thing. In short, when a Christian congregation tries to discern the will of God for its future, it most likely will be choosing to continue the path of Christ—of entering suffering and brokenness in order to do the sacrificial, life-giving thing.”*

Commitment to a discernment process is where we begin. Before we can hold a common vision and do any planning or use any tool to name reality, we need to begin with some common understanding of and commitment to corporate discernment. Basically the work of ministry planning in any church is, at its heart, about our (individual and congregational) relationship with God.

## Lectio Divina Exercise

1. Organize the council into small groups.
2. Reading and meditating on the Word
  - a. Begin by reading the passage below alone
  - b. Read it aloud together from the screen
  - c. Read it silently again, focusing on a phrase or two
  - d. Be fully present with eyes closed – pick out a single word that stands out as one of the church visitors reads through the selected verse or passage once more.

***I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people. Ephesians 1:17-18***

3. After these readings, underline at least three (you may do more) phrases in the passage that speak to you in understanding what discernment means personally. Then jot down below your thoughts
  - a. "In the phrase..... "I see or hear or understand or think about:  
 .....  
 .....
  - b. "In the phrase..... "I see or hear or understand or think about:  
 .....  
 .....
  - c. "In the phrase..... "I see or hear or understand or think about:  
 .....  
 .....
4. After everyone in your small group is finished, share together briefly what each of you selected and why you selected these phrases.
5. Church visitors may then ask each group to offer insights and comments on what they have discussed, focusing on what discernment means for us as individuals and for our congregation. Possible question to council members: *What are some things that need to happen in my own life and what should be happening in our congregation as we seek to be obedient?*
6. If time permits these responses can be written on newsprint and left up for a few weeks just as a reminder to everyone.

## **Church Order and Church Visiting**

### **Church Order Article 42: Classical Counselors and Church Visitors**

- a. The classis shall be responsible for appointing persons to provide counsel and advice to churches. The classis shall appoint church visitors to visit each church in classis on a yearly basis.
- b. The church visitors shall consist of one or more teams of officebearers chosen for their experience and counsel. Team composition shall include a minister of the Word and at least one other officebearer. Their task shall be to ascertain whether the officebearers of the church faithfully perform their duties, adhere to sound doctrine, observe the provisions of the Church Order, and promote the building up of the body of Christ and the extension of God's kingdom. Churches are free to call on the church visitors whenever serious challenges arise that would benefit from their advice. The church visitors shall provide classis a written report of their work.

*A more complete statement can be found in the Church Order Manual, Section II, Article 42.*

## Healthy Church Areas Described

Healthy Church Executive Survey (HCES) measures 11 health areas both in terms of how your people see your church and in terms of how they live out their own faith. The 11 health areas are as follows:

1. **Centrality of the Word of God (CB)**— Is the Bible the foundation of our teaching and preaching? Are we applying God's word in every area of life? Do we proclaim and teach the bible in a clear, theologically sound and practical way that reflects the Reformed confessions? Do we preach gospel of Christ to a lost and broken world?
2. **Kingdom Extension (KE)**— Are we passionate about reaching our community, nation and world with gospel? Are we engaged in the surrounding community? Do our members bear personal witness to their faith in Christ?
3. **Loving Relationships (LR)**— Are we building loving relationships in which there is room to disagree? Are we intentionally creating opportunities for individuals to engage with one another in practical ways in our congregation? Do we strengthen relationships with small groups and mutual accountability? Do we use biblical principles in handling conflicts?
4. **Authentic Spirituality (AS)**— Are we aware of our inclination to be conformed to this world? Does our congregation depend on the presence and power of Holy Spirit? In every area of life does our church enable and encourage us to know God and follow him? Do we practice the spiritual disciplines in our daily lives?
5. **Transforming Worship (TW)**— Does our worship life engage our hearts, minds and emotions in glorifying God? Do the sacraments of baptism and Lord's Supper have an integral place in our worship? Is worship planned to engage and influence both Christians and those not yet committed to Christ? Does the church appeal to various generations attending worship services?
6. **Servant Leadership (SL)**— Are our leaders committed to developing and empowering leaders in our church? Are our leaders more concerned about members' spiritual development than their own success? Do leaders work as a team and are they held to high standard of godliness and competence?
7. **Generous Stewardship (GS)**— Do we joyfully share our time, talents and treasures in ministries of the congregation, classis and denomination? Do we teach stewardship principles? Does our church build on gifts in our church and community? Does our church promote faithful stewardship of God's creation?
8. **Intentional Disciple Making (DM)**— Do we measure effectiveness by how members' attitudes and behavior mirror Christ? Do we have a clear picture of the disciple making process and is that built into fabric of our church? Are we committed to seeing each member use their spiritual gift(s) in context of the church?
9. **Mission/Vision (MV)**— Does our congregation have clear sense of our church's mission and compelling vision for its future? Do we periodically assess all areas of our church's effectiveness based on our mission, vision and goals? Are we willing to sacrifice, change, take risks, even suffer for sake of the gospel?
10. **Justice and Righteousness Advocacy (JR)**— Do we proclaim the biblical message of fairness and equity for all, advocating for justice in the world? Does our congregation demonstrate God's passion for poor, disenfranchised and homeless? Do we minister effectively to people with disabilities, those who have suffered abuse, and others who suffer in our community?



11. **Children and Youth Ministry (CY)**—Our congregation makes this ministry a high priority and has a strategy for the faith formation of children and youth; we support parents in their efforts to nurture the faith of their children; our youth remain in a Christian church after becoming adults; we include children and youth in all aspects of congregational ministry.

## Survey Statements Classified by Church Health Area

Health Area	<i>Question refers to:</i>	
	Church	Self
<b><i>Centrality of the Bible (CB)</i></b>		
	Our church strongly urges us to apply the Bible to every area of our lives.	Every day I earnestly think about how to apply God's Word to my life.
<b><i>Kingdom Extension (KE)</i></b>		
	Our church clearly reflects a holistic commitment to reaching the unchurched in our community and beyond.	I intentionally build relationships with non-Christians and other Christians.
<b><i>Loving Relationships (LR)</i></b>		
	Our church strongly encourages us to build relationships with one another.	I'm growing in my sense of belonging in my congregation.
<b><i>Authentic Spirituality (AS)</i></b>		
	Most people I know in this church demonstrate an authentic and growing faith by the way they live.	I actively practice spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible reading, silence, and personal reflection.
<b><i>Transforming Worship (TW)</i></b>		
	Lives are being changed and nourished because of God's presence in our worship.	I approach the worship services of our church with anticipation that God will move me to change my life.
<b><i>Servant Leadership (SL)</i></b>		
	Our leaders, including volunteer leaders, inspire us to grow spiritually.	I speak regularly with others about their spiritual life.

Health Area	Question refers to:	
	Church	Self

***Generous Stewardship (GS)***

We are generous in offering our God-given gifts of time, talents and goods to meet the needs of our church and community.

I feel that I'm learning every day to be more generous with the gifts God keeps giving me.

***Disciple Making (DM)***

Our church has a clear disciple-making process from exploring Christ to spiritual maturity.

I discuss my growth as a disciple of Jesus Christ with a person I trust.

***Mission and Vision (MV)***

Our church's programs and activities flow from a clear mission and vision.

I'm committed to my church's mission/vision and I'm willing to make sacrifices for it.

***Justice and Righteousness (JR)***

My church helps me think through the complex issues facing our world today (such as poverty, war, abortion, environment, racism, and homosexuality) using Kingdom values.

I'm actively involved in working for justice in our community.

***Children and Youth (CY)***

Our church helps nurture the faith of children in practical ways, including teaching and mentoring by seasoned Christians.

In the past year I have intentionally encouraged a child or young person in their spiritual life.

## ***Launch Letter Template***

### **Healthy Church Executive Survey**

### **WE NEED YOUR HELP!!!!**

### **Please help your church by participating in this survey**

- Who should participate?* Every council member and those invited by council
- Why should you participate?* The results gathered by this survey will help the leadership of our church to prayerfully consider where God is calling our church to faithfully follow.
- How do you access the survey?* Log onto the Internet & type this address into the address bar at the top of your web browser:

**[www.crcna.org/cvs/9999](http://www.crcna.org/cvs/9999)**

#### **Information to help you with the survey:**

1. The survey is quite brief and should not take you longer than 10-15 minutes to complete. If you are not able to use the Internet, contact \_\_\_\_\_ and request a hard copy of the survey.
2. Once in the survey after clicking on the link, mark your answers quickly. You are strongly encouraged to answer every question. If you are not sure how to answer, then be sure to mark "Unsure."
3. The survey is programmed so that you can move backward if you want to reconsider your answer to a certain question. Be sure to move to the very end of the survey and click the final NEXT button to ensure that your responses are included.
4. At the end of the survey is a place to record your comments about your church and/or the survey. If you prefer, you may also share your comments with any member of the Church Visiting Team. Names are listed below.

Thank you in advance for promptly completing the survey.

Your Church Visiting Team

***[List members of team with contact information]***

# Healthy Church Executive Survey Sample



*Healthy Churches Transforming Lives and Communities Worldwide | Christian Reformed Church in North America  
November 2016 edition*

## General Instructions

Please use this survey to rate the health of your church as you see it. Choose your ratings as fairly and objectively as possible. The goal is not to make your church look either good or bad but to provide an honest assessment of it. Your assessment, along with others from the church, is a valuable contribution to making your church as healthy as possible.

Please try to give an answer to every question; however, you may skip any question that you prefer not to answer. Check those responses that most closely represent your opinions and experiences.

The survey has two parts:

- (1) statements about your church, and
- (2) statements about yourself.

All statements refer indirectly to or measure one or more of the following 11 health areas:

- (1) centrality of God's word,
- (2) sense of mission/vision,
- (3) reaching out locally and globally,
- (4) loving fellowship,
- (5) spirituality,
- (6) worshiping,
- (7) leadership,
- (8) stewardship,
- (9) disciple making,
- (10) justice and righteousness, and
- (11) ministry to children and youth.

When the survey refers to **church leaders or leadership**, do not limit your understanding to only pastors or full-time, paid staff. Instead think of all those in your church leading its ministries, whether or not the position is paid or voluntary, full-time or part-time.

Note that **no personal identification is requested**. Responses in the returned surveys from your church will undergo data processing. Only aggregated summary statistical results will be seen by anyone at your church. **Your answers will be kept anonymous.**

For best results, you should **consider each question quickly and then select your answer**. Do not spend time pondering specific details.

It is expected that this survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

**Thank you in advance** for taking the time to complete this survey. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

## About Your Church

Using the scale at the top of the columns, indicate how true you think each statement is about your church.

Please mark only one circle in each row.

	Definitely UNTRUE	Hardly true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Definitely true	Unsure
1. Our church strongly urges us to apply the Bible to every area of our lives.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 9
2. Our church clearly reflects a holistic commitment to reaching the unchurched in our community and beyond.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 9
3. Our church strongly encourages us to build relationships with one another.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 9
4. Most people I know in this church demonstrate an authentic and growing faith by the way they live.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 9
5. Lives are being changed and nourished because of God's presence in our worship.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 9
6. Our leaders, including volunteer leaders, inspire us to grow spiritually.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 9
7. We are generous in offering our God-given gifts of time, talents, and goods to meet the needs of our church and community.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 9
8. Our church has a clear disciple-making process from exploring Christ to spiritual maturity.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 9
9. Our church's programs and activities flow from a clear mission and vision.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 9
10. My church helps me think through the complex issues facing our world today (such as poverty, war, abortion, environment, racism, and homosexuality) using kingdom values.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 9
11. Our church helps nurture the faith of children in practical ways, including teaching and mentoring by seasoned Christians.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 9

## Demographics

- Are you currently serving as a member of council/consistory?
  - ☐ 1 Yes
  - ☐ 2 No
- What is your gender?
  - ☐ 1 Female
  - ☐ 2 Male
- What is your age?
  - ☐ 1 Under 20
  - ☐ 2 20 to 34
  - ☐ 3 35 to 49
  - ☐ 4 50 to 64
  - ☐ 5 65 to 79
  - ☐ 6 80 or older

4. In what ways are you currently involved in this church? *Check all that apply; please review both columns!*

- ☐<sub>1</sub> Sunday or church school teacher  
☐<sub>2</sub> Choir member  
☐<sub>3</sub> Small group member  
☐<sub>4</sub> Small group leader  
☐<sub>5</sub> Church committee member  
☐<sub>6</sub> Church committee chairperson  
☐<sub>7</sub> Deacon  
☐<sub>8</sub> Elder  
☐<sub>9</sub> Council or consistory officer  
☐<sub>10</sub> Organist or pianist  
☐<sub>11</sub> Other instrumentalist

- ☐<sub>12</sub> Pastor (senior, associate, youth, etc.)  
☐<sub>13</sub> Praise team  
☐<sub>14</sub> Usher or greeter  
☐<sub>15</sub> Worship leader  
☐<sub>16</sub> Youth leader  
☐<sub>17</sub> Administrator  
☐<sub>18</sub> Custodian  
☐<sub>19</sub> Other (*specify*):

☐<sub>99</sub> *None of the above*

## About You

Using the scale at the top of the columns, indicate how true you think each statement is for yourself.

*Please mark only one circle in each row.*

	Definitely UNTRUE	Hardly true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Definitely true	Unsure
1. Every day I earnestly think about how to apply God's Word to my life.	<input type="radio"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>9</sub>
2. I intentionally build relationships with non-Christians and other Christians.	<input type="radio"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>9</sub>
3. I'm growing in my sense of belonging in my congregation.	<input type="radio"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>9</sub>
4. I actively practice spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible reading, silence, and personal reflection.	<input type="radio"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>9</sub>
5. I approach the worship services of our church with anticipation that God will move me to change my life.	<input type="radio"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>9</sub>
6. I speak regularly with others about their spiritual life.	<input type="radio"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>9</sub>
7. I feel that I'm learning every day to be more generous with the gifts God keeps giving me.	<input type="radio"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>9</sub>
8. I discuss my growth as a disciple of Jesus Christ with a person I trust.	<input type="radio"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>9</sub>
9. I'm committed to my church's mission/vision and I'm willing to make sacrifices for it.	<input type="radio"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>9</sub>
10. I'm actively involved in working for justice in our community.	<input type="radio"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>9</sub>
11. In the past year, I have intentionally encouraged a child or young person in their spiritual life.	<input type="radio"/> <sub>1</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="radio"/> <sub>9</sub>

## Optional Comments

Please add your comments about church health and/or the survey here. *Please avoid any words that might identify yourself or others; even if you want to be known, your self-identification may affect others.*

## Thank You!

Thank you for completing this survey. You have significantly contributed to helping your church toward becoming a healthier church. Your contribution is greatly appreciated.

***Please return your survey*** to the designated person or location at your church or mail it to the church for data entry by your church's office staff or data entry volunteer.

*If you are uncomfortable with your survey being viewed by a church member, you may mail the survey anonymously to the following address, and the Calvin College Center for Social Research will do the data entry at a nominal additional expense to your congregation.*



Center for Social Research  
Calvin College  
3201 Burton St. SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49506



## Church Visiting Survey Results for Sample Church

■ Definitely True   
 ■ Mostly True   
 ■ Somewhat True   
 ■ Hardly True   
 ■ Definitely UNTRUE   
 ■ Unsure

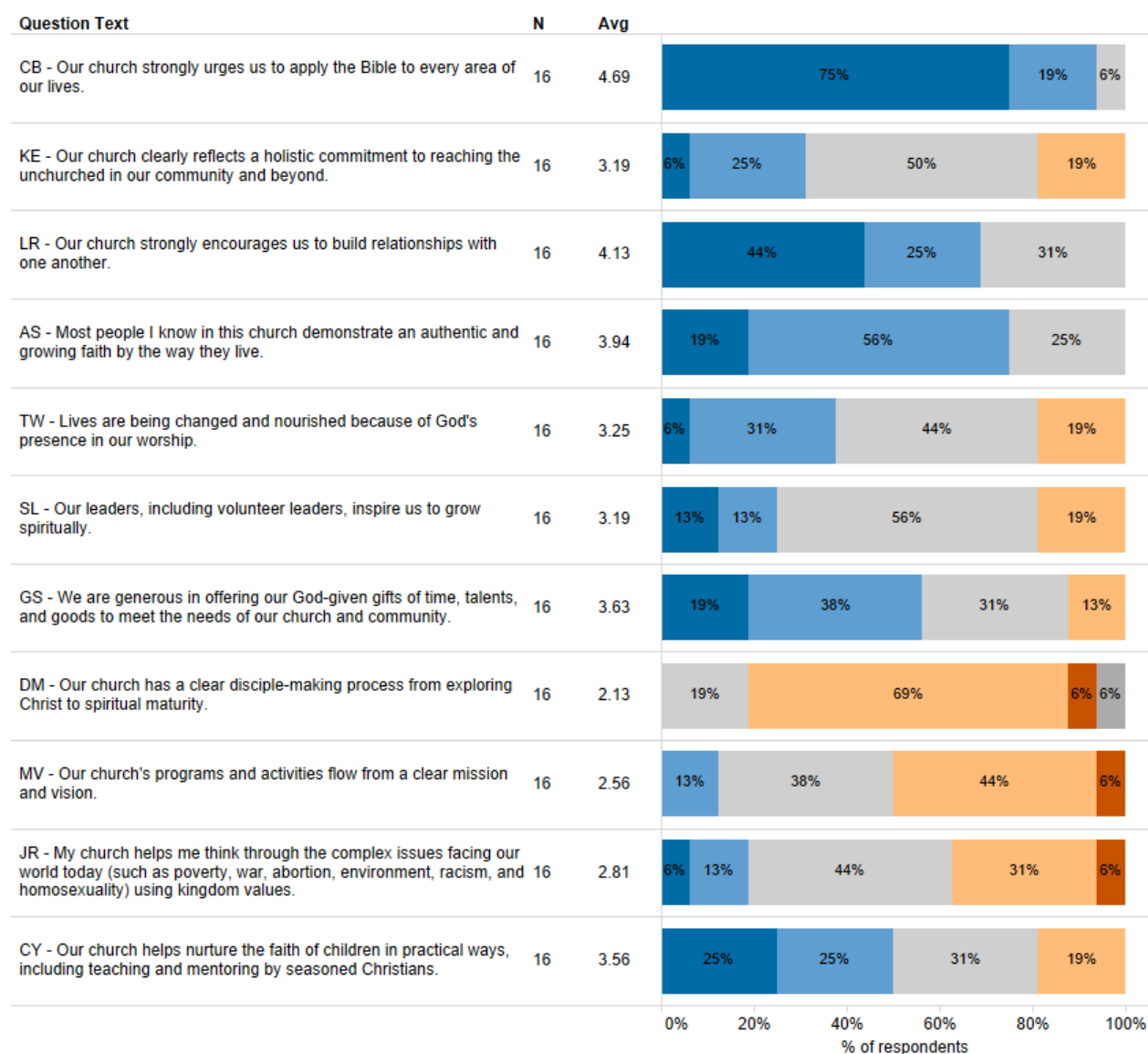
### Perceptions of Church

Question Text	N	Avg					
CB - Our church strongly urges us to apply the Bible to every area of our lives.	16	4.69	<div> <div style="width: 75%;"></div> <div style="width: 19%;"></div> <div style="width: 6%;"></div> </div>				
KE - Our church clearly reflects a holistic commitment to reaching the unchurched in our community and beyond.	16	3.19	<div> <div style="width: 6%;"></div> <div style="width: 25%;"></div> <div style="width: 50%;"></div> <div style="width: 19%;"></div> </div>				
LR - Our church strongly encourages us to build relationships with one another.	16	4.13	<div> <div style="width: 44%;"></div> <div style="width: 25%;"></div> <div style="width: 31%;"></div> </div>				
AS - Most people I know in this church demonstrate an authentic and growing faith by the way they live.	16	3.94	<div> <div style="width: 19%;"></div> <div style="width: 56%;"></div> <div style="width: 25%;"></div> </div>				
TW - Lives are being changed and nourished because of God's presence in our worship.	16	3.25	<div> <div style="width: 6%;"></div> <div style="width: 31%;"></div> <div style="width: 44%;"></div> <div style="width: 19%;"></div> </div>				
SL - Our leaders, including volunteer leaders, inspire us to grow spiritually.	16	3.19	<div> <div style="width: 13%;"></div> <div style="width: 13%;"></div> <div style="width: 56%;"></div> <div style="width: 19%;"></div> </div>				
GS - We are generous in offering our God-given gifts of time, talents, and goods to meet the needs of our church and community.	16	3.63	<div> <div style="width: 19%;"></div> <div style="width: 38%;"></div> <div style="width: 31%;"></div> <div style="width: 13%;"></div> </div>				
DM - Our church has a clear disciple-making process from exploring	16	3.44	<div> <div style="width: 19%;"></div> <div style="width: 38%;"></div> <div style="width: 31%;"></div> <div style="width: 13%;"></div> </div>				

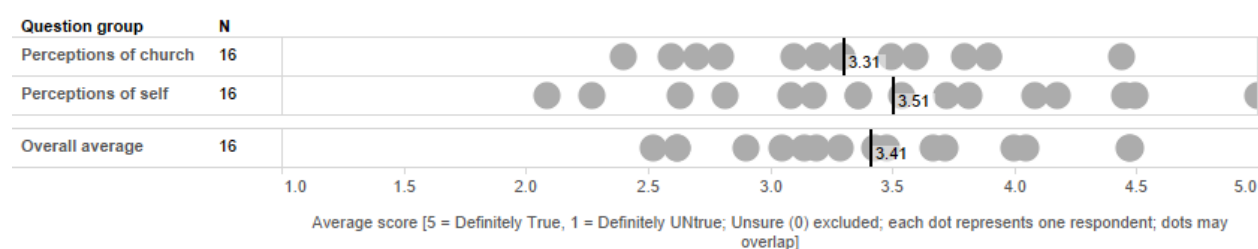
## Church Visiting Survey Results for Sample Church

■ Definitely True   
 ■ Mostly True   
 ■ Somewhat True   
 ■ Hardly True   
 ■ Definitely UNTRUE   
 ■ Unsure

### Perceptions of Church



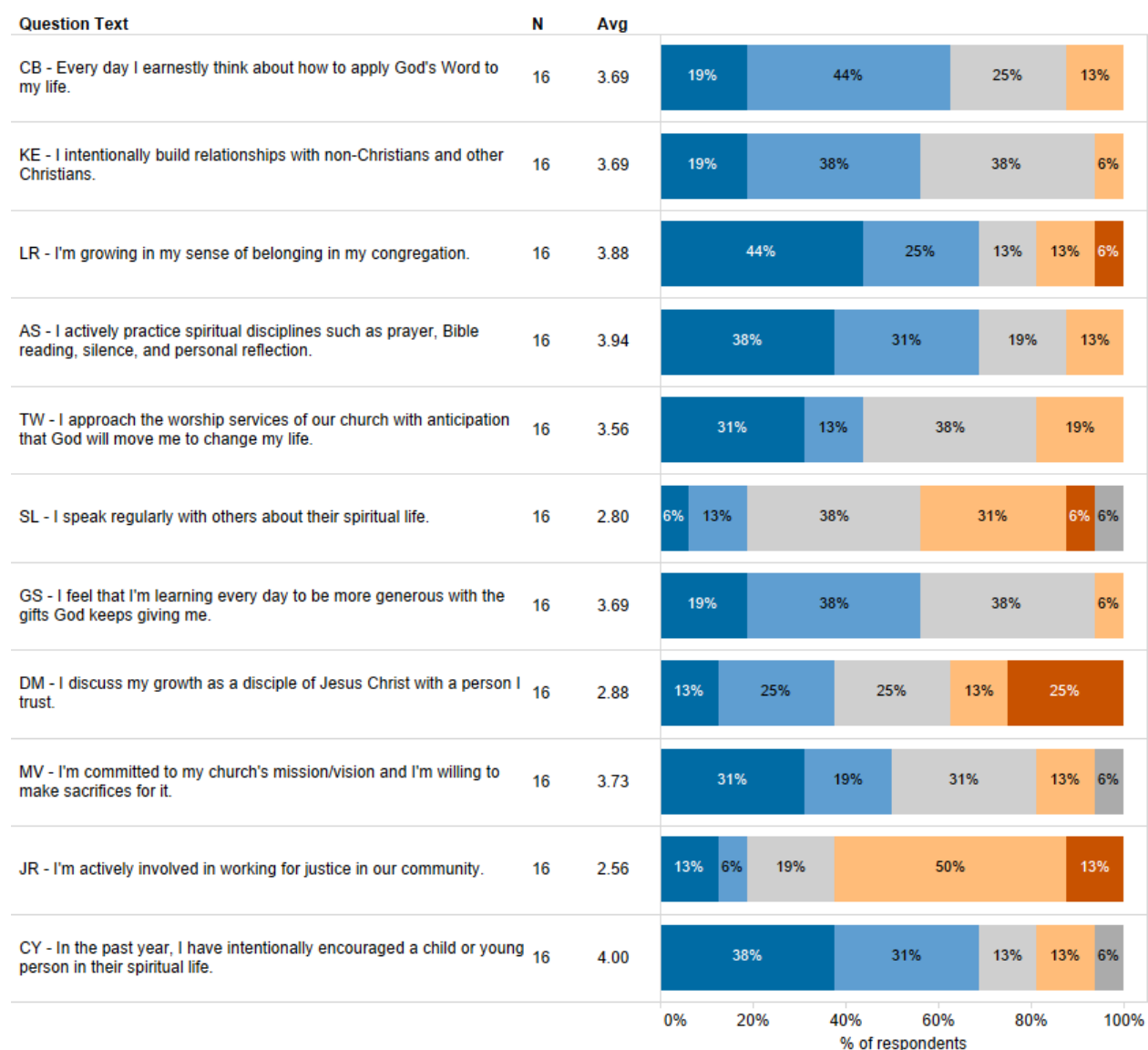
### Scale averages



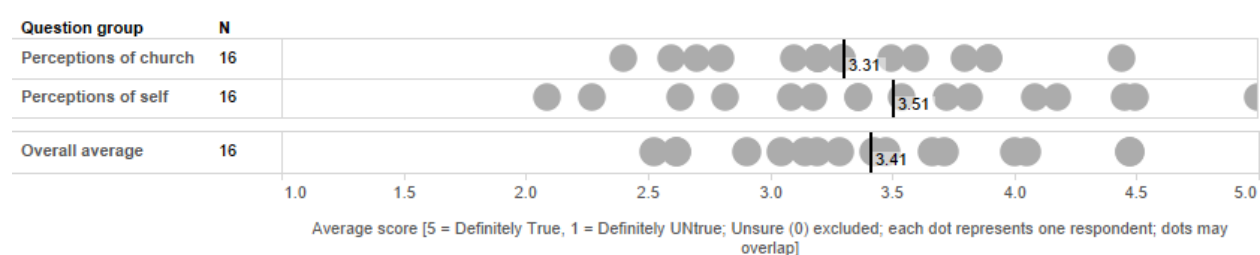
## Church Visiting Survey Results for Sample Church

■ Definitely True  
 ■ Mostly True  
 ■ Somewhat True  
 ■ Hardly True  
 ■ Definitely UNTRUE  
 ■ Unsure

### Perceptions of Self



### Scale averages



## Supplemental Church Visiting Questions

To be done after the council has taken the survey and church visitors have led them through the results.

- I. Select one or two questions at your discretion to guide the post-survey conversation.
  - Where is God at work in your church today?
  - What good things have you seen God doing in this congregation this past year?
  - What is one meaningful change you'd like to see at your church in the upcoming year? What roadblocks might be in the way of that change?
  - In the past year, name an event when the council functioned well as leaders of the church. Why did things go so well?
  - What are some of the lingering things you don't like to talk about at your church but know you need to be talking about?
  - As you reflect on your annual budget, what are you seeing?
  - Where does your church like the decision-making authority to lie? How does that play out in the day-to-day functioning of the church?
  - What is one thing your council can do to deepen your spiritual lives as leaders in this church?
- II. *Church visitors are strongly encouraged to discuss issues of compliance with the church's council. Consult the Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government, Appendix D for a number of sample questions to help with this sometimes difficult task. We urge you to carefully review the guide and, based on what you know about the congregation and council from your previous visits and/or the results of the survey, select one question on the work of the minister, one on the work of the council, one on the work of the elders, one on the work of the deacons, and one on the work of the ministry associates (as is applicable in the local context).*

## Church Visiting – Follow-up Options

Church visitor teams are encouraged to follow-up with church leaders as an essential element in building and maintaining a supportive relationship. Such follow-up often is routine. However, conversations with council members may create a situation in which more extensive follow-up is recognized and needed. The following are some possible options:

### A return visit by the church visitors:

- for further dialogue
- for follow-up on recommendations
- for clarity around issues that were initially nebulous

### A referral to:

- A committee of classis for support or guidance
- Regional Pastor for support of pastor or family
- Home Missions regional rep for assistance with mission, vision or strategic planning
- Pastor Church Resources for additional consultation on:
  - strained relationships
  - issues of pastoral or congregational transition
  - vocational assessment of a staff person by mental health professionals
  - establishing healthy staff interactions
- Pastor Church Resources for educational resources regarding:
  - healthy interactions
  - difficult conversations
  - stewarding conflict
  - transitioning to a staff ministry
- Office of Disability Concerns for help in responding to specific issues of disability
- Office of Safe Church Ministry for guidance on policies/procedures relative to a *child safety policy* or other questions pertaining to abuse
- Executive Director of Denominational Ministries for guidance on questions about polity and procedure
- Particular resources unique to the community

## Testimonials

Our council is actually new to this process. Since our re-establishment we have welcomed an entirely new council. I thought the process was really helpful. Our council was slow to respond to the survey, but enjoyed reading through the responses.

The council action is to begin engaging the congregation in thinking through these broader church health questions.

I would recommend using the survey every year. First of all, new members will be on council, secondly, churches change and the same questions can show new results.

Classis Holland  
Jon Brown, Senior Pastor  
Pillar Church 1.18.2016

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The experience was positive. I got us talking about some different things. I am not sure there was much action vis-a-vis other years, but this is a comment on us, not on church visitors or the process.

The approach allowed us to get right to some of the areas of weaknesses. Doing the survey was a good thing. We had a good discussion.

One of the missing pieces seems to retain the accountability piece, seems to be leaving. Some of the questions in the old listing should be put in the supplemental questions, so should be placed in the supplemental questions.

Having the same church visitors for multiple years is a good thing. We are getting to know them and this makes the conversations easier and more open.

The SWOT approach we completed a couple of years ago was not every effective, so needed more work. This survey allowed us input ahead of time and so we had thought about it. Also could discuss what we collectively felt.

Should definitely be done each year. A good questions pastor Chad suggested is: "We challenged you on this last year, what has happened?"

Classis Holland  
Chad Steenwyk, senior pastor  
Central Ave CRC 1.04.2016

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Council members were very positive and appreciative. We spent an hour and a half with them and when we announced it was time to close, one member remarked, "Where did the time go so fast?" The council was much more accepting of this approach than the previous approach; one seasoned elder remarking that this was the best church visiting experience in all the years he had been on council. Also was a comment of appreciation that both church visitors were laypersons, rather than just clergy; encouraged us to continue to get lay elders involved.

Perhaps were aware of the fact that discipleship needed attention, but discussion indicated clearly that work was needed on establishing a clearer discipleship pathway, both for current members and for people new to the faith.

Leadership is currently analyzing present ministries to see how the total program could be improved, and remarked that this discussion will provide focus for that effort. Visit included a discussion about difficulty of getting candidates for office-bearer replacements. Came to realize that they needed to be on constant search for persons with potential and continuously encourage people to consider serving...all about building community and relationships continuously.

Classis Holland  
St. Joseph CRC, St. Joseph, MI  
Stan Koster and David Altena -  
Church Visitors

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#### *What is good?*

The report card church visits of the past needed to be changed and the healthy church visit survey and discussion process is the right thing to do.

To "force" the council to participate in a self-analysis survey and pause and have a focused discussion on what is good and what needs to be improved with outside guests is very good.

Intra-church relationship building is really good and trying to formalize the process of establishing those relationships in an intentional way will serve our churches well.

The survey results on the 11 areas of church health provide a good foundation for those discussions.

Classis Kalamazoo  
Kevin TenBrink - Church Visitor

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Here are some of the things I am learning so far in the process:

1. As a church visitor with 15-16 years' experience doing visits, it is clear to me that effectiveness is linked to having a trusting relationship with the churches. This was true for the older church visiting system as well. But the new system allows that trust to be built, perhaps more readily, as the mere act of taking a survey tells church leaders that we are concerned to get to know them and the struggles and challenges they face. It also makes it hard to allege a visit was "irrelevant," since we take up issues generated from their own perception of things. Before, building trust took years of contact through meeting the council members and interacting at classis meetings, post-classis pulpit exchanges, and other bridge building. While these things are still helpful, the survey adds another tool to the box.
2. The new process is more work for a visitor in doing a visit, but that's okay. It takes more time to arrange for the surveys to be done, and get and distribute the results. Then, after the visit is over, we still need to touch base from time to time to see how things are progressing and if we can be of further help. But again, this is good - it develops relationships between the church visitors and the church

leadership. Linking church visitors with fewer churches helps. That way, the workload can still even out from what we had before.

3. The fact that this is a different approach in itself can help, because as visitors we demonstrate that we are willing to change in seeking to improve what didn't seem to be a very popular system before, at least as it was traditionally viewed. One good change in direction of the new system is that it applies the CRC Church Health characteristics to our churches. This is what we've sought to do in Healthy Church Teams all along. The new visiting protocol provides a natural way, within the fabric of denominational practice, to do that. It's a great way to move things forward positively, and for those churches that might not have had the desire to opt for the more in-depth "Healthy Church Survey," they can still be helped by the basic insights of it via the Church Visiting Survey.

4. Still, as with anything new, church visitors do face skepticism from some folks in councils. That's okay too. It makes me try harder to do a good job with it. From my perception, another challenge we're facing is motivating the Church Visitors to get going and set up some visits. I'm not exactly sure why this is. It may be a combination of things. Under the old system, it seemed like visits were taking place pretty infrequently. It may take some time to get this old way "out of our system." Hopefully, we'll speed this up sooner rather than later. It may also be that pastors who are church visitors are feeling some "burnout" from getting involved and doing things. However, church visiting is one way we can show a strength from our past - the notion that "I am my brother's keeper." I am here to care for him too. Individualism and congregationalism move over! Mutual care is here!

Classis Zeeland  
Steve Mulder - Church Visitor  
Pastor of Overisel CRC 1.14.2016



## CASE STUDIES

### Case Study 1

You are planning a Church Visit with Silverado CRC. During the pre-visit meetings you sense that the pastor is less than communicative about his work and role. His responses seem brief and emotionally flat. You inquire about what he most enjoys about his work and he has difficulty providing much of a response.

*Questions to Ponder and Discuss:*

*Given what you have initially learned or observed, what is your next course of action?*

*As you explore the dynamics, you determine you should . . .*

- continue the HC process as planned*
- continue the HC process with adjustments*
- discontinue the HC process*

*What factors would contribute to your decision going forward?*

*What other options might you consider to address this situation?*

### Case Study 2

You are preparing for a Church Visit with Tesla CRC. As you connect with the pastor and council chair you learn there is significant relational tension between the youth director and the lead pastor. As you explore it you learn that a sub team of council is working on it, but there has been little progress so far.

*Questions to Ponder and Discuss:*

*Given what you have initially learned or observed, what is your next course of action?*

*As you explore the dynamics, you determine you should . . .*

- continue the HC process as planned*
- continue the HC process with adjustments*
- discontinue the HC process*

*What factors would contribute to your decision going forward?*

*What other options might you consider to address this situation?*

### Case Study 3

The first visit with Accord CRC seemed to go well. Preparations are proceeding and the team is in place. Later, you receive a phone call from one of the elders indicating there is growing concern about the lack of church participation of the pastor's spouse. The elder reported that a conversation was attempted but the spouse's response was "that's not my job!"

*Questions to Ponder and Discuss:*

*Given what you have initially learned or observed, what is your next course of action?*

*As you explore the dynamics, you determine you should . . .*

- continue the HC process as planned*
- continue the HC process with adjustments*
- discontinue the HC process*

*What factors would contribute to your decision going forward?*

*What other options might you consider to address this situation?*

### Case Study 4

As you receive and process the results of the Healthy Church (HC) survey for Equinox CRC you notice that several responses in one category are extremely low and out of pattern with the rest and there are some statements in the "comments" section that give you pause. As you explore this with the pastor and head of council you discover that, several years ago, there had been a "relationship" between a council member and a member of the congregation of which some in the church are aware and who believe the council did not sufficiently address it. This could be one factor relative to the outlying responses to the HC survey.

*Questions to Ponder and Discuss:*

*Given what you have initially learned or observed, what is your next course of action?*

*As you explore the dynamics, you determine you should . . .*

- continue the HC process as planned*
- continue the HC process with adjustments*
- discontinue the HC process*

*What factors would contribute to your decision going forward?*

*What other options might you consider to address this situation?*