

THRIVING CHURCHES

...helping churches transform lives,
empower people and grow.

MINISTRY

Rev. Robert B. Ellsworth, Ph.D. and Rev. Janet B. Ellsworth,

Unity in South Windsor, CT

September 2008

Introduction

Developing a thriving church is an exciting but often challenging endeavor. It takes:

- Willingness to take the pulse of your entire congregation, using a survey instrument that measures aspects of ministry proven to change lives and grow churches.
- Effective action, based on knowing which next steps are best for your church.
- Enlisting people to participate in the effort who have both heart and passion.

Every church has its strengths. It's important to be conscious of and celebrate them. Your church community needs to continue what you are doing in these areas. This is where our program becomes invaluable. From the congregation's perspective, your strengths and greatest opportunities for constructive change are brought to your attention. Every church also has areas that need further development. We invite you to ponder what your congregation is experiencing.

This report is customized for you. We compare your survey results with norms based on other congregations similar to yours. Without norms, it's impossible to tell which areas are above and below the tipping point between good and excellent.

Be sure that your leadership team has a copy of the Church Life Survey to help each person understand more fully the content of the survey results.

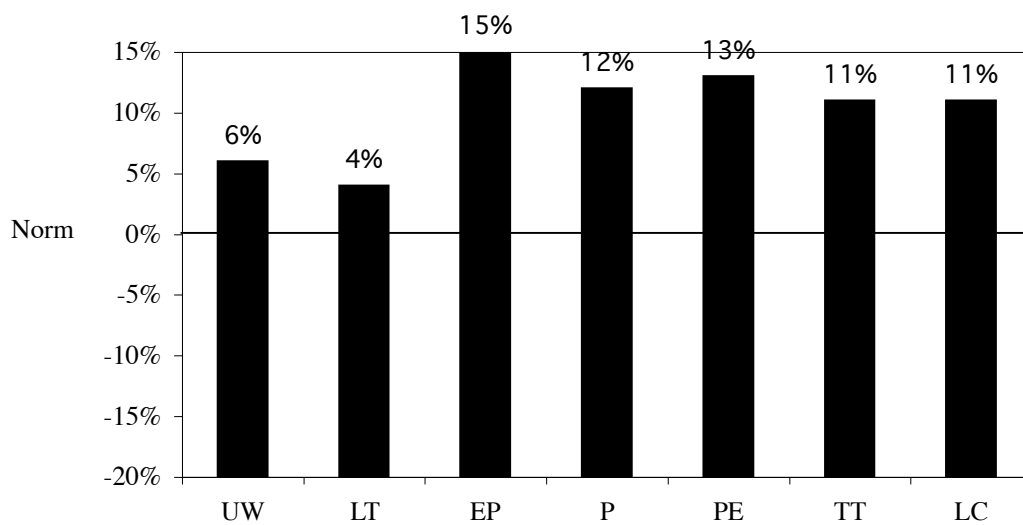
We appreciate the opportunity to walk along side of you as you lead this congregation. It is a great privilege to serve you, as you serve God's people.

Contents	Page
Overview of Your Church Life Survey Results.	2
Ministry Areas Profiled.	3-9
Identify and Celebrate Your Strengths.	10
Your Greatest Opportunities for Further Development.	10-12
What Really Grows Thriving Churches.	12
How this information can help your church.	13

964 NE Wiest Way
Bend OR 97701. (541) 382-7404
Email: revsrobjan@bendtel.net
www.thrivingchurches.org

Overview of Your Church Life Survey Results

This is a picture of your congregation's perception of your ministry. You can see which ministry essentials have exceeded the norm, the minimum found in growing churches. You can also see your greatest possibilities for constructive change.



UW = Uplifting Worship: Songs uplifting, sermons inspire, emotional release, etc.

LT = Leadership Team.

EP = Empowering People: People encourage me, safe place, training occurs, etc.

P = Purpose: Leaders communicate clearly this church's purpose or mission.

PE = Prayer Emphasis: This church really shows people how to pray.

TT = Transforming Teachings: Attend classes, read/apply spiritual teachings, etc.

LC = Life Changing Impact. Coming here makes positive difference, etc.

1. Uplifting Sacred Worship

Surveyed 119

			Your Percents Compared to the Norm*								
	Norm	Your % Saying Yes	% Below Norm					Norm	% Above Norm		
			-30	-25	-20	-15	-10	-5	5+	10+	15+
(2) Cong Songs	<u>82%</u>	<u>86%</u>									
(3) Special music	<u>87%</u>	<u>88%</u>									
(4) Insp. Sermon	<u>90%</u>	<u>100%</u>									
(5) Useful sermons	<u>82%</u>	<u>94%</u>									
(6) Emot. release	<u>76%</u>	<u>85%</u>									
(7) Wonder/mystery	<u>79%</u>	<u>82%</u>									
(8) Feel uplifted	<u>90%</u>	<u>97%</u>									
Average	<u>84%</u>	<u>90%</u>									

*Norms: The average percents of congregants in churches similar to yours saying "yes" to the survey items.

First, it's important for you to identify your church's strengths. Usually these took years to develop. Too often people look for weaknesses. It will help you to understand your strengths if you each have a copy of the Church Life Survey.

In *Worship*, you can see that the quality of inspiring sermons, practical sermons, emotional release and feeling uplifted clearly exceed the norm.

2. Leadership

4

			Your Percents Compared to the Norms								
	Norm	Your % Saying Yes	% Below Norm			Norm	% Above Norm				
			- 3 0	- 2 5	- 2 0	- 1 5	- 1 0	- 5	5 +	1 0 +	1 5 +
(9) Joy/Laughter	<u>90%</u>	<u>99%</u>							-----		
(10) Enthusiasm	<u>91%</u>	<u>95%</u>							-----		
(11) Compliment	<u>83%</u>	<u>84%</u>							-----		
(12) New Things	<u>76%</u>	<u>77%</u>							-----		
(13) Evaluate	<u>67%</u>	<u>72%</u>							-----		
Average	<u>81%</u>	<u>85%</u>							-----		

3. Empowerment

(14) Encourage	<u>56%</u>	<u>73%</u>							-----		
(15) Safe place	<u>68%</u>	<u>86%</u>							-----		
(16) Training	<u>60%</u>	<u>72%</u>							-----		
(17) Identify gifts	<u>66%</u>	<u>80%</u>							-----		
Average	<u>63%</u>	<u>78%</u>							-----		

List the strengths you see:

4. Purpose

5

			<i>Your Percents Compared to the Norms</i>									
	Norm	Your % Saying Yes	% Below Norm					Norm	% Above Norm			
			-30	-25	-20	-15	-10	-5		5+	10+	15+
(18) <i>Communicated</i>	<u>77%</u>	<u>89%</u>								_____		
(19) <i>Remembered</i>	<u>new</u>	<u>82%</u>										
<i>Average</i>	_____	_____										

5. Prayer

(20) <i>Emphasized</i>	<u>66%</u>	<u>79%</u>								_____		
------------------------	------------	------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	-------	--	--

6. Transforming Teachings

(21) <i>Classes, etc.</i>	<u>35%</u>	<u>58%</u>								_____		
(22) <i>Read, apply</i>	<u>76%</u>	<u>86%</u>								_____		
(23) <i>Difficult times</i>	<u>87%</u>	<u>93%</u>								_____		
(24) <i>Stress using</i>	<u>91%</u>	<u>95%</u>								_____		
<i>Average</i>	<u>72%</u>	<u>83%</u>								_____		

List the strengths you see:

Secondary Elements I

			<i>Your Percents Compared to the Norms</i>									
	Norm	Your % Saying Yes	<i>% Below Norm</i>					<i>Norm</i>	<i>% Above Norm</i>			
			- 3 0	- 2 5	- 2 0	- 1 5	- 1 0	- 5		5 +	1 0 +	1 5 +
<i>7. Youth Ed</i>												
(25) <i>Quality YE</i>	<u>68%</u>	<u>66%</u>										
<i>8. Serving Experiences</i>												
(26) <i>I volunteer</i>	<u>54%</u>	<u>56%</u>										
<i>Quality</i>												
(27) <i>Energizing</i>	<u>82%</u>	<u>91%</u>										
(28) <i>Enjoy</i>	<u>73%</u>	<u>75%</u>										
Average	<u>77%</u>	<u>83%</u>										

List the strengths you see:

Secondary Elements II

			<i>Your Percents Compared to the Norms</i>									
	Norm	Your % Saying Yes	% Below Norm					Norm	% Above Norm			
			- 3 0	- 2 5	- 2 0	- 1 5	- 1 0	- 5		5 +	1 0 +	1 5 +
9. Connecting												
<i>Dwellers</i>												
(29) Miss me	76%	65%										
<hr style="border-top: 1px dotted black;"/>												
<i>Seekers</i>												
(30) I participate	55%	53%										
(31) Made friends	62%	61%										
Average	64%	60%										
10. Small Groups												
(32) I attend	34%	46%										
(33) Discuss Spirit	86%	91%										
(34) Satisfying	79%	89%										
Average	66%	64%										

List the strengths you see:

11. Life Changing

			Your Percents Compared to the Norms									
	Norm	Your % Saying Yes	% Below Norm					Norm	% Above Norm			
			- 3 0	- 2 5	- 2 0	- 1 5	- 1 0	- 5		5 +	1 0 +	1 5 +
(35) Positive diff	<u>92%</u>	<u>96%</u>										
(36) Happier	<u>79%</u>	<u>93%</u>										
(37) Vital role	<u>80%</u>	<u>93%</u>										
(38) Enthusiam	<u>78%</u>	<u>96%</u>										
(39) Some happen	<u>87%</u>	<u>95%</u>										
Average	<u>83%</u>	<u>94%</u>										

Life Changing Impact is an outcome indicator of the quality of ministry essentials.

List the strengths you see:

12. Miscellaneous

			<i>Your Percents Compared to the Norms</i>									
	Norm	Your % Saying Yes	% Below Norm					Norm	% Above Norm			
			- 3 0	- 2 5	- 2 0	- 1 5	- 1 0	- 5		5 +	1 0 +	1 5 +
(1) Greeted	<u>95%</u>	<u>97%</u>								-		
(40) God's Love	<u>94%</u>	<u>98%</u>								-		
(41) Inviting	<u>37%</u>	<u>36%</u>								-		
(42) Complaints	<u>11%</u>	<u>15%</u>								-		
(43) Tithe	<u>39%</u>	<u>43%</u>								-		
(44) Announcements	<u>80%</u>	<u>88%</u>								-	-	
(45) Worship length	<u>89%</u>	<u>97%</u>								-	-	
(46) Outreach	<u>66%</u>	<u>34%</u>	—————									
(47) Seating	<u>70%</u>	<u>90%</u>								-	-	
(48) Parking	<u>73%</u>	<u>93%</u>								-	-	

In response to item 49, your congregation perceives an increase in attendance, compared to a year ago.

IDENTIFY AND CELEBRATE YOUR STRENGTHS

When church communities become strong in six ministry essentials, they impact more lives and attract more people. In surveying over 170 congregations, we learned that ministries thrive when a high percentage of congregants; (1) experience sacred, uplifting **worship**, (2) see **leaders** who are enthusiastic, encouraging, willing to try new things and drop or modify what isn't working, (3) feel **empowered**, (4) learning and practicing transforming **teachings** that help them handle difficult times better, (5) actively showing people ways to **pray**, (6) and frequently communicating the church's **purpose**. As those essentials needing attention are strengthened, more congregants will report their lives changing in positive ways.

The profile of your ministry essentials (page two) shows that your ministry is **strong in all six primary essentials!** Rarely do we find a church as strong as yours in all six essentials.

We developed **norms** to help leaders compare their results with churches similar to theirs. We compare your survey results with other progressive churches (such as Unity) similar in size to yours. Take time to look through pages three to five and identify which aspects of the six essentials are particularly strong. On page 3, you can see that inspiring and practical sermons (items 4 and 5), emotional release (item 6) and feeling uplifted (item 7) are clearly stronger than normal. Then, look at "Your Greatest Opportunities."

Four other *secondary* essentials have statistically significant but only *moderately* strong links to life changing impact and numerical growth. On pages 6-7, you can see that your ministry is above normal in **two** of these secondary essentials, namely, the quality of **servicing** and the quality of **small group** experiences (pages 6 and 7).

Important Demographics.

	Normal	Your Church		Age and Gender	Normal	Your Church
1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd visit	7%	7%		Age under 40	13%	7% (-6)
Coming 1-11 months	18%	18%		Age 40-64)	66%	68% (+2)
Seekers (1 to 3 years)	23%	23%		Age 65+	22%	25% (+3)
Dwellers (3+ years)	52%	52%		% Female	61%	64% (+3)
% Inviting others	37%	36% (-1)				

The demographics above reveal that your ministry is similar to other churches like yours. Notice, however, that the percentage of your congregants under age 40 is lower than normal.

YOUR GREATEST OPPORTUNITIES. Your overall survey results reveal two opportunities for impacting even more lives, retaining more people and continue growing your congregation. Listed in order of those needing most attention:

1) Finding ways to respond to some of the needs of people outside your church. Normally, 66 percent of congregants in churches similar to yours report that their church *actively responds to the needs of people outside the church* (see item 46, page 9). Only 34 percent of your congregation checked *yes* to this item. This is 32 percent below normal.

As seen earlier, your ministry is doing a great job in offering the kinds of experiences that transform lives. Christian ministry, however, also includes helping others. Sometimes, it is difficult to find the balance between "inward looking" and reaching out to others. Some

people in your congregation wrote personal notes indicating that they would like to see more attention being given to helping people outside the church.

2) **Connecting** for **dwellers** clearly needs attention, as seen on item 29, page seven. For dwellers (those coming 3 years or more), the survey item that best measures connecting is, *If I did not come for a month, several people would definitely miss me*. Also, far more dwellers than seekers were hearing (and engaging in?), complaints, as seen below. When people feel unconnected and hear complaining, many will leave (or have already left) their church.

When responding to congregational feedback regarding ministry essentials that need further development, some leaders focus on a glass half empty, some on a glass half full. For example, in your ministry, 65 percent of dwellers feel connected. This means that this glass is more than half full. But 65 percent also indicates that your ministry has *11 more points to go* to reach the level of excellence found in thriving church communities.

Miscellaneous Aspects of Ministry, listed on page nine, includes a mixture of items. Three are strongly linked to both life changing impact and church growth. Some can trigger irritation or disappointment. Some can block growth.

The aspects listed on page nine that are significantly linked to life-changing impact and numerical growth include; (1) a *low* level of hearing complaints, (2) a high percentage of people inviting others, and (3) hearing about God's love. For your church, God's love is stronger than normal. The rate of inviting others is normal.

Complaints are a bit high (4 points above normal). In exploring this further, we found that 24% of dwellers report hearing complaints, compared with seekers (3%). Do you know what dwellers are complaining about? Is it something from the recent past, or something currently happening? Can ways be found to address and help heal this?

Two other aspects can *block growth*, namely, latecomers having difficulty finding parking and/or seating. Neither appears to be a problem in your ministry.

Recommended Next Steps.

- You are invited to schedule a conference call with us to review your report, discuss questions, and explore issues and options you would like to discuss. Call us to explore best dates. You should initiate the conference call. During the conference, you can learn what other churches have done to strengthen certain areas needing attention. Sometimes, we can provide resource material.

- Prioritize the ministry areas that you agree most need attention. We recommend that you start with your "greatest opportunities." It's better to work with two or three of the most important areas and do well rather than trying to do too much and doing poorly. Identify who will carry the energy for change over time.

- Provide feedback to your congregation. Share information about strengths, areas needing attention and actions planned. When congregants identify ministry essentials that need further development, they need to know that they have been heard *and* that their input plays an important role in changes planned.

- Find a way to *objectively* measure progress made. In his research, Paul Borden (*Hit the Bullseye*) found that leaders in churches that really grew more often acted effectively and practiced accountability. One way to evaluate this is by resurveying in a year or two. If you decide to resurvey, your ministry becomes eligible for a 20 percent discount.

- Consider creating a survey response team for working on some of your prioritized areas. This insures that someone is carrying the energy for change *and* monitoring the impact of changes made. Such teams typically include a minister, a board member open to change, a wise elder, one of two newer people and an excellent facilitator.

Sustaining the energy for change is crucial to success. Boards create a vision and identify priorities, but most have too much on their plates without also trying to implement *and* sustain energy for change. Enabling others to act brings forth additional creativity. Too many leaders receive their survey results but do not remain focused on strengthening ministry essentials. These churches rarely become more life impacting or grow.

WHAT REALLY GROWS LIFE CHANGING CHURCHES

By studying survey responses from 31 churches that have re-surveyed, we found some surprising answers to what really grows life changing churches. These re-surveyed church communities clearly fell into two groups, those that were thriving (Group A) and those that were not (Group B). At the time of the 2nd survey, for example, more Group A congregants reported their lives changing and more people attending. In non-thriving churches (Group B), fewer lives than before were changing and attendance had declined. The average time between the first and second surveys was three years.

Number of Lives Changing

Churches	Number	<u>1st survey</u> Aver. % Lives Changing	<u>1st survey</u> Average Attendance	<u>2nd Survey</u> Aver. % Lives Changing	<u>2nd Survey</u> Average Attendance
Group A	17	82%	143	88%	211
Group B	14	84%	155	82%	115

Lives changing. In Group A churches, the average percentage of people who reported their lives were changing in positive ways *increased* from 82 to 88 percent between the 1st and 2nd survey. In Group B, the percentage of lives changing dropped from 84 to 82 percent.

Attendance. Average attendance in Group A churches increased from 143 to 211, an increase of 48 percent. This represents an increase of 16% per year. In Group B, average attendance *decreased* from 155 to 115, a decrease of 26 percent (9% per year).

These results take on new meaning when you look at the total number of lives changed. At the time of the first survey, for example, the total number of people whose lives were changing in **Group A** churches was **1,993** (17 churches x 82% x 143). This increased to **3,157** people at the time of the second survey (17 x 88% x 211) an *increase* of **1,164** people whose lives were changing! Thus, this increase occurred partly because of a stronger life changing impact in Group A churches and partly because more people began coming.

In contrast, the total number of people in **Group B** churches whose lives were changing dropped from **1823** (14 x 84% x 155) to **1352** (14 x 82% x 115) a decrease of **471** people.

What happened in Group A and B church communities that accounted for these amazing differences? We have learned as much from what does *not* work as from what leads to success. In Group B ministries:

- The second survey indicated that in Group B ministries, the overall **quality** of the ministry essentials that change lives and grow churches did *not* improve. Quality of ministry essentials changes lives. Our research clearly shows that when people's lives are changing, they report feeling enthused when talking with others. Enthusiasm attracts people.
- Congregations also reported a *decrease* in certain aspects of **leadership**. For example, congregants perceived that Group B leaders were less frequently *encouraging and complimenting people* at the time of the second survey. Encouragement and support helps create the kind of atmosphere in which people grow spiritually. Also, Group B leaders became *less willing to try new things*.

One can only speculate *why* many Group B leaders resisted using the survey information as a guide to identifying which aspects of ministry needed to be developed further. Initial resistance to change is normal. As seen below, however, Group A leaders moved beyond resistance into taking constructive action.

It puzzled us to find that Group B leaders less often encouraged and complimented people. Perhaps some were disappointed in how their congregation answered the survey questions and decreased their supportive contacts with congregants.

Also, in working with churches over the past 10 years, we have noticed that some leaders tend to discount information from congregants. They often express their feeling that the survey results showing ministry weaknesses were “wrong” and strongly conveying “we know best.” Organizational consultants generally agree that this top down approach no longer works well. Some resistant leaders tried introducing other changes not related to the survey results.

In Group A ministries:

- The overall **quality** of ministry essentials improved an average of six points. The two ministry areas showing the biggest improvement in Group A churches were, (1) *Really showing people how to pray* (+14 points) and (2), more leaders frequently *communicating the church's purpose* (11 point increase). In these churches, empowerment and leadership also improved significantly (+6 and + 5 points respectively).
- Congregants perceived leaders as more willing to try new things (6 point gain).

Clearly, *what leaders do with the survey information* makes all the difference in the world. Leaders who want to see their ministry help more people change in positive ways and see more people coming need to take their congregation's perceptions and experiences seriously. Listening to a vocal minority isn't particularly helpful. Also, leaders need to engage in constructive action and practice accountability by monitoring the impact of changes made.

How this information can help your church.

First, focus on improving those underdeveloped ministry essentials that have a proven impact on changing lives and growing congregations.

Second, continue or even increase complimenting and encouraging your congregants. Congregations do not thrive when leaders pull back from interacting in supportive ways.

Thank you for inviting us to be part of your journey in ministering to God's people.