



PATHWAYS

— *for congregational development* —

PREPARE AND ASSESS

- *Vital mission congregations creating a more just, equitable, and inclusive church and world.*

INTRODUCTION

- *And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. - Romans 5:5*

United Methodists of Greater New Jersey (GNJ) wants your congregation to have a great future. *Pathways* is a tool and guide to help you discern God's calling and plan for your congregation.

People in your community need to experience God's healing love. Healthy and fruitful congregations connected and engaged missionally with the people in the community are bearers of God's love as experienced through the life of Jesus Christ. *Pathways* will help you get there, and along the way will carry your congregation toward becoming more sustainable, vital, and culturally competent.

GNJ offers four main ways to develop spiritual leaders and congregations for vital ministry and mission:

1. **Working for Justice:** *Journey of Hope*, working towards ending the sin of racism.
2. **Growing in Leadership:** *Leadership Academy*, equipping clergy and laity to be leaders in congregational and community ministry
3. **Growing in Vitality:** *Pathways* for learning, growing, and planning a congregation's culturally competent vital ministry and mission. As disciples of Jesus Christ, congregations will be educated and equipped to do the important work of creating more just and equitable churches and communities.
4. **Deepening Faith:** *Breakthrough* for growing pastors and congregations in their preaching, worship practices and forming small groups.

Pathways offers your congregation an opportunity to assess your current situation, to learn and grow in understanding, and to create a plan that will give your congregation the tools and a plan to transform lives, the congregation, and the community. It will engage the congregation in intercultural competency work, which is an essential part of Christian discipleship. It will create clarity and focus for your ministry that will bear fruit and sustainable results.

THE PROCESS

The pathway to be a vital mission congregation

PART 1

PREPARE

- Form a team
- Center spiritually
- Create a discernment space, contemplating and listening to learn

ASSESS

- Claim your strengths
- Understand current realities and future probabilities
- Discover how God is calling you into the community
- Discern your learnings for next steps

PART 2

PLAN

- Identify the module(s) that your congregation will engage in for missional sustainability
- Set vitality goals and actions steps
- Organize and align resources to accomplish the plan
- Communicate with and invite the congregation to engage in the plan

ENGAGE

- Organize work teams and staff/congregational leader assignments
- Carry out your plan
- Have strategic conversations at least quarterly to celebrate accomplishments, identify learnings, make necessary changes to make progress

AREAS OF FOCUS

There are specific areas of planning and engagement, which have been divided into four different modules. In time more modules will be added. Following a time of assessment, your congregation may engage in as many of these areas as you wish and can realistically engage.

1. **Sustainability** | the *Sustainability Module* is for congregations to reduce risk factors that are or may create obstacles for their future: property issues, insufficient income, and dwindling membership. You will explore how to address your current risk factors and ensure a sustainable mission and ministry for your future, and you will experience how to leverage your strengths and consolidate your assets to create a healthy future
2. **Fruitfulness** | the *Congregational Health and Fruitfulness Module* is for congregations that need to grow in the five core areas of ministry that are essential for a congregation's vitality and fruitfulness: worship, small groups, new disciples, missions, and generosity. You will explore how to focus your time, leadership, and resources toward adapting, refining, and improving and growing in these areas of vitality. You will experience how to set goals that will move forward your ministry.
3. **Community Engagement** | the *Community Engagement Module* is for congregations that want to become partners with neighbors, community leaders, community organizations, businesses, and elected leaders to develop the community. It is also for congregations considering being a Hope Center. You will explore how to create dynamic partnerships within your community to meet the needs of the people, and you will experience how to discover the assets of your community and how you can work collaboratively for a brighter future.
4. **Organization** | the *Organization Model* is for churches that wish to shift their leadership's time and energy toward becoming spiritual leaders, rather than being board members concerned with routine administrative matters. You will explore how creating appropriate organization can support the work of congregational vitality. You will also experience how to develop an organizational structure that will best fit your size, budget, and leadership style.



■ *The Pathways team looks forward to working with you as you discern and plan for God's great future for your congregation.*

PREPARE

■ *Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans. - Proverbs 16:3*

CONGREGATION'S *PATHWAYS* TEAM

The *Pathways* team is a group of congregational leaders and influencers.

The team is to reflect the following principles:

- **Deep Faith** | a growing relationship with God through Jesus Christ.
- **Openness** | curiosity, not afraid of change, willing to engage with others by listening and respecting others.
- **Outward mindset** | missional focus, with an emphasis on the community.

Please see Appendix A for best practices on selecting an effective *Pathways* Team. At times, this team may add others and even encourage community members to join their work, particularly as the team plans to engage with the community.

FORM A TEAM

A Team Leader is to be selected by the church leadership to convene and coordinate the team's work. The team should reflect the congregation and the community. Invite those who lead the organizational and administrative life of the congregation. Include long time members, newer members and those who have not become members yet. The team members need to have a variety of experiences and viewpoints, to be intergenerational, and ethnic. Include those who represent the passions and experience for the program ministry.

The pastor is a key member of the *Pathways* team. Your pastor has been appointed to lead the church and set a vision for mission and ministry for the local congregation. The pastor as a team member will also keep the group rooted spiritually, offer theological reflection, and provide the encouragement needed for the team to engage in difficult conversation, which can be catalyst for change.

MODELS FOR PREPARING, ASSESSING AND PLANNING

There are a few models to move through the preparing, assessing, and planning sections of *Pathways*. Each congregation will create its own unique timeline. We set the following timelines as a guide for your planning.

- **Saturday Model** | meeting for four hours on Saturdays with appropriate time in between to collect data and complete action steps.
- **Weeknight Model** | meeting for two hours on weeknights with appropriate time in between to collect data and complete action steps.

The Preparing, Assessing and Discerning stages will take place over three to five months.

CENTER YOUR WORK SPIRITUALLY

Pathways is important and hard work. It challenges thinking, assumptions, and experiences. Each time you gather, make time and space to be spiritually centered and to shape participants into something new.

- **Prayer** | one person is to begin with a prayer, praying for the people of the congregation and community, and for the group's wisdom and understanding during their time together.
- **Centering Scripture** | the team should hear a passage of scripture read and sit quietly and ponder the following:

Creator, how will you shape me in this conversation?

Jesus, how will you guide me?

Holy Spirit, how are you blowing fresh breezes of wisdom and understanding for me today?

After a few minutes, each person will respond with only one word that captures their centering time.

HOLY CONFERENCING

Pathways is a journey of hope! Your engagement with this guide, conversations, and discernment as a team are what John Wesley called "Holy Conferencing." This work calls upon you, as part of a community of faith with deep love for God and each other, to look with fresh eyes at your context for ministry.

During this time, you will be asked to assess your congregation with realism, both its strengths and challenges. This process invites you to see yourself in connection to, not only a local congregation or the United Methodist Church, but also as part of the movement of God's Spirit in and through people that is the CHURCH!

The initial steps in *Pathways* are an important part of this sacred journey. Set aside assumptions and preconceived outcomes and open yourself to dive in deeply in faith, trusting in God's wisdom and guidance.

THE FOLLOWING ARE IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF HOLY CONFERENCING:

- **Deep Listening** | Listen to each other and for God.
- **Engagement** | Listen to understand, and when speaking, honor what someone else has said, and share for yourself, not for others.
- **Invitation** | Welcome everyone into the conversation and ensure no one voice dominates the conversation. Invite others to share.
- **Trust** | Trust that the group and the answers are with the team.
- **Comfortable** | Be at peace with and allow for silence and disagreement. God speaks in the midst of each.

Personal	
Congregational	
Community	

THE JOURNEY BEGINS: I LOVE TO TELL THE STORY

Your story, your congregation's story, and God's big story.

God's story holds the story of faith together. In several sentences, please share the following stories:

- **Personal Story** | How has your faith story been impacted by this congregation?
- **Congregational Story** | Share a key moment in your congregation's story over the last few years
- **Community Story** | As you look at your community, how do you describe the story of the community unfolding. How might your congregation help write a new chapter.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

Read through this scripture and spend a few minutes pondering and discussing together: This scripture comes at the end of the second chapter of Acts, or as some call it "the birth of the Church chapter."

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:42

- *What was the focus of their actions as they gathered?*
- *The gathered were made up of apostles and disciples. What was the work of each?*
- *What might it mean for you as a congregation to focus on the apostles' teaching?*
- *Share a time you were blessed to worship, be in fellowship with other followers of Christ? What did you feel? How did it connect you to God and others?*

As we end this first section, we will close in Holy Communion. You are invited to break bread together and each lift a sentence to pray for your community and congregation.



ASSESS

■ *Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. - Matthew 7:24*

Performing a comprehensive congregational assessment provides leaders with the information and insights needed to gain a clearer picture of your church’s health and to evaluate the key internal and external factors impacting the vitality and fruitfulness of your ministry in the community.

Pathways continues, assessing your congregation in the following areas:

1. **Strengths** | highlight the values, assets, and gifts of your congregation.
2. **Sustainability** | measure the congregation’s resources to sustain the mission.
3. **Fruitfulness** | evaluate discipleship engagement in the core ministries of the church.
4. **Cultural Competency** | personal and congregational learning, growth, and commitment and engaging the community in dismantling racism and sexism and other issues of equity and inclusion.
5. **Community Engagement** | consider how your congregation reflects and engages your community.

ASSESSING YOUR CONGREGATIONS’ STRENGTHS

Each team member is invited to answer the following questions on their own and then bring them to the team for a time of conversation and collective discernment.

CORE VALUES

Core values are principles or standards about what is most important, both for individuals and congregations. They explain “who we are”; they are our identity. Values usually do not change overtime. They are the constant, passionate, biblical core beliefs that keep a congregation focused on its mission and ministry purpose.

Circle one: Using a scale of 1-5, with (1) meaning “Not Yet” and (5) meaning “Strongly Agree,” assess your congregation’s missional ethos and practices.

	1	2	3	4	5	Your Score
Your congregation has an official set of core values that are public, shared regularly, and interpreted to disciples and leaders.						
Your congregation’s mission statement is clearly aligned with the mission of the United Methodist Church of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.						
Your congregation has an official vision statement that guides the ministry of the church, and that has been reviewed/updated in the past 3-5 years.						
Section Average <i>Sum of individual scores divided by 3.</i>						

After review and conversation, enter your assessment value for this section on the *Pathways Worksheet*.

LEADERSHIP

■ *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. - 1 Corinthians 12:27*

Equipped and empowered lay and clergy leadership that are released for ministry will direct the congregation towards vitality and fruitfulness. Effective leaders lead out of their spiritual giftedness and their natural and acquired skills. Leaders surface and are developed.

Circle one: Using a scale of 1-5, with (1) meaning “Not Yet” and (5) meaning “Strongly Agree,” assess your congregation’s leadership development ethos and practices.

	1	2	3	4	5	Your Score
Your congregation’s leaders are actively growing as disciples of Jesus.						
Your congregation’s leaders can explain the mission and the vision of the church in compelling ways.						
Your congregation regularly offers resources to help people identify their spiritual gifts and skills for fruitful servant leadership.						
Your congregation has an intentional process to identify, develop and deploy people to leadership.						
Your congregation offers tools and opportunities for leaders to evaluate their performance and identify growth areas.						
Your congregation regularly thanks disciples, leaders, and the pastor(s) for their service.						
Your congregation’s leaders intentionally mentor other people in the church and are also mentored by others.						
Your congregation’s leadership team reflects the diversity in your pews (age, gender, ethnicity, culture, etc.)						

Section Average
Sum of individual scores divided by 3.

After review and conversation, enter your assessment value for this section on the *Pathways Worksheet*.

ASSETS FOR MINISTRY

- *God has gifted your congregation with an abundance of resources to carry out the mission of the church. The Bible witnesses to the goodness and fullness of God’s provision from Genesis 1 all the way to Revelations 21.*

An asset is anything that can be used to grow vitality in your church. It can be a person, a physical structure or place, a space, a program, a practice, a community service, or a partner organization.

List the assets for ministry present in your congregation and community for each of the following categories: and community for each of the following categories:



Hand: skills that people in the congregation possess and are willing to share with others (i.e., carpentry, sewing, bookkeeping, teaching, cooking, playing a musical instrument, etc.)

Empty light green rectangular box for notes.

Head: knowledge that people in the congregation have in an area like child development, health care, history of your neighborhood, teaching, finances, legal matters, etc.

Empty light green rectangular box for notes.

Heart: passions that people in the congregation have that stir them to action (i.e., prayer, racial justice, immigration rights, recovery ministries, mission, outreach, climate change, etc.)

Empty light green rectangular box for notes.

Initiatives: programs available through the congregation and in the community that seek to enhance people’s discipleship and quality of life (Contemporary Worship Service, Small Groups, Youth Group, AA, Grieving Groups, etc.)

Relationships: contacts/connections with agencies, organizations, and influencers in the community that can expand the reach of the congregation’s ministry (Social workers, school principal/counselors, police chief, mayor, ecumenical associations, etc.)

Mortar: buildings, places, spaces, and equipment that is available for ministry and community outreach (i.e., multi-purpose sanctuary, basketball court, audio visual equipment, livestreaming cameras, classrooms, nearby parks, parking, etc.)



After review and conversation, list your assets for each category on the *Pathways Worksheet*.

CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRY STRENGTHS

Fruitful congregations offer meaningful and relevant ministries, programs and initiatives that connect and engage the congregation and people in the community.

Using a scale of 1-5, with (1) meaning “Not Yet” and (5) meaning “Strongly Agree”, assess your congregation’s strengths in ministry.

	1	2	3	4	5	Your Score
Worship and Preaching	1	2	3	4	5	
Pastoral Care / Congregational Care	1	2	3	4	5	
Developing and Nurturing Disciples	1	2	3	4	5	
Children Ministries	1	2	3	4	5	
Youth Ministries	1	2	3	4	5	
Young Adult Ministries	1	2	3	4	5	
Mission in the Community	1	2	3	4	5	
Generosity and Stewardship	1	2	3	4	5	
Equipping Laity for Ministry and Mission	1	2	3	4	5	
Interpersonal Relations	1	2	3	4	5	
Cultural Competency	1	2	3	4	5	
Conflict Resolution	1	2	3	4	5	
Strategic Visioning and Planning	1	2	3	4	5	
Administration	1	2	3	4	5	
Communications	1	2	3	4	5	
Commitment to Connectional Ministry	1	2	3	4	5	
Other	1	2	3	4	5	
Other	1	2	3	4	5	
<i>Section Average</i> <i>Sum of individual scores/ 16.</i>						

After review and conversation, enter your assessment value for this section and list your top five (5) strengths on the *Pathways Worksheet*.

Strength 1: _____ Strength 4: _____

Strength 2: _____ Strength 5: _____

Strength 3: _____

ASSESSING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Vitality and sustainability are connected factors toward effective ministry; however, they are different things. Vitality is the faith and spiritual life fullness of a congregation measured by participation and engagement through five core markers of vitality: worship, small groups, new professions of faith, hands on mission, and generosity. Sustainability measures the capacity of a congregation to carry out a vital mission with the resources available.

When a congregation is no longer able to have a robust mission in the community, meet financial and administrative obligations and attract new people, this becomes a monumental obstacle for the continuation of the ministry. A sustainable congregation can maintain its buildings and properties and support its leadership and ministry budget so it can carry out the mission in the community and be bearers of hope in the world.

CHURCHES AT-RISK – 10 INDICATORS

There are 10 areas evaluated to determine if the mission and ministry of a congregation is at risk. While all congregations have potential and experience mission constraints, churches with a higher number of risk indicators have less probability to recover and turnaround.

Using the information reported by your congregation in the GNJ Year End Statistical Reports through Ezra, assess your congregation's risk for the following indicators:



<p>The congregation's worship attendance is under 50 people. (2 points). While congregation vitality and sustainability come in all sizes, the smaller the congregation's size, the more difficult it is to carry out ministry in the community. <i>GNJ healthiest congregations average over 125 in worship attendance.</i></p>	<p>Your congregation's average worship attendance is: _____</p> <p><i>Line # 7 on your EZRA report</i></p>
<p>The congregation declined 25% in worship attendance over the last five years (2 points). Accelerated decline in worship attendance significantly decreases the ministry capacity of the congregation. <i>GNJ healthy congregations grew by 3% over five years.</i></p>	<p>Your congregation's worship attendance (grew) or (declined) by: _____%</p> <p><i>Line # 7 on your EZRA report</i></p>
<p>Pastoral compensation averages more than \$1,000 per worshiper. This indicates that there are fewer resources for ministry, community mission and administration. (2points) <i>GNJ's healthy congregations investment by church size groups is:</i> GNJ healthy congregations' investment by church size groups is: Under 50 in worship, \$751.77 50-100 in worship, \$606.73/ 101-150 in worship, \$485.66 151 and above is \$334.37</p>	<p>Your pastoral compensation average per worshiper is: \$ _____</p> <p><i>Line # 41a, b, c on your EZRA report</i></p>
<p>The congregation debt averages more than \$7,000 per worshiper and the average worship attendance more than 100 people. This makes it difficult to pay off debt and hinders ongoing ministry and mission. (4 points) <i>GNJ's healthy congregations worshipping over 100 debt average is \$377 per worshiper (this number is exclusive of a building campaign).</i></p>	<p>Your congregation's average debt per worshiper is: \$ _____</p> <p><i>Line # 26, 27on your EZRA report</i></p>
<p>The congregation's debt is greater than \$4,000 per worshiper and the average worship attendance less than 100 people. The combination of these two factors creates greater risk as it significantly reduces the funds available for ministry and mission in the community. (4 points) <i>GNJ's healthy congregations worshipping under 100 debt average is \$1,808 per worshiper (this number is exclusive of a building campaign).</i></p>	<p>Your congregation's average debt per worshiper is: \$ _____</p> <p><i>Line # 26, 27on your EZRA report</i></p>
<p>The congregation's operational expenses are greater than \$1,500 per worshiper. When congregations are spending more per average worshiper for utilities, insurance, building maintenance and other administrative expenses, they can no longer afford supporting a clergy person and ministry expenses to attract new people, serve the community and make new disciples. (6 points) <i>GNJ healthy congregations' average operational expenses are \$409.30 per worshiper.</i></p>	<p>Your congregation's average operational expenses per worshiper are: \$ _____</p> <p><i>Line # 47on your EZRA report</i></p>
<p>The pastoral compensation and operational expenses combined are greater than the income of the congregation. (5 points) Your congregation's pastoral compensation and operational expenses (is), (is not) greater than the congregation's income.</p>	<p>Is / Is not <i>Line # 41a,b,c plus # 47 on your EZRA report</i></p>
<p>The congregation's liquid assets, including endowments are less than the congregation's 6-month budget, and/or has declined by 15% or more over the last three years.</p> <p>This may indicate that the regular income sources are not enough to cover the operation expenses of the church and/or that the church income does not provide enough to set monies aside for special project and/or difficult seasons. (5 points)</p>	<p>Your congregation's liquid assets is _____ and it (does, does not) exceed six months of budgeted expenses. Your liquid assets have (grown, declined) by: _____%. <i>Line # 25 on your EZRA report</i></p>
<p>The congregation did not give 100% of its Shared Ministry. (8 points) <i>GNJ's healthy congregations give 100%.</i></p>	<p>Your congregation gave: _____%.</p>
<p>The congregation did not pay 100% of its property insurance, health insurance, pension, and other direct bills from GNJ or has past due amounts from previous years? (8 points) <i>GNJ's healthy congregations pay 100%.</i></p>	<p>Your congregation gave: _____%.</p>

Total Sustainability Score is:

Your Sustainability Score is:

Churches who are not giving 100% of shared ministry^[1] and paying 100% billables for the past two consecutive years are automatically a Sustainability Level 2 church and at risk of becoming a non-viable congregation. Churches with these risk factors must demonstrate significant progress in meeting these goals within 18 months.

- **Sustainability Level 5** | Very strong position to sustain mission and ministry – up to 10 points.
- **Sustainability Level 4** | Strong position to sustain mission and ministry – 11-20 points.
- **Sustainability Level 3** | Positioned to sustain mission and ministry – 21-25 points.
- **Sustainability Level 2** | Requires assessment, a plan and improvement of sustainability 26-35 points.
- **Sustainability Level 1** | Requires GNJ team assessment, and congregational plan and improvement of sustainability 26-50 points.



- **Congregations with Sustainability Risk number of 4 and 5** sustainability should develop a plan to take appropriate steps to strengthen and further engage in ministry and mission. This may include things like hiring an additional staff person to grow a particular ministry or adding to or improving the building for mission and ministry.
- **Churches with Sustainability Risk number of 2 and 3** sustainability should review areas of deficiency and use the Pathways Sustainability Module to develop a plan to address them. While they may be addressed over 1-3 years, there must be a sense of urgency. You will either become more sustainable or lose capacity to sustain mission and ministry.
- **If your congregation has a Sustainability Risk number of 1** the next step is to contact your district superintendent as you work with a facilitator on a conversation about being a legacy church and discern together steps toward ending ministry well and consideration of closing with purpose and intentionality.

After review and conversation, record your sustainability assessment value and sustainability level on the *Pathways Worksheet*.

[1] For the year 2020, 67% participation in Shared Giving is counted as 100%.

ASSESSING CONGREGATIONAL HEALTH AND FRUITFULNESS

Fruitful congregations live out their God-breathed mission to make disciples for the transformation of the world. They connect people with God, each other, and the world. There are five core areas of ministry that are essential for a congregation’s vitality and fruitfulness: worship, small groups, new disciples, missions, and generosity.

WORSHIP,
 at its core, is about the wonder of worshipping the Creator of the Universe. It is an encounter with the living God through the risen Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Circle one: Using a scale of 1-5, with (1) meaning “Not Yet” and (5) meaning “Strongly Agree,” assess your congregation’s worship practices.

	1	2	3	4	5	Your Score
The worship experience in your congregation is invitational, interactive, inter-generational, interesting, and inspiring.						
The worship experience in your congregation is done with excellence and reflects a growing diversity in styles of preaching, music, and prayer.						
The worship experience in your congregation includes preaching that consistently helps disciples grow in their theological understanding and apply the scriptures/faith to daily living.						
The worship experience in your congregation regularly includes an invitation for participants to make a decision for Christ and fruitful discipleship.						
The worship experiences in your congregation are planned with a team approach that includes both clergy and laity.						
<i>Section Average Sum of individual scores/ 5.</i>						

SIGNS OF FRUITFULNESS

Vital congregations grow their average worship attendance by at least one worshiper over a three-year period.

Enter your congregation’s average worship attendance change over the past 3 years.	
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After review and conversation, on your *The Pathways Worksheet*, enter your score for this section and Vitality Outcome.

NEW DISCIPLES MAKING

New Disciples Making involves a way of life that demonstrates our meaning, significance, and purpose in God, as individuals and as the church; and faith sharing that invites people into a relationship with Jesus Christ, and community through the church.

Circle one: Using a scale of 1-5, with (1) meaning “Not Yet” and (5) meaning “Strongly Agree,” assess your congregation’s worship practices.

	1	2	3	4	5	Your Score
Your congregation has an intentional system to welcome, follow up and incorporate visitors into the life of the church.						
Your congregation regularly equips and encourages disciples and leaders to share their faith with others and invite people to the church.						
Your congregation has had new visitors attend worship, small groups, or mission projects in the last year.						
More than 25% of visitors return after an initial visit.						
Church members can name at least one person that they have invited into faith, outside their family, in the last three years.						
Congregants identify and actively pray for persons to come to faith.						
<i>Section Average Sum of individual scores/6.</i>						

SIGNS OF FRUITFULNESS

Vital congregations have one new profession/reaffirmation of faith for every 20 worshipers each year.

Enter your congregation’s number of new professions of faith per 20 worshipers. <i>Average Worship Attendance/20 = Professions of Faith needed for regenerative ministry.</i>	
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After review and conversation, enter your assessment value and vitality outcome for this section on the *Pathways Worksheet*.

SMALL GROUPS

Small Groups intentionally seek to build relationships and Christian community, help disciples mature in their faith, and engage disciples in their calling and purpose in life.

Using a scale of 1-5, with (1) meaning “Not Yet” and (5) meaning “Strongly Agree,” assess your congregation’s small group practices.

	1	2	3	4	5	Your Score
Your congregation consistently offers small groups throughout the year.						
Your congregation regularly encourages all members and participants to be part of a small group experience.						
Your congregation offers at least one small group experience for new disciples and people outside the church (i.e., grieving, parenting, recovery, etc.).						
Your congregations offer small groups that are relevant and meaningful to children, youth, and young adults.						
Your congregation’s small groups are mostly led by laity.						
Your congregation’s small groups experience prioritize conversation amongst participants over sharing of information by the group leader.						
Your congregation has a small group strategy and program for the next nine months.						
<i>Section Average Sum of individual scores/7.</i>						

SIGNS OF FRUITFULNESS

Vital congregations have 60% of worshipers regularly participate in a small group experience.

Enter your congregation’s percentage of worshipers that participate in small groups. <i>Small Groups Participation / Average Worship Attendance = Percentage of worshipers in small groups.</i>	
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After review and conversation, enter your assessment value and vitality outcome for this section on the *Pathways Worksheet*.

OUTREACH AND MISSIONS

Outreach & Missions translates to action. It is being the hands and feet of Jesus Christ in the community and around the world. It involves engaging our communities in the places of greatest need and demonstrating God’s mercy through ministries that provide for daily life necessities.

Using a scale of 1-5, with (1) meaning “Not Yet” and (5) meaning “Strongly Agree,” assess your congregation’s mission practices.

	1	2	3	4	5	Your Score
Your congregation actively engages in at least one hands-on mercy and justice initiative/ministry through your own outreach (i.e., food pantry, thrift shops, recovery groups, employment training, etc.)						
Your congregation recruit volunteers of all ages and trains them to serve with excellence, compassion, and cultural competence.						
Your congregation collaborates on local hands-on outreach and mission through partnerships with other churches and organizations.						
Your congregation sends volunteers to participate in regional or international hands-on mission projects at least once every two years.						
Your congregation tithes a portion of their income to mission or supports a missionary.						
Your congregation regularly shares stories of transformation during worship to encourage disciples to a life of active service in the community.						
<i>Section Average Sum of individual scores/6.</i>						

SIGNS OF FRUITFULNESS

Vital congregations have 50% of worshipers participating in hands-on mission in the community.

<p><i>Enter your congregation’s percentage of worshippers that engage in hands-on mission. People engaged in hands-on mission / Average Worship Attendance = Percentage of worshippers engaging hands-on mission.</i></p>	
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After review and conversation, enter your assessment value and vitality outcome for this section on the *Pathways Worksheet*.

GENEROSITY

Generosity focuses on God’s abundance and prioritizes offering to God the best of our time, talents, and resources for ministry and mission in the community and the word.

Using a scale of 1-5, with (1) meaning “Not Yet” and (5) meaning “Strongly Agree,” assess your congregation’s generosity practices.

	1	2	3	4	5	Your Score
Your congregation promotes giving as an opportunity for disciples to express their faith and invest in the vision of the church, rather than a means to cover the budget.						
Your congregation has an intentional yearlong stewardship plan to help disciples grow in their generosity, not just during the yearly stewardship campaign.						
Your congregation teaches about generous giving and living during the new disciples/membership classes.						
Your congregation shares a detailed financial report to all members and participants at least once a year to model healthy transparency and accountability.						
Your congregation has an intentional plan to thank members and participants who give to the church at least twice a year.						
<i>Section Average Sum of individual scores/5.</i>						

SIGNS OF FRUITFULNESS

Vital congregations raise enough money to fully fund the operations and ministries of the congregation. GNJ anticipates all congregations achieving three to five markers.

<p><i>Enter your congregations’ budget balance for the past year.</i> <i>Total Income – Total Expenses = Budget Balance</i></p>	
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After review and conversation, enter your assessment value and vitality outcome for this section on the *Pathways Worksheet*.

ASSESSING YOUR CULTURAL COMPETENCY AWARENESS

Intercultural competency is the skill and ability to understand the cultural norms and behaviors of another person or group and shift our way of thinking and behaviors based on the identified differences and commonalities to effectively connect with the other person or group.



Using a scale of 1-5, with (1) meaning “Not Yet” and (5) meaning “Strongly Agree,” assess your congregation’s cultural competency ethos.

					Your Score
People in your congregation are aware of and open to sharing their values and culture with others.	1	2	3	4	
People in your congregation acknowledge their discomfort when encountering human differences of any kind (. i.e., race, color, theological perspective, language, social-economics, political views, etc.)	1	2	3	4	
People in your congregation have a growing understanding of the different cultural backgrounds present in the congregation and community and value them as crucial to the core identity of persons and groups.	1	2	3	4	
People in your congregation understand that individuals and the church culture are not the standards when assessing appropriate and inappropriate behaviors.	1	2	3	4	
People in your congregation are committed to a spirit and mindset of constantly learning about other persons and groups.	1	2	3	4	

Section Average
Sum of individual scores/ 5.

After review and conversation, enter your assessment value for this section on the *Pathways Worksheet*.

ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNITY

■ *Fruitful congregations have a heart for, understand, and are connected to their community.*

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

MissionInsite - All GNJ congregations have free, unlimited access to MissionInsite. A community demographics information website. Instructions on how to register your church is available at <https://missioninsite.com>.

IN MISSIONINSITE

1. Set the radius based on your context, urban 1 miles, suburban and rural up to 5 miles.
2. Download and review the ExecutiveInsite Report and the MinistryInsite Report.

Then, discuss together the questions below to get a snapshot of your community and church.



Complete the table below using the ExecutiveInsite report from MissionInsite.

	Community	Church
Population		
What is the projected population change (percentage) for your community for the next five years?		
In what age groups will you find the greatest shift (either up or down)?		
Age Groups – indicate breakdown, total should be 100%		
What is the current average age of your community and church?		
Children and youth ages 0-17		
Young adults ages 18-34		
Adults ages 35 to 64		
Senior adults ages 65 and over		
Ethnicity – indicate breakdown, total should be 100%		
Asian (Non-Hispanic)		
Black/African American (Non-Hispanic)		
White		
Hispanic or Latino		
Pacific Island/American Indian/Other (Non-Hispanic)		
Income		
Average per capita income		
Average household income		
Anticipated change in the next five years indicated by percentage.		
Education		
High School or Less		
Associate Degree or Greater		

Based on the MissionInsite information, discuss the following questions as a team:

The congregation closely reflects the ages of the people in our community	Y	N
The congregation closely reflects the economic condition of the people in our community	Y	N
The congregation closely reflects the race of the people in our community	Y	N
The congregation has ministries that are serving people in our community who are not like us	Y	N
Our leadership reflect the age, education, economic and race of the people in the community	Y	N
Our congregation recognizes we are not as engaged as called to be in relationship with our community	Y	N

WHAT ARE YOU LEARNING?

DISCUSS WITH YOUR TEAM THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. What have you observed about your community?
2. What surprised you?
3. What was confirmed?

MISSIONAL DISCERNMENT

- *My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style. - Maya Angelou.*

You and your congregation have had important conversations to assess your church’s strengths, leadership, ministry, sustainability, vitality on the 5 core ministries, cultural competence, and engagement with your community. Now, it is time to pause and listen to what you have learned and prayerfully consider your next steps.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

As you prepare for this important time together, ask the members of the *Pathways* team to prepare in advance by taking some personal time to pray, read scripture and reflect on the following questions.

Using a scale of 1-5, with (1) meaning “Not Yet” and (5) meaning “Strongly Agree,” discern your personal missional engagement.

	1	2	3	4	5	Your Score
My faith is being shaped and lived out through the ministry of my congregation today.						
I am currently being inspired, challenged, and unleashed to serve others in the name of Christ.						
I am fully invested in the life of the church, with my prayers, presence, service, giving, and witness.						
I am ready and willing to begin the challenging work of dismantling the sin of racism.						
I am ready and willing to begin the challenging work of dismantling the sin of sexism.						
I am prepared to go forward as a member of the ACT Plan Team to assure my congregation fully lives out its call for today and into the future.						
My experience and my aspirations reflect the overall congregation.						
<i>Section Average Sum of individual scores/ 7.</i>						

Enter your personal discernment score. _____

TEAM DISCERNMENT

- *For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven... - Ecclesiastes 3:1*

Now, it is time to move beyond your personal reflections to discern as leaders the place God is leading the congregation. Review all the assessment sections and consider what God has next for you. While it is important to aspire to great things, it is equally important to realistically ground your conversations in the information you collected in your *Pathways Worksheet*.

We, as followers of Jesus, are part of something much bigger than ourselves, our local congregation, even our denomination. We are a part of God’s wide and deep movement of the Holy Spirit from generation to generation.

As a group discuss the following questions, considering your personal reflections and congregational assessment:

1. What does it mean to you that “for everything there is a season”?

What season is your congregation in today?

Using a scale of 1-5, with (1) meaning “Not Yet” and (5) meaning “Strongly Agree,” discern your congregation’s missional reality.

						Your Score
Our congregation currently offers abundant life to its members and is a source of life in the community. New people regularly join our congregation, grow in their faith, and offer servant leadership in the church and community.	1	2	3	4	5	
Our congregation has the gifts and talents, including both human and financial resources, to continue offering sustainable life-giving ministry.	1	2	3	4	5	
Our congregation will embrace the change necessary to move towards vitality and dismantling the sin of racism and sexism.	1	2	3	4	5	
<i>Section Average</i> <i>Sum of individual scores/ 3.</i>						

After review and conversation, enter your team assessment value for this section in the *Pathways Worksheet*.

NEXT STEPS

As a team, prayerfully discern which of the following statements realistically best describes your congregation’s direction for the future. Take some time in prayer, silence, and discussion until you feel God’s peace about the way you have discerned to move forward.

Again, remember that while it is important to aspire to great things, it is equally important to realistically ground your conversations and discernment in the information you collected in your *Pathways Worksheet*.



A	We do not feel we need any support from GNJ right now.
B	We humbly recognize that our best days are behind us, and it is time to discontinue. We are ready to take the next steps to do so and ensure resources are available to reach future generations with the good news of Jesus Christ.
C	We recognize that our ministry and mission is important to our community. We are also concerned that our church cannot be sustainable in the future and need to discuss possible actions to adapt our congregation’s ministry to its current realistic capacity.
D	We recognize that our ministry and mission is important to our community. We are also concerned that our church cannot be sustainable in the future, and we would like to explore affiliating with another United Methodist congregation nearby to best use our limited resources.
E	<p>We are ready to take the next steps to grow in health and fruitfulness as a congregation through Pathways</p> <p>Select the module(s) that will be most helpful for your congregations:</p> <p>___ SUSTAINABILITY: is for congregations that desire to reduce risk factors that are or may create obstacles for sustainable ministry.</p> <p>___ FRUITFULNESS - is for congregations that desire to create an intentional discipleship system and grow their fruitfulness in the 5 core ministries: worship, small groups, new disciples, missions, and generosity.</p> <p>___ ORGANIZATION: is for congregations that wish to shift their governance structure into a simplified mission leadership board.</p>
	<p>COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: is for congregations that desire to become partners with neighbors, community leaders and organizations for sustainable community transformation, and for churches wanting to start Hope Centers.</p>

After review, conversation, and prayerful discernment, enter your team discernment in the *Pathways Worksheet*. At this point, work with the facilitator partnering with your congregation about your discernment to understand your next steps.

APPENDIX A

BUILDING A TEAM

PEOPLE NOT TO INVITE

- people not good at decision making or unable to consider potential consequences
- people who are unwilling to change themselves or their church to accommodate the needs of other people
- people with “axes to grind” about the church
- the pastor’s #1 opponent
- people who want to go back to 1947, or whatever year is remembered as the favorite time in your church
- people too busy to be effective
- people who focus on managing the details instead of looking at the big picture

PEOPLE TO INVITE

- people who would be open to what God is calling your church to be and to be about in the future
- people who understand your church’s strengths and weaknesses
- people who understand the “political realities” of your church
- people who can understand the value of open deliberations and the need for a redundant system for keeping membership informed
- people actively supportive of the current pastor
- people willing to learn new things and think new thoughts
- people who have a “voice” back in the congregation and are listened to when they speak
- people who are willing to put time, energy, work, and prayer into the effort of the committee
- people comfortable discussing ideas (“purpose,” “role,” “mission”)
- people active as volunteers in the life and ministry of the church

WHO SHOULD BE THE CHAIRPERSON?

- not the pastor
- a person with a strong voice and credibility in the congregation and who will be listened to when reports are offered

From Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations
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APPENDIX B: COMING OUT OF THE PANDEMIC AWARENESS

- *So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! - 2 Corinthians 5:17*

We are coming through a global pandemic, the likes of which have not been seen for a least a century and the challenges of it have been compounded by travel and commerce that span the globe. There is no doubt that COVID-19 and efforts to respond and treat people have severely impacted nearly every nation. The full impact of this will not be measured in just years but perhaps generations. It has accelerated changes already underway and literally overnight moved the Church into a new world where there appears that there is little that will return to the “old” normal.

How your congregation fares, depends in large part on how the leaders and members make intentional decisions that may be needed to refined, adapted, changed or replaced by new decisions and directions as we move out of the pandemic.

Kate Kotan, author of “Being the Church in a Post-Pandemic World” writes that “the two most critical and key traits for a healthy, vital and relevant church will be flexibility and being highly relational! Other traits and attributes congregational leaders will need are being visionary, spiritually grounded, deeply committed, innovative or entrepreneurial, bold, courageous and resilient.”¹

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AS YOUR CONGREGATION MOVES THROUGH THE PANDEMIC AND MINISTERS IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD.

- Name three areas where you have seen momentum in the last few months? These are opportunities for your congregation; how can you lift them up or expand them?
- Name three of your biggest challenges as a congregation. What can you let go of for now?
- Who is missing? What intentional plan can you develop to reconnect and reengage them? Who would be the best to reach out to them?
- What changes have happened in your mission and ministry that seem to be permanent; which changes seem to be transitional?
- How are you using technology for mission and ministry? In worship? In small groups? In community outreach? What investments have you made and/or might need to make in technology? In staffing to support the new ways you are doing ministry?
- How are you structuring worship to meet the needs of the congregation as well as reaching new people? How do you create relationships with new people both in person and virtual attendees.
- What might need to change in worship to reach new people, especially those who are not coming into your building?
- How did your congregation connect with your community during the pandemic? What was successful that needs to continue? What might be new needs in your community at this stage of the pandemic? Are there community members who have been impacted more by the pandemic? Is this a need you might be able to address?
- What are the unique strengths of your congregation that can be adapted or leveraged to move your ministry forward coming out of the pandemic?
- How ready and willing do you believe the congregation is prepared to carry out your mission in this transitional season?

¹K. Kotan, “Being the Church in a Post-Pandemic World!”, 18.



PATHWAYS
— *for congregational development* —