

Sustainability

Why is sustainability important?

The ability to sustain the mission and ministry of a congregation is paramount to making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Primary to the mission is committed and inspired disciples of Jesus Christ and the financial resources to carry out the mission. Without people and without money, a congregation cannot sustain its mission and its own future.

Sustainability is the measurement of how well a congregation can sustain its mission and ministry financially. In your congregation's sustainability report, it measures your financial capacity by looking at a series of indicators to reach new people, grow giving and have the right proportions of givers to ministry and operational expenses. Every congregation faces challenges within its control and things beyond their control. Some examples are financial challenges, property issues, decline in the number of people, loss of vitality, difficulty reaching new people, conflict, pandemics, and fluctuations in the economy. The ability and commitment to address the issues makes the difference. Some of these a congregation may be able to address, and some are beyond the capacity and ability of the congregation to address. For some congregations they have completed their life cycle and it is time to discontinue.

What is the difference between sustainability and vitality?

Sustainability is the measure of a congregation's capacity to sustain its ministry and mission, with factors such as facilities, revenue, spending, debt, and people being taken into account. Vitality measures how a congregation is able to engage its people in five core ministries of the church found in Acts 2:41-47. Congregations that demonstrate vitality but are unsustainable are congregations that do not have enough people and finances to sustain the ministry and operations of the congregation.

What are the key measures of sustainability?

1. People
 - Does the congregation have enough people to carry out the ministry and administrative tasks of the congregation?
 - Are the people of the congregation engaged and serving in leadership and supporting with their time and talents the ministry and administrative tasks of the congregation?
 - Are the people of the congregation inviting new people and making disciples of Jesus Christ so that at a minimum the congregation at least maintaining but more importantly growing over time?
2. Finances and Property
 - Is there sufficient giving to pay all obligations including ministry activities, mission support, administration, sufficient clergy and staff salaries and benefits, the bills of the congregation including shared ministry apportionments and general church apportionments and the maintenance of the property?

- Does the congregation have debt that is limiting the congregation's ability to carry out the mission and ministry of the congregation?
- Does the congregation's debt focus the congregation on itself rather than reaching out to others.
- Is there deferred maintenance that is not being addressed because there are insufficient funds?
- Are their reserves to sustain the mission and ministry and are the reserves growing or are they being depleted?

What are the levels of sustainability?

There are five levels of sustainability.

Sustainability 5

Indicates that you are very likely to sustain your congregation's mission and ministry.

Sustainability 4

Indicates that you are likely to sustain your congregation's mission and ministry.

Sustainability 3

Indicates that while you are likely to sustain mission and ministry, you have challenges that must be addressed.

Sustainability 2

Indicates that it is unlikely that you will be able to continue as you are and that you will need to address issues immediately or the prospects of your closing in the coming years are likely.

Sustainability 1

Indicates that your best years are behind you and that you need to discern your legacy and how you want to close with dignity.

Congregations with sustainability risk numbers of 2 and 3 should develop a plan that includes action steps to address and strengthen in any or all five areas of sustainability: facilities, finance-revenue, spending, debt, and faithful folks. There should be a sense of urgency that drives focused attention and intention to implement your plan for sustainability.

How can find out my congregation's sustainability rating and receive a report about my congregation's sustainability?

Sustainability scores can be found in the stats table in each Church Profile for the church conference reports.