

pulse

A Congregational Vitality Assessment Tool

PULSE 2

Valley Life Community Church

Meridian, Idaho

February, 2018

Final Report
Updated

Introduction

Dear Valley Life Community Church,

Thank you for letting us take your PULSE for a second time. As you ponder the PULSE results from this year and compare them to the results from last time, keep in mind that you may have advanced, remained the same or even digressed on the ten Healthy Missional markers. It is what it is. It takes a certain degree of emotional fortitude to be able to look at ourselves and speak honestly about our current condition, especially when compared to a prior years' PULSE results.

We encourage you to be vulnerable and transparent with each other and with God as you review these findings. In short, be a non-anxious presence. Reaffirm your Relational Covenant to God and to each other. May your conversations be civil, compassionate and Christ-honoring.

In the first PULSE, we provided interpretation and recommendations. In the subsequent PULSE assessments, we encourage you to take the lead. We ask that you first distribute these results and sample framing questions to your key leaders (both formal and informal) and to the Vitality Team. Give them a week or so to reflect and pray. Schedule a half or full day retreat to have a conversation with God and with each other regarding the information.

A list of sample framing questions can be found in Appendix A. In terms of approach, you may want to use an affinity group exercise to process the information in an engaging manner found in Appendix B.

You will also notice that in this year's PULSE report, we have included the actual responses to the open-ended questions (see Appendix C). These responses are anonymous and everyone was informed about this change before they took PULSE the second time around. We wanted you to have these responses so you can more fully understand how people perceive the church. Although it is human nature to want to know who wrote this or that, we encourage you to look past the "who" and focus on the "what."

We believe that people will really appreciate "Round 2" of the PULSE process. This is not something that churches usually do, but you are helping to make evaluation a normal and natural process of church life. God will honor you for that! Remember, you get what you measure.

There is probably a sense of curiosity and perhaps anxiety, as people anticipate the results of Round 2. This is a healthy tension, and we encourage you to use this dynamic in a way that engages more people in the process.

Again, thank you for leading the way for other RCA churches. May God greatly bless His work in and through you for His glory and for the good of your neighbor. If you need a copy of your Pulse 1 report, please contact Carol Siacotos, PULSE Director for the RCA Far West Region.

Grace and Peace,

Steve Norman and Phil Assink
Co-Directors of Congregational Vitality for the Far West Region of the RCA

*Number of surveys completed and submitted for data analysis from Valley Life Community Church:

PULSE 2015: 86 Assessments

PULSE 2018: 89 Assessments

Valley Life Community Church

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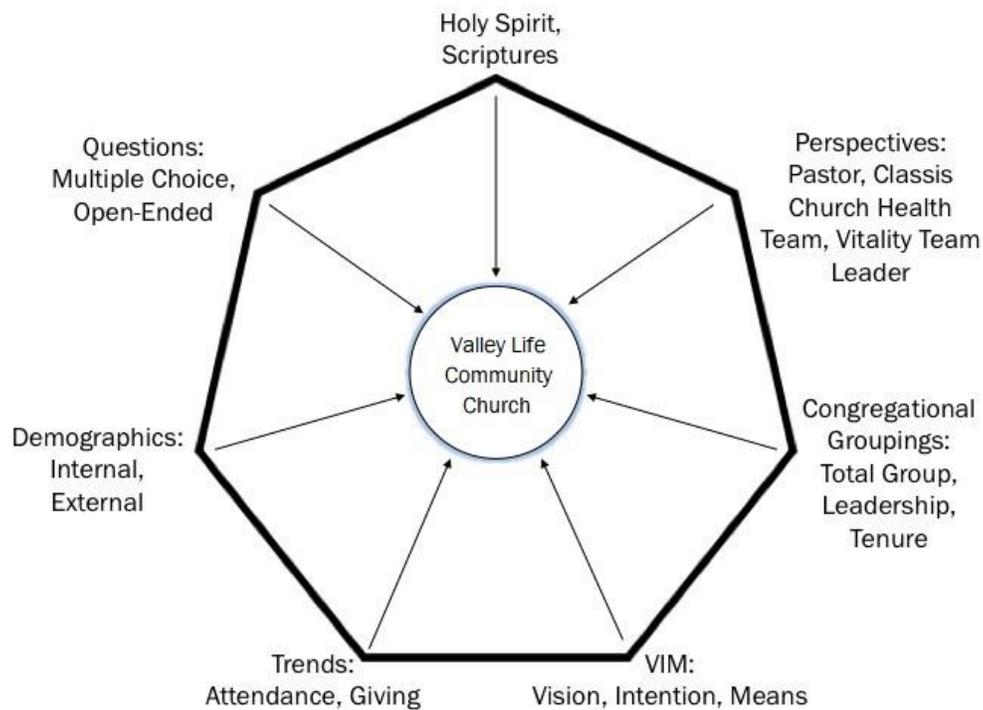
The Purpose of PULSE

The purpose of PULSE is to edify and strengthen RCA churches. In other words, PULSE...

- P**rovides awareness of current reality
- U**pdates progress annually
- L**inks the church more closely with the mission and message of Jesus
- S**uggests next steps
- E**ncourages spiritual discernment

How PULSE Works

PULSE works due to a powerful combination of factors, depicted in the chart below.



These factors help the church get a fix on their current position. Awareness and acceptance of one's current reality is an important step in becoming a Healthy Missional church. Admitting the truth is the first step toward change. Acting on the truth may even be more challenging.

The seven letters of Revelation were addressed to seven distinct churches to help them develop a deeper awareness and acceptance of their current reality. Only then could they overcome and reach their full kingdom potential in Christ.



PULSE Relational Covenant

Colossians 3:12-14

In our work and conversations as a family of faith, we realize that in any healthy family there can be conflict, disagreements, and misunderstandings. We can be guided by healthy norms in order to maintain clear communication and personal assumptions. We seek to have conversations that are civil, compassionate and Christ-honoring. Therefore, we covenant together in these guidelines for loving relationships and values to guide our conversations. How we treat each other goes beyond words.

Gratitude with Humility

We are grateful for the blessings of church and community with which God has graced us. With contrite hearts, we acknowledge that we have fallen short of the desires of our Lord for his church. We are thankful for God's grace and love as we acknowledge our shortcomings and seek to follow His direction for the church's future, whatever that may be.

Relationships that are God-Honoring

In every way, by thought, word, and deed, we seek to build God-honoring relationships with each other. We will build each other up and not tear down. We will respect everyone's participation and contribution as a joyful response in expressing love for God.

Always Gentle, Loving, and Open Communication

We accept disagreement, conflict and evaluation as normal and natural. Our approach to dealing with difficult issues will be gentle and loving. Whenever any of us has a disagreement with or criticism of another, we will communicate directly with that person, we will speak for ourselves only, and we will do so in the Christ-honoring and compassionate spirit of this covenant.

Considerate and Respectful, Graceful, and With Empathy

We will constantly strive to be respectful of one another's point of view, graceful in our manner of communication, and always acting with empathy and understanding of another's ideas or position. We will listen, with an open mind, to the opinions, ideas, and concerns of others and respond with thoughtfulness and sensitivity. We will focus on issues and not personalities. We will deal with behaviors, not motives. We will respond, not react.

Everyone Seeking Unity through Sacrifice

We recognize that we are in a church built on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ and that He is the head as well. We will seek unity by willingly sacrificing our own desires to those of our risen Lord. This is Christ's church, not ours'.



Valley Life Community Church Relational Covenant/Draft

We at Valley Life Community Church seek to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace in our relationships with others in order that we might honor and glorify God, and be living examples of His word. With God's help, we will:

- Pray for our leaders and congregation. Ask for the Spirit to work through each one by guiding and directing decisions made in all aspects of Christ's will for Valley Life.
- Speak the truth in love so that we may all grow up into him, who is the Head, that is, Christ. **Eph 4:14-16**
- Admonish one another in wisdom. **Col. 1:28**
- Encourage and build up one another for the good of the body. Listen carefully with patience and grace to other's thoughts and ideas, knowing that each one is part of the body.
- Bear with each other and forgive grievances as God has forgiven us. Go first to the defender seeking understanding and reconciliation.
- Engage everyone into the life of the church. Many gifts make up one body. Build up the body with each doing its own part.
- Respect and support those in leadership positions trusting that they are being guided by the Holy Spirit and working for the good of the body.
- Set aside personal preferences to fulfill the vision and mission of the church, recognizing that we are working together for the benefit of God's church.

Behavioral Covenants- Holy Manners for a Faith Community: A behavioral covenant is a written document developed by leaders, agreed to and owned by its creators and practiced on a daily basis as a spiritual discipline. The Covenant answers the question, "How will we behave (how will we live together?) when we don't understand each other and when we don't agree?"

-Gil Rendle, Behavioral Covenants in Congregations



Section 1: Healthy Missional Markers

Centrality of the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16)

- We believe that the Bible is the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine and conduct.
- Our preaching and teaching in all settings reflects careful preparation, relevance, and creativity.
- Our people are equipped and growing in their ability to study and apply Biblical truth in ways that lead to a scripturally integrated life.

Life transforming walk with Jesus (John 3:3,30; Phil. 1:6)

- We teach our people how to be attentive to Christ in all circumstances.
- Our people understand the radical nature of the message and mission of Jesus that continually deconstructs and reconstructs a person's life.
- Our people are equipped and growing in their ability to use a variety of spiritual growth resources, experiences, and settings.

Intentional evangelism (Matthew 28:18-20)

- We are burdened for the spiritual condition of those who do not yet know Christ.
- We have identifiable pathways for evangelism to take place in our ministries.
- Our people are equipped and growing in their ability to build spiritual friendships and know how to share their faith as God-birther opportunities arise.

Transforming communities through active compassion, mercy and justice ministries (Micah 6:8)

- We are burdened for the hurting people in our community and beyond.
- We have identifiable pathways for compassion, mercy and justice ministries to take place.
- Our people are equipped and growing in their ability to see and address the hurts and the causes of hurt in our community and beyond.

Global perspective and engagement (Acts 1:8)

- We raise the sights of our members beyond our congregation and community by developing a Biblical worldview and often pray for and reference global matters.
- We have identifiable pathways to support the cause of Christ globally.
- Our people are equipped and growing in their ability to participate in the global dimensions of our ministry.

Compelling Christian community (Acts 2:42-47)

- We understand that our love for one another is a powerful testimony to the deity of Jesus.
- We love each other as we are, not as we should be.
- We share life together beyond the worship service.

Heartfelt worship (Psalm 138:1a; John 4:23)

- We exalt and celebrate God for who he is, what he has done, what he is doing and what he will do.
- Worship reflects careful preparation to help give voice to many dimensions of response to God such as adoration, praise, contrition, lament, and commitment.
- People leave worship knowing something more about the heart of God and about their own hearts.

Sacrificial and generous living and giving (Romans 12:1-8)

- We help people discover, develop and deploy their spiritual gifts.
- We regularly, graciously, and unapologetically teach on the importance of financial stewardship in the spiritual growth of the Christian.
- We have many examples of lifestyle choices being made on the basis of stewardship and the priority God plays in the lives of our members.

Culture of godly leadership (Hebrews 13:7)

- Our leaders at all levels serve with character, competence, and conviction.
- A spirit of collegiality pervades, with our people trusting our leaders and our leaders trusting our people.
- We continually identify and train godly leaders for all dimensions of our ministry.

Fruitful organizational structures (Exodus 18:13-26, Acts 6:1-7)

- We can articulate a compelling, Christ-honoring vision for our church.
- We embrace evaluation as normal and natural and work through conflict constructively.
- Our organizational structures are designed to be efficient at making decisions while at the same time building congregational ownership for those decisions.



Section 2: Summary of Healthy Missional Marker Scores



Missional Marker Scores		
Marker:	Year	
	2015	2018
Life Transforming Walk with Jesus	3.62	3.58
Heartfelt Worship	3.29	3.43
Centrality of the Word	3.21	3.41
Culture of Godly Leadership	3.21	3.35
Compelling Christian Community	3.04	3.29
Sacrificial Giving and Living	3.01	3.28
Transforming Communities Through CMJ Ministries	2.86	3.20
Intentional Evangelism	2.91	3.11
Fruitful Organizational Structures	2.87	3.00
Global Perspective and Engagement	3.05	2.97
Overall Score	3.11	3.26

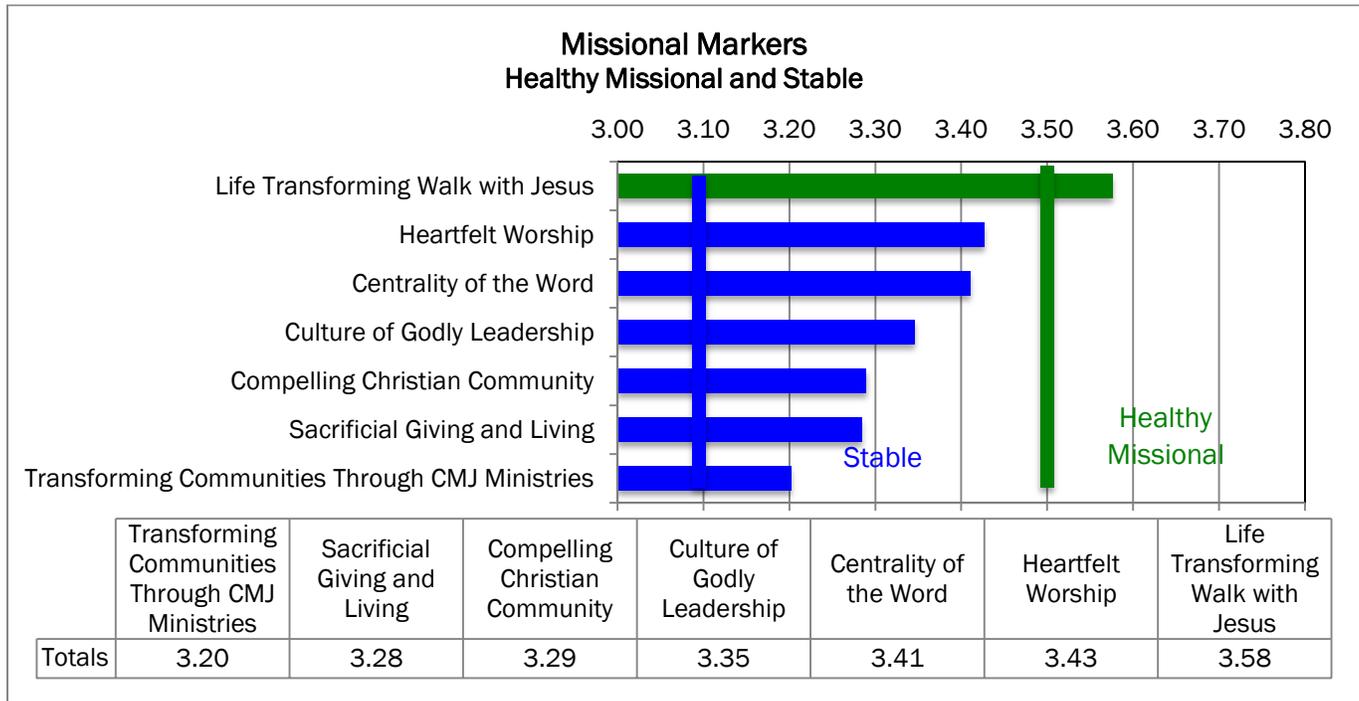
Grading Scale:

Healthy Missional	3.50 - 4.00
Stable	3.10 - 3.49
Critical Moment	2.70 - 3.09
At-Risk	0.00 - 2.69

Valley Life Community Church
Stable - 3.26



Summary of Healthy Missional and Stable Markers



Questions with Healthy Missional Scores

	Question	Marker	Total
3	The Bible is central to the preaching, teaching and worship of our church.	Centrality of the Word	3.98
39	I sense that prayer is a significant part of the life at Valley Life Community Church.	Life Transforming Walk with Jesus	3.78
2	Valley Life Community Church has sponsored one or more mission projects in which members and attenders could participate:	Global Perspective and Engagement	3.68
23	The sermons at Valley Life Community Church are relevant to my life.	Heartfelt Worship	3.65
30	It seems to me that at Valley Life Community Church, people have a genuine love for each other, even if we don't agree on every issue.	Compelling Christian Community	3.65
21	I am experiencing more joy in Christ by being a part of Valley Life Community Church.	Life Transforming Walk with Jesus	3.61
5	In using my spiritual gifts to serve my church and/or community, I feel that:	Sacrificial Giving and Living	3.58
11	My church has helped me make positive changes in my walk with Christ in the past year.	Life Transforming Walk with Jesus	3.54
12	I feel inspired by the musical portion of the worship service at Valley Life Community Church.	Heartfelt Worship	3.51

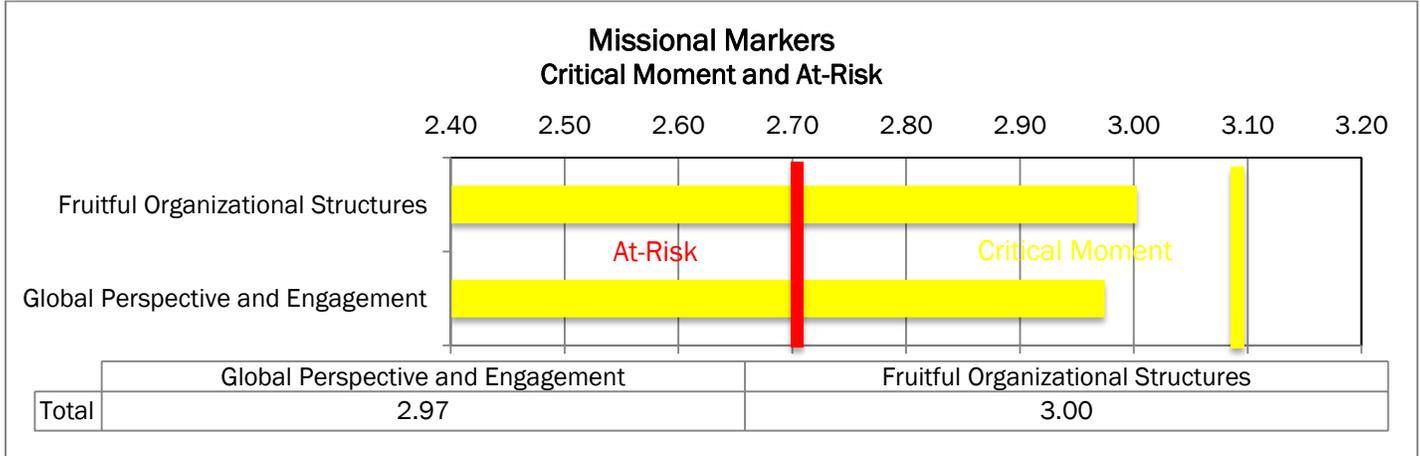


Questions with Stable Scores

Question	Marker	Total
34 I am praying for my unsaved friends to meet Christ.	Intentional Evangelism	3.48
17 Mercy is extending God's unconditional love. My church is intentional about extending mercy to those in our community and/or around the world.	Transforming Communities Through CMJ Ministries	3.48
8 When I think of inviting someone to worship what goes through my mind is:	Heartfelt Worship	3.46
16 I believe that our lay leaders are competent to handle change and lead our church forward.	Culture of Godly Leadership	3.43
9 Since attending Valley Life Community Church I have developed close friendships with others at the church.	Compelling Christian Community	3.43
35 My church has not helped me align my priorities so I can better follow Christ.	Centrality of the Word	3.42
31 I am confident in our pastoral leaders' ability to skillfully guide Valley Life Community Church forward and handle necessary change.	Culture of Godly Leadership	3.40
25 My church helps me sense the presence of the Holy Spirit in my life.	Life Transforming Walk with Jesus	3.38
24 In the last few months, my behavior has changed in at least one specific way as a result of applying God's Word to my life.	Centrality of the Word	3.37
36 After important decisions are made, I notice that some people seek to undermine those decisions.	Culture of Godly Leadership	3.34
18 My church is helping me to share the Gospel clearly and boldly.	Intentional Evangelism	3.26
6 I give the following portion of my income to God for the support of the ministry of Valley Life Community Church:	Sacrificial Giving and Living	3.24
14 Compassion is identifying with and joining in the suffering of others. My church suffers alongside those who are hurting in our community and/or world.	Transforming Communities Through CMJ Ministries	3.22
19 I believe the leaders of our church (lay/pastoral) are able to manage conflict in a healthy way.	Culture of Godly Leadership	3.21
15 In my church I do not receive biblical instruction about financial giving.	Sacrificial Giving and Living	3.18
28 Our church's teaching on compassion, mercy and justice has compelled me to act.	Transforming Communities Through CMJ Ministries	3.16
33 If I made my need(s) known to Valley Life Community Church, I am not confident the church would respond in a caring manner.	Compelling Christian Community	3.15
40 God called his creation good and gave instructions to care for the garden. Our church has challenging teaching regarding our God-given responsibility for the wise use of God's creation.	Sacrificial Giving and Living	3.13



Summary of Critical Moment and At-Risk Markers



Questions with Critical Moment Scores

Question	Marker	Total
26 During the week, it is uncommon for me to think about something I experienced or learned while worshipping at Valley Life Community Church.	Heartfelt Worship	3.09
27 I am building relationships with people who need to know the Lord.	Intentional Evangelism	3.06
37 Justice is joining God in making things right. My church is aware of injustices and actively working to make things right.	Transforming Communities Through CMJ Ministries	2.94
22 When there is tension in our church we work to name and address it.	Compelling Christian Community	2.93
10 I am satisfied with communication in our church.	Fruitful Organizational Structures	2.91
7 I hear prayers in our church for the broader concerns of our world (e.g., AIDS, human trafficking, world hunger):	Global Perspective and Engagement	2.91
38 Our church eliminated or significantly changed a program that was not working in the last five years.	Fruitful Organizational Structures	2.90
1 On average, I read the Bible:	Centrality of the Word	2.88
29 I am unaware of the ministries and organizations with whom our church partners.	Global Perspective and Engagement	2.84

Questions with At-Risk Scores

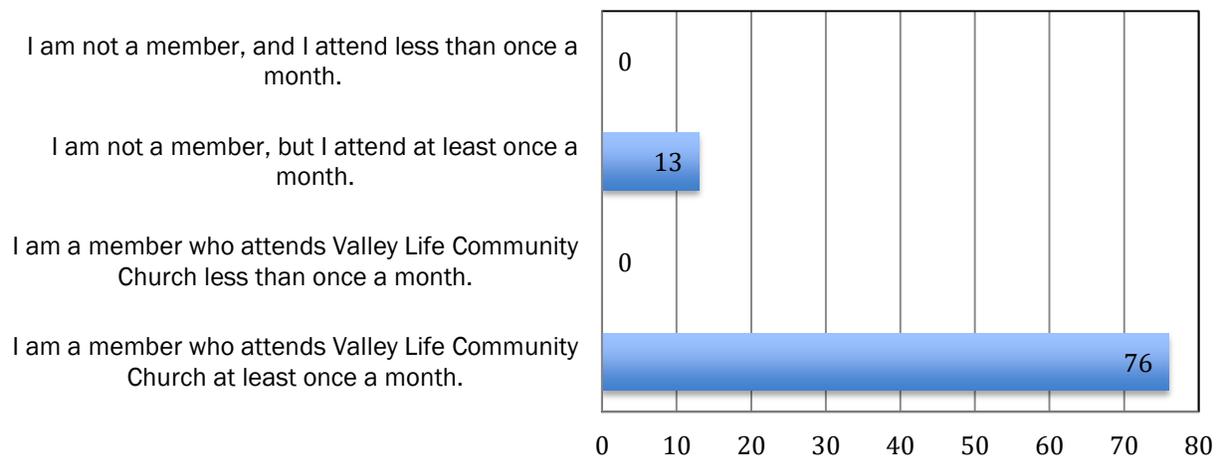
Question	Marker	Total
13 I do not hear of people coming to know Christ through the ministries of our church.	Intentional Evangelism	2.63
4 I hear reports about or prayers for our church's/denomination's missionary efforts around the world:	Global Perspective and Engagement	2.47



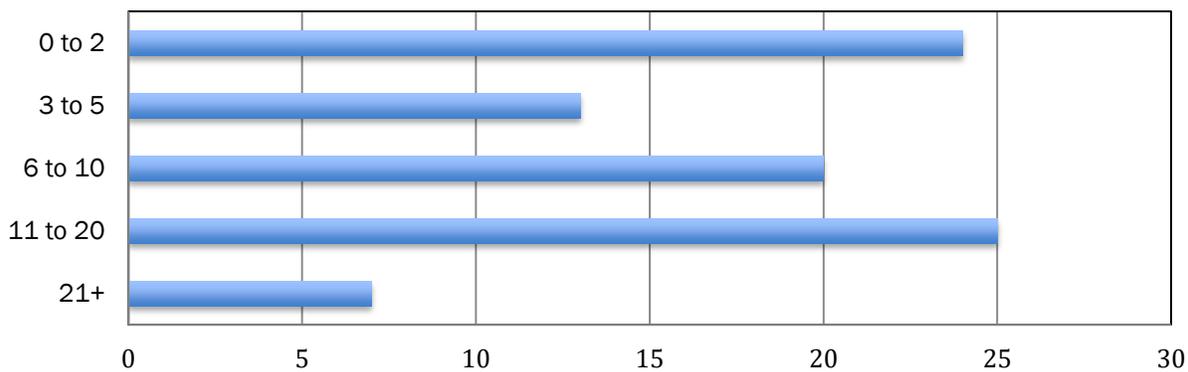
Section 3: Demographic Results

Internal Demographics

Question 46: Please select the statement that best describes you:



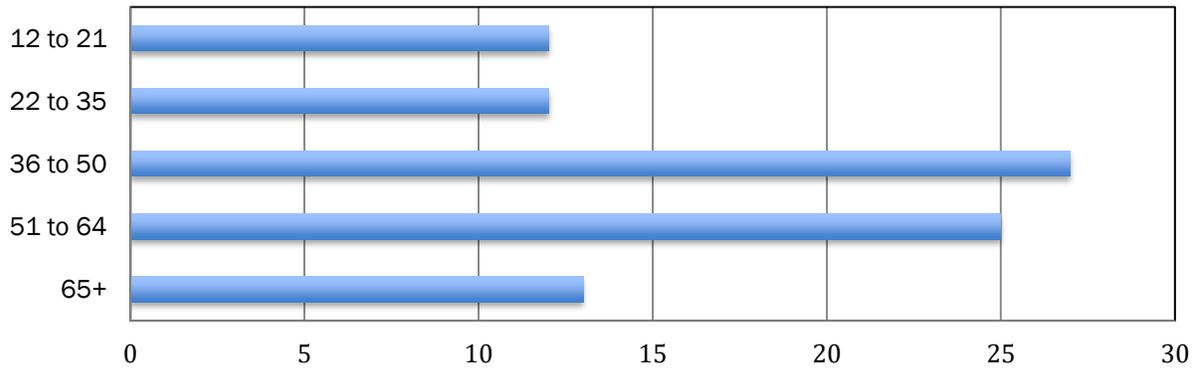
Question 47: I have been attending Valley Life Community Church for the following number of years:



	21+	11 to 20	6 to 10	3 to 5	0 to 2
Responses	7	25	20	13	24

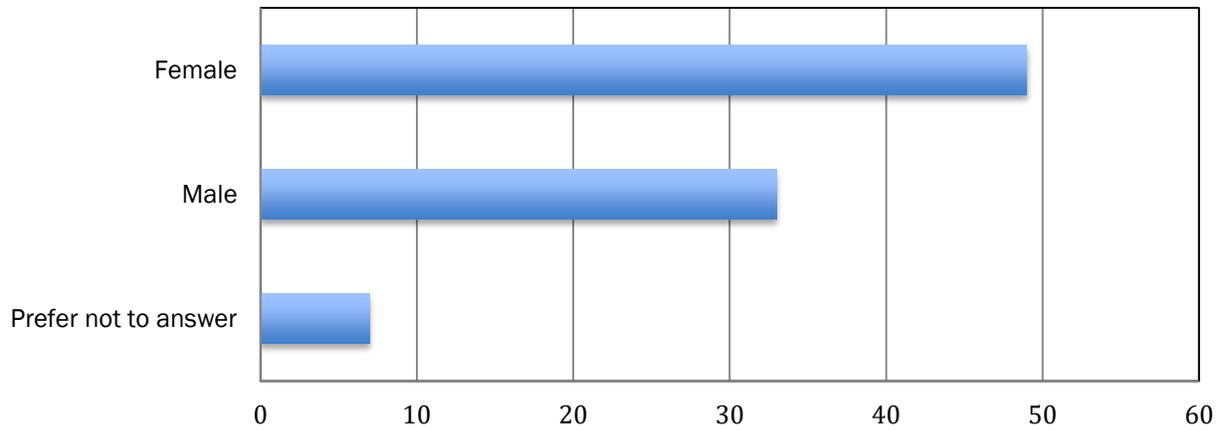


Question 48: I am in the following age category:



	65+	51 to 64	36 to 50	22 to 35	12 to 21
Responses	13	25	27	12	12

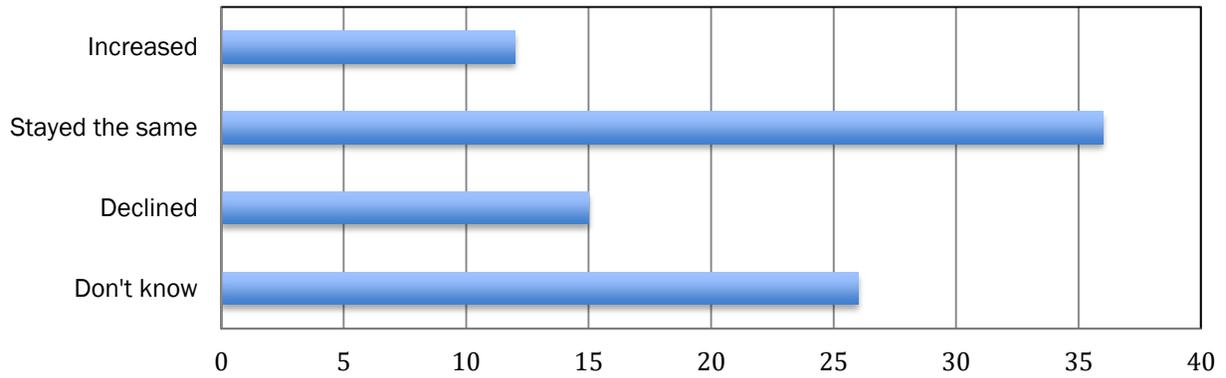
Question 49: I am:



	Prefer not to answer	Male	Female
Responses	7	33	49

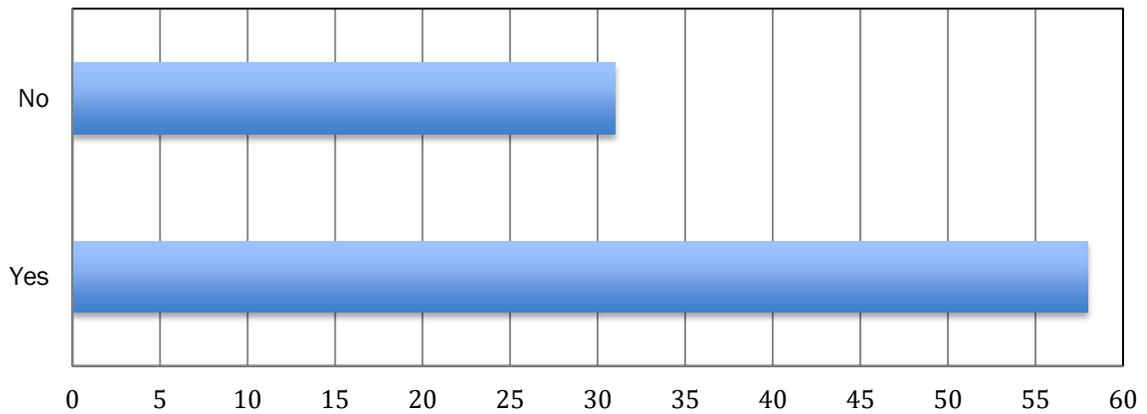


Question 50: In the last 10 years, our worship service attendance has:



	Don't know	Declined	Stayed the same	Increased
Responses	26	15	36	12

Question 51: When asked I could clearly state our church's mission and/or vision:



	Yes	No
Responses	58	31



Section 4: Tenure, Leadership, and Age

2015 Tenure

Marker:	Score by Years at the Church:				
	0-2 (12)	3-5 (15)	6-10 (21)	11-20 (16)	21+ (4)
Centrality of the Word	3.25	3.12	3.11	3.39	3.31
Life Transforming Walk with Jesus	3.73	3.50	3.57	3.72	3.63
Heartfelt Worship	3.42	3.22	3.19	3.38	3.31
Intentional Evangelism	3.02	2.88	2.71	3.11	2.88
Transforming Communities Through CMJ Ministries	3.00	2.75	2.83	2.91	2.81
Global Perspective and Engagement	2.59	3.02	3.02	3.37	3.42
Compelling Christian Community	3.10	2.92	2.80	3.44	2.94
Sacrificial Giving and Living	2.86	2.97	2.85	3.30	3.38
Culture of Godly Leadership	3.73	3.07	3.00	3.13	3.56
Fruitful Organizational Structures	3.10	2.87	2.61	2.88	3.56
Total Score	3.18	3.03	2.97	3.26	3.28

2018 Tenure

Marker:	Score by Years at the Church:				
	0-2 (24)	3-5 (13)	6-10 (20)	11-20 (25)	21+ (7)
Centrality of the Word	3.46	3.25	3.38	3.45	2.00
Life Transforming Walk with Jesus	3.64	3.31	3.63	3.63	3.93
Heartfelt Worship	3.46	3.29	3.56	3.41	2.68
Intentional Evangelism	3.09	2.79	3.09	3.27	3.29
Transforming Communities Through CMJ Ministries	3.16	3.10	3.16	3.34	3.61
Global Perspective and Engagement	2.84	2.83	3.22	2.90	1.34
Compelling Christian Community	3.33	3.23	3.30	3.26	3.21
Sacrificial Giving and Living	3.25	3.29	3.18	3.38	1.80
Culture of Godly Leadership	3.21	3.29	3.31	3.53	3.11
Fruitful Organizational Structures	2.95	2.81	2.94	3.19	2.96
Overall Score	3.24	3.12	3.28	3.34	2.79



2015 Leadership

Marker:	In Leadership (16)	Not in Leadership (52)
Centrality of the Word	3.44	3.14
Life Transforming Walk with Jesus	3.75	3.58
Heartfelt Worship	3.25	3.30
Intentional Evangelism	2.98	2.88
Transforming Communities Through CMJ Ministries	2.64	2.93
Global Perspective and Engagement	3.08	3.04
Compelling Christian Community	3.16	3.00
Sacrificial Giving and Living	3.22	2.95
Culture of Godly Leadership	3.02	3.26
Fruitful Organizational Structures	2.89	2.87
Total Score	3.14	3.10

2018 Leadership

Marker:	In Leadership (19)	Not in Leadership (70)
Centrality of the Word	3.59	3.36
Life Transforming Walk with Jesus	3.74	3.53
Heartfelt Worship	3.55	3.39
Intentional Evangelism	3.33	3.05
Transforming Communities Through CMJ Ministries	3.33	3.17
Global Perspective and Engagement	3.31	2.88
Compelling Christian Community	3.59	3.21
Sacrificial Giving and Living	3.40	3.25
Culture of Godly Leadership	3.41	3.33
Fruitful Organizational Structures	3.14	2.96
Overall Score	3.44	3.21



*Parentheses () indicate number of responses in each category, of a total **68** responses in 2015 and **89** responses in 2018.



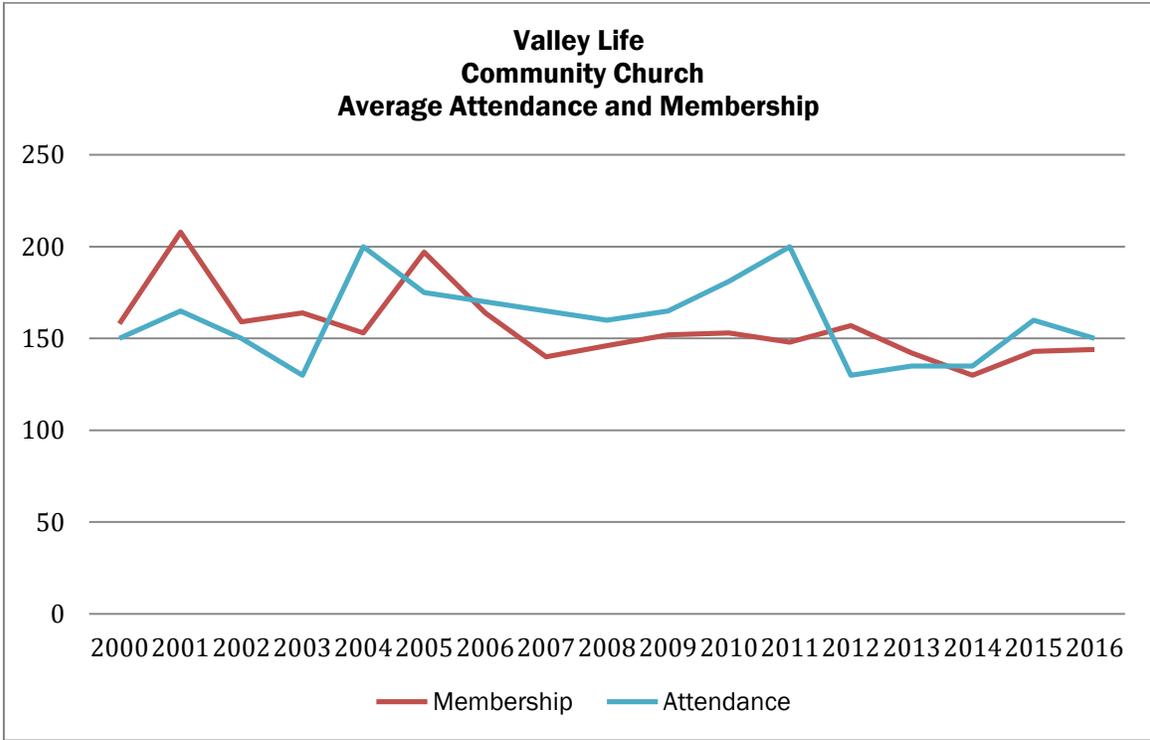
Age

Marker:	Score by Age Range				
	12 to 21 (12)	22 to 35 (12)	36 to 50 (27)	51 to 64 (25)	65+ (13)
Centrality of the Word	3.25	3.27	3.35	3.52	1.92
Life Transforming Walk with Jesus	3.79	3.56	3.38	3.66	3.71
Heartfelt Worship	3.48	3.33	3.46	3.38	2.48
Intentional Evangelism	3.52	2.92	2.90	3.18	3.33
Transforming Communities Through CMJ Ministries	3.60	2.98	2.99	3.31	3.37
Global Perspective and Engagement	2.98	2.70	3.04	3.00	1.81
Compelling Christian Community	3.46	3.25	3.14	3.38	2.85
Sacrificial Giving and Living	3.11	3.45	3.18	3.37	1.97
Culture of Godly Leadership	3.56	3.35	3.26	3.37	2.88
Fruitful Organizational Structures	3.17	3.06	2.94	3.08	2.81
Overall Score	3.39	3.19	3.16	3.32	2.71

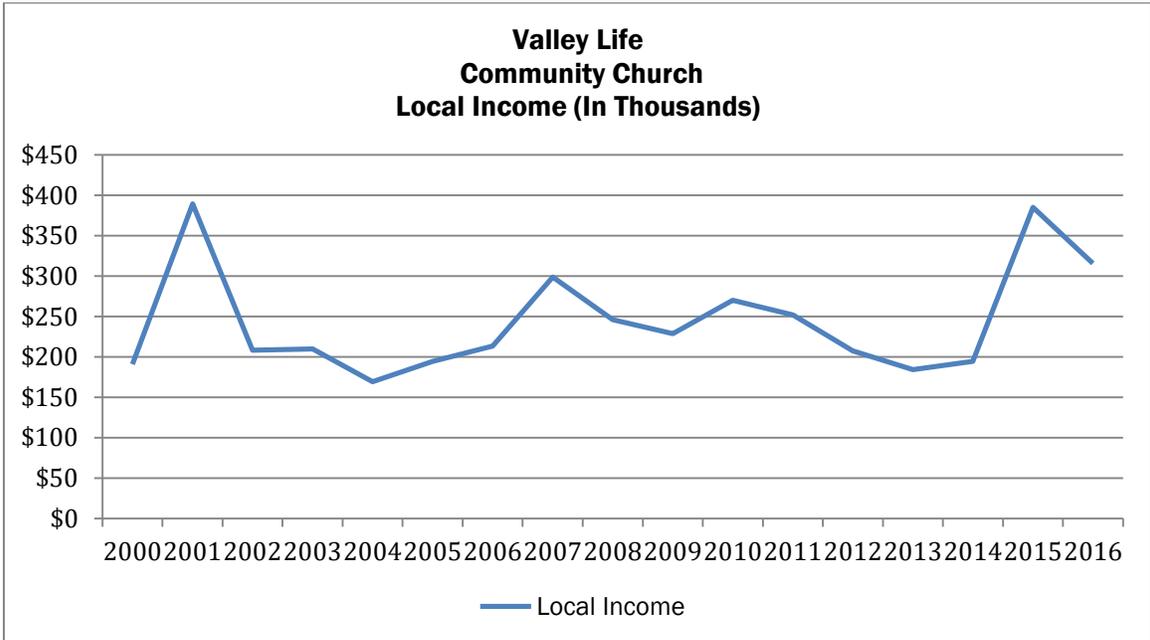


Section 5: Attendance and Income Trends

As reported to the General Synod every March



Note:



Note: Gaps in the lines of data indicate no data was reported for that category, for that year. Also, it is important to delineate between weekly giving and bequests.



Section 6: Church Type and Trajectory

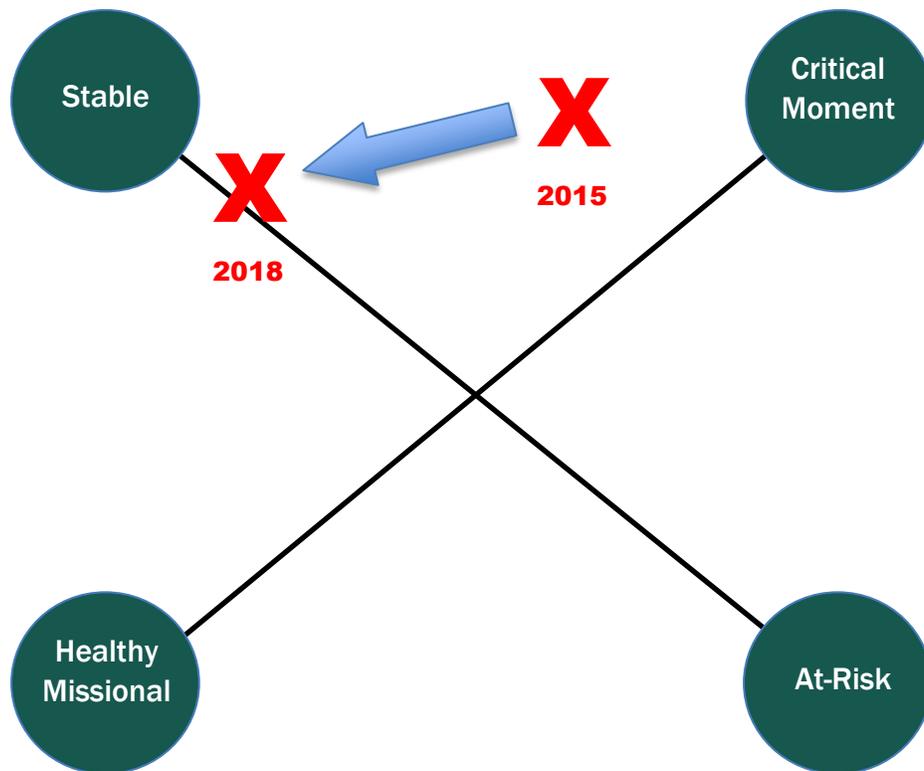
There are four types of established churches in the RCA: Healthy Missional, Stable, Critical Moment and At-Risk. These are churches that have been in existence for at least ten years.

Jesus loves each of these churches equally, just as he loves the seven churches in the book of Revelation. Even though churches come in different shapes and sizes, it is comforting and reassuring to know that each one matters to God.

In a Healthy Missional church, the ten markers are lived out consistently. There are no perfect churches, but a Healthy Missional church generally displays all the signs of life and vitality.

Based on the multi-choice questions from PULSE, the church type that most closely describes Valley Life Community Church is **Stable**. However, that is not the whole story. It is necessary to consider the open-ended questions, attendance and income trends to fully grasp the health of the church and the trajectory of the arrow.

The Four Types of Established Churches



Section 7: Overview of Results and Conclusion

“...Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” Ephesians 4:15-16

Overview of Results:

Valley Life improved in 8 of the 10 Health Missional Marker categories and of those 8, five were statistically significant (+.2 or more). Further, the two that went down a fraction were NOT statistically significant. Be encouraged you are moving in a good direction.

EVERYONE took the 10 Health Missional Marker assessment (100%). The open ended comments represent a fraction of the congregation. Consequently we recommend that you take the top two or three key elements out of the first two open ended questions and spend most of your time looking deeply in the all the charts related to the 10 Health Missional Markers.

In your congregational report be sure to thank everyone for their time and input and celebrate the positive direction of your scores

Conclusion:

The intent of PULSE is to speak the truth in love so that churches will reach their full Kingdom potential in Christ and grow in ways that matter to God. Your church matters to God regardless of your current state of health. Just like the words to the seven churches of Revelation, the message of PULSE contains a call to awareness, rugged hope and redemptive warning.

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches? Revelation 2:7

As stated in the introduction, the answers are not in PULSE, the answers are in the conversations you have about PULSE, as the Holy Spirit leads and guides. These conversations need to be civil, compassionate, and Christ honoring. This is why a relational covenant is vital.

Again, in the first PULSE report, we provided interpretation and recommendations. In PULSE 2, we encourage you to take the lead.

We ask that you first distribute these results and sample framing questions to your key leaders (both formal and informal) and to the Vitality Team. Give them a week or so to reflect and pray. Schedule a half or full day retreat to have a conversation with God and with each other regarding the information.

A list of sample framing questions can be found in Appendix A. In terms of approach, you may want to use an affinity group exercise to process the information in an engaging manner found in Appendix B.

As you ponder, discuss and pray about the data provided, may you sense God's empowering presence and love for you. This is a matter of spiritual discernment and we commend you to the Lord,

as you listen to the still small voice
as you love one another
as you discern what God's desire is for you and your community.

