

## The Powerful, Invisible Influence of Core Values: Why Every Congregation Needs to Identify Them

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How do we explain these contradictory facts?

*Fact #1:* During recent years many church leaders wrote excellent vision statements and mission statements—assuming that this process would increase their congregation’s effectiveness.

*Fact #2:* After a few years of setting goals and making plans based on those carefully crafted words, many of those church leaders report no improvements in their congregation’s effectiveness. As one layperson said, “Year after year, we continue to do pretty much what we’ve always done.”

Congregational behavior does *not* stem from what its leaders write on paper but from the core values of its members. Congregations *always act on their core values*, not on the goals they set! Congregations *act according to their core values*, not according to their plans. If a church’s core values do not support its vision statement and mission statement, the writing process creates zero change.

**What are congregational core values?** To understand the powerful nature of core values, think of an apple core: the seeds in that core are the apple tree’s core values; these seeds create the future. *A congregation’s core values are deeply ingrained thought-patterns that motivate behaviors.* Core values are those beliefs and convictions that are extremely meaningful to the majority of a church’s leaders and members. Usually unwritten and unstated, a congregation *expresses its core values* (deeply ingrained thought-patterns) *in behaviors* such as the following:

- Ministries to which most of the members are willing—or unwilling—to give time and energy
- Programs and activities with which most of the members feel comfortable—or uncomfortable
- Policy-setting and planning decisions that key laypersons vote for—or against
- Clergy and staff member actions that key laypersons affirm—or oppose

Unfortunately, a congregation’s core values are partially invisible to its members and key lay leaders, submerged in “the way we have always done things here.”

**What causes a congregation’s core values?** Just as the physical health of human beings derives from multiple causes—such as exercise, diet, genetics, and stress—the *actual* core values of congregations derive from a complex mixture of many factors. Three important ones:

1. *Theological focus.* Which theological imperative does the congregation emphasize—from among the three that Jesus taught his first disciples?

- *Christ’s Great Commandment:* “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27).
- *Christ’s Great Commission:* “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Christ’s three theological imperatives summarize as follows: (a) Help people grow spiritually in their relationship with God. (b) Love our neighbors in church, community, and world. (c) Offer Christ to people outside our walls.

Congregations rarely give equal emphasis and energy to all three of Christ’s theological imperatives. They affirm the truth of all three, but they tend to make Christ’s three theological

imperatives a multiple-choice question. That selection produces a church's theological focus, the biblical imperatives about which the church's leaders feel the most passionate.

2. *Core-values-driven ministry activities.* The ministries, or behaviors, that congregations emphasize arise from the deeply held core values of (a) the present pastor, (b) previous pastors, (c) influential lay leaders, and (d) the congregation's traditional behaviors from previous years and decades. When a congregation's *desired* core values do not produce the intended results, the congregation is often unconsciously living out in its thinking, planning, and behaviors the *actual* core values stemming from one or more of those four influences.

3. *Current community context.* Effective ministry activities are consistent with the congregation's geographical location at this point in history. Congregations tend to lag about one generation behind in their ministry behaviors; thus, reducing their ministry effectiveness. Therefore, the leaders of effective churches continually ask, "What ministries are effective in this particular community, at this point in history?"

*Summary:* To be effective, a congregation's theological focus and its core-values-driven ministry activities must match the reality of its current community context.

### **Why do clergy and lay leaders often fail to recognize their congregation's core values?**

Inability to see and understand the invisible power of core values stems from at least four factors.

1. *Church leaders tend to confuse their preferred core values with their actual core values.* Clergy and lay leaders often articulate what they want to happen in their congregation: "We want to stop the gradual membership decline of our congregation." or "We want to help the hurting people in our community."

In their desire to strengthen congregational effectiveness, lay leaders and clergy often blur the distinction between *preferred* core values—the ideals toward which they are striving with vision and mission statements—with *actual* core values (deeply ingrained thought-patterns that motivate congregational behaviors).

In any war between *preferred* core values and *actual* core values, guess who wins? Not the conscious, rational beliefs regarding what clergy and lay leaders think their congregation's core values *ought to be*. The winner is always the unconscious, reflexive thought-patterns of *actual* core values that have driven a congregation's behaviors during past years and decades.

People outside the congregation (or new pastors) can often spot habitual congregational thinking and behavior patterns that make this church's *desired* core values impossible to achieve. What usually happens when those outside observers or newcomers point out the disparity between *desired* results and deeply ingrained thinking and behavior patterns that produce *actual* results? Denial! Rationalization! Shoot the messenger!

2. *Church leaders tend to confuse core values with other terms that comprise congregational personality.* Words such as ethos, hopes, dreams, priorities, goals, vision, mission, plans, and strategy are *not* congregational core values. A church's core values are the deeply ingrained thought-patterns of influential lay leaders and members—beliefs and convictions that determine "what we do in this congregation" and "how we do things around here."

3. *Church leaders tend to confuse the qualities listed in secular "Values Statements" with core values that motivate congregational behaviors.* This substitution is a natural inclination. That type of values statement (sometimes labeled "mission statement") usually contains words that reflect ideal thinking and behaviors. These models began appearing in business books during the 1980s. Thus, church leaders often see on the walls of hospitals and businesses statements such as the following: "It is our desire to honor God through our work on His behalf. To that end, we will do His work with the qualities we most value: integrity, grace, excellence, relevance, authenticity, passion, humility, faith, inclusiveness, commitment, joy and love."

But using classic corporate values-statement models in congregations has at least five flaws:

- They are more like a list of *ideal* ethos, spirit, or behavior descriptions; not a list of *actual* core-values (deeply ingrained thought-patterns) that produces effective ministries.
- They are not directly related to the theologically rooted vision, mission, and core values that Jesus taught his disciples.
- They seldom influence the behaviors of church staff and members.
- They are difficult to measure.
- They are difficult to hold church staff and members accountable for accomplishing.

4. *Church leaders tend to confuse printed vision statements and mission statements with core values.* For example, one congregation expresses its vision as “Seeking life-changing encounters with Jesus Christ.” That church states its mission with these four words: “accepting, transforming, equipping, and sending.”

But those valuable and biblically rooted words do not define that congregation’s *actual* core values. Rather, those words express that congregation’s *preferred* core values. By contrast, *actual* core values are deeply ingrained thought-patterns that drive most of the congregation’s thinking, planning, and actions.

**How can a congregation discover its *actual* core values?** Look at recent history. What has been happening during the last five to ten years? The most accurate way to obtain that information is a survey of leaders and members. These people know the *actual* core values that drive a congregation’s vision, mission, strategies, and tactics.

Most new pastors conduct such surveys informally, as they get acquainted with the congregation’s lay leaders and members. A formal, scientifically designed survey, obtains *actual* core-values information faster—and more accurately.

During a typical worship service (not a holiday weekend, late May, or summer), do a seven-minute “Personal Opinion Survey for Worship Attendees” to identify the “Top 10 Core Values” that drive most of this congregation’s *thinking, planning, and actions*.\*

**How can a congregation transform its *desired* core values into *actual* core values?** Anyone who reads unpleasant information on bathroom scales knows that information does not equal transformation. Facts do not automatically produce behavior changes.

Over the decades, a congregation’s *needs* often change a great deal. Examples of new needs churches sometimes experience: (a) more money to pay its bills, (b) more members to reduce the empty feeling in its worship service, (c) better children and youth ministries that magnetically attract young-adult households, (d) a desire to welcome new kinds of people in a changing neighborhood, or (e) young adults from a new generation that feel spiritually nourished with a different style of worship music.

But as new needs appear on a congregation’s radar, despite considerable desire and effort, why do pastors and lay leadership often fail to meet those new challenges? The powerful inertia of *actual* core values: Over the decades, the *actual* core values (deeply ingrained thought-patterns that motivate behaviors) of a congregation’s influential organizing pastor and lay leaders are continuously reinforced. Those *actual* core values continue to attract new attendees and members who appreciate those core values and repel people who do not appreciate those core values.

Does this mean that congregational change is impossible? No! That pessimistic conclusion would deny the power of God’s Spirit to bring change to individuals and churches. Strongly motivated pastors and lay leaders—aided by the leverage of various resources—can transform *desired* core values into *actual* core values.

Horticulturists can produce a new variety of fruit tree by grafting new limbs to an old tree. Pastors and lay leaders can add new knowledge and new skills to a congregation’s repertoire of ministries. By this grafting process, pastors and lay leaders can strengthen the ministries essential

to their congregation's overall health and effectiveness (a) with this generation of members, (b) in this community, and (c) at this time in history.

Transforming a *desired* core value into an *actual* core value only happens when several influential laypersons experience "cognitive restructuring." They revise some of the deeply ingrained beliefs and convictions that drive their congregation's thinking, planning, and actions.

Cognitive restructuring does not happen by writing a vision and mission statement. Nor does cognitive restructuring happen by publishing a report of survey results. Nor does cognitive restructuring usually happen instantaneously. More often, it is a process.

What process is our church using to transform *desired* core values into *actual* core values that drive congregational effectiveness?

# What Core Values Drive Our Church?

## A Congregational Planning Process

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To derive maximum benefit from this process, follow *to the letter* the instructions on the next few pages. This process helps congregations to accomplish three goals:

1. Identify the congregation's *actual* core values, so that leaders can compare them with *desired* core values.
2. Involve lay leadership in identifying *desired* core values that they wish to transform into *actual* core values.
3. Involve lay leadership in making action-plans that can transform *desired* core values into *actual* core values.

To ensure that the Congregational Planning Process becomes more than an intellectual exercise in which participants gain insights but do not take action, remember these facts:

- Information on paper does not equal transformation in congregations. Knowing does not equal doing. Hope is not a strategy. Desire is not a plan.
- Building on present strengths only occurs in the presence of strong motivation; unmotivated people tend to resist insights and actions that could propel them in new directions.
- The strong motivation that enhances a congregation's effectiveness rarely happens by reading a book; by attending a single meeting, seminar, workshop, or event—or by taking a survey.
- The motivation-building process that leads to enhancing congregational strengths more often arises through a lengthy period of study, discussion with other respected persons, testing ideas, and refining procedures through experience.

***A congregation's denominational affiliation and local traditions influence the manner in which it accomplishes democratic decision-making.***

Respecting congregational polity (form of government) is important. Otherwise, some lay leaders and rank-and-file members might reject the discussion and implementation of new ideas because they feel that “we didn't go about this properly.”

Of equal importance are planning and decision-making procedures that (a) obtain input from every age group, (b) discuss all opinions in a respectful and open way, (c) allow the appropriate committees and ministries to reflect on new ideas, and (d) where possible, test new ideas in order to reliably evaluate their effectiveness.

***The following Congregational Planning Process is an excellent way to achieve both of those goals:***

1. The congregation's governing body (different denominations use different names for this group, such as church council, official board, session, elders, or vestry) makes a decision to engage in this Congregational Planning Process.
2. The congregation's governing body appoints a special task force to act on its behalf during the next sixteen months, comprised of six respected laypersons and the pastor. *Warning:* No matter how small or large their number of active leaders, congregations get far better results when their governing body appoints this Congregational Planning Team than when it assigns this responsibility to any pre-existing group in the congregation, such as the governing board, the executive committee, or a long-range planning committee.
3. A good selection formula for this Congregational Planning Team: two people above age forty, two people under age forty, two adults who became members within the last three years, and the pastor.
4. The role of the chairperson is especially important. He or she should possess qualities such as detail-ability, willingness to follow the step-by-step process laid out in this material, strong understanding of group process, good listening skills, and the ability to respect and affirm people without always agreeing with them.

***Additional Planning Team option:*** Some Congregational Planning Teams may elect to invite a "guest facilitator" to take part in this process. This can happen in a variety of ways:

- Some Congregational Planning Teams may prefer to *begin* the process with a "guest facilitator."
- Other Congregational Planning Teams, if they feel that they are "stuck" at some point in the step-by-step process, may decide to invite a guest facilitator in at that point.

The role of a "guest facilitator" is NOT (a) to tell the church or its Congregational Planning Team what to do or (b) to provide additional resources for the committees, ministry teams, or other leadership groups. Rather, the guest facilitator's role is to assist the Congregational Planning Team by providing guidance in accomplishing the steps of the Congregational Planning Process outlined in this material.

To accomplish that role, the guest facilitator takes part in one or more of the Congregational Planning Team Meetings on an informal, as-needed basis, at the will of the Congregational Planning Team. (Some regional denominational structures may wish to train and/or provide a list of qualified individuals in that geographical area on whom congregations can call to serve as guest facilitators.)

**Step #1:** \_\_\_\_\_ (date) The first Congregational Planning Team Meeting occurs during *the week following* the Sunday in which people complete the “Personal Opinion Survey for Morning Worship Attendees” (photocopied from the last two pages in this resource and administered *exactly* as instructed on pages 12-13).

*To this first meeting* of the Congregational Planning Team, invite all committee chairpersons, ministry team coordinators, and paid staff members. Note: some congregations have ministry teams; some do not. Whatever names your congregation uses for them, include in this first meeting the chairperson or coordinator of *all* planning and action groups that report to your church’s governing board.

*Prior to this first meeting*, the Congregational Planning Team chairperson uses the following procedure with the stack of “Personal Opinion Survey for Morning worship Attendees” sheets:

- (a) The chairperson totals the worshiper check marks for each item on the Survey and writes the totals in front of each item on a clean Survey sheet.
- (b) Using an electronic version of pages 10-11 from later in this resource titled “Results Sheets,” the chairperson does the mathematical calculations necessary to fill in all of the blanks (i.e., divide the number of checks for each item by the total number of completed survey forms). Example from the two lines of one congregation’s “Results Sheets”:

*1<sup>st</sup> Rank—Effective preaching—91% of survey respondents (checked by 513 people)*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Rank—Effective seasonal special events (such as Christmas Eve, Holy Week, Christmas Musical)—70% of survey respondents (checked by 392 people)*

*At this first meeting*, the chairperson uses the following agenda:

- (a) Distribute to each person present a copy of pages 1-6 of this material, and give them ten minutes to read those six pages. (*Do not distribute these pages prior to this first meeting, as it might distort the accuracy of the data obtained in the Survey.*)
- (b) Distribute to each person present a copy of the tabulated pages 10-11 “Results Sheets” and the last four pages of this material (the “Instructions for Administering” on pages 12-13 and a copy of the Survey). Why? Some people inevitably mention details of the Survey during the discussion in this first meeting. Give people ten minutes to read the “Results Sheets” and to develop a personal list of “insights and surprising information” that seems to jump out of worshipers’ opinions (*without discussing these with other people in the group*).
- (c) After ten minutes, ask *every* person to take turns reading to the group his/her list of “insights and surprising information.”
- (d) Invite questions, comments, and discussion.
- (e) Ask the group to develop and prioritize a consensus-list of three to five items that they would prefer to see ranked in the “Top 10 Core Values” list (items that they wish were *actual* core values instead of *desired* core values).
- (f) Create from that prioritized, consensus-list the agenda items for the next Congregational Planning Team Meeting.
- (g) Engage the group in setting the dates for all of the future meetings. Write those dates in the blanks provided.

**Step #2:** \_\_\_\_\_ (date) In preparation for its second meeting—one week later—the Congregational Planning Team Chairperson downloads free of charge from the [www.theparishpaper.com](http://www.theparishpaper.com) Web site the free *Contents-Descriptions: 34 Free Church Effectiveness Nuggets Volumes* document.

To this second meeting of the Congregational Planning Team, invite all committee chairpersons, ministry team coordinators, and paid staff members.

At this second meeting, the chairperson uses the following agenda:

- (a) Discuss ways by which committees and ministry teams might transform the prioritized, consensus-list of *desired* core values developed at the first meeting into *actual* core values.
- (b) Distribute a copy of the free *Contents-Descriptions: 34 Free Church Effectiveness Nuggets Volumes* document to each person present. Ask committees and ministry teams to study the *Nuggets Volume(s)* that seem to offer helpful discussion and planning information related to their areas of responsibility as an optional aspect of this Congregational Planning Process. The pastor and/or laypersons may suggest additional or alternative resources.
- (c) Based on the prioritized, consensus list of *desired* core values that we want to make *actual* core values (developed at the first meeting, in Step #1 above), discuss and decide which of these *Nuggets Volumes* and/or additional or alternative resources that our committees and ministry teams may want to study as they develop action-plans.
- (d) Select from the free *Contents-Descriptions: 34 Free Church Effectiveness Nuggets Volumes* document the appropriate *Nuggets Volumes* and download them free of charge from the [www.TheParishPaper](http://www.TheParishPaper) Web site. (Each *Nuggets Volume* comes with copyright permission that allows photocopying of that volume for local use in our congregation.)

**Step #3:** \_\_\_\_\_ (date) To this third meeting—one month after the second meeting—of the Congregational Planning Team, invite all committee chairpersons, ministry team coordinators, and paid staff members.

The chairperson follows this agenda:

- (a) Distribute to the Congregational Planning Team members, the various committee chairpersons, and the ministry team coordinators sufficient copies of the *Nuggets Volume(s)* selected at the previous meeting—and/or additional or alternative resources. *Crucial to this Congregational Planning Process is the opportunity for committee and ministry team members to examine ideas and methods outside the range of what they have previously discussed.*
- (b) Ask each committee and ministry team to set weekly dates for studying the *Nuggets Volume(s)* and/or additional or alternative resources. *At least one and preferably two members of the Congregational Planning Team attend each of these study/discussion meetings of individual committees and ministry teams. However, EVERY member of the Congregational Planning Team reads all of the resource(s)—so that they can understand the reasons behind the*

*recommendations that each committee and ministry team makes to the Planning Team in Step #4 below.*

- (c) Ask each committee and ministry team to set a date to meet with the Congregational Planning Team (following the conclusion of their individual meetings, described above) to discuss possible action-plans that seem to make sense. *The Congregational Planning Team meets with EACH committee or ministry team INDIVIDUALLY. This allows for coordination of all planning and avoids the danger of committees and ministry teams riding off in all directions—which could easily happen as the committee and ministry teams begin implementing ideas designed to transform the prioritized, consensus list of desired core values into actual core values (the list developed at the first meeting, in Step #1 above).*

**Step #4:** \_\_\_\_\_ (date) To this fourth meeting—three *months* after the third meeting—of the Congregational Planning Team, invite all committee chairpersons, ministry team coordinators, and paid staff members. The Congregational Planning Team calls for a report of suggested action-plans from each committee and ministry team and discusses how the congregation moves from thinking to doing in a unified manner.

**Step #5:** \_\_\_\_\_ (dates)  
The Congregational Planning Team meets monthly for one year to monitor and coordinate the action process—as the congregation’s committees, ministry teams, and paid staff implement, refine, and perfect the action plans.

**All Steps:** Make prayer a high-priority part of this process, in every meeting. At the close of each session, ask participants to stand in a circle, join hands, and take turns offering brief prayers.

Download from [www.theparishpaper.com](http://www.theparishpaper.com) a FREE procedure for involving the entire congregation in daily prayer. These *free* procedures are available *only* in electronic form, on the [www.theparishpaper.com](http://www.theparishpaper.com) Website, *not* in response to a request by E-mail, U.S. Mail, FAX, or telephone.

## Results Sheets

The results of the “Personal Opinion Survey for Worship Attendees” (see last two pages for a copy of the survey)—completed by \_\_\_ people during morning worship on \_\_\_\_\_ (date) indicates the following:

### **Items Worship Attendees Ranked as a “Top 10 Core Value”**

1<sup>st</sup> Rank—Effective .... — \_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

2<sup>nd</sup> Rank—Effective .... — \_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

3<sup>rd</sup> Rank—Effective .... — \_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

4<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... — \_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

5<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... — \_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

6<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... — \_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

7<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... — \_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

8<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... — \_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

9<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... — \_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

10<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... — \_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

**Items Worship Attendees Ranked Lower than a “Top 10 Core Value”**

11<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... —\_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

12<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... —\_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

13<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... —\_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

14<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... —\_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

15<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... —\_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

16<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... —\_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

17<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... —\_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

18<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... —\_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

19<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... —\_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

20<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... —\_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

21<sup>st</sup> Rank—Effective .... —\_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

22<sup>nd</sup> Rank—Effective .... —\_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

23<sup>rd</sup> Rank—Effective .... —\_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

24<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... —\_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

25<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... —\_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

26<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... —\_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

27<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... —\_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

28<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... —\_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

29<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... —\_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

30<sup>th</sup> Rank—Effective .... —\_\_% of survey respondents (checked by \_\_\_ people)

## **Instructions for Administering the “Personal Opinion Survey for Morning Worship Attendees”**

*You do not have permission to change in any manner whatsoever the wording on this copyrighted “Personal Opinion Survey for Morning Worship Attendees.” Any alteration of the words is an express violation of United States and International Copyright Law.*

Photocopy the “Personal Opinion Survey for Worship Attendees” on the front and back of one sheet of paper, exactly as is. (Do NOT photocopy on two separate sheets stapled together.)

*Warning:* Do not send the Opinion Survey home with people and ask them to bring it back next week. This produces distorted information. Only a handful of people return the sheets, primarily those who are not time-pressured, enjoy filling out such forms, or have a strongly negative opinion about something.

For the same reason, putting the survey in the church newsletter or distributing it by mail produces information distortion. Then, too, if you circulate this type of opinion poll at times other than Sunday morning, approximately 5 percent of the members put their imaginations in overdrive. They manufacture reasons, many of which are inaccurate, for “why the pastor wants this survey completed.” Some of that imagination-run-amuck 5 percent say, “She must be getting lots of complaints.” Such rumors distort feedback data.

Additionally, some people in that 5 percent group telephone one another, expanding the volume of negative rumors. Some such telephone chatterers coach one another on what to write and not write on the opinion survey, thus distorting the data.

Death, taxes, and that 5 percent are always with us. Do not give them the opportunity to distort our results. Use the opinion survey on Sunday morning, in exactly the manner described below.

*Warning:* Do not announce in the church newsletter the previous week that we will do this opinion survey next Sunday morning. Some people stay home, saying, “We aren’t having regular church today.” Again: data distortion!

*The pastor says at announcement time, early in the service, “We will complete the worship service ten minutes early today, so we have time to get your opinion on important matters.”*

Remind people, “Please do not take the sheets home with you. Our Congregational Planning Team will meet to study them this week.”

A few people will write on the bottom of their survey sheet, “I needed more time to think about these items.” However, the opinions about which people feel most passionate immediately jump into their minds when we ask them to express themselves in the manner prescribed here. That is exactly the information we seek. We want off-the-top-of-the-head, feeling-level responses, not a carefully-crafted term paper.

*At the close of the service*, before the benediction, the pastor says, “After the Amen, please be seated. The opinion survey we’re asking you to complete takes about seven minutes. We finished worship early today, so that you would have time to help with this. Even if you are a worship visitor, you can contribute valuable insights.”

As the ushers distribute the Survey (photocopied front and back on one sheet), the pastor says, “We know some people may object to doing this on Sunday morning. We agree. We would prefer to do it at another time. However, this is the only way we can obtain a large, accurate sampling of opinions. We hope you will understand the necessity of doing it this way.” (That type of statement reduces the number of forms on which people write, “I hate doing this kind of thing on Sunday morning.”)

When everyone has a Survey, the pastor reads the front of the sheet *aloud* as people follow along. (This is essential! Otherwise, some people will misunderstand the survey and supply faulty data.)

The pastor asks people to turn the sheet over; then reads the **bold paragraphs** at the top of the page *aloud* as people follow along.

Close your instructions by saying, “Please leave quietly as you finish your sheet, since other people may still be working on theirs. Place your sheet in the boxes at the sanctuary door(s).”

**At the end of the worship service, distribute this seven-minute Survey to each junior-high age, or older, worshiper. Wait for the pastor's instructions before you begin completing the Survey.**

## **Personal Opinion Survey for Worship Attendees**

As one aspect of our planning for the future, we want to identify the core values that drive most of our congregation's thinking, planning, and actions.

*Core values are deeply ingrained thought-patterns that motivate behaviors:*

- To understand the powerful nature of core values, think of an apple core: the seeds in that core are the apple tree's core values; these seeds create the future.
- A congregation's core values are those foundational beliefs and convictions that are extremely meaningful to the majority of its leaders and members.

*Usually unwritten and unstated, a congregation expresses its core values (deeply ingrained thought-patterns) in behaviors such as the following:*

- Ministries to which most of the members are willing—or unwilling—to give time and energy
- Programs and activities with which most of the members feel comfortable—or uncomfortable
- Policy-setting and planning decisions that key laypersons vote for—or against
- Clergy and staff member actions that key laypersons affirm—or oppose

*Unfortunately, a congregation's core values are always partially invisible to its leaders, submerged in "the way we have always done things here."*

The best way to surface a congregation's invisible core values is to look at recent history: *what has been happening during the last few years?*

We are NOT asking your opinion on (a) what you personally think we OUGHT to do or (b) what you have heard leaders say we OUGHT to do.

We are asking your opinion on what has been happening during the last few years.

After completing your survey, please leave quietly. Place your survey in the box provided for that purpose as you leave the sanctuary. Please do not take it home with you. Please do not sign your name.

This survey *intentionally* asks for a quick, feeling-level response, rather than lengthy reflection.

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**--Over to Complete the Survey**

**Based on what you have experienced and observed in our congregation during the last few years, please check ten items from the list below that seem to be our congregation's "top 10 core values." (If you do not see 10 core values in our congregation, check *fewer* than 10, but do NOT check more than 10.)**

**Please do NOT check more than 10 items. This is a *forced-choice* survey. Checking more than 10 items invalidates your survey.**

- Effective teaching of personal prayer habits
- Effective advocacy of social justice issues in the community, nation, and world
- Effective recognition of people who provide volunteer service
- Effective fellowship events and activities
- Effective adult Sunday school classes
- Effective weekday, adult Bible study, prayer groups, and life-skill (parenting, marriage or relationship development) groups
- Effective seasonal special events (such as Christmas Eve, Holy Week, Christmas Musical)
- Effective teaching of personal financial stewardship
- Effective financial support of community service efforts
- Effective hands-on involvement in community service efforts
- Effective relationships and teamwork among clergy, staff, and members
- Effective care and concern for members/attendees during times of life stress
- Effective junior high Sunday school classes
- Effective senior high youth Sunday school classes
- Effective junior high youth group
- Effective senior high youth group
- Effective traditional style worship
- Effective contemporary style worship
- Effective blended style worship (includes both traditional and contemporary singing)
- Effective encouragement of attendees to invite community residents to visit worship
- Effective encouragement of attendees toward personal sharing with others regarding their faith
- Effective system for involving all new members in a group and a ministry role
- Effective printed materials and communication systems
- Effective nursery/preschool and elementary Sunday school classes
- Effective children's ministries (such as weeknights, after school, or Saturdays for 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grades)
- Effective financial support of world mission efforts
- Effective hands-on involvement in world mission efforts
- Effective warmth and welcoming attitudes toward newcomers
- Effective, quality facilities
- Effective preaching
- Other .... (Add in the space below *only* if you believe one of our top ten core values is *not* on the above list)