

FAQ: The Church Assessment Tool®

by J. Russell Crabtree

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Q *What is the Church Assessment Tool®?*

A The Church Assessment Tool® is an 85 question, online assessment of a congregation that is completed by members of a church. We affectionately call it a CAT-SCAN. It generates a report called *Vital Signs®*.

Q *What is the purpose of the Church Assessment Tool®?*

A Using the Church Assessment Tool® is like taking your church to a doctor, a travel agent, and a tailor. It gives leaders a read-out on the health of the church, a sense of where members think the church should head in the future, and a description of the church as a unique body of people.

Q *How do church leaders use the Church Assessment Tool®?*

A Churches find the information provided by the Church Assessment Tool® to be helpful whenever important decisions need to be made. This includes strategic planning, preparing for a pastoral search, deciding about yoking or merging churches, planning for a stewardship or capital campaign, and helping a new pastor understand where to start. Churches also use the Church Assessment Tool® to measure progress or just to get a check-up on how the church is doing.

Q *Leaders talk to people in the church all the time. Why do they need a survey to know what people are thinking?*

A Leaders, like everyone else, tend to talk with a relatively small number of people. It can be difficult for them to have a comprehensive understanding of how the entire body is doing. When someone comes to them with a problem and concludes with "And I'm not the only one who feels this way," the leader is left wondering "How many people do feel this way?"

Q *Isn't a survey too impersonal?*

A In fact, many people find a survey to be very personal because it asks them their personal perspective on a number of topics that they are rarely asked about. What is certain is that the Church Assessment Tool® is *impartial*. Because the results are completely confidential, it does not matter whether a person is talkative or shy, young or old, a recent member or a longtime member. Their views are equally respected.

Q *The church is a spiritual organization. Can we really measure its health?*

A No, we can't. What we can do is ask members to bear witness to what they are experiencing in the church. If a large number of its members are bearing witness to a sense of meaning and purpose, to positive relationships, and to an experience of the presence of God then we can conclude from their testimony that the church is vital and healthy.

Q *Should we be giving technology such an important role in discerning a direction?*

A In the 15th century the church adopted the new technology of the printing press as a means of communicating more effectively with people. Technology now allows us to be more effective in *listening* to people.

Q *What about people who don't have computer access?*

A We provide a PDF file of the survey that can be used to create print copies that members can complete and return to the church where a trusted person can go online and input their data.

Q *Should leaders be discerning God's will through surveys?*

A Information from the *Vital Signs®* report is just one component of a discernment process. Leaders must also include prayer, Scripture, and tradition. However, leaders cannot help their members move in a new direction if they do not know where their members are. When I call someone to task for directions, the first question they will ask me is "Where are you now?" If I don't know, they can't help me. It is a cardinal rule of spiritual leadership: You cannot help a person or group of person move to a new place if you do not start with where they are. The Church Assessment Tool® helps leaders know where their members are.

Q *There are other assessment tools that are available. What makes the Church Assessment Tool® different?*

A The Church Assessment Tool® has a track record over 25 years with hundreds of churches. In addition, we have developed customized versions of the Church Assessment Tool® for churches doing succession planning, interim ministry, pastoral search, pastoral start-up, and designated pastorates.

Q *Can we add questions to the Church Assessment Tool?*

A Yes, the church can add up to five of its own questions at no additional fee.

Q *Who takes the Church Assessment Tool?*

A All members and affiliates who live “in-town”, have been active within the past year, who are able to physically and emotionally cope with the survey, and are 16 years of age or older.

Q *How does the church set up the survey for members to take it?*

A We create the survey for the church and send the web link to the church contact person. The webmaster for the church website creates a button, either on the homepage or on a separate page of the website which members can click.

Q *How do we make sure that unauthorized persons don't take the survey?*

A We can provide a password that is communicated to members to insure that others cannot access the survey.

Q *How do we publicize the Church Assessment Tool?*

A A full set of instructions is provided for the church including sample documents and announcements. Members can be notified by mail or email and given information about how to take the survey.

Q *How long do we give members to take the survey?*

A Generally, churches give their members two to three weeks to take the survey.

Q *After members have completed the survey, how long does it take to get a Vital Signs® report?*

A We will generally email a report to the church contact person within 48 hours after the close of the survey.

Q *What does the Vital Signs® report contain?*

A A Vital Signs® report contains a number of sections including key indicators, drivers of satisfaction, critical success factors, future goals, descriptive indices on theological perspective and flexibility, performance indices on hospitality, morale, conflict, governance, spiritual vitality, education, readiness for ministry, and worship. There is a financial profile and a clergy profile sent confidentially to the pastor. Depending upon the particular situation, there may be a transition profile, an interim profile, a designated pastor profile, or a start-up profile. In addition, the responses to all the supplemental questions developed by the local leadership are tabulated and displayed.

Q *Once we receive the Vital Signs® report what help is available to help us interpret it?*

A The Vital Signs® report contains narrative, numerical, and graphic information in it to help make it as easy to understand as possible. Should further assistance be required, we can provide onsite interpretation of the data to church leaders.

Q *What does the Church Assessment Tool® cost?*

A The cost is scaled for the size of the church as measured by average Sunday (or weekend) attendance.

Q *How do we get started?*

A The church appoints a liaison for the CAT SCAN. This person then registers the church for the CAT by going to www.holycowconsulting.com/registercat.