

A Congregational Vitality Assessment Tool

East Hills Community Church

Riverside, California

April 2018

Final Condensed Report
Congregational Meeting on June 3, 2018

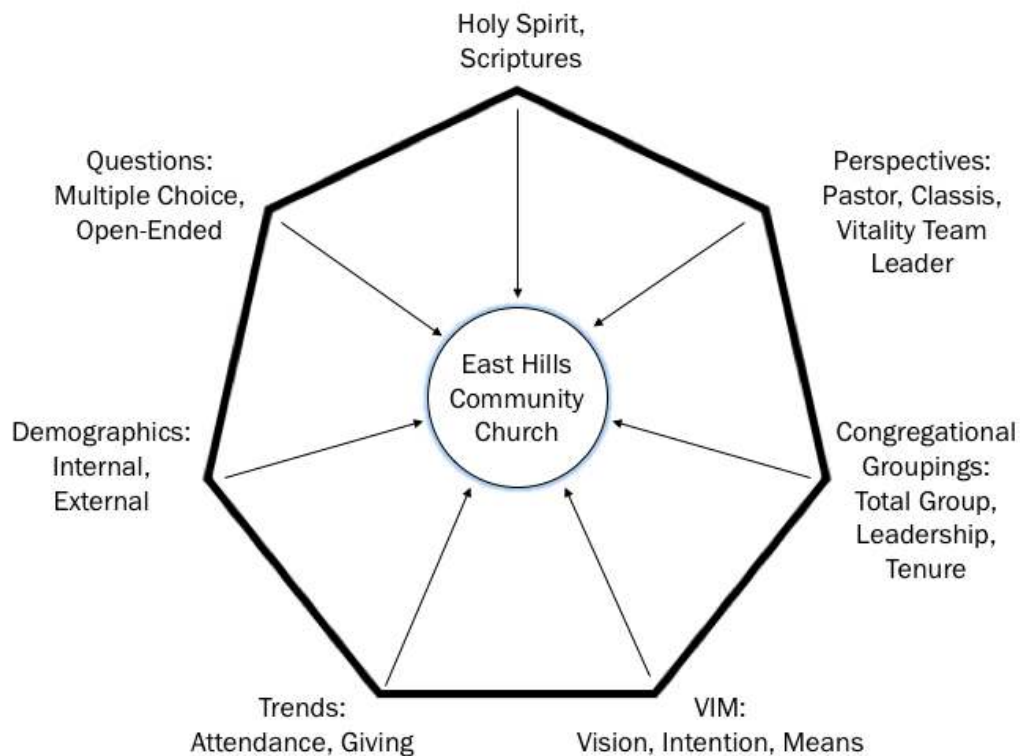
The Purpose of PULSE

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.



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-birthed 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)

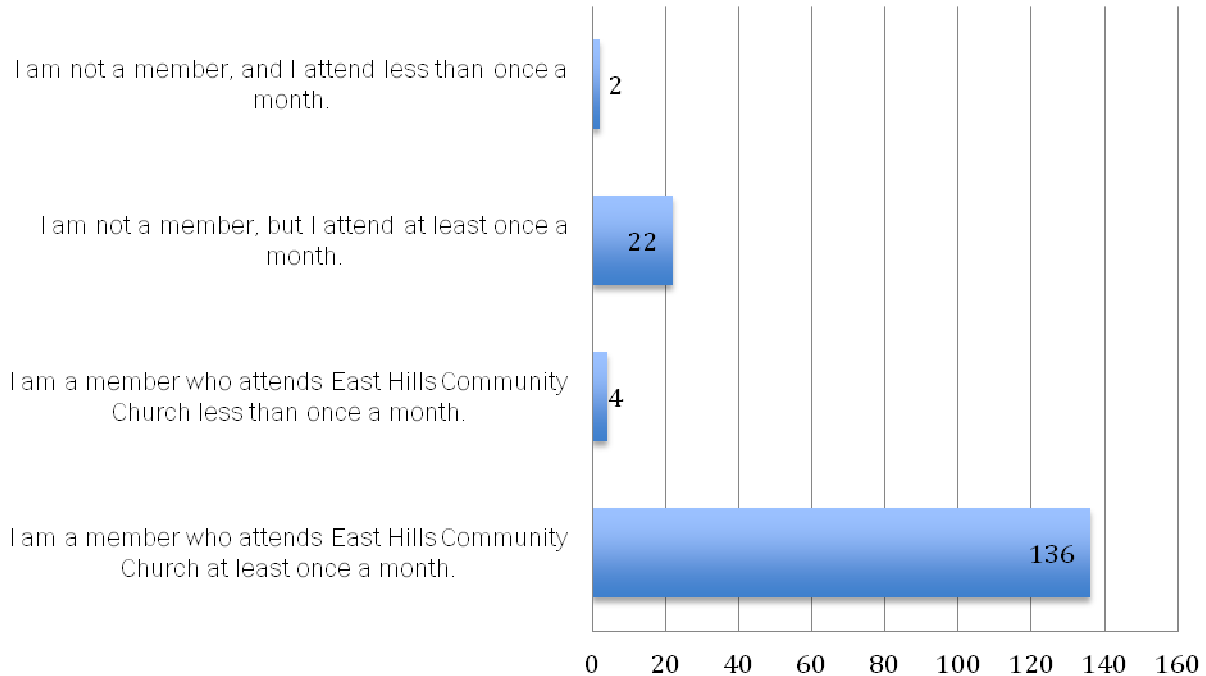
- We can articulate a compelling, Christ-honoring vision for our church.
- We embrace evaluation as normal and natural and work through conflict constructively.
- Our organizational structures are designed to be efficient at making decisions while at the same time building congregational ownership for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



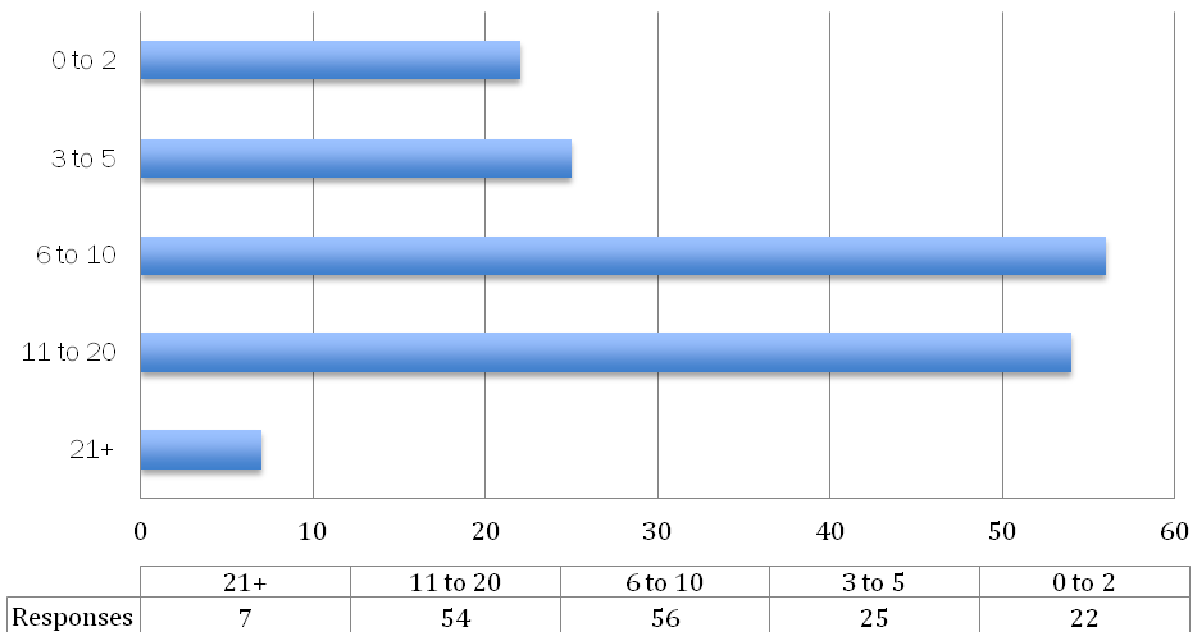
Section 3: Demographic Results

Internal Demographics

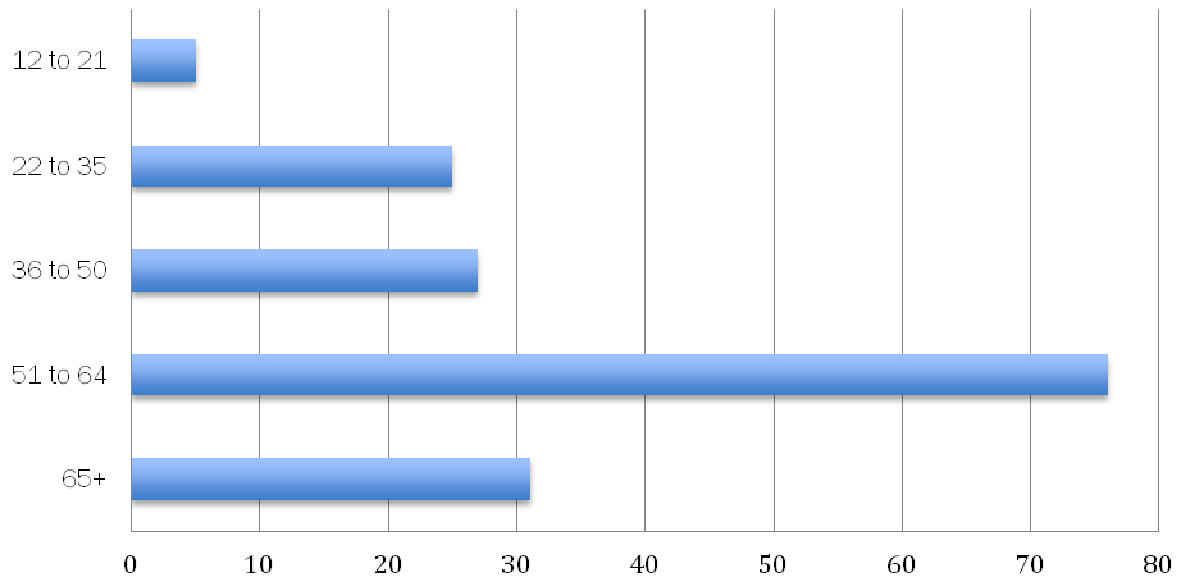
Question 46: Please select the statement that best describes you:



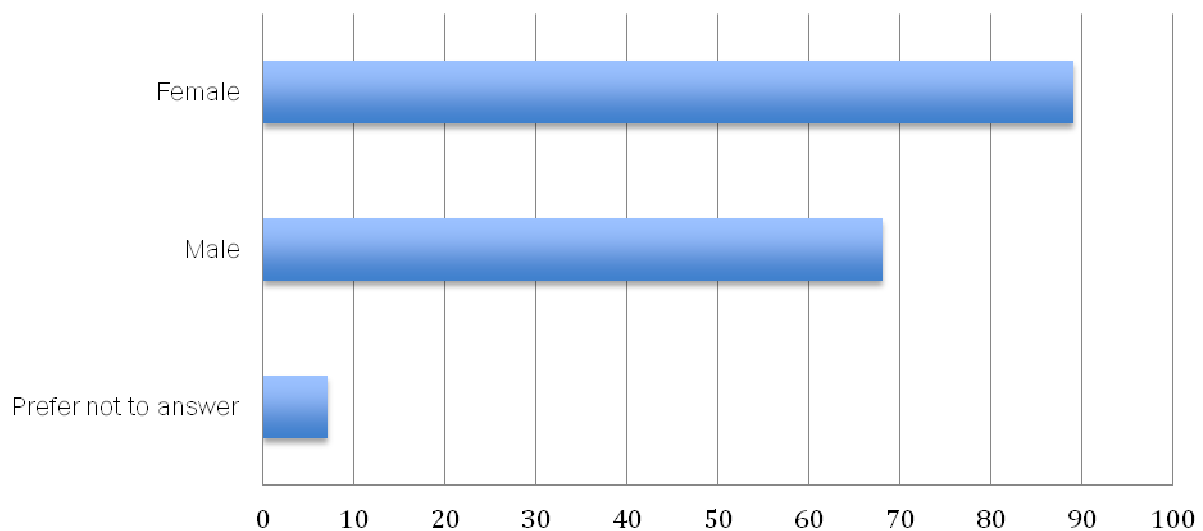
Question 47: I have been attending East Hills Community Church for the following number of years:



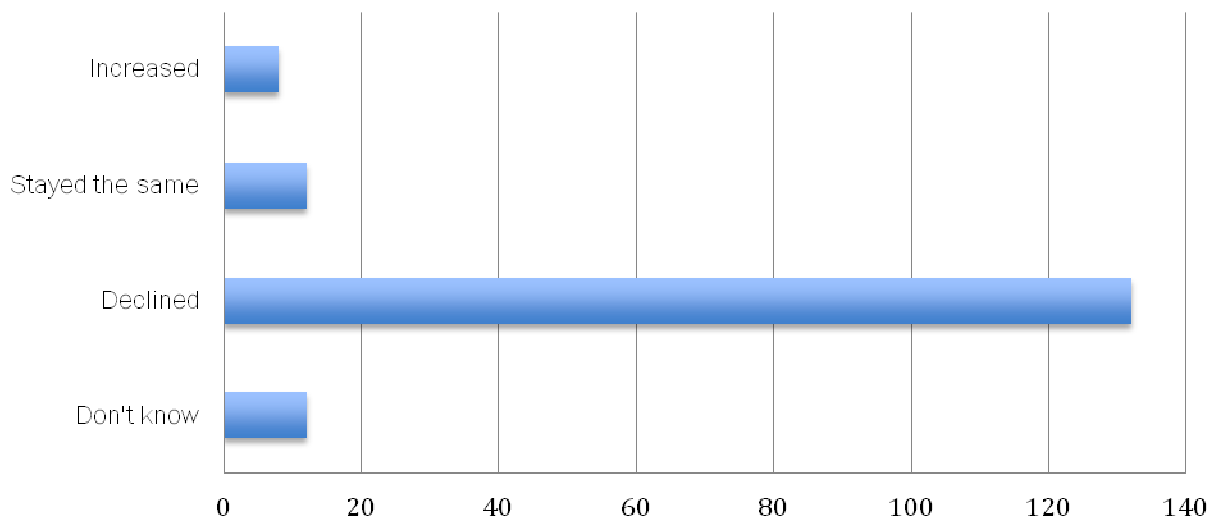
Question 48: I am in the following age category:



Question 49: I am:

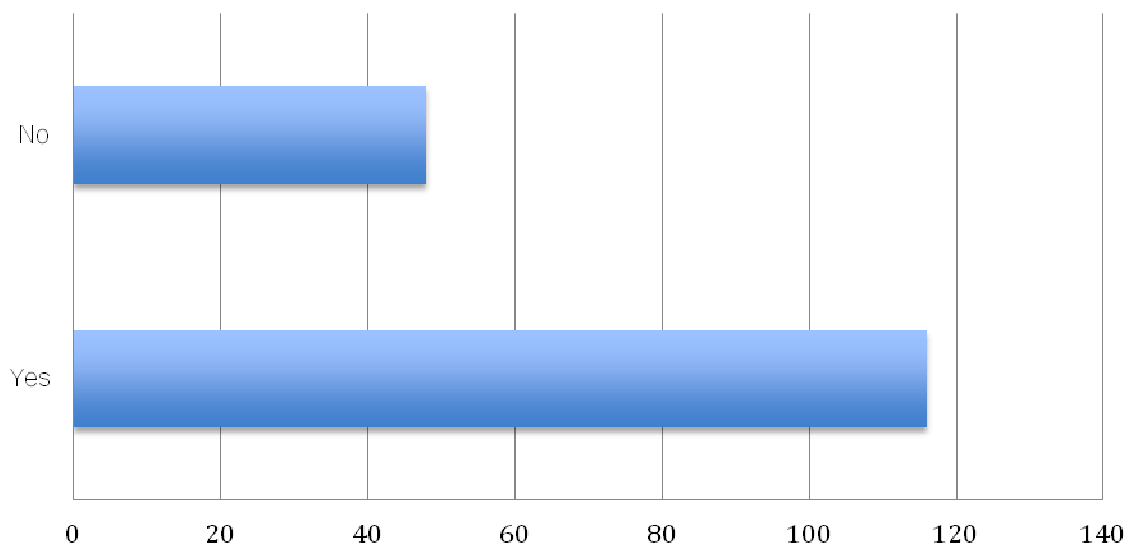


Question 50: In the last 10 years, our worship service attendance has:



	Don't know	Declined	Stayed the same	Increased
Responses	12	132	12	8

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

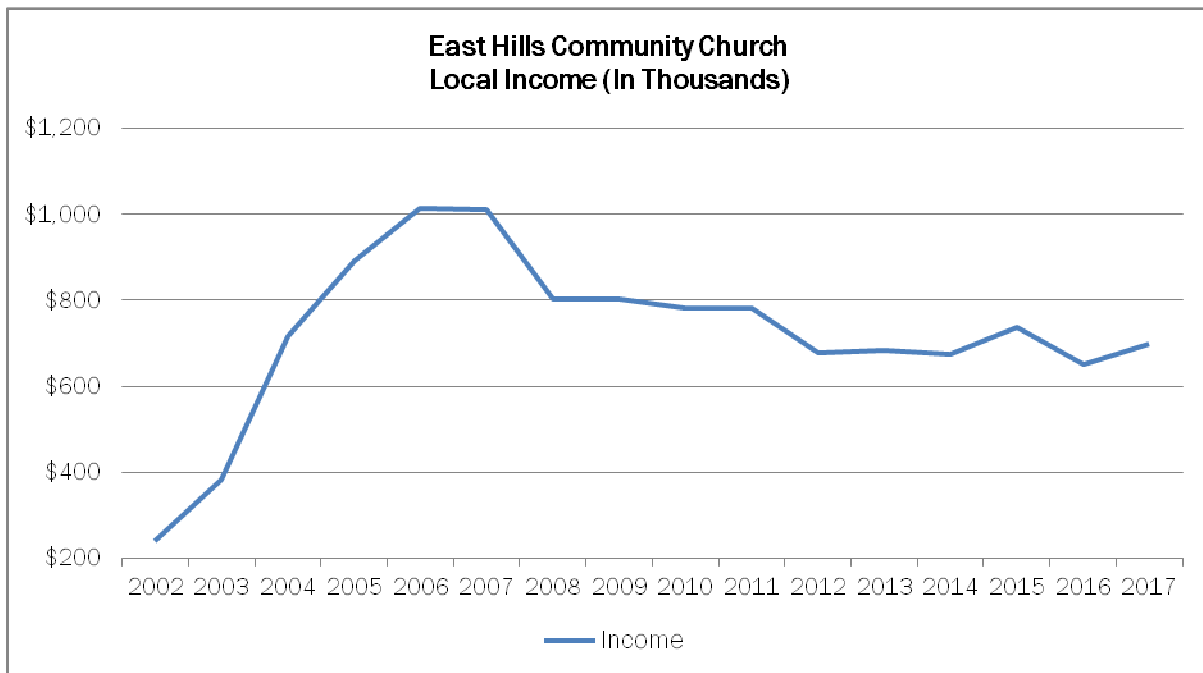


	Yes	No
Responses	116	48

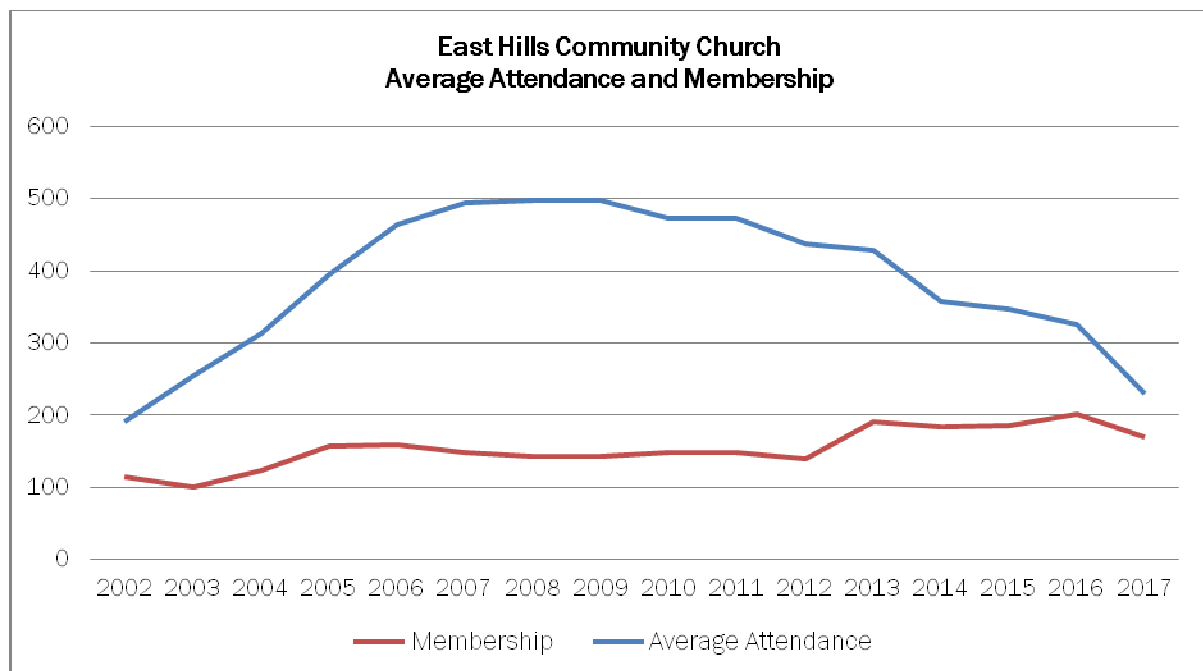


Section 6: Attendance and Income Trends

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 2: Summary of Healthy Missional Marker Scores



Healthy Missional Marker Rankings	
Marker:	4.00 scale
Life Transforming Walk with Jesus	3.49
Compelling Christian Community	3.37
Heartfelt Worship	3.29
Sacrificial Giving and Living	3.27
Culture of Godly Leadership	3.17
Global Perspective and Engagement	3.12
Transforming Communities Through CMJ Ministries	3.08
Intentional Evangelism	3.05
Centrality of the Word	2.93
Fruitful Organizational Structures	2.91
Overall Score:	3.17

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

East Hills Community Church
Stable 3.17



Section 4: Responses to and Interpretation of Open-Ended Questions

Summarized by Topic

41. In your opinion, what is the single greatest strength of East Hills Community Church? (156/164)

Caring Body (34/156; 22%)
Fellowship and Community (29/156; 19%)
Godly Preaching and Teaching (23/156; 15%)
God is Here/We are Seeking Him (14/156; 9%)
Life Groups and Ministries (10/156; 6%)
Staff and Lay Leadership (9/156; 6%)
Outreach/Evangelism (8/156; 5%)
Prayer (8/156; 5%)
Miscellaneous/Don't Know (44/156; 29%)

42. In your opinion, what is the single greatest area for improvement? (154/164)

Lay and Staff Leadership/Vision/Hire Lead Pastor (20/154; 13%)
Evangelism/Invitation/Outreach (18/154; 12%)
Reaching Families/Younger People and Associated Ministries (19/154; 12%)
Worship Service Changes (15/154; 10%)
Too Many Cliques/Need More Connectedness (12/154; 8%)
Clear/Transparent/Timely Communication (9/154; 6%)
Welcoming/Accepting/Integrating (10/154; 6%)
Membership Commitment to Attend and Serve (7/154; 5%)
Miscellaneous/Don't Know (44/154; 29%)

43. In a few sentences, how would you describe the overall health of East Hills Community Church? (151/164)

Healthy Missional (13/151; 9%)
Stable (23/151; 15%)
Critical Moment (88/151; 58%)
At Risk (6/151; 4%)
Don't Know (21/151; 14%)

44. What is one change that could significantly strengthen East Hills Community Church? (145/164)

Better Leadership and Staff Restructure (24/145; 17%)
Worship Service Restructure (13/145; 9%)
More Community Outreach (13/145; 9%)
Invite/Welcome/Integrate People into Service (11/145; 8%)
Hire Pastor John as Lead Pastor (11/145; 8%)
Grow People in the Faith/Discipleship/Bible Study (10/145; 7%)
Increase Attendance, Especially Younger (10/145; 7%)
More Biblical Preaching and Teaching (7/145; 5%)
Miscellaneous/Don't Know (46/145; 32%)

45. Is there anything else you would like to share about East Hills Community Church? (120/164)

Love East Hills Community Church (19/120; 16%)
Get More People Engaged, Especially Women (12/120; 10%)
Need Clear Vision/Change is Necessary (8/120; 7%)
Love the People Here, This Community is Family (7/120; 6%)
Need Better/Expanded Lay Leadership (7/120; 6%)
Personal Follow-Up with New People and Older Members (6/120; 5%)
Miscellaneous (35/120; 29%)
Nothing Else (26/120; 22%)



Interpretation of Data and Open-Ended Responses

The following is a list of observations and questions for the congregation, based on their responses to the open-ended questions (41-45). Although there are other questions to be asked, these are the ones that are most apparent. Please prayerfully consider these observations as you discern God's future for your church.

OBSERVABLE STRENGTHS

1. CARING CONGREGATION

Many observe the greatest strength of East Hills as the quality of the care members of the congregation exhibit toward one another. Members are described as kind, compassionate and loving toward one another. People feel safe at East Hills and there is a sense of trust that has been built over many years of relationship.

2. FRIENDSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP

There is a strong sense of camaraderie and friendship. This goes beyond the sense of caring expressed above. Many see East Hills as their people, their community, and their friends. In other words, they feel very close to the other members at East Hills, like a family.

3. GODLY PREACHING AND TEACHING

There is great appreciation for good preaching that is Biblically rooted. People appreciate not only quality preaching and the strong grounding in the Bible, they also like that it is applicable, addresses current issues directly, and challenges people to grow.

GROWTH AREAS

1. LEADERSHIP

The top recurring theme that showed up in the open-ended questions is East Hills need for a new lead pastor. Another theme alongside the need for a lead pastor is the need for visionary leadership. What is being expressed is a sense that East Hills is okay but off track and needs a vision correction. Also mentioned was the need for a unifying vision for all of the leaders of the church.

2. OUTREACH

The decline of East Hills in recent years is obvious in the open-ended questions. Many are identifying the need for outreach and evangelism. What is encouraging is that most are correctly identifying that everyone needs to be more engaged in outreach. Outreach is not a better website or more attractive programming, outreach is a discipleship issue.

3. YOUTH / YOUNG FAMILIES

The congregation is aging, and people are noticing. Some identify this as a retention issue; some blame leadership or identify programming problems and shortcomings. Indirectly, most are identifying that the church is not connecting with youth and young families in the neighborhood.



Section 7: VIM Assessment

Healthy Missional churches are full of vim and vigor. VIM stands for Vision, Intention and Means. While these dynamics are sometimes difficult to rate, they do provide another look into the current reality of the church. The VIM rates are measured in terms of low, medium and high. There is a correlation between the type of church and the rate of VIM. For example, healthy missional churches have a VIM score of High Vision, High Intention and High Means. At-risk churches have a VIM score of Low Vision, Low Intention and Low Means.

The VIM score is a result of deduction and discernment, not statistical analysis. The PULSE team takes into account all the results, combines the information with what is known from other established churches, and prayerfully discerns the VIM levels.

Vision is the picture of a preferable future – God’s future for the church. Vision gives people a target and gets people in the game. Vision helps dreams become bigger than memories. Christ honoring vision is compelling and inspires people to move forward to reach their full kingdom potential in Christ. It is communicated with clarity, urgency and passion.

*Based on the responses from PULSE and information about other established churches, the rate of vision for East Hills Community Church is **LOW**.*

Intention is the resolve to move forward and the will to live, the willingness to count the cost and pay the price. It is the commitment to do whatever it takes to move forward and become a healthy missional church. Intention also embraces the understanding of what it means to carry out the message and mission of Jesus in a postmodern, post Christian culture. There is a willingness to accept the degree and the kind of change that is truly necessary to become a healthy missional church in this culture. Churches often underestimate just how much change is needed in order to thrive. There is a belief that “we can grow without change and change without pain.”

*Based on the responses from PULSE and information about other established churches, the rate of intention for East Hills Community Church is **MEDIUM**.*

Means are the available resources to accomplish the vision and follow through on the church’s intentions. Means refers to the ministry muscle of the church. Ministry muscle includes factors like stamina, children and youth, finances, building, leadership, number of volunteers. This asset base provides a sufficient platform for moving forward.

*Based on the responses from PULSE and information about other established churches, the rate of means for East Hills Community Church is **HIGH**.*

VIM Summary:

LOW Vision, **MEDIUM** Intention, and **HIGH** Means is a pattern consistent with other established churches that are **CRITICAL MOMENT**.



Section 8: 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.

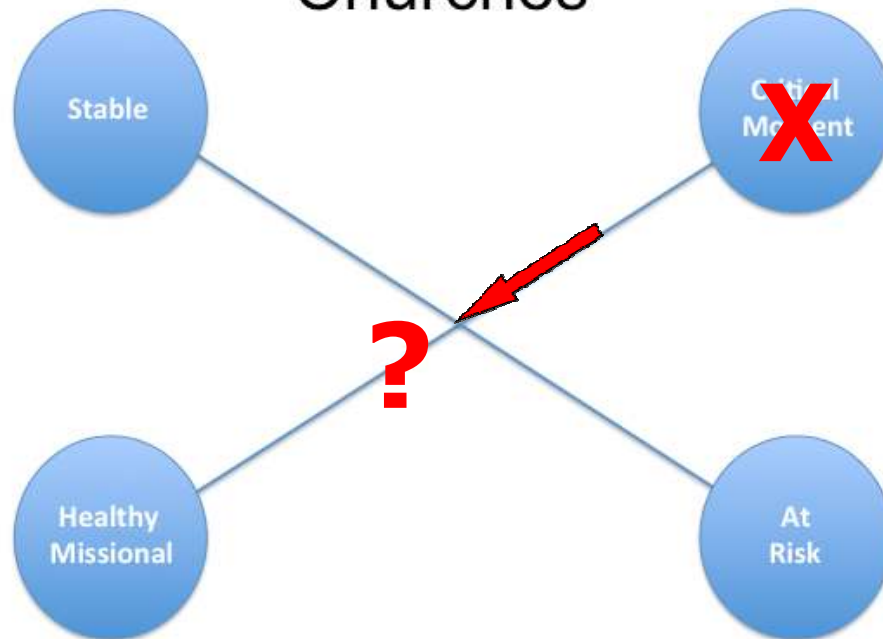
In a healthy missional church, the ten markers are lived out consistently. There are no perfect churches, but a healthy missional church generally displays all the signs of life and vitality.

Based on the responses from PULSE and information about other *established* churches, the church type that most closely describes East Hills Community Church is **CRITICAL MOMENT**.

The trajectory of the arrow is more important than the location of the “X”. East Hills Community Church **HAS THE POTENTIAL TO MOVE TOWARD HEALTHY MISSIONAL**.

How can a church that is **CRITICAL MOMENT** move forward in the journey of becoming a healthy missional church? The next section is devoted to answering that question.

4 Types of Established Churches



Section 9: Next Steps and Recommendations **...for the congregation and leadership**

As a **CRITICAL MOMENT** church, East Hills Community Church has incredible potential to become a Healthy Missional church. The following recommendations are made in a spirit of humility and gentleness.

Spirituality

- The whole congregation needs to be engaged with God's Word personally, more than just a good sermon. Most people at East Hills place a high value on good Biblical preaching however, they do not read the Bible and generally do not feel impacted by what the Bible teaches.
- Individually people are not interacting with people who are far from God and are not sharing their faith. They identify this as a need with regard to the numeric decline of the church but they do not own any responsibility for sharing the Good News in their own sphere. How can the members of East Hills connect their own spiritual maturity and development with "going into all the work and making disciples"?
- Can the incredible strength of caring and friendship be shaped into caring for the stranger and friendship with seekers who are nearby East Hills but far from God?

Chemistry

- The congregation clearly has the ability to have rich and meaningful relationships with other members at East Hills. It is likely that those same people do not have relationships with those in the neighborhood of East Hills. East Hills will not grow unless the current members have conversations with people who live near East Hills and those conversations lead to relationships.
- How can the current members of East Hills get to know the neighbors of East Hills in a way that involves outreach and initiating conversations versus inbound marketing or attraction which does not work in our day?
- There were noteworthy differences with current members concerning one significant change that would lead to meaningfully strengthening East Hills. How can the current members of East Hills follow the leadership direction of the Elders, Trustees, and Vitality Team during this time of transition and renewal before a pastoral Call?

Strategy

- Take what you have learned from the PULSE to improve your congregational profile and pastoral profile.
- Take what you have learned from PULSE to help East Hills get back on the right track. East Hills is truly at a critical moment and also seems to be off track in terms of mission. It is time to get back on track. How can you use PULSE to adjust the mission of the church presently?
- East Hills is placing great hope in a new leader who will bring fresh vision. Wouldn't it be wonderful if during the interim, while the new lead pastor is being called, that the congregation as a whole became outward facing and fully engaged in mission? Can you imagine the celebration as new believers in Jesus are baptized and grow in their faith even before a new lead pastor arrives?
- What strategy is needed to get East Hills to have every member growing in their personal understanding and application of the Bible AND intentionally engaged in conversations and relationship building in the neighborhood surrounding East Hills?



Next Steps and Recommendations ...for the Pastor

Spirituality

- As pastor you need to model the way for the congregation. If the Congregation is falling behind in areas of reading of the Bible and of the personal impact of their faith on their behavior the pastor must personally engage with the Bible daily apart from your professional responsibilities, personally experience the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and personally engage in hospitality to those who are not Christians. Personal practice, journaling, the humility to engage others who can help you, and sharing your current experience of these practices will bring, joy, growth and become contagious. You must exemplify the values you want the congregation to adopt.

Chemistry

- The pastor cannot expect change to occur as a result of introducing and promoting programs. The pastor must become the prime example of the values. No Bible reading plan or evangelism plan will succeed unless the pastor is fully and fruitfully engaged and championing the effort. The pastor must have regular and fresh stories of personal growth and transformation that come as a result of personal Bible study and application, apart from sermon and other prep. The pastor must have regular, current stories about sharing their faith and introducing others to Jesus. The pastor must be the prime promoter of Bible reading, the prime promoter of personal transformation, and the prime promoter of outward engagement and evangelism. The pastor must exemplify the change that is needed. The pastor must also bring key leaders on the journey with them. It is very important that the pastor has the ability to persuade and involve the leaders of the church in the key changes that need to take place. The change needed is initiated by the pastor's personal practices. However, for change to be catalytic the pastor must engage key leaders of the church (official leaders as well as other influencers) in Bible reading, personal transformation, and evangelism. Leaders in turn will help spread the movement into their spheres of influence.

Strategy

- The pastor needs a coach to help set goals and engage in the behaviors needed. In addition to a coach the pastor should identify mentors to help with key change areas. Loren Van Woudenberg has good experience with 3DM (3-Dimensional Movement) a very effective discipleship and missional movement ministry. Also, consider joining a 3DM learning community with Jeff Allen. Jeff Ludington and Ken Korver have much to offer with regard to evangelism in the local church. Talk with them about Organic Outreach and learn how to make Organic Outreach part of the DNA of the church and not just another program. Ken Korver has championed Bible reading in his congregation. Talk with him about how to get the whole congregation reading the Bible. Set clear goals around personal and congregational Bible reading. Set clear goals around the numbers of conversations and meetups you personally, and the congregation will have with people who are not Christians who live in the vicinity of the church (1-3 miles, see the MissionInsite demographic reports). To be the change agent the congregation needs you must first exemplify the change that is needed and second you must engage the church leaders in the same behavior.



Section 10: 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

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

According to your responses and from what we know about other established churches, East Hills Community Church is **CRITICAL MOMENT**.

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.

As you ponder, discuss and pray about these recommendations, may you sense God’s empowering presence and love for you. Keep your ears and eyes open to the leading of the Holy Spirit and to follow through with courage and faith. 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.

