

NAMING THE PRESENT—ACTIVITY

Review Current Realities

*“If a church has diminished to **fewer than forty-five** active confessing members or shows that it lacks a sufficient number of members who can provide leadership or it can no longer meet its financial obligations or there is no prospect of continued growth, then a classis should consider that these are sufficient indicators for it to begin discussing with such a congregation whether it is still appropriate for it to retain organized status.”*

—Supplement, Article 38-d, Church Order of the CRCNA

The [Church Order](#) calls attention to certain details that are indicators of the need to assess viability. It’s important that everyone has the same information in front of them so that actual numbers and trends are accurate—and shared by all who are in the discernment process. It’ll be necessary for data to be gathered beforehand and provided to the participants. It’ll also be helpful to consider this basic information in relationship to the matter of your church’s place in the [life-cycle chart](#) (p. 2) in George Bullard’s [The Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development](#).

Time needed for activity

60 - 90 minutes (once the prep work in step 1 below has been completed)

Group size

Any number of current members and regular visitors

Steps for Activity

1. Prepare a chart or graph that highlights the trend in *membership numbers* as well as *membership demographics*. This will allow the present to be understood within the framework of the past.
2. Present the graph/chart to the group. Allow time for questions and comments.
3. Present George Bullard’s [The Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development](#). Give special attention to the life-cycle chart on page 2. Allow time for questions of clarification.
4. Once there’s a consensus about the church’s present location on the life-cycle chart, review what this suggests in terms of questions to consider.

Facilitator’s Questions

After the activity, allow time for discussion around some questions like these:

1. Most every living organism has a life-cycle, moving from birth to maturity to death. Unless we intentionally interrupt this natural cycle with fresh gusts of Spirit-wind, an organism like a church body will mature, age, and die. (*And even then, there’s hope for new life, per the law of the seed that Jesus teaches in John 12—when planted, a seed that dies produces new life!*) How might these rhythms of the created order be instructive for your church?
2. How do people feel about the membership chart/graph? Concerned? Guilty? Sad? Neutral?

3. What questions does your church's current life-stage prompt you to consider?
4. If you imagined your congregation as an individual person with a specific age, gender, and posture—how might that speak into your programming, conversations, and capacities? For more on this, see the [Who Is Our Church?](#) activity.