

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS®

by

Peter Rudowski
DECEMBER 2016

Reflections On Congregational Life is a service of the Southern Ohio Synod, ELCA

Within the last year, I had a conversation with a CPA who was interviewing for a position in a small company. During the interview she asked, what are the company's KPIs (Key Performance Indicators)? KPIs are the items that inform the leadership team if a company is healthy or if its performance is subpar. The CPA knew that her performance evaluation would be based on the company's KPIs. She also knew that if there were more than 3 to 5 KPIs her performance evaluation would be "muddled" to use her terms.

Since my conversation with this CPA, I have wondered about the KPIs of congregations. A good clue to a congregation's KPIs is answered in the response to the question, how is your congregation doing? The response is the conscious or subconscious KIPs of the pastor and/or governing board.

Following are the KPIs from the 1960s-70s, 80s-90s, and for the 21st century.

KPIs for the 60s-70s

In the 60s-70s, the adage was a home going pastor is a church going congregation. A KPI was that the pastor visited each member in his or her home at least once year.

Pastors were chaplains of congregational members. A KPI was regular visits to members in the hospital. A connected KPI was monthly visits, with holy communion, to members who were home bound or in nursing homes.

In John, 10:14, Jesus says that he is the good shepherd and that he knows his sheep. The KPI of this text was the good shepherd, the "good pastor," knows the name of every member of the congregation including children and pets as well as the names of extend-

ed family members. Many congregants expand this KPI to mean the pastor is my friend.

One of the rewards for serving on a committee was that the pastor would see every committee member. Therefore, a KPI was that the pastor would visit or attend every committee meeting and say hello to every participant.

All the KPIs of the 60s and 70s were inward focused. Not a single KPI was outward focused. National denominations tried to raise the status of evangelism and other outreach ministries to be KPIs with little success.

KPIs for the 80s-90s

Lyle Schaller noted that congregations founded on or before 1900 and still existed in the last quarter of the 20th century were at least three times larger in membership than they were on the date of their founding. This numerical growth affected the KPIs of congregations in the last quarter of the 20th century.

1. Small groups became a KPI in the 80s and 90s. How many small groups a congregation had was an indication of its health and vitality. A healthy congregation had 6 to 7 small groups for every 100 worshipers. In larger congregations, worshiping over 100 or 125, it was the small group that knew members' names and helped them in time of stress.

2. If a congregation was to grow beyond 125 to 150 worshipers, 2 to 4 lay volunteers had to assume responsibility and authority over congregational ministry programs. A KPI was how many ministries were the responsibility of lay leaders.

3. Church growth, usually in the form of numerical growth, became a KPI. The KPI

counted numerical growth in terms of members and worship attendance.

In the 80s and 90s, the focus of KPIs was inward. It was thought that if a congregation was effectively serving members, non-members would be attracted to the congregation.

KPIs for the 21st century

Numerically, worship attendance and membership has declined from its high point in 1963 until today. This decline has occurred as the United States' population increased. In addition, the largest growing religious group in the United States in the 21st century is the NONES - those who claim to have no affiliation with an establish congregation or denomination. Decline in worship attendance and the growth of NONES is changing the KPIs for the authors who write articles and books on parish administration and/or church growth. Some 21st century KPIs are:

How many conversations have congregational leaders and members had with NONES, agnostics, or atheists? Do these conversations lead to an invitation to experience and/or participate in a ministry program at the leader's/member's congregation?

How many congregational ministries and/or programs are planned and implemented with the primary audience being non-members?

Many congregations have a purpose or mission statement that proclaims they are to make disciples for Jesus, help individuals grow their faith, and/or to serve others in Jesus' name. These purpose statements require KPIs that measure how many adult baptisms occurred in the last year or how many individuals returned to a congregation after an extended absence. Or, what was the growth in Sunday School, weekly Bible studies, or faith formations groups? Or, how many times Jesus' name was connected to serving of a dinner at a downtown church or local food pantry?

A KPI can be how many times a congregation has implemented a ministry program, enhanced a ministry program, or held a good

funeral for a ministry program that no longer meets the needs of members or non-members. This KPI originates from cultural and demographic studies intended to inform leaders about worship preferences, educational trends, and communication mediums.

5. Many congregations have a non-profit, a for-profit, and/or a government agency as a neighbor who seek to serve the community in which they exist. A KPI could measure how many partnerships a congregation has with those who seek to provide child care for the working poor, provide counseling for the distressed, or provide necessary life-skills to those struggling with normal every day living. In these partnerships, how does a congregation witness to its faith motivation for service?

The KPIs of the 21st century face outward into the community that the congregation claims to serve.

Conclusion

The purpose of a KPI is to inform leaders how their congregation is performing. When someone asks, so how is it going, what are the 3 to 5 KPIs used to describe your congregation's health and vitality? Are the KPIs reflective of the 60s-70s, the 80s-90s, or the 21st century? Are the KPIs from each time period? Do the KPIs reveal why your congregation values and measures what it does? Do they reveal why the congregation is numerically growing, stable in worship attendance, or declining in membership?

I think it would be a good administrative practice for congregational leaders to have a lengthy discussion about their KPIs. Once the KPIs are identified, every governing board meeting begins with an evaluation of how the congregation is performing against its Key Performance Indicators.

Peter Rudowski served as a parish pastor for 33 years. In this capacity, he developed knowledge and skills in parish administration and organizational systems. He now serves as a consultant to pastors and congregations. He is also the author of CONNECTING THE DOTS: Ministering To Your Congregation Through Its Organizational System published by Xlibris - order via the internet at xlibris.

He can be contacted for a consultation at: phone 513-791-8920 or e-mail address: prudowski@fuse.net