

## Vital Signs Dashboard

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### **How do I get my churches signed up?**

The good news is each of our churches in the Susquehanna Conference is already registered to begin using the dashboard. If you have received a reminder email, this verifies you are go to go! If not, contact the conference office for help.

#### **What if I clicked the "opt out" link on my reminder email? How do I opt them back in?**

Send a request to [vitalsigns@gcfa.org](mailto:vitalsigns@gcfa.org) or directly to [ssimpson@gcfa.org](mailto:ssimpson@gcfa.org). The churches will be reactivated within two (2) business days.

#### **I notice there are entry spaces going back to the beginning of the year. Do I need to enter past week's data?**

You do not need to go back and enter from the beginning of the year, however, if you are able to do so the statistics you enter on the Vital Signs Dashboard will be carried onto your year-end statistical reports simplifying the gathering of that data.

#### **Can I change, add or amend my entries at a later date?**

Yes! You can always make changes or additions to any earlier week the next time you submit your data.

#### **What do I include in worship attendance?**

Worship is one of the most important ways we United Methodists encounter the living God through the risen Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and vital worship is a key indicator of a vital congregation.

For Worship Attendance, report the total attendance at all services your church holds on a regular weekly basis as a primary opportunity for worship.

- DO report all persons, including children, who participate in all or part of the service.
- DO report attendance at services held on Sunday.
- DO report for services held on Saturday, or other days of the week, if the people who attend that service and do not normally also attend on Sunday as well.
- DO NOT include worship for special services that are only held on special occasions such as Christmas Eve, Maundy Thursday, or Good Friday.
- DO NOT report persons who are in your church building during worship times, but are not participating in a worship service.

#### **What do I include in professions of faith?**

As United Methodists, we believe we are called by God to spread the good news of Jesus Christ and to join with one another in Christian community. One of the ways we assess our strength in answering this call is through professions of faith where someone who currently does not hold membership in another church professes their faith in Jesus Christ and joins a congregation as a professing member.

- DO report youth in confirmation classes who have joined the church that week.
- DO NOT report transfers from other United Methodist or non-United Methodist Congregations
- DO report adults joining your church who have never been a member of another church.
- DO NOT report persons who have previously been a member of a congregation, but currently don't hold membership in a church.

#### **What qualifies as a small group?**

As United Methodists, we believe through the grace of God every person can continue growing in their faith and discipleship. One of the most important ways we do this is through participation in small groups, created for helping our members become more faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, through learning, mutual support and accountability, and service to the world.

With that being said, every church has groups that meet throughout the week, but not every group should be reported here.

- DO report persons engaged in covenant discipleship or other accountability groups

- DO report Sunday School classes as small groups
- DO NOT report persons more than once.
- DO report small groups that get together for bible study or, in some cases, to provide ministries to the community.
- DO NOT report groups that primarily meet for recreational activities like sports.
- Please remember we are not counting 'attendance' of small groups, but rather, individuals who are participating in a 'small groups'. That is why we say only count them once. Our goal to to count the number of individuals who are a part of one or more small groups.
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- In some cases it may be difficult to determine what groups should or should not be included here, and that's okay. What is important is that your congregation has a clear understanding of what you consider to be these small groups, and you report your data consistently over time.

### **What qualifies as involvement in mission?**

United Methodists are disciples of Jesus Christ who are engaged in the world. Through local and international mission trips, soup kitchens, prison ministries, literacy programs, and thousands of other ways, we're working to transform the world. Vital congregations have members who are engaged in the world around them, whether that's down the block or halfway around the world.

For persons serving in mission and outreach:

- DO report persons working on mission teams that week.
- DO include persons who work in community ministries provided by your local church, such as after school programs, food banks, or homeless ministries.
- DO include persons who work as part of the church's support for community ministries with other churches or organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, or CROP Walk.
- DO NOT include persons who volunteer for ministries on their own without the support or endorsement of the church. Although this is important ministry, it's not something for which the church can claim responsibility.
- DO NOT include persons who work in mission and outreach as part of their job.
- DO NOT report persons more than once.
- Again, there may be times when it isn't easy to know what should or should not be included here. Just remember to be clear about how you define it, and report consistently.

### **Why do you want to know about the amount of offering?**

Although your church may receive part of its income from endowments, rents, investments, or special fundraisers, giving by your members through their pledges and offerings is a key indicator of vitality.

- DO report monies collected during your worship services.
- DO report monies collected for Special Sunday Offerings, the Advance, or a capital campaign.
- DO report monies collected through electronic funds transfer or online giving.
- DO NOT report returns on investments, rents, or fundraisers.
- DO NOT report registration fees or tuition for daycares, schools, or other programs where fees are paid to the church for education or service.

### **What about amounts given to other organizations in support of mission and ministry?**

United Methodists are generous people. When we can't support mission and ministry with our own hands, we do it with the financial gifts God has given us. An important indicator of church vitality is that amount given by the congregation to support benevolent and charitable ministries. These are causes your church supports outside of its own ministries.

- DO include the amount the congregations pays for Shares of Ministry (apportionments), Special Sundays, Advance Specials, or other United Methodist causes.

- DO include the amount your congregation pays to other organizations doing important ministry that aren't specifically United Methodist.
- DO include the amount your congregation pays to other organizations in your community where your members are volunteering, such as Habitat for Humanity.
- As many congregations support these ministries on a monthly or quarterly basis, it's okay to report a zero on a given week. Simply report the spending that has occurred that week to help ensure money isn't counted more than once or not at all.

**Will this data show up on the year-end statistical report?**

Yes. Vital Signs data can be used to populate your average attendance and professions of faith on the year-end statistical report. If a church has populated this data for a full year, the information will be populated in the end-of-year statistical reporting tool.

\*This information is found on the Vital Signs website and is copied here to help you use it more efficiently.