

How Do Canadian Protestant Churches Evaluate Ministry “Success”?



A CANADIAN RESEARCH SURVEY WITH PASTORS AND BOARD MEMBERS

Five Smooth Stones

CONSULTING LTD.

Governance Consulting for Churches and Christian Ministries

There is Still More Work to be Done

Canadian Protestant church board members and pastors need a strong theological foundation for the practice of evaluating what “success” means for the local church. While recently there has been some movement away from using the traditional metrics of attendance and giving, the results from this research survey reveal that there is still more work to be done.

This survey, conducted in the fall of 2018, provides several insights

- > Slightly more than half of survey participants who said they evaluate ministry **have a loosely defined evaluation process**
- > Thirty-nine percent of respondents said that they were **unsure how to go about doing a ministry evaluation**
- > Slightly more than half of these churches either **do not have specific ministry evaluation criteria** or indicated that they **need to make more progress in this area**
- > Churches that do establish criteria are typically **using activity-oriented measures** (e.g., how many in attendance, how many people led to Christ, what percentage of attendees are engaged in ministry, offerings) **as opposed to outcome-oriented criteria**
- > Nearly half of survey respondents gave no response or were **not sure how they incorporated theological principles, biblical passages, or spiritual practices into their ministry evaluation process**



Download a Ministry Evaluation Devotional Resource

Looking for a resource to assist your board with ministry evaluation? Download a free devotional resource for church board members and pastors based on the messages to the seven churches in Revelation at [fivesmoothstones.ca/seven-churches-devotional](https://www.fivesmoothstones.ca/seven-churches-devotional)

About the Survey Participants



512
Total participants

338
pastors

174
board members



PASTORS

Male	85%
Female	14%
No response	1%

AGE GROUPS

	Pastors	Board Members
18 – 29	1%	2%
30 – 39	16%	6%
40 – 49	21%	10%
50 – 59	36%	30%
60 – 69	20%	30%
70 and older	5%	21%
No response	1%	1%



BOARD MEMBERS

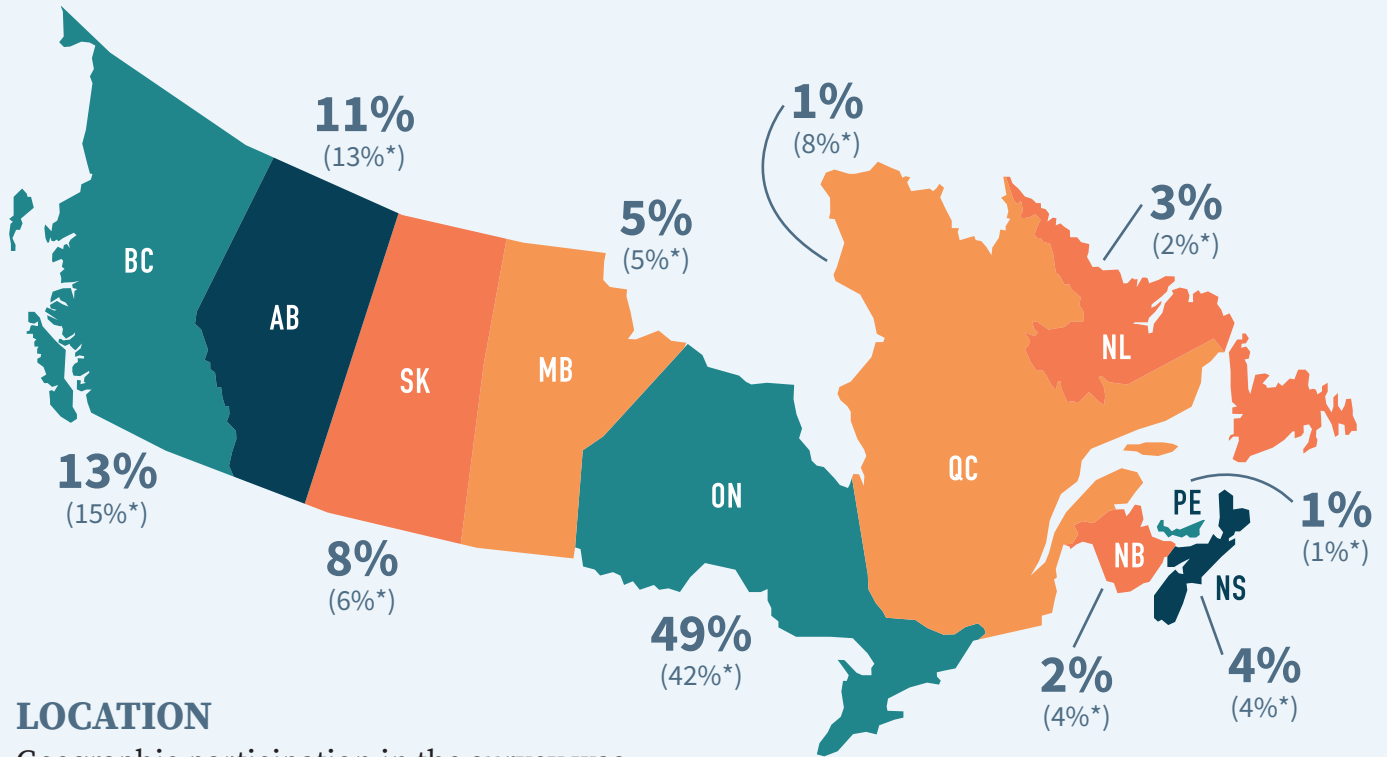
Male	59%
Female	40%
No response	1%

CHURCH SIZE

The majority of participants were from small and medium-sized churches with less than 250 people attending the weekly worship gathering.



< 75 people		39%
75 – 150 people		32%
151 – 249 people		14%
250+ people		15%



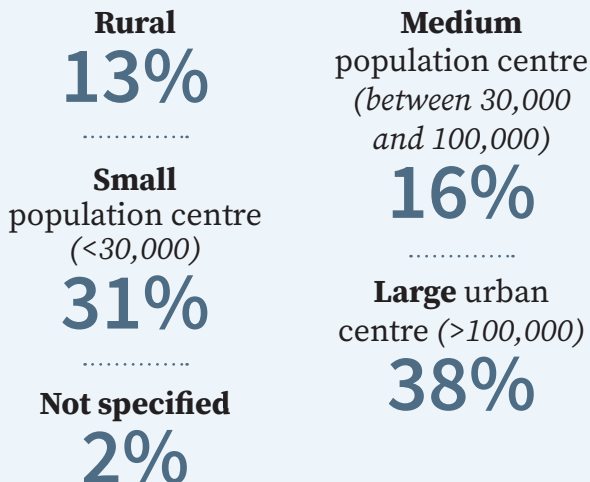
LOCATION

Geographic participation in the survey was reasonably consistent with the geographic distribution of Canadian Protestant churches, with the exception of Quebec, which was under-represented because the survey was only available in English.

* Percentages in brackets reflect the percentage of Protestant churches in that province.

DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION

A variety of denominational affiliations were represented in the survey; however, Pentecostal, Baptist, Presbyterian and Lutheran traditions were the largest groups.



Pentecostal—20%

Baptist—17%

Presbyterian—15%

Lutheran—15%

Free Methodist—7%

Evangelical Covenant—5%

Be in Christ—4%

Mennonite—4%

Other—11%

None—2%

Research Findings



CLEAR MISSION STATEMENT AS AN ANCHORING POINT FOR MINISTRY EVALUATION

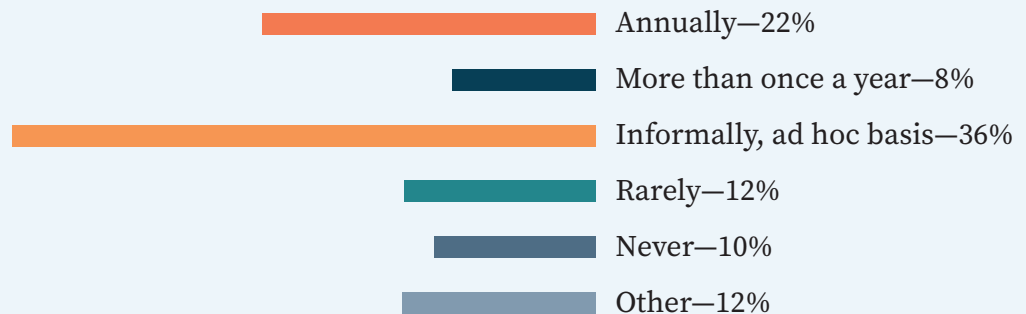
Small churches are significantly less likely than larger churches to have a mission or purpose statement that provides a clear reference point for ministry evaluation.

Church Size	<75	75–150	151–249	250+
Have a clear mission statement	64%	77%	87%	94%
Have a mission statement, but it is not clear	19%	15%	9%	3%
Do not have a mission statement	16%	7%	3%	1%



FREQUENCY OF MINISTRY EVALUATION

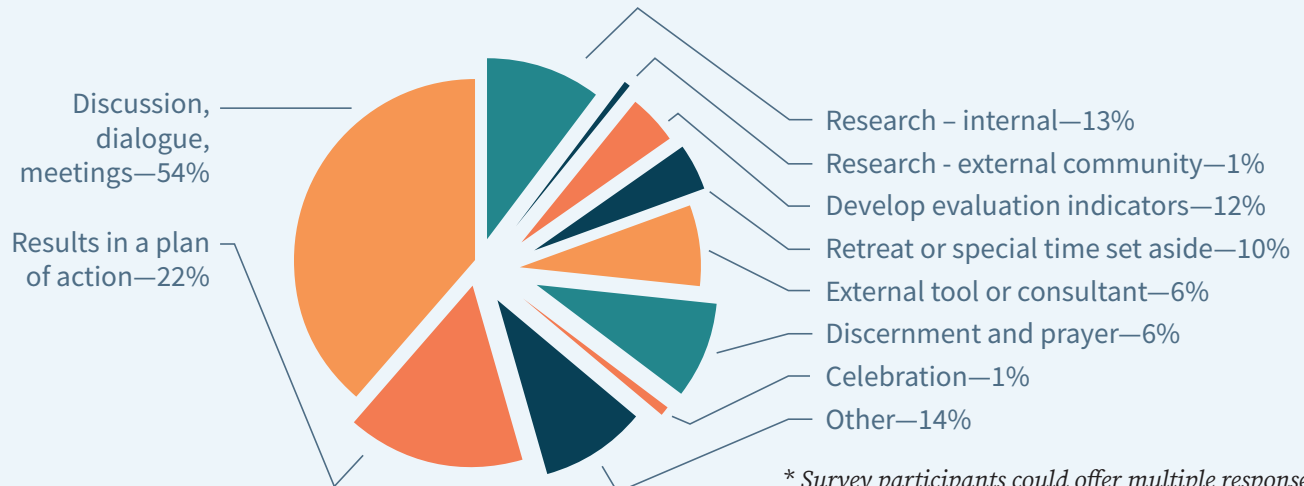
Less than 1/3 of participants said they evaluate ministry at least annually, with 22% revealing that they rarely or never evaluate ministry. A significant segment, 36 percent, declared that they conduct an organizational evaluation informally, on an ad hoc basis. Small churches were significantly more likely to say that they rarely or never evaluated ministry.





METHODS USED IN THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Boards and pastors rely heavily on discussion as the most common method of engaging in the evaluative process. Relatively few gather additional research, develop evaluation indicators, or include discernment and prayer as part of their evaluation process.*



* Survey participants could offer multiple responses; therefore, this list does not add up to 100%.

WHAT CRITERIA ARE USED TO EVALUATE MISSION ACCOMPLISHMENT?

A significant percentage of churches do not have specific evaluation criteria or indicated that they need to make more progress in this area.

47%
Have evaluation criteria

28%
No criteria used

25% Criteria vague; need to do more in this area

Churches who do establish evaluation criteria typically use activity-oriented, quantitative measures (e.g., how many in attendance, how many people led to Christ, what percentage of attendees are engaged in ministry, offerings).*

Large churches with 250 people or more were more likely to emphasize ministry engagement, small group ministry, leading people to Christ, baptisms, as well as maturing faith and discipleship.

31%	Attendance or numerical growth	12%	Goal achievement
25%	Discipleship, maturing faith	10%	Baptisms
23%	Leading people to Christ	10%	Internal satisfaction
22%	Financial (offerings, financial health)	9%	Worship experience
20%	Volunteer engagement in ministry	9%	Leadership development
18%	External or community focus/service	7%	Small group participation
13%	Internal church relationships (love, fellowship)	5%	Missions
		5%	Membership
		5%	Analysis of effectiveness, fruitfulness

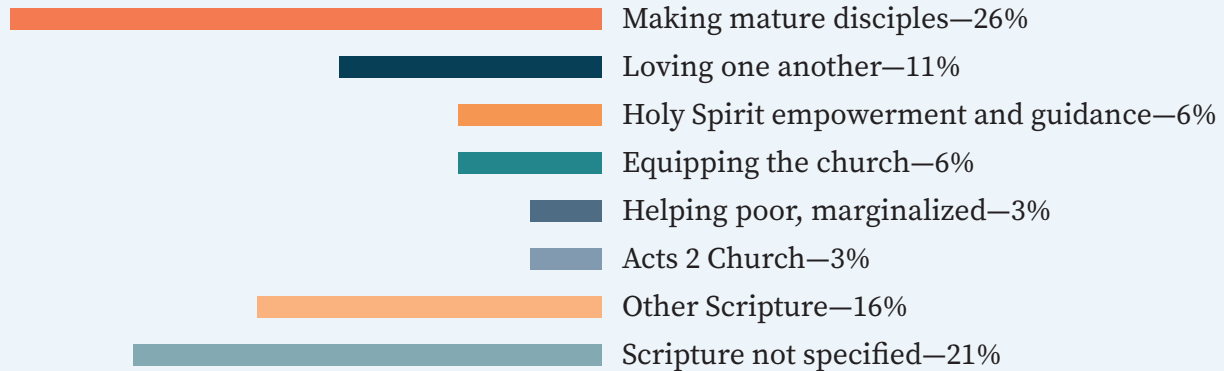
* Survey participants could offer multiple responses; therefore, this list does not add up to 100%.



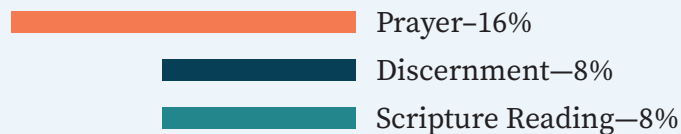
INCORPORATING BIBLICAL PASSAGES AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Nearly half of survey respondents gave no response or were not sure how they incorporated biblical passages and spiritual practices into their evaluation process.

Biblical Passages:



Spiritual Practices:



* Survey participants could offer multiple responses; therefore, this list does not add up to 100%.



WHAT MAKES EVALUATION DIFFICULT?

The vast majority of churches face some type of barrier, obstacle, or challenge—only 4 percent of participants indicated that they faced no barriers at all. The most significant barrier identified was that leaders were not sure how to conduct a ministry evaluation.*

39%
Not sure how to do it

30%
Not enough time

28%
No interest

29%
Lack of clarity around mission/purpose

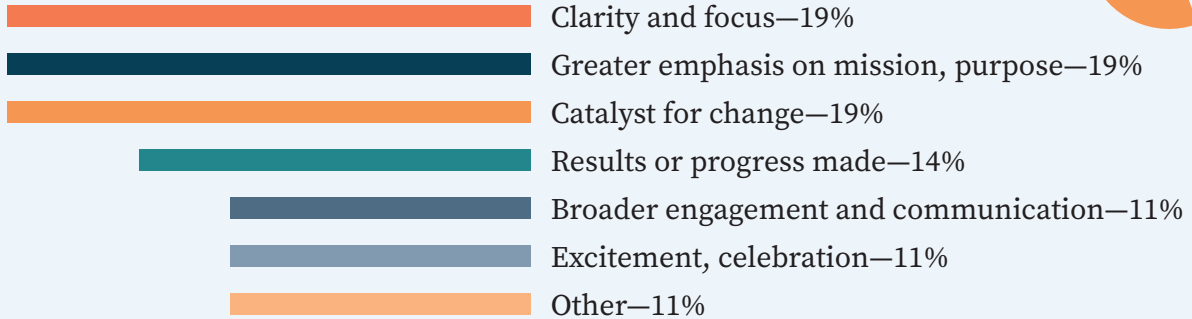
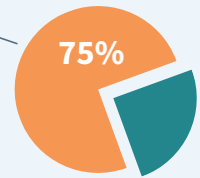
4%
No barriers

* Survey participants could offer multiple responses; therefore, this list does not add up to 100%.



POSITIVE OUTCOMES OF EVALUATION

Seventy-five percent of participants provided one or more positive benefits related to ministry evaluation.*



* Survey participants could offer multiple responses; therefore, this list does not add up to 100%.

Download a Ministry Evaluation Devotional Resource



Looking for a resource to assist your board with ministry evaluation? Download a free devotional resource for church board members and pastors based on the messages to the seven churches in Revelation at fivesmoothstones.ca/seven-churches-devotional



ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

Heather Card is the president of Five Smooth Stones Consulting Ltd., a ministry-minded organization that specializes in governance consulting for churches and Christian ministries. Her keen desire is to call Christians around board tables to integrate biblical theology and practice.