CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT MODEL

ORIGIN AND CONTEXT
The model was developed by the Rev. Dr. Nancy Bowen. It calls for the development of a continuous feedback process that can be used in building a “learning congregation”, that is, a congregation that is always engaged in expanding the breadth and depth of its knowledge, regularly assesses its internal and external environments, and can respond to change from within or without with resiliency.

It relies on gathering small items of information and reviewing them on a regular basis to facilitate progressive improvements in ministry effectiveness or to imagine new programs and ministries as the congregational year progresses.

For maximum effectiveness, it would need to become part of the congregation’s “culture” or regular habit of action.

It promotes the idea that decision making regarding shifts and changes in ministry and programming can be made in increments on a continuous basis.

BENEFITS OF THE MODEL
- This model provides a primary element in building a “learning” congregation.
- It is relatively easy to implement in a short period of time.
- Observations are made and feedback is gathered very close to the time of actual experience.
- Model questions are presented that can be used as a core or inspiration for the development of other questions.

CHALLENGES OF THE MODEL
- It requires more intentionality than some other models to gather feedback from a broad range of participants.
- Some people may find it difficult to work with smaller bits of information in an effective and continuous manner.

PROCESS
This process of assessment calls for regular and focused feedback from those who have been involved in particular congregational activities.

Assessment should be gathered at the end of specific activities:
- at the end of each adult class or series (examples: at the end of Building Your Own Theology course, at the end of a Small Group Ministries unit or term - not after each meeting)
- at the end of an outreach activity (examples: cooking for the homeless, food bank work day, hosting Interfaith Hospitality Network families, etc.)
- quarterly after a chosen sermon or Sunday service (offered by ministers and guest speakers)
• special celebrations or ceremonies
• age bracketed RE classes (examples: K-1, Youth, 9th Grade, etc.)

This continuous process should be a coordinated effort engaging all professional staff and key lay leaders. It should be coordinated in staff meetings and board meetings so that the questions are few and focused and feedback is not received from the same people all of the time.

It is essential that questions be developed that will help the staff or leadership increase their learning and improve in specific ways. Avoid asking people if they “like” something.

**Some Suggested Questions:**

- What was most helpful in ____________?
- What new ideas or ways of thinking about things were introduced?
- What did you learn?
- What changes have you made in your life?
- How can we partner with you in reaching your spiritual goals?

The questions should solicit feedback AND offer a clear indication of what a mature and faithful person is doing with this experience called congregational life.

It is possible to use the website and email lists to solicit responses after each activity. It would be relatively easy to Survey Monkey with comment boxes.

Feedback is solicited from participants only. Example: A question about the congregation’s annual meeting would only be sent to those who attended. (One might want to ask others what would motivate them to attend the annual meeting, but that is a different survey.)