

Reports and Statistics: A Spiritual Exercise

Yes, I am serious: Completing the painful, tedious, un-rewarding, (add your own description) tasks of annual reports and statistics can be transformed into a spiritual exercise.

Are you familiar with the practice of *consciousness examen* (examination or awareness of consciousness)? This is a review of the ways you were aware of God over the course of a period of time. Often folks will do this review at the end of the day. Where was God's presence most clear? When did God seem distant? When did I completely forget to consider that God had anything to do with what was going on around me? How am I being invited to respond?

The intent of the exercise is to attune ourselves to a growing awareness of God's activity in our daily lives; to pay attention to invitations to act or respond to God's action. It is a way to reshape a life to a God orientation rather than simply a self orientation.

Our institution called the United Methodist Church delights in gathering data and information. You are asked to help placate this insatiable appetite by providing the food via reports and statistics. You don't like feeding the beast because you know it will never stop craving more. You get angry and tired and discouraged, and wonder why am I doing this? Is this what I signed up for when I agreed to be a pastor or leader in the church? Do you ever ask, 'where is God in this?'

Well, until something huge happens in our institution and the beast can go on a low-data diet, what can we do to turn the food preparation into a tolerable experience?

Reframe it. Look at it as an opportunity to examine where God has been at work and what God might be inviting you and your congregation(s) to do, be, or change.

For example, consider these basic statistical questions: How many members at the start of the year? How many at the end? Use them as an opportunity to ask: Who are these numbers? Who are the ones no longer counted? Who are the ones now included? Where can you see God at work in this? Is there something you don't want to look at?

Clergy and local churches are asked to complete Profiles for Mission and Ministry. You could sit down and start writing, grumbling at the perceived waste of time. Or you could turn it into a time for prayer. Ask God to help you complete the questions, ask for God's eyes and ears as you reflect and write. As you look at the mission field, what jumps out at you – is this an invitation to respond to a need? Do any of the goals you list have anything to do with the mission field insight? Any nudges to share with others?

Clergy have to complete a Personnel record. As you reflect back over your past experiences before and after becoming a clergy person, where do you see God's action? Use this as a holy time for review of your life with God. Give God credit!

Set aside the time to reflect and pray, enlist prayer support from members of your congregation. Pay attention to feelings and emotions that might arise as you answer different questions– joy, gratitude, remorse, sorrow, excitement, etc. We are the Body of Christ and all of these emotions exist in us. Listen to them and ask for courage, healing, forgiveness. Be grateful, give thanks, be open to God.

If we are to be about God's work, then use every moment to be aware of God's work!

The peace of Christ be with you,
Evie Doyon