

FAITHFUL STEWARDS

Rev. Thomas Soltis, SELC Stewardship Director

Statistics

Statistics serve a useful purpose. They offer an overview of things. Credit card companies send monthly statements indicating purchases and payments. Wise stewards carefully review their credit card accounts to see if they harmonize with their personal budgets. Church statistics are important as well. They offer an overview of congregational performance revealing accomplishments for which to praise God and areas for improvement.

Success or Failure?

Statistics sometimes can be disappointing. The state of the Old Testament Church during the time of the prophet Elijah was most discouraging. The faithful prophet labored energetically for the Lord. The results were disheartening. Elijah became so depressed he desired to die. (1 Kings 19:3-4) The fierce opposition of wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel hindered his work. He lamented: "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left and they are trying to kill me too." (1 Kings 19:10) Elijah considered himself unsuccessful - an utter failure. Yet he was faithful and that's what really counts.

Successful or Faithful?

Scripturally, the favored word regarding Church work is not "successful, but "faithful". The O.T. Hebrew word for faithful is "em-oo-naw" indicating the virtues of "stability, reliability and trustworthiness". The N.T. Greek word is "pistos" involving "trustworthiness in the execution of commands and the discharge of duties". The important question to ask for a pastor or lay person is not about being successful or unsuccessful on the basis of good or bad statistics. The question to ask is: "Have I been faithful in the execution of God's commands and trustworthy in Christian duties?"

IT IS REQUIRED IN STEWARDS THAT A MAN BE FOUND FAITHFUL. (1 Cor. 4:2)

Stewards of the Gospel

There are, of course, many commands in Scripture. A very important one is Christ's Great Commission: "Go make disciples". (Mt. 28:19) Christian stewards (caretakers) of the Gospel are to preserve its purity from all error. (Some denominations have tainted the Gospel with a theology of salvation through works.) In addition, Christian stewards (managers) of the Gospel are commissioned to share it everywhere - through personal witnessing and internationally through district and synod mission outreach.

Obstacles

Elijah faced many obstacles. The opposition of Ahab and Jezebel were devastating. The current Post-modern (Post-Church) culture places road blocks to hinder our Christian outreach. Organized churches are considered by many to be "passe". Biblically based doctrines - irrelevant. Sharing the Gospel at times ends up like pouring water on a duck's back - no penetration. And yet we must continue being faithful in the proclamation of the Gospel. Elijah thought it was all over. It was not. God encouraged him to continue. The wonders he worked with the 7,000 faithful remaining in Israel (1 Kings 19:18) were truly awesome. He remained faithful in his God-given role. So must we - despite the obstacles.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

www.selc.lcms.org

(Stewardship - Personal Stewardship)

Evangelistic Stewards

Current Cultural "Isms"