



Why Not Distribute Your Vital Signs[®] Report in Advance?

Most boards are accustomed to having important documents distributed to them in advance of a meeting so that members have an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the information prior to discussing it. It comes as a surprise when we advise that copies of the Vital Signs[®] report not be distributed to a leadership team until a trained interpreter is available to walk them through those documents. Here is our rationale.

When most people hear the word “survey” they often think of an opinion poll. The data from an opinion poll is simple to read and easy understand. When the media declares from a recent poll that the President of the United States has a 48% approval rating, most people understand that 48% of the persons surveyed approve of the job that the President is doing in leading the country. Anyone who can read a newspaper can understand this kind of data without assistance.

The Church Assessment Tool[®] is not an opinion poll. It is a scientific tool that generates a sophisticated readout on your congregation. The Vital Signs[®] report requires an interpretation to correctly understand it. Our experience is that when it is distributed in advance, members reading through it become confused and frustrated. By the time the consultant arrives to walk them through it, a level of anxiety and defensiveness has set in that is hard to reverse. The result is a bad experience for everyone.

An analogous situation would be passing around a set of x-rays to lay persons like me sitting around a table without the benefit of a radiologist. One person may assume that the spot on an x-ray indicates a serious condition and jump to the conclusion that someone they care about is suffering a fatal illness. Another person may become concerned about a different spot on the x ray but jump to the same conclusion. When the radiologist finally walks in, he or she encounters a room full of anxious people who have become needlessly worked up over a set of x-rays that indicate a perfectly normal person.

For this reason, we recommend that churches enlist the support of a trained interpretive consultant early in the assessment process who can review the Vital Signs[®] report with the leadership team. Many regional associations such as Presbyteries, Synods, and Diocese have persons who have been trained to do this interpretive work. If not, contact the office of Holy Cow! Consulting and we will discuss other options with you.

Our goal is that the information from the Vital Signs[®] report will be both clear and insightful so that you can make better decisions in less time with more confidence.