

Joys and Sorrows Survey Next Steps

After speaking with numerous people about joys and sorrows in person and receiving feedback from nearly 100 persons in various types of congregations about this ritual, we believe that we can draw some very general conclusions.

First, that more study is merited. Some trends were identified between satisfaction and effectiveness of joys and sorrows with congregational size, model of joys and sorrow used, type of governance, congregational policies and other active (or non-active) ministries.

Second that the overall premise that joys and sorrows exists in our congregation because it is meeting a particular need – or set of needs – for a community still stands. What is most interesting, however, is that most congregations seem to be distinctly different in a number of ways and thus the needs of the congregation that joys and sorrows might be trying to meet will vary significantly.

Finally, we have come to recognize that joys and sorrows is like any other tool: it has only a limited number of practical uses. Responses in the survey seem to indicate that joys and sorrows – no matter how well thought out or well presented – can make up for lack of other programs required to foster intimacy, pastoral response, communication, worship or fellowship. We suspect that one of the strains on joys and sorrow is that it is often asked to make up for deficiencies in these other areas.

The purpose of this study is not to show that joys and sorrows is good or bad. It is to aid a congregation's members in having a conversation about their needs and expectations of joys and sorrows and have as much information as is available to deciding upon the appropriate strategy to meet those needs and expectations. For some congregations this will mean realizing that only minor adaptations are necessary to maximize effectiveness and satisfaction. For some congregations, this will mean changing core elements such as ritual words, giving more clear instructions or changing the model entirely. For some congregations this will mean identifying other areas of the church to improve to take some of the pressure off joys and sorrows.

In any case, we recommend that congregations begin to identify what goals it has for joys and sorrows and bring as many people on board with getting buy-in and participation in working toward those goals.

We wish to continue this study by redesigning this survey and opening it up to other parts of the country. If you believe your district would be interested in participating, please contact, Greg Ward at gsward@comcast.net