

You Make a Difference

The members of your congregation are watching you. Sounds ominous. Or at the very least, uncomfortable. But it is also one of your greatest opportunities in ministry. What you do and *who you are* make an enormous difference in the lives of the people you lead. In a thousand ways, small and large, you have moved people closer to Christ. Sometimes you wonder if this is true.

In April 2003 *Circuit Rider* completed a survey of United Methodist clergy. We invited readers to respond to a questionnaire and we also called pastors across the connection. One of the topics that quickly rose to the top of the list of questions and concerns you identified as important was “spiritual leadership.” Not just leadership but *spiritual* leadership.

The literature of secular management and leadership published in the last 15 years has offered important insights that are useful in leading any group of people, including a congregation. While helpful, that literature is not even close to sufficient for the challenges you face. You can't fire the cranky, disruptive member; you are always “on call”; pain, illness, disappointment, death and every manner of human brokenness is your daily agenda; someone

always notices what your spouse and children do (or don't do); you cannot order your members to tithe or discipline them when they choose the football game over Sunday worship. Each member of the congregation has little idea of the demands other members are making on you. It's difficult to measure results or to know if the results you are measuring are pleasing to God. What kind of business is this, anyway? And who would want to lead such an enterprise?

Your call to ministry must have seemed clear when you were ordained. Christ was so close. You could hear his voice: “My sheep need a shepherd.” The poet Mary Oliver asks, “What will you do with your one wild and precious life?” It is not a one-time question just for young people, but a question for each stage of the life God has given us.

In this issue of *Circuit Rider*, we don't have “answers” about how to be a spiritual leader. We hope these articles will remind you of what you've always known but which, in the press of daily ministry, may have slipped from your center.

Thank you for giving your one “wild and precious life” to shepherd the people of God.

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