

Staying Power

Shared at Shadow Rock UCC

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Last week we explored how we got connected to Shadow Rock and I think we discovered that each story had some uniqueness but they also shared some similarities. Ultimately, an invitation was made. Today we will explore why do people stay connected to Shadow Rock in hopes that we can articulate something that is going on inside of us and among us spiritually.

On the front of the bulletin I introduce a formula that reads prayer + math equals staying power. I want to define terms before I get into the formula.

The term prayer is speaking volumes about intimacy and connection. When I speak of prayer I am not talking about flowery words from the preacher creature of high priest. Monty Python has a skit where the priest drones on in that special public pious tone,

"Let us praise God. Oh Lord, oooh you are so big. So absolutely huge. Gosh, we're all really impressed down here I can tell you. Forgive us, O Lord, for this dreadful toadying and barefaced flattery. But you are so strong and, well, just so super. Fantastic. Amen."

Instead, I am talking about intimacy and connection. All of the western monotheistic religions of the Western Civilization could be viewed as paths to help connect creatures to the Creator. There is this recognition that we are disconnected somehow from our true selves, from each other, and from God. With this recognition of alienation and separation we have devised ways to create horizontal intimacy and vertical intimacy. With friendship, family, and community we try to create horizontal intimacy. With religion, spirituality, and practices of study, meditation, and music we try to create vertical intimacy. One of the greatest insights of faith is that we meet our needs for intimacy when we understand that our horizontal and vertical quests for intimacy are not separate journeys, but the same. Our intimacy needs are best met when we love both God and neighbor, and see God in our neighbor, and see God as our neighbor; this is prayer.

When I use the term math I am talking about relationship calculus. I am not talking about a straight line operation. For example, $1+1=2$. It is important for us to get out of this simple operation thinking in order to understand how people stay connected to Shadow Rock

If we take the simple formula of $1+1=2$ and we apply values to each number then we can see why we need to stretch our thinking about why we stay together.

1 represents a person + 1 represents a program = 2 represents my presence, so...

I + Preschool = Presence
I + Youth Program = Presence
I + My Favorite Music = Presence

What happens when you subtract?

I – Preschool = Absence
I – Youth Program = Absence
I – My Favorite Music = Absence

This is a simple and frustrating math that represents a lot of the thinking of most congregations as they think of growth and revitalization. It is the kind of thinking that moves churches to think that if we add programs then we will add people. There is some truth in this but it misses the relationship calculus that truly creates staying power.

The math I am talking about is represented by $1+1=3$. For example,

1 idea + 1 idea = a third idea
1 person + 1 person = a third person
1 person + 1 transformative experience = a new person

The formula works at the All Team Council. One team sees what another team is doing and a third totally different experience is created.

The first kind of math is consumer driven. You lose your product and you stop going to the church store. The second kind of math is driven by the reality of multiple connections and multiple relationships. The second kind of math, $1+1=3$, celebrates the heart, mind, and soul connections which make us invest in the values, vision, and mission of Shadow Rock and our shared future.

I was watching the people of our Facilities Team working.....None of them have a consumer or $1+1$ attitude or orientation to the church. They were on ladders, hanging off the edge of the roof, trimming bushes, putting up signs, moving refrigerators, and planning their contributions for Shadow Rock's future. They were putting their hearts, heads, and hands together to create more than the sum total of their individual team members. They are fully invested.

The root word for investment is *vestis* meaning "garment". When I say I am invested, I am saying, "I am committed, I have put you on and I wear you. I wrap myself up with you. I wrap you around me and I want you to wrap me around you! I feel naked without you. I feel incomplete without you." This is staying power.

What are we to each other? Is Shadow Rock a foundation garment or one of many pairs of shoes?

The old image of the “armor of God” works: the helmet of healing, the breastplate of justice, and the girdle of truth. When we carry this understanding we carry within us the power to stay connected to Shadow Rock.