

The Bean-Counters among Us
By Rev. Carol Tompkins

1 lima ... 3 green ...6 pinto ... 4 soy ... Oh! Sorry! Didn't see you standing there.
Guess you caught me. Bean-counting, that is. Want to know why I'm doing it?

Back at Reunion, when the PC(USA) came into being, there were some concerns about various groups being represented in the leadership of the denomination when the shift was made to all presbyteries being geographical presbyteries. So the Articles of Agreement that formed the PC(USA) created something unique to our denomination, Committees on Representation, to help us look at how we're doing.

Well, truth is, collecting statistics IS one of the responsibilities of the Committee on Representation. However, it's not our sole reason for being. Rather, it is a very important tool serving a much broader purpose: social justice.

As I write this, it's been almost 50 years since Martin Luther King, Jr's "I Have a Dream" speech, and we still await the day when we live in a nation where people "will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." Affirmative Action and the need for keeping statistics continue to be discussed. One of the most eloquent arguments I've heard is the need for statistics to help us see the gaps.

Let's shift away from the usual diversity issues for a moment and examine how those statistics serve us as a tool for probing the gaps. One presbytery began collecting statistics and discovered that the committee responsible for developing the annual budget was comprised solely from people associated with large and medium membership churches. Yet it was these people who were making decisions that might affect the ministry, if not the life, of small membership congregations. As a result of that 'bean-counting,' there is now someone on the committee who can say: "If we make this decision, this is how it will affect my church and others like it." Yes, the decision may be made anyway; however, the voice will have been heard first.

Our church has a great wealth of diversity which has yet to even be touched. We are, unfortunately, a long way yet from reaching the point where everyone understands that 'handicapped accessible' does not necessarily mean only 'wheelchair accessible.' The enthusiasms, wisdoms, and concerns of the youth and senior adults.....and all those in-between..... may vary significantly, yet each deserves to be heard and considered. And what about singles in a world where couples tend to be considered the norm? Or those whose voices have been either limited or excluded from the leadership table for generations? And.....well, you know of diversities that I haven't the space to even begin to list!

I, too, have a dream. A dream of a time when the 'bean-counters' among us look at the numbers and see that the gaps have been filled before we even get there! Ah.....but that's impossible, you say? Didn't Jesus say something about, "For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible" (Matt 19:26 NRSV)? And, in God, there is hope! So, in the meantime, I'll just continue striving to find and bring those voices to the table and do what work I can to make dreams become a reality.

Now, I'll have to ask you to excuse me. It's time to get back to my bean counting. Let's see.....where was I? Oh, yes! 4 soy.....2 kidney.....