

I am fascinated by the Olympics. While I don't normally watch much TV, I have found myself glued to the couch for 3-4 hours each night taking it all in. I find gymnastics particularly amazing. Even when I was the same age as those competing, I was never that flexible.

I also find the judging to be curious. It's obvious that you should lose points when you fall or slip or stumble. I get that. I don't really understand how routines that seem fairly similar and equally amazing receive very different scores. Sometimes even the commentators are surprised. The same thing happens in diving and other sports that don't rely on a stopwatch. The judges though seem to know what they're looking for. Different judges may be looking for different things but at least they have some criteria to go by.

That got me to thinking: how do we – or perhaps how should we - judge a church? By the same token, how should we judge a presbytery? Although that may seem overly harsh or critical, at least in biblical terms, the purpose of judgement is meant to bring us closer to God. So another way to think of this is: what do we need to do as a church or what do we need to do as a presbytery to bring us closer to God?

We frequently judge a church by the size of its membership, by the size of its budget, or by its worship attendance. That can be helpful information and we probably do need to keep track of these things.

However those metrics don't necessarily reflect how faithful a church is or how faithful its members are. It doesn't tell us if people give willingly or begrudgingly. It doesn't tell us if people serve joyfully or out of a sense of guilt. It doesn't tell us if they care only about themselves or if they care about their community. It doesn't tell us if they feel connected to some mission project or if they feel a sense of partnership with Christians in other countries.

I'd also want to know: is their laughter in their worship? Do they smile at each other during their meetings? Do they reach out to people who visit? Do they talk about their church to other people? And when they do, do they complain about what's happening or do they share a sense of excitement?

When it comes to the presbytery: is the presbytery them or is the presbytery us? Is the presbytery its staff or its building or is the presbytery a set of relationships? Is the presbytery defined by its budget or by its manual or is it defined by what it does to help its churches?

I think we all may have different assumptions about how we judge a church as well as how we judge a presbytery. One step is to examine our assumptions and then name them. What do we think is important? What should take precedence and priority? A next step is to talk about this with people we know and compare ideas to see what differences there might be.

To be sure I'm not even sure what criteria I use or if I even have criteria. In some ways I'd say I tend to feel that this is more like art, in that I know what I like and I go more by feeling than by any specific criteria when I look at a church or at a presbytery. I'm not sure that's really true though. I've got some more thinking to do. What do you think? How do you judge a church and a presbytery? What criteria do you use?

And even before we decide who gets a medal, maybe we need to agree on what exactly it is that we're trying to do.