

CHURCH IMAGE GAME

CAN'T AVOID MAKING A WITNESS

People have images of clergy, sometimes unfair images, but such images convey a message or a witness, about the faith. The truth is that both as clergy and as churches, we can't avoid making a witness. It is not uncommon to meet a person who was deeply injured by an experience in the church that caused them to both leave the church and, in many cases, affected their faith in a negative way. Conversely, we know people who were freshly attracted to the church because of something they experienced among a group of Christians.

A SHOCKING POSITIVE WITNESS

Occasionally a body of Christians takes an action shaped by their faith that is so counter to normal behavior that the larger society is shocked but also strangely moved by it. Recall the response to the Amish community when they responded with forgiveness to the families of those who had shot some of their children in an Amish school. In preparation for the congregational game I'm about to describe, you might want to identify several examples of Christian behavior that challenged what we might expect from normal human behavior.

A CHURCH GAME

At a church gathering, introduce the game by speaking about how churches inevitably make a witness to society by their building, their response to visitors, their programs, and how they respond to community events or conditions. Invite people to give several examples of how outsiders make judgments about the church and the faith based on an image drawn from actions or behavior of the church, members or church leaders. What did people see, for example, when it was reported several years ago that Pope John Paul visited the person in prison who had tried to assassinate him.

Now, in small groups, have people identify a societal situation that challenges the wellbeing of our society. Next, have them imagine how a body of Christians might seek to live out one of Jesus' teachings in a way that might challenge society's assumptions and offer a fresh perspective. Have each group describe their situation and response and the message of faith they would hope such behavior would proclaim.

INTENTIONAL WITNESS

While no one can control how others interpret what we do, we can be intentional about what we do and the faith we want to convey. As a final phase of this game, let each group consider one image that they hope will be or can be proclaimed to the community at large that would speak to the faith they affirm.