



Stats  
have  
Faces

Best efforts will  
not substitute for  
knowledge.

W. Edwards Deming

## Handout 1

# Introductory reading

*Discerning what God is up to in our neighbourhoods is not so much about skills or knowledge as about learning to hear God together and discerning how we might join with what the Spirit is already doing in our community.*

Welcome to the *Stats have Faces* program which has been produced to help your congregation build a better understanding of your community.

Sometimes we don't know as much about our own communities as we think we do. Sometimes what we once knew is no longer the case.

All agencies and service and care providers are encouraged to carry out research in relation to their local community. Churches should be no different. While communities might share similarities such as schools, shops and sporting facilities, each one is unique with its own character and potential.

The *Basis of Union* says that the Uniting Church “stands in relation to contemporary societies in ways which will help it to understand its own nature and mission”. The more we understand our communities, those that live in them and their needs, the better we can serve God in being effective in mission.

The Queensland Synod's Vision 2020 calls for the church to be a “sustainable mission oriented organisation”. The *Stats have Faces* process provides tools and activities to help your congregation to engage more effectively in mission in your neighbourhood.

# Handout 1 // Introductory reading

Statistics are valuable tools in this process but it is important to remember that behind every number there is a story about real people living with frustrations, hopes and dreams. Statistical information is never a substitute for going out and meeting the people who actually live and work in your community. Nor can statistics substitute for prayer and reflection on God's calling for your congregation.

Society has changed a great deal. People are more mobile than ever before and we live in an age of incredible opportunities for communication and connection. This is a time when it should be possible to feel increasingly that we belong to a community. This is far from the truth for the many people in our neighbourhood who struggle with isolation and despair.

The issues are different in remote, regional or urban areas, but society everywhere is striving to retain or develop a sense of community. As churches and individuals we are in a unique position to help build stronger communities.

In our traditional church communities we sometimes make the assumption that God's call is an elite and mysterious experience, reserved for activities which occur within the four walls of the church building, or for times of private and deliberate withdrawal, prayer and reflection.

The role of church is not to rescue people from the world, but to be the church embedded in the world, helping to transform it. Historically, the church was local, taking place in neighbourhoods and in people's homes.

It has been said that "It is not the church of God that has a mission, but the God of mission who has a church". Mission is an attribute of God; the church is just one instrument of God's mission. God is at work in places that the church is not, and it is the Spirit working within us that enables us to see where and how God is working in the world beyond the walls of the church.

Jesus was present, ministering to his neighbourhood. He acted inclusively, treating every encounter differently and with its own dignity. For him every conversation was unique and every relationship was life-giving and life-demanding.

Much of Jesus' own mission was carried out in his local community, in people's homes, in marketplaces and on the street. He met people in the midst of the most ordinary tasks: drawing water from the well, in their workplaces, over meals and at a family wedding.

How well do we actually know our neighbourhoods and our neighbours? Many people do not know the names or anything about the people who live across the road or around the corner from them. Do we linger long enough to see the small details where we perceive the hand of God—the intricate patterns formed within the spider web on the ugly broken fence, the way the raindrops drip from the ends of the leaves and form puddles on the ground?

We need to constantly attune ourselves to recognise God's presence in the ordinariness of our neighbourhoods. The neighbourhood is holy ground and it is sacred. Encounter it with reverence and view it as holy.



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## Handout 2

# Bible study

To understand  
God's thoughts  
we must study  
statistics, for these  
are the measure  
of his purpose.

Florence Nightingale

### Trivia quiz icebreaker

Some people seem to have an extraordinary capacity to remember trivial things. Try this quick true/false trivia quiz.

1. A giraffe can clean its ears with its 50 cm tongue.
2. Penguins fall backwards when they look up at airplanes.
3. The longest recorded flight of a chicken is 13 seconds.
4. The weight of all the termites in the world is 10 times greater than the weight of all the human beings put together.
5. A cockroach can live for several weeks without a head until it dies of starvation.
6. A sneeze usually travels from your mouth at around 50 kilometres per hour.
7. The microwave oven was invented by mistake when an engineer testing a magnetron tube noticed that the radiation melted the chocolate bar in his pocket.
8. When Moses took the census near the Jordan River the total number of the men of Israel was 601 730.

### Thinking about collecting statistics

Every five years a census form is completed by all households in Australia. Our last census was undertaken in August 2011.

- Do you remember filling in the census form, or helping someone else to do so?
- As a group, make a list of the questions you can recall.
- How did you feel about filling out a census form?
- For what purposes is the census data collected?

# Handout 2 // Bible study

## Reflecting on the scriptures

Statistics play an important role in the history of the Old Testament. The Book of Numbers is named after two “countings” of the people of Israel. Read Numbers 1:1-3 (CEV).

*The people of Israel had left Egypt and were living in the Sinai Desert. Then on the first day of the second month of the second year, Moses was in the sacred tent when the Lord said: I want you and Aaron to find out how many people are in each of Israel's clans and families. And make a list of all the men twenty years and older who are able to fight in battle.*

- The Israelite community was preparing for a journey through the wilderness to the land of Canaan. What do you see as the main purpose for taking a census at this point?
- What was significant about who was actually polled and who was not?
- When and why have you counted or surveyed your congregation, and what did you learn?

The Bible suggests that accurate numbers are necessary for informed decisions. Read Luke 14:28-30 (CEV).

*Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. What is the first thing you will do? Won't you sit down and figure out how much it will cost and if you have enough money to pay for it? Otherwise, you will start building the tower, but not be able to finish. Then everyone who sees what is happening will laugh at you. They will say, "You started building, but could not finish the job".*

- What is the main thrust of this parable?
- Has your congregation used this kind of planning and preparation process as it goes about its normal business?
- Having looked at these passages, in what ways do you think the church could use statistics and measurement information?

## Looking forward

Discerning what God is up to in our neighbourhoods is not so much about skills or knowledge as about learning to hear God together and discovering how we might join with what the Spirit is already doing in our community.

It has been said that for mission to be effective, it should be intentional rather than improvised.

- If we are trying to discern what God is up to in our neighbourhoods, what information will we need and how will we get it?
- What information would be helpful in assisting your congregation to join with what the Spirit is already doing in the community?

## Prayer (Five minutes)

Pray for the Stats have Faces process and the work ahead. Ask God to bless the journey and to give clarity about the destination.



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## Handout 3

# Find the figures

Ninety nine percent of all statistics only tell 49 percent of the story.

Ron DeLegge II

The local area report is the first step in discovering your local community. Take time to read through the information, tables and graphs, and consider what the statistics reveal about the neighbourhood in which you live.

- What percentage of people live alone?
- How many people are under 16 years of age?
- What percentage of the population are elderly?
- How many people in the community have a profound or severe disability?
- How many children attend school?
- What proportion of the community were born overseas or speak a language other than English at home?
- What kind of work do people do, and what is the unemployment rate?

Think about the unique aspects of your community:

- How does the community compare with other Queensland communities?
- Is your community growing and what are the projected population increases?

Note that we not drawing conclusions about what this information means for mission. At this stage the process is about analysis of the data. Once you have read the report, consider the following:

- What statistics grabbed your attention?
- What statistics did you disregard?
- Do the statistics match your own view of the local community?
- What changes have you observed?
- How might the community change in future years?
- Does this information provide any insight into how God is working in your neighbourhood?

Remember, *Stats have Faces*. Statistics are not just information to be used in isolation to support or disagree with a viewpoint or situation. The figures represent real people living in relationships, dealing with all the aspirations and disappointments of life.



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## Handout 4

# Community asset visit

Do not put your  
faith in what  
statistics say until  
you have carefully  
considered what  
they do not say.

William W. Watt

This part of the *Stats have Faces* process is to identify “community assets”; those individuals, associations and organisations in the local area which build social capital.

The community asset visit moves us beyond mere numbers by looking at the networks already active in our communities and viewing our local area from their perspective.

In a concrete way we will begin to see what God is already up to in our neighbourhood.

Remember that **you are going as guests to listen and to learn, not to tell people what you believe** or about the role of the church – unless you are invited to do so.

Questions you might like to ask during your visit:

1. What is the overall purpose of the project/program?
2. What does the project/program offer the local community?
3. How long have you been working within the local community?
4. What do you see as the greatest strengths of the local community?
5. What do you see as the greatest challenges facing the local community?
6. Does your project/program work with volunteers? If so, what recruitment, training and risk assessment procedures do you have in place?
7. How is your project/program funded?
8. Which companies/agencies/organisations/government departments partner with your organisation?
9. Is the project/program affiliated with any religious organisations?
10. How do you determine if the project/program is meeting its goals?

Don't forget to thank your hosts.



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## Handout 5

# Exploring your neighbourhood: an exegetical walk

All the statistics  
in the world can't  
measure the  
warmth of a smile.

Chris Hart

The word exegesis literally means a critical interpretation and is commonly applied to the study of literature. As readers of the Bible, we exegete the text with a view to discerning its truth for our lives. In this exercise you are invited to undertake an exegesis—a critical interpretation—of your neighbourhood.

Through careful, sensitive and critical observation, your task is to discern the truth of God's presence where you live. Quite simply, it's about reading your neighbourhood as one of the primary texts of daily life—one through which God speaks.

To do this properly, you need to set aside two hours of uninterrupted time. Before you head out, consider your destination. What constitutes your neighbourhood? You may choose to walk around the area where you live, through your town centre or near the church.

Once you have a rough idea of what area to include, grab a notebook and pen and head out.

Be sure to include time to stop and have a drink, to sit in a park or at a bus stop, and to linger outside public buildings or places of interest. Don't just look at your surroundings, but take note of your feelings and reactions.

# Handout 5 // Exploring your neighbourhood: an exegetical walk

## Here's a list of questions to consider:

1. Think about the built facilities. How old are the houses or apartments in this area? How much renovation or rebuilding is going on? What do you notice about the front gardens? Does your neighbourhood feel like a cared-for place? Do you see any community or civic buildings? What are their purposes? Do they look welcoming and busy, or are they deserted? Do you see any churches or religious buildings? What does their design or appearance communicate? What kinds of commercial buildings are there? If your neighbourhood includes a shopping area, is there provision for people to sit and interact?
2. Think about the people. Excluding the business areas, how many people did you pass on foot? What age, race, and gender are they? Do people look, dress and act the same way as you? Walk around a supermarket or local store and identify who makes up the clientele. How pedestrian-friendly is the neighbourhood? How would you encounter your neighbourhood if you were elderly, disabled, a young child or parent with children, or if you didn't have a motor vehicle?
3. Think about the social assets. What public spaces are provided for children, teenagers or adults? Are they being used, and how? If there a local park, what do you notice about it? Does it feel like an inviting place? Who is there and how is it used? Is there public transport, and who uses it? Stop—sit if you can—in a tree-lined street or quiet spot and also at a busy intersection. What are the smells and sounds of the neighbourhood? Are there things that you sense are missing?
4. Think about the strengths and weaknesses. Is there a freeway, major highway or railway close by? If so, try and imagine the area before it existed. Who has gained and lost by its presence? Are there any geographical or constructed features that divide your neighbourhood? Are there places that you wouldn't go or where you don't want to stop?
5. Ponder the ways in which you sense God's presence. What sense of connection do you feel to your neighbourhood as you walk through it? Where are the places of life, hope, beauty or community? What evidence of struggle, despair, neglect and alienation do you see? How do you feel about your neighbourhood?

## Review

You may wish to return to the maps you drew in an earlier section and consider how you might have drawn these differently.

Adapted from an exercise in *God Next Door: Spirituality and Mission in the Neighbourhood* by Simon Carey Holt. Permission given.



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## Handout 6

# Reflecting on the research

A small sample,  
we repeat, is  
rarely the big  
scientific problem.  
Interpretation is.

Stephen Thomas Ziliak

Data gathering is important, but it is even more important to reflect on the information collected and decide what action can be taken. This step in the *Stats have Faces* process is a time of reflection looking closely at what is currently going on and seeking for “clues” about where to focus our attention.

Reflection is a means of assisting us to explore thoughts and feelings, and to work through the information in an attempt to gain new understanding, fresh insights and self-awareness.

Always remember that *Stats have Faces*. This is about people not numbers. Remember too that God is already at work in your community and the challenge is to recognise where that is happening.

1. Take a look at the Queensland Local Area Statistical Report (Find the figures) and discuss:
  - What surprised you about this report?
  - What did you already suspect?
  - What particular things characterise your local community?
  - What challenges does the information present?
  - What extra information can you add to this from the Mapping your community, Exegetical walk and Identifying community assets exercises?
2. Take a look at your Congregation Profile Survey (Know your own) results and discuss:
  - What surprised you about this report?
  - What did you already suspect?
  - What particular things characterise your congregation?
  - What challenges does the information present?
  - Does your congregation have assets that don't show up in the survey?

# Handout 6 // Reflecting on the research

3. Reflecting on existing community connections:
  - With which groups in the community is your congregation already in relationship?
  - How do people from your congregation already connect with organisations in the community?
  
4. Putting it all together. Take some time to consider all the information you have collected. Don't think about needs (for now), but reflect upon the connections in your community.
  - What are the similarities and differences between the demographics of your congregation and your community?
  - What additional information does the Mapping your community and Identifying community assets exercises add to the demographic data?
  - Which community members have come to mind most as you looked at the data?
  - Which church members have come to mind?
  - Make a list of ways in which you, your church or the community might use the information which has been gathered.
  - What community services or groups are missing from your local community?
  - Are there any issues, people or groups that are overlooked?
  - What further information do you need?



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## Handout 7

# Bible study

Good ideas are common—what's uncommon are people who'll work hard enough to bring them about.

Ashleigh Brilliant

### Phobia quiz icebreaker

Can you identify the following phobias?

1. Alektorophobia
2. Ephebiphobia
3. Chiclephobia
4. Arachibutyrophobia
5. Ablutophobia
6. Omphalophobia
7. Hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia
8. Chronophobia
9. Arithmophobia
10. Phobophobia

### Reflecting on the scriptures

Discerning what God is up to in our neighbourhoods is not so much about skills or knowledge as about learning to hear God together and discovering how we might join with what the Spirit is already doing in our community.

The *Stats have Faces* process has been about listening. This Bible study will provide another way of hearing the voice of God about how we are called to engage with our community.

# Handout 7 // Bible study

Luke 10:1-12 is about mission and tells the story of the sending of the 70 into the towns and villages where Jesus himself would go. Ask someone to read this passage.

*After this the Lord appointed 70 others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you". But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near. I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town".*

- As the passage was read, where did your mind stop?
- What questions do you have about the text?
- Would you prefer to be a "labourer in the harvest" or a "lamb in the midst of wolves"?
- What is the basic message the 70 are asked to share? How different is that from other messages the church might choose to share?
- What insights about the process of connecting with your community did you gain from this story?
- Reflecting on the statistics and information you have collected, how do you think this story is relevant to the people in your community?

## Looking forward

It has been said that an idea that is developed and put into action is more important than an idea that exists only as an idea.

We know that *Stats have Faces* and that we cannot solve all of the problems in our community. The last part of the process is to discern together how we respond to the information before us, and how we set our priorities.

- Consider what God may be asking you and your congregation to do in the community in response to the needs and opportunities which have been identified through the *Stats have Faces* process.
- Put together a list of ways you and your congregation might join with what the Spirit is already doing.
- Rate each suggestion from 1 to 5 with one being the lowest priority and five being the highest.
- Note which items are short-term "quick wins" and which are longer term priorities.

## Planning to Share

Discuss how to share your experience, reflections and priority suggestions with your congregation.

## Prayer

Writer Eugene Peterson gives a great paraphrase of John 1:14.

*... and the word became flesh and moved into the neighbourhood.*

Consider those words in silence for a few minutes then give thanks for the insights God has given about your community and church through the *Stats have Faces* process. Ask God to bless the action your congregation will take to respond to the journey you have taken together.



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