

August 6, 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our meeting at JSM this year was Monday, Aug 1, from 6:00-7:30pm in Hilton Chicago Salon A5. Twenty-five attended, including perhaps half first-timers. We discussed the topic, *“Is there a distinct role of leadership by Christian statisticians in the contemporary climate – locally in their workplace and nationally within the ASA? If so, what should it be? How do we do it?”* There was no CSIDG business conducted, because the business will be handled at the group-wide level. More on that below. Afterwards, fifteen of us went to dinner at MingHin Cuisine in Chinatown for a delicious ‘family-style’ Chinese food dinner (for \$13 ea!). The fellowship around our table was beautiful (see photo). Here are a few items:

1. Welcome to the 49 who added their name to our email list!
2. Special thanks to Fred Hickernell and Julia Sabella for supplying Bibles for the table. We gave out 53 large print ESV, 10 small print ESV, and 24 Chinese Bibles, for a total of 87 Bibles!
3. Only the coordinator has access to the email list (around 250 people) and I only send on it BCC a few times per year. We do the primary interaction during the year on the CSIDG listserv. Please join by sending an email to: CSIDG-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. We therefore do not have a membership directory currently available, but hope to develop one (see below).
4. Jane Hutton added an excellent #8 to the seven points on the discussion handout: We can be an influence for Christ by intentionally being in groups with non-Christians (the human tendency to only be in groups like ourselves can breed misunderstanding on both sides).

Back to the discussion. Given the direction the ASA is heading, I do not believe that the current organizational structure is adequate to accomplish all that God would have of us. We are visible enough to be coming into the crosshairs of the broader negative cultural influence the ASA is trending on, yet we are not organized well enough to prepare our members for it. To open the evening’s discussion, I read the story of how God led me to this conclusion. The four pages of the story are below, along with some framing remarks, and the handout. I hope you will take the time to read it, but I’m not asking you to. I am, however, asking that you **please fill out a 5-item anonymous survey of our membership** (plus a few quick demographic items). I believe there are some simple and cheap things we can do that will not place too much work on any one person – but we do need help to take this group to the next level. Here is what’s next:

1. Everyone fills out the 5-item [CSIDG Leadership Survey](#).

It will close on Weds, Aug 24, after which I will email the descriptive stats and call for a discussion on the listserv.

2. A discussion of the future of the leadership structure of CSIDG will follow on the listserv during late August and September.
3. After the discussion winds down, I will send the entire CSIDG email list a summary, and call for volunteers.

Let us be like “The sons of Issachar, men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do, their chiefs were two hundred; and all their kinsmen were at their command.” (1 Chron 12:32) Please pray for God’s direction for our group in this transitional time. Please also pray for protection for my family as we lead in this and other spiritually significant transitions in our spheres.

In Christ,
Jason

At the CSIDG 2016 Dinner



CSIDG for JSM 2016 Opening Remarks

The LORD has impressed upon me that we, the Christian Statisticians Informal Discussion Group (CSIDG) within the American Statistical Association (ASA), are a microcosm of the Christian church within the US. What I am now going to say is personal, and it is my opinion, and it is leading to the discussion topic. Because I am starting off with my personal experience, I want to assure you from the outset that this is not about me, and we're not going to discuss a merely subjective issue, and this is not a hidden agenda to merge a business item with our annual discussion. The discussion topic is: *Is there a distinct role of leadership by Christian statisticians in the contemporary climate – locally in their workplace and nationally within the ASA? If so, what should it be? How do we do it?*

I am compelled by God to frame this topic with the following story from my life in the past month:

1. Four weeks before JSM I received the following email on the CSIDG listserve from long-time CSIDG member, Marlin Eby:

Dear Dr. Wasserstein:

As a long-time member of ASA (more than 40 years), I am greatly saddened and disappointed by the recent resolution passed by the ASA Board in response to laws passed in North Carolina and Mississippi.

I strongly oppose discrimination, but the purpose of these laws is not discrimination. They are privacy-protection laws.

I appeal to you as a husband, father, and grandfather. Do you really want males showering with your wife, daughters, and granddaughters?

I urge the Board to reconsider and not be swayed by loud and bullying voices.

Sincerely,

L. Marlin Eby, Ph.D.

I looked up what he was responding to, and found the following, which dates perhaps to Spring 2015:

The ASA Board of Directors resolves that the ASA will not sign contracts for meetings in any state that passes laws that discriminate against individuals based on gender, sexual orientation, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, age, national origin, gender identity or expression, veteran status or other protected status.

<http://www.amstat.org/policy/asa04082016resolution.cfm>

One morning, on my regular bike ride with prayer, I felt a strong impression from God to also write to the ASA, both a public post as well a private letter about the resolution to our Executive Director Ron Wasserstein and our President Jessica Utts, both of whom I know. Now I had contacted governmental leaders or written an editorial to a newspaper perhaps two times in the past, but never to my own professional organization, let alone to people whom I knew. I was afraid, but I was compelled, and I did it. I crossed a personal line in that.

2. Three weeks before JSM I had been waiting on the LORD for direction on the best activities for the CSIDG meeting, but still heard nothing. Then I received one, and only one, email from a CSIDG member about it. Don Lewis had read [hold up Hyndman's book and read the back cover] and his heart was pricked about it – he asked if we could discuss something relevant to that at the meeting?
3. Two weeks before JSM, a member who prefers to remain anonymous sends me the following email,

Jason,

I will not be at JSM this year, but I thought I would share a concern. I have several Christian statistician friends who I would not feel comfortable inviting to be a part of CSIDG. My sense over the years has become stronger that the group is really for conservative Christian statisticians. Comments made over the years about the gay statisticians group and other things about what the Bible "clearly teaches" have made it clear to me that my more liberal/progressive Christian friends would not be welcome, or at least would not feel welcome. If this is the intention of the group, that is fine, we should just be honest about that. If this is not the goal, we should be careful to ensure that we are a welcoming place where varying views are accepted and leadership would need to remind those with strong conservative opinions that we are a space for a variety of Christian views (and those with strong liberal ones as well, once any of those joined).

That letter cut me like a knife in the heart. I am the leader of this group and I have never intended there to be such a feeling of unwelcomeness, but I have been too long in the position to blame it on anything else besides myself.

4. Shortly after that, I noticed that there are now service projects of JSM in host cities. Several years ago, before JSM did service projects, CSIDG took a survey of members and a small subset requested that we do service projects around the time of JSM. We, because of me, missed the boat on that one. CSIDG has organized never organized a single service project I am aware of.
5. Around the same time, I got this ASA Member News:

The ASA is one of 31 science organizations that signed [a letter to members of Congress \(PDF\)](#) stating: "Observations throughout the world make it clear that climate change is occurring, and rigorous scientific research concludes that the greenhouse gases emitted by human activities are the primary driver."

The letter also highlights the "broad negative impacts" of climate change and the need for action before concluding, "We, in the scientific community, are prepared to work with you on the scientific issues important to your deliberations as you seek to address the challenges of our changing climate."

[A press release with quotes from many heads of the letter's signatories, including ASA President Jessica Utts, is available here.](#)

Here is what I think about that:

- a. The case for anthropogenic global warming is unconvincing to me
- b. Even if global warming is happening due to other causes such as natural climate cycles, my understanding is that the amount we could roll it back is practically insignificant, and the negative impact on the world economy would be far worse than if we had instead used the resources spent on stopping it to directly help the vulnerable people who would be harmed by such economic policies in the first place.
- c. Part of the evidence for these views comes from past JSM sessions!
- d. My point is not the merits of the arguments surrounding this controversial issue – my point is that OUR professional association is attempting to effect public policy on debated issues in ways that are out of sync with the support of, I think, a consensus of its members. This remark applies to the contracts for meetings resolution as well.
- e. Such courses of action will remain, however, until they are changed. They will not change until members request change, or leadership changes. New leadership will not emerge unless people step up.

- f. My purpose in saying these things is not to get a CSIDG petition going and “flex our muscles” to the leadership, nor is it to guilt some of you into running for office. Rather, it is to call each one of us to pause and look at the direction our country as a whole, and the ASA in particular... and ask the LORD if He’s calling you as an individual, or us as a group, to do anything about it.

6. Soon after, I had a chance meeting with our brand new dean. It was his second day on the job, the first time I had seen him on the job, and instead of introductions or work-talk, he spoke of his surprise at the lack of leadership for the country portended in the current presidential candidates (Trump vs. Clinton). That conversation was not my dean’s character but I believe God arranged it that way as the final piece to prompt me to make leadership the topic of our CSIDG discussion.

7. The very next day I receive this email by non-CSIDG statistician Phil Reiss

Dear Prof. Wilson,

Greetings! I am writing to you regarding the Christian Statisticians meeting at the upcoming JSM. I am a Jewish statistician who moved last year from the US to the Galilee, and since then have begun to be involved with grassroots interfaith efforts to bring peace to the Holy Land. The latter is a topic of great interest to at least some Christians, so I was wondering if you would be willing to have me join part of the meeting at JSM for a brief presentation and discussion with your group. Please let me know. Thank you very much!

Best,
Phil Reiss

This is the only contact I have EVER received by anyone outside our group to dialogue or speak at our meeting. Did I hear God knocking on my door, yet? I subsequently had a phone conversation and invited Phil to share for 5 min. and have 5 min. for Q&A with us tonight.

What is God doing in all this?

I have too many stories about myself, and volunteers whose work for this group fell off due to busyness. I am like those invited to the wedding feast for the king’s son, but Matthew 22:5, “They paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business.” In the past, our manner of operation worked. But the ASA has changed; our country has changed. I don’t believe it’s working anymore. What should I do? What should WE do?

Now – those are the questions that I’m asking myself. And if those of you present tonight want to discuss them, then I welcome that. But, as I said at the beginning, this is not about me, and I’m not smuggling a business agenda item into the agreed-upon discussion. We’re first going to discuss the topic at hand:

Is there a distinct role of leadership by Christian statisticians in the contemporary climate – locally in their workplace and nationally within the ASA? If so, what should it be? How do we do it?

[Go impromptu, and begin discussion here.]

[For the email to those not present, the text below may fill in some of the impromptu gaps. Pass handout and start with the 1st Round Q. Probably don't read the excerpt from Corey's book, but mention it is excerpts.]

This is relevant to all of us personally and professionally. Indeed, the topic of "statistician as leader" has been a big topic of discussion in the Quality & Productivity Section of ASA, having received extensive coverage by Ron Snee and Roger Hoerl. Here's how we're going to do it: We'll discuss this in groups for 15-20 min., and then discuss all together. After that, as a concrete step in a different direction than I (and I think CSIDG) have ever taken, I have invited the Jewish statistician, Phil Reiss, to share what is on his heart for 5 min. followed by 5 min. of discussion. After that, I am trusting the Holy Spirit to guide us where He wills for the final phase tonight.

Before we begin tonight, looking forward, I am going to email the membership a copy of this transcript, as well as a summary of the points raised in our meeting tonight. I am going to initiate a discussion of the direction of CSIDG, as well as our future leadership, on the listserv. Clearly, I have carried the torch, but my flesh dims it too much for the need of this darkening hour in our culture. Perhaps we should organize more formally and form a board? Perhaps we should join an established Christian organization like the Association of Christians in the Mathematical Sciences (ACMS) or the American Scientific Affiliation (ASA)? Even if we discuss these things in the last phase of our evening tonight, we would like those invested members who couldn't be at JSM this year to have a voice.

Rather than jump immediately into the discussion, I wanted to provide some wisdom, some counsel that we could reference, and also ponder later. I was at a loss until I was again prompted about a book my University president, Barry Corey, had recently published and was giving to faculty and staff in May. They still had some, so I went and got it and here are a few excerpts:

Round 1: Is there a distinct role of leadership by Christian statisticians in the contemporary climate – locally in their workplace and nationally within the ASA? If so, what should it be? How do we do it?

Round 2 (?): (1) Where can Christians take lead to move beyond the numbers to a vision of what is good? Give examples like statistics showing disproportionate killing of black young men by police that say nothing about what a community should look like. (E.g. If the white death rate moves up compared to high black death rate- is that good? (2) How can Christians move into other areas of ASA to lead outside of the fellowship bubble? (3) How should CSIDG, as an organization, respond to these cultural changes?

Corey, Barry. 2016. *Love Kindness*. Tyndale Publishers. [All text below is quotations, with pages in parentheses.]

In today's polarized culture, we are often pulled toward one extreme or the other, soft centers or hard edges. I'm proposing a different approach, a third way. Rather than the harshness of firm centers and hard edges, and rather than the weakness of spongy centers and soft edges, why don't we start with kindness? Kindness is the way of firm centers and soft edges. (xv)

This book's title, *Love Kindness*, comes from [Micah 6:8], 'To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.' *Love* kindness. We don't 'just do' kindness in some Nike-esque way. We are to *love* kindness.... 'Love kindness' is the partner of 'do justice.' If doing justice is the firm center, then loving kindness is the soft edges. Both are what God expects of us, not one or the other. And we do both of these with equal passion while walking humbly with God. (xvii)

I wrote this book as an alternative to the voices of barbed-wire-wrapped Christians who are picking fights from pulpits, blogs, talk shows, town meetings, or political platforms. I also wrote this book to demonstrate that kindness is not anemic or convictionless. Rather, it has the power to influence others, revealing the truth and grace of the Christian faith far more than the insecurity of confrontational posturing.

[T]he Bible never talks about kindness as a gift you either have or you don't. It describes kindness as a fruit of the Spirit, a virtue that is meant to grow from all Christians, even when other people don't like the kindness they see in us. This may sound counterintuitive, but the objective of the receivable life is not to be received, but to be *receivable*.... Whether or not the grocery clerk or the college professor receives my overtures of kindness should not be my concern.... [Jesus] even assures us of solidarity with him when we are snubbed, affirming in the Gospel of Luke that 'whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me (10:16).' (6-7)

How do I live a life that is more receivable, more radically kind? Lately, I have been asking that question about not just what it means to be a receivable disciple, but also what it means to be a receivable church, a receivable nongovernment organization, a receivable for-profit company, a receivable university. What would happen if we as leaders resolved that the conviction of our organizations stayed firm while our edges riskily and radically softened? (197)

How do we do this as leaders? How can the church continue as a vibrant and winsome witness in the world, needed now more than ever before? Below are seven thoughts I've pondered on how we might position ourselves away from *isolation* on the one side and *conformity* on the other. The higher ground, not the middle ground, is to consider new and enhanced ways to extend our organizations' reach with humility and confidence, with influence, and yet without capitulating on our deeply held and time-honored convictions. (201) *A firm center and soft edges means...*

1. We become more involved in the culturally unfamiliar.
2. We are creators of goodness and beauty.
3. We approach the growing opposition in our day by leading with humility.
4. We fear not when our grace is met with hostility.
5. We remain even more deeply rooted in biblical faithfulness.
6. Evangelism is at the heart of why we live this way.
7. We need to remember that Christ-centeredness means we will never be marginalized.