

THE KEYS



Church of St. Peter the Apostle

Anglican Catholic Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic States

www.dmas-acc.org

The Rev. Canon Peter Geromel, OHI, DMin - Rector

November 2023

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The Rector's Ramble (In and out of Brambles)

"A Link in a Chain."

St. Cardinal John Henry Newman (1801-1890) wrote:

"God has created me to do him some definite service; he has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission – I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. *I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons.* He has not created me for nothing." (Emphasis mine)

This goes for parishes too.

I have noticed in my interactions with folks in the community that they're often struggling to find a way to break the ice. This isn't unusual between laity and clergymen and is especially the case with those unfamiliar with churchmen. (By "churchmen" I mean those who are pastors in the more catholic traditions rather than any of the "free church" traditions, such as Baptist or Pentecostal.) One of the questions I get fairly often that I, frankly, struggle to answer in a way that I find satisfactory is the query: "How large is your congregation?" or "How many people do you have?" This is essentially the same question and sometimes both versions are asked at once.

I've surveyed other clergy as to how they answer this and one said he answered as to what his "average Sunday attendance" is and another said that he just rounds up a little bit with how many he has on the rolls. Both options certainly present themselves as options to my mind in the split seconds after someone asks this, arguably, rather forward question. It is forward because I can't imagine anyone asking a doctor, "how many patients do you have?" So I could just say, "we have about 30" if I want to go in the "average Sunday attendance" direction or, "we have about 50" if I want to go with how many we have on the rolls. Another possibility is to say, "we're a fairly small congregation" and leave it at that, and I can imagine that there are plenty of clergy who wince as they say it, and still answer with those very words, "we're a small church". But none of the above answers are precise enough or satisfactory to me. A "small congregation" could range anywhere from twenty souls to two-hundred souls! Indeed, in an age of "mega churches", so great is the gap between the "mega church" and all other churches that any church that is not a "mega church" could easily be referred to as a "small church". I don't like to ever say "small church". I think this is self-defeating and poor advertising. One should probably say, "a quaint church" or, even better, (since "a quaint church" may say more about the ivy growing on the outside walls than it does about size) one might say "a family-size church" or "we are a family church". Again, nothing is accurate or satisfactory, unless one is a "mega church". But if one were pastoring such, folks probably know you and about how many folks you have too.

Instead, (and you may be aghast or gasp to know that I say this publicly to our community) I have found myself saying, without hesitation, that our size is "enough to keep me busy." Not everyone, I'm sure, will take it well when I say this. It's a bit evasive and off putting, I admit. But it does what I am called to do as a priest, something Jesus would do, and that is to bring things round to the angle from which they should be considered at the essential level. Really, the general trend is that whatever your membership number is on the rolls you will get between a third or half or even two-thirds of that as your "Average Sunday Attendance" or "ASA" (as we call it in professional clergy world). Nevertheless, I have served congregations where I have had over a hundred on the rolls and only a smidgen over thirty on Sunday. Usually, I have

served where there were about sixty on the rolls and about thirty in the pews per Sunday. But that doesn't quite get us accuracy. It doesn't come close to being accurate sociologically or in the spiritual realm and let me explain why.

Every congregation is different. I could have a church where only thirty were there on Sunday and the pastoral needs were almost nil (and I might be able to serve that place in twenty or thirty hours a week) or I could have a church where only thirty were there on Sunday and the pastoral needs were such that I needed about sixty or more hours to serve them – and not just because the people were “messed up”. For instance, there could be a lot of sickness or children in the parish with special needs that the parents need assistance with. There could be young people who wanted help with vocational difficulties or wanted to learn more about their faith. Or not. But what I want to focus on is the way in which *the numbers do not represent the actual numbers of the people being reached in a parish!*

Consider the fact that each family unit or member of a church is not itself or himself or herself some autonomous unit. The pastor is not a doctor or therapist or, heaven forbid, a stockbroker or financial advisor. My congregational membership is in no way equivalent to the census of patients or a list of clients. That is not how this works. And any comment by an outsider or a member of the church that implies that the “size” of the church is just based on the numbers in the pews on Sunday or the number of souls in a register is confusing apples for oranges and showing they have very little understanding as to what the Church or a church is supposed to be. Each member or family in a parish is connected to all sorts of other people who do not regularly or probably ever attend. Yet the needs of those persons are not irregularly brought by members to the church for help either through prayer or action. More to the point, sometimes the pastoral needs of people who have never been and will never, ever, ever (did I say “ever”?) become members of the congregation simply *must* be attended to by that pastor, for there is simply no other man available to do the task. This can include weddings, hospital visits, funerals, even advice and counsel. But more than likely it includes many, many things (taking up hours and hours) that can't even be put into neat categories such that you could say, “I did 14 weddings this year for non-members!” or “300 hospital visits to non-members!” The tasks attended to are in very unique categories of service which are just as unique as the individuals themselves. Indeed, in many of my parishes over the years, the members came on Sunday and were never seen from again until the next Sunday and, thank God, Monday thru Saturdays seemed to be well-filled with “walk ins”. A parish is “a link in the chain, a bond of connections between persons.” It's about care and relationship, not size. As we have seen, how do you define “size”? You can't.

I could go on about this for quite a while and fill up pages with anecdotes, but I won't. I've made my point. The reality is, when I say, “enough to keep me busy”, I mean it. And I have every intention of focusing attention back on what matters – soul care and not on whether or not a few pews are bare or whether we need to build a larger “campus” because things are hopping on Sunday morning. If there are bare pews somewhere, and this makes folks in that congregation uneasy, maybe that church should consider simply removing a few. The pews are there to be sat in, and that's it; not to provide a judgment call as to whether or not that church is “successful.” That being said if there's an empty pew, we might as well try to fill it. 😊

News and Information

November 11th – Martinmas & Veterans' Day celebration, 5 PM

November 23rd – Thanksgiving Eucharist, 10 AM

November 26th – Pledge cards due

Nov. 29 or 30 – St. Andrew's Day – to be determined based on piper availability.

NOVEMBER, 2023

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
LEGEND: HC - Holy Communion; FHE – Festal Holy Eucharist; HE - Holy Eucharist; SS – Sunday School; PG - Prayer Group; EP – Evening Prayer; MP – Morning Prayer; P&HU – Prayers and Holy Unction			[1] 6:00 p.m. HC & Poem Study	[2] 12 noon HC	[3]	[4] 5:00 p.m. HC
[5] 8:00 a.m. MP & HC 10:00 a.m. HE, SS TRINITY XXII	[6]	[7]	[8] 6:00 p.m. HC & Poem Study	[9] 12 noon HC	[10]	[11] 5:00 p.m. HC
[12] 8:00 a.m. MP & HC 10:00 a.m. HE, SS TRINITY XXIII	[13]	[14]	[15] 6:00 p.m. HC & Poem Study	[16] 12 noon HC	[17]	[18] 5:00 p.m. HC
[19] 8:00 a.m. MP & HC 10:00 a.m. HE, SS TRINITY XXIV	[20]	[21]	[22] 6:00 p.m. HC & Poem Study	[23] 10:00 am HC THANKSGIVING DAY	[24]	[25] 5:00 p.m. HC
[26] 8:00 a.m. MP & HC 10:00 a.m. HE, SS SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE ADVENT	[27]	[28]	[29] 6:00 p.m. HC & Poem Study	[30] 12 noon HC		

IN THE LORD'S SERVICE

If you cannot fulfill your assigned duty because of an urgent reason, PLEASE SECURE A REPLACEMENT.

	November 5	November 12	November 19	November 26	December 3
Coffee Hour	S. Darby	C. Pappas	V. Williams	C. deRosset	L. Olver
Sat. Epistoler 5 p.m.	A. Butterfield	A. Butterfield	A. Butterfield	A. Butterfield	A. Butterfield
Epistoler 8 a.m.	D. Drysdale	C. Von Claparede	G. Mauney	D. Drysdale	C. Von Claparede
Epistoler 10 a.m.	T. Paisley	P. Williams	T. Paisley	G. Terrell	P. Williams

Altar servers and ushers will be assigned as available before each service.

2023 Vestry (term end): Allen Butterfield ('25), Dan Drysdale ('23), Lisa Olver ('24),
Ted Paisley ('24), Mike Slayton ('25), Phil Williams ('23)