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Sunday Evenings at St. Paul's

The Marriage of Congregational Development and Anglican Liturgical Principles

by Stephen Crippen



“Beauty and mystery. Silence and stillness. Open hearts and open minds. Sacred conversation. The holy meal. Ancient ritual.”

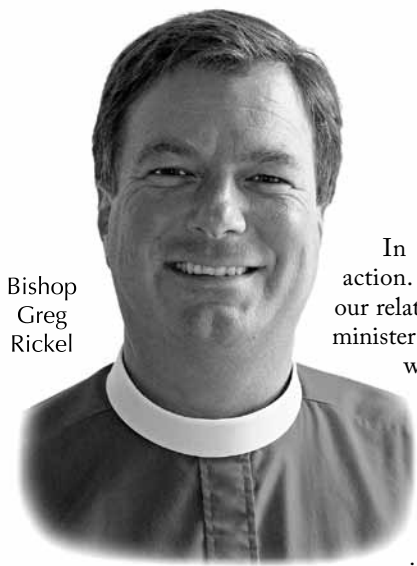
These words, featured on new advertising signboards, are the images, objects, practices and patterns that guided a small group of clergy and laity at St. Paul's, Seattle as they developed a new Sunday evening Eucharist that was held for the first time at 5 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 27.

St. Paul's took this step to respond to a practical need: recent growth of membership. Average Sunday

continued on page V3

Inside:

- Grants to Congregations... V4
- Convention Wrap-up... V5
- A Closer Look at Liturgy... V9
- The Cost of Addiction... V11
- Clean Greens...V12



Bishop
Greg
Rickel

Dear Ones

In so many ways the liturgy is stewardship in action. In the midst of liturgy is the stewardship of our relationships; our life together; our call to be in and minister to the world. While we tend to focus on money when we speak of stewardship, it actually is only a very small part of this way of life for us. However, since we are really in that "season" of stewardship at the moment I would like to discuss the place of money in our liturgy.

One thing I really noticed in moving to an ordained role in the church was how infrequently the plate came to me. It was as if I was now "off the hook." I eventually asked that it be passed to me so people could see me putting an offering in as well. I am happy to say it happens at our cathedral now since I asked about that some time ago. I see at some diocesan conventions and other church events that ushers bypass all of the robed "professionals." I usually make a scene when this happens.

Last year I was part of a ceremony in which I was vested in the pews as a board member. Our prior two days of meeting time with the board was all about our financial situation and the fact that we had to "lead" on turning it around. Yet in this service, the bypassing happened as usual. I stood up and quietly asked those around me if they had intended to give. Indeed many of them, and so I began collecting money from the robed throng. In a few short minutes I had hundreds of dollars in my hand, and I rather unceremoniously carried it back to the shocked ushers standing there waiting to go forward.

People offer many reasons for the bypass: "You have vestments on so we think it might be difficult to get to your wallets!" "It seems rude to ask our board to give." On the contrary—all should be offered the chance to give alms and to tangibly offer ourselves.

Money is one of the only tangible things we now bring to liturgy as a body. In earlier times the bread and wine brought to the service to share actually came from the homes of those who brought it forward, which is sometimes true but not nearly as much today. What our money symbolizes is the "sweat" of our lives. We put ourselves on the altar as every one of us has given part of our lives in order to have that money, no matter the amount, which has gone forward and is offered to God.

We often seem to shy away from this. I once actually witnessed a service (not in this diocese) where the offering was brought forward by the ushers veiled, covered up, so no one could possibly see the money. Then it was held up from about 25 feet away from the altar, the priest gave the sign of the cross from the distance, and then the offering was whisked away to an office just off the nave. I could actually see the counters counting the money as we said our prayers. Odd, to say the least.

It has always been very important for me to place this offering on the altar, to have it present there throughout our prayers. This symbol makes it clear that we do not see it as offensive or dirty or something we must apologize for in our Christian life. In fact, it is truly the offering of ourselves; it is us on the altar.

Equally, when we don't do this, it also symbolizes something, even if words are never said. It signals that perhaps we should apologize for this part of our life together. One correlation I could make is a celebration of labor I often called for in my parish, where on Labor Day weekend people were invited to bring some symbol of their vocation. We would always joke that if you drove a forklift, please just bring the keys! It was always a powerful day to see all of the symbols surrounding the altar and the church. We do the same every week in the form of what we have been given in return for our labor.

I encourage you to look for other ways we symbolize scarcity in our liturgy, and ways we can instead make a sign for abundance, to talk about our feelings of money in the liturgy, and to celebrate the giving of that money—the offering of ourselves to God.

Faithfully,

Gregory H. Rickel
Bishop of Olympia



www.bishoprickel.com

community in which to explore God's infinite goodness and grace as revealed in the life and continuing revelation of Jesus Christ.

The Rt. Rev. Gregory H. Rickel, Bishop of the Diocese of Olympia, embraces radical hospitality that welcomes all, no matter where they find themselves on their journey of faith. He envisions a church that is a safe and authentic

My Beloved Friends

"Worship is offering the best you have to the best you know."

— my father quoting someone else

It was one in the morning when I called the church to get the service times (which weren't on their website). The answering machine had a lovely welcoming message but no service times! I hung up angry and frustrated. I decided to call back—this time to leave a message saying how frustrated I was . . . but the Spirit convicted me.

Someone answered the phone! Yet the woman who answered couldn't have been more gracious. She told me that her daughter had come home from her first (ever) date and they were up talking too late. As for service times, the people gathered around 10 a.m. and they started when there was a critical mass, usually around 10:00 a.m.

Church is held in an old home—now a community center run by several churches in this transitional neighborhood. There were folding chairs in the front room and a couple dozen folks getting things ready to be church. People introduced themselves and warmly welcomed us.

Finally we gathered in that front room, the priest put on her stole and we started worship. Well, actually, not quite. Rev. Deb, the vicar, began by gently sharing hard-to-hear news and other prayer needs and concerns of the congregation: a young member of the congregation who was in the juvenile detention center after breaking parole; an older man, sitting in front of us, who was starting chemo the next day and Carl, sitting next to us, who would accompany him in this process; thanksgivings for the "best reader of scripture in the congregation" who was, this week, graduating from literacy classes. This calling out of concerns was followed by the laying on of hands (by all of us) for them and others. Members of the congregation were spontaneously invited to lead the prayers.

Music was from a song sheet of praise and gospel hymns. The new reader indeed read the first lesson beautifully. Rev. Deb started her sermon, but having forgotten the psalm, was interrupted by the young man who was to lead the psalm waving his notebook. So we returned to the psalm. Clearly, he was learning to read, too (the young woman next to him helped him with his reading).

In Rev. Deb's sermon on "my yoke is easy and my burden is light," she said that when we are yoked with one another and with Christ, we can pull much heavier loads than we can individually. She spoke to the specific concerns of the congregation. At the peace, everyone greeted everyone. At the Lord's Prayer we held hands, moving into a large circle. During the singing of the closing hymn, folks scooted in close to each other, and to us, singing with their arms tightly around one another.

When I was a parish priest I put a high value on preparing, practicing, caring for all the details of worship and I still do. Yet in this place, where liturgy was truly the immediate work of the people, I was moved to tears, deep prayer and offering all that I had and all that I am to God and the folks around me.

Nedi Rivera
Bishop Suffragan



Bishop
Nedi
Rivera

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News articles and letters to the editor are welcome. Articles and letters should be limited to 300 words on topics of current events affecting the diocese, the Episcopal Church, or the Anglican Communion as a whole. Letters to the editor must be signed and names cannot be withheld. All articles and letters are subject to editing. Photographs should be high-resolution digital files.

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attendance over the past year has increased to about 175, and the 10:30 a.m. liturgy began to feel uncomfortably full. In response to this, a series of town meetings were held in which the Rev. Melissa Skelton (St. Paul's rector) and parishioners explored their experience of numerical growth and options for responding to it.

The result was a decision to create a liturgy that was neither a carbon copy of the morning liturgies nor a jarring departure from the rich pattern of liturgical life at St. Paul's. It is called "Sunday Evenings at St. Paul's," a service of Holy Eucharist with music and expansive language; a new, more intimate worship space in the refurbished parish hall; social time following the liturgy each week; and a monthly dialogical time for adult formation.

A team of parishioners led by Skelton was commissioned by the vestry to lead the project. The team, aided by a diocesan grant to support some of the costs of the effort, decided that the work fell into four important areas: Property and Physical Plant; Liturgy and Music; Pastoral and Community Development; and Internal and External Communication.

Liturgy and Music

The liturgy and its music were created to be familiar to Sunday morning worshippers while at the same time expressing a simpler, deeply contemplative yet participative Benedictine character. These choices were an intentional way for the parish to live more fully into its Anglo-Catholic identity and make its identity more accessible to a larger number of people.

The evening service contains many of the elements of the St. Paul's 10:30 a.m. Eucharist—sung liturgy, incense, silence and stillness. Other liturgical actions were carefully planned to fit both the space and time of the new evening setting, and a liturgy that encourages active participation from the congregation. Candles abound; incense is kept to a minimum. The presider offers a brief sermon from the midst of the assembly, and the sermon is followed by time for others to offer their own reflections.

Gary James, organist and choirmaster at St. Paul's, recruited a new choir and chose music both old and new for use in an intimate evening setting. Many of the choral anthems are written by James himself, and while some of the hymns are taken from Hymnal 1982 and also sung at the 10:30 a.m. liturgy, other hymns with expansive language complement the more familiar music.

The Rev. Ralph Carskadden, priest associate at St. Paul's and a member of the planning team, said, "The new evening Eucharist is like an island of prayer, praise and silence next to a beautiful below-ground garden off a busy urban street corner. The simplicity of the setting, the gathering of the community 'choir style' on the sides of the altar and the gentle pace of the liturgy reflect a Benedictine spirituality which is part of the Anglican tradition at St. Paul's."

Property and Physical Plant

Several changes were made to the building in an effort to create a distinctive yet consistent worship experience prior to a separate renovation of the existing nave. Parishioners are directed to a side entrance through the green space on the west side of the building. A ramp leads them down to a new ceramic water feature outside a new door to the parish hall.

The hall itself has been refurbished to accommodate the new liturgy. New wooden David Rowland chairs (the same chairs that grace Canterbury Cathedral's nave) are placed in an oval pattern around new furnishings, which include a lectern, square altar and a Mary shrine near glass windows. The smaller room and careful layout of chairs and furnishings allow the people to see each other across the central area of activity and allow the liturgy to be focused on the altar at the center of the room.

Pastoral and Community Development

The planning team engaged the whole parish in the planning and preparation of the third liturgy, and encouraged current parishioners to actively participate in the liturgy itself. They also considered how newcomers attending the new liturgy would be welcomed, formed and incorporated into the St. Paul's community. They decided to add a social gathering after the Sunday evening liturgy and a monthly time for adult formation. Many other adult formation programs and newcomers gatherings occur on weeknights and weekends, and those attending the Sunday evening liturgy will be invited to participate in those broader parish events. In these ways, Sunday Evenings at St. Paul's leads participants into the heart of parish life.

Communication: Internal and External

The new liturgy needed to be introduced both to those already in the parish and to new people outside the parish. The parish was continually informed and involved with a dedicated website page, bulletin inserts and announcements at coffee hour. Parishioners were also involved in refurbishing the parish hall and creating vestments and other materials to be used in the Eucharist.

External communication to date has involved the development of new signboards,

postcards and posters, and the development of advertising based on the signage. Other external marketing being considered are personal invitations to households in the neighborhood and hangtags on doors.

Principles and Process

When a person walks into the St. Paul's parish hall on Sunday evening, in the center of the room she will see an illuminated table. Around the table, sitting and standing, singing and speaking, she will encounter the gathered assembly. As the liturgy unfolds, she will see the assembly actively participating in the four-fold liturgical rhythm of gathering, proclaiming the word, celebrating the meal and being sent back into the world.

This setting—a table surrounded by an active, participative assembly—silently articulates the liturgical principles that guided the whole project. "Sunday Evenings at St. Paul's" was made possible by careful leadership, but the process was not imposed upon the parish. At each juncture, everyone was invited to study the issues at hand, ask questions and express concerns about what was happening, and join in the actual work of creating a third liturgy.

This project could be a starting point of reflection for other congregations who are contemplating the gifts, opportunities and challenges of their own communities. The Rev. Joseph Hickey-Tiernan, chair of the diocesan Commission on Liturgy and the Arts' Liturgical Theology and Catechesis Subcommittee, said, "This new start at one of our parishes is clearly based on the principles that make Anglican liturgy both so rich and so adaptable. Any congregation interested in refreshing its worship or its worship space could take this as an invitation to plant the seed of a renewed experience of liturgy for themselves."

Seeing this as the fruit of congregational development efforts at St. Paul's, Skelton added, "This has come about through the careful and intentional release of the parish's energy for an expanded expression of its identity—I call that 'congregational development!'"

Stephen Crippen, a member of St. Paul's, serves on the Diocesan Liturgical Theology and Catechesis Committee. Photos by Crippen and John Hill.

Bishops' Visitation Schedules

Want to know where your bishops are in the diocese?

Want to hear what they have to say?

Here's a list of upcoming visitations for Bishops Rickel and Rivera.

Bishop Rickel's Visitation Schedule

November

- 1 St. Clare, Snoqualmie
- 3-4 St. Alban, Washington, D.C. (ordination of Jered Weber-Johnson)
- 5 St. Antony, Silverdale (retired clergy luncheon)
- 6-7 Dumas Bay, Federal Way (College for Congregational Development)
- 8 Our Saviour, Monroe
- 9-12 New Orleans, La. (mission trip)
- 14 Church of the Apostles, Seattle
- 14 St. Matthew, Auburn (dinner auction)
- 15 Trinity, Everett
- 17-20 Chicago, Ill. (triennium committee meetings of General Convention)
- 19-21 Austin, Texas (emerging church meeting)
- 20-22 St. Benedict, Lacey (HYC)
- 29 Transfiguration, Darrington
- 30-Dec. 3 Florida (Ecumenical Stewardship Center Leadership Conference)

December

- 3-5 Huston Center, Gold Bar (Diocesan Council retreat)
- 6 St. Matthew, Auburn
- 13 Emmanuel, Mercer Is.
- 13 St. Paul, Seattle
- 16 St. Clement, Seattle (Blue Service)
- 20 St. James, Sedro Woolley
- 24 St. Mark's Cathedral, Seattle
- 26-Jan. 2 Vacation

Bishop Rivera's Visitation Schedule

November

- 1 Diocese of Eastern Oregon
- 2-3 New York, NY (House of Bishops planning meeting)
- 6-7 Dumas Bay, Federal Way (College for Congregational Development)
- 13-16 Diocese of Eastern Oregon
- 17 St. Benedict, Lacey (ordination of Andrew Shirota)
- 18 Covenant House, Seattle (UW Crossroads Campus Ministry)
- 20 St. Andrew, Seattle
- 21 Dumas Bay, Federal Way (deacon BACOM)
- 21-29 Vacation
- 30-Dec. 2 New York, NY (Presiding Bishop's Council of Advice)

December

- 3-5 Huston Center, Gold Bar (Diocesan Council retreat)
- 6 Good Shepherd, Federal Way
- 11-13 Dumas Bay, Federal Way (Deacon Formation)
- 16-25 Vacation