

9. Other Observations

While doing the research for this paper, I visited a number of Anglican parishes that offered something other than a diet of Eucharist-only services. I also solicited feedback from others around the world through '*i-church*', the online parish developed by the Diocese of Oxford. Members of *i-church* are located in various places - Australia, New Zealand, England, Singapore, the United States, the West Indies and Canada.

At the Church of the Good Shepherd, in Toronto, I encountered a full traditional Morning Prayer service, done in Anglican chant, complete with all of the usual canticles. The congregation numbered approximately 30. The problem in this case is that only a handful of elderly women knew the particular chant tone that was being used in the service. Even I, an Anglo-Catholic and trained in Anglican Chant in seminary, found the tone to be obscure and difficult to follow, and was uncomfortable as a result. The community around Good Shepherd is changing, and some of the new people from the community, mostly Black and Asian, are finding their way to Good Shepherd. However, they sat at the back of the church, for the most part; while the good ladies 'leading' the chant sat in a group at the front. Morning Prayer, in that context, was more of a bar to entry than an open door.

At St. Timothy's in Agincourt, I attended a full service of choral Matins, using Anglican Chant. Approximately 170 people were in attendance. The service is conducted once a month, with the goal of retaining the diversity of the tradition, and opening up the church to those who are not cradle Anglicans. The congregation is still not completely comfortable with the service, but the clergy and organist are working with them to bring them to a position of comfort. In fact, the organist rehearsed the congregation in the singing of the canticles before the service began. At St. Timothy's the BCP is not used for morning

prayer; although the BCP liturgy is. They have produced a special booklet, customizing the liturgy for their particular application. At the time of writing their principal outreach service is Contemporary Healing Service, held once a month on a Saturday night. It is well attended.

At The Church of the Redeemer, I encountered a traditional sung Evening Prayer using the BAS and plainsong. With subdued lighting and appropriate silent spaces the experience was transforming, and completely satisfying. About 35 young people were in attendance. Other than the priest I was the oldest person there.

At St Margaret's North Toronto, I attended an early Evening Prayer at 4 pm. I was one of only four people in attendance. It was a full sung service in Anglican chant, led by the organ. Clearly the intention of attracting people who found Sunday morning services challenging for one reason or another was not working in this context.

Through the internet I encountered a variety of opinions on my thesis topic – parish communion inhibits church growth. I had posted a question in one of the online forums. My question and a sampling of the responses, are posted below:

Posted by: Brian Bartley Jan 15 2006, 09:06 AM

Dear Friends,

I am seeking help with research for my thesis: "The Parish Communion movement inhibits church growth."

There is some evidence here, in North America, that where Morning Prayer is alternated with Communion (Eucharist, Mass), as the principal Sunday service, churches are growing. The premise is that such churches are more open to the uninitiated because there is no "bar" to entry – real or perceived. Although baptism is a pretty low bar, it is still there, and becomes substantially higher with the current emphasis (in Canada anyway) on adult baptism and catechumenical formation over a period of a year or more, and congregational discernment before initiation.

What I am looking for, as well as thoughts and opinions, is evidence one way or the other. Reference and links to churches who have success with an alternating format would be useful – and, of course, similar information about churches where it has been tried and found wanting.

I know that The Rez (Church of the Resurrection in Toronto) follows such a format, and has managed to reboot itself from virtual dissolution to a thriving congregation – but there is the possibility that it is an anomaly, and that what worked there will not work elsewhere (although, my opinion is that it will)

When I am talking about Morning Prayer, I am not necessarily talking about the Cathedral Offices in Anglican or Plain Chant, although I am interested to hear how that works where it is still being done, if at all. The Rez follows the BCP format, but uses contemporary music led by a gospel rock band. The Rector is

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one of the guitar players. In their case, the Morning Prayer congregation is actually larger than the Communion service – perhaps by one third. Their objective is, of course, to lead everyone to communicating membership. I posted a reference to the Rez in the discussion on “Links to Growing Churches”.

I would appreciate whatever help and perspective you can provide.

God Bless!

Brian Bartley

Posted by: Tim H Jan 15 2006, 10:58 AM

It sounds like you've chosen your conclusion before starting your thesis

I'm not sure about your evidence, but at my RL church everyone stays home when there are rumours of Morning Prayer... It sounds to me as if the success of the Rez is largely due to its exciting new format, not to the traditional service form it uses. Its possible that the pressure to come to the altar in a Communion service is off-putting for less committed visitors, but I doubt that the solution is as simple as switching to a different chapter of the BCP.

Posted by: James Johnson Jan 15 2006, 10:21 PM

QUOTE(Tim H @ Jan 15 2006, 03:58 PM)

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Peace all!

[quote name='James Johnson' date='Jan 16 2006, 03:13 AM' post='9883']

Peace all!

It seems to me that this is a very interesting and important topic. I do not have any evidence-sorry-butlet me say that I am a high church Anglo Catholic and am beginning towonder if we have not made a BIG mistake by eliminating Morning Prayer. By downplaying the Protestant element, we have downplayed preaching. And preaching attracts people. Most Episcopal priests are not interesting or exciting preachers. Secondly, the beautiesof Anglican Chant, when used properly, are very attractive. Also, I think that many potential converts coming from Protestant bacjgrouns are turned off by the "catholic" aspects ofweeklymass.

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Best regards and good luck with this important research.

James

Posted by: John Scholefield Jan 16 2006, 04:57 AM

An interesting line Brian,

In my local churches (3 in the benefice) we alternate Communion and "Family" services. It is very clear that in these three small English villages the non-communion services are most often the most popular.

I suggest that the reason is twofold - not that many people are confirmed any more and families with young children feel inhibited about attending "serious" services, so they come to the family style services.

In the love of Christ,
John

Posted by: Jan Perkins Jan 16 2006, 09:37 AM

In my childhood communion seemed to be only once or twice a month. I still have a leaning towards that pattern, based on my early understanding that you took communion when you had prepared for it, and to a certain extent needed it.

It was like cheesecake - good on occasion but not to be had every day. One of the things that made finding a church here hard was the emphasis on communion. When every Sunday service is communion I am less likely to go. I have found that when I choose not to take communion because I do not think it right for me at that time I get looked at a bit askance by some participants, while others prod me to go up anyway or ask for explanations . . .

I also like a variety of services.

Jan

Posted by: James Johnson Jan 16 2006, 04:45 PM

Peace all!

I still have some trouble with this system-so I goof now and then.

I wanted to add the following thought: I have been wondering more and more if the great loss of people, at least from the Episcopal Church, since the 70's is, at least in part, related to the loss of morning prayer as the (or a) primary Sunday service. It is hard to know-but the thought does niggle at me.

People whether they are called "liberals" or "traditionalists" do seem to be rock headed about things (I am no different) Many of the changes that happened in the US were FORCED on the church-it might well be that the forcing as much as the changes that were responsible. I expect that for some, the change in churchmanship that a shift in emphasis from MP to Mass, represented such a sense of forcedness.

Best Regards,

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James

Posted by: Jayne Tite Jan 17 2006, 04:39 AM

QUOTE(James Johnson @ Jan 17 2006, 10:45 AM)

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I doubt that you can say it was forced on the church. The decisions re change in the ECUSA are democratically taken, they pass through GC with a majority and then have to be agreed by parishes before being finalised by, again, a majority at GC. Thus you might say that some congregation members felt forced.

That does not alter the fact that the departure of people from the ECUSA relates in some degree to change, but by and large few people have actually left the church, preferring to move to some other, usually new, denomination. All this talk about denomination loyalty is, to my mind, nonsense, as we all belong to one Church, though at times it is hard to believe that.

Jayne(in aroha, hope and Faith) nz
mailto:enyaj@xtra.co.nz

* . (\ *** /) * . * Be beautiful inside, in your hearts,
* . * (\(_)/) * * with the lasting charm of a gentle
* * (_ /||\) . * And quiet spirit, that is
* * . /____\ * . so precious to God
(1 Peter 3:4 TLB)

Posted by: John Scholefield Jan 17 2006, 04:41 AM

I have to agree with you Jan, indeed from many years as a choirboy (40+ years ago!) I remember only 1 sung Eucharist per month, but communion added at the end of every other Matins for those who wanted to stay!

I also have some agreement with James, in churches where a "strong" priest (ie bull-headed) sets the

rules and decides that Eucharist/Mass is all he accepts (they are mostly men such priests!!), then congregations have declined markedly. In the village in which I live this happened and the Baptist church

was the winner . Now our CofE church has two major non-eucharistic services each month folk have come back. Strange isn't it!

However these popular services are not Morning Prayer, but a more informal celebration of the Word.

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In the love of Christ,

John

Posted by: Joe Parrish Jan 17 2006, 07:14 PM

We have found that adding services, not necessarily any particular type, does grow our church. We have two Eucharists on Sundays, and two using the Offices. Each time we added a service we grew. Each time a service was closed, we shrunk. Peace and blessings,
Joe

Posted by: Christine Shilling Jan 18 2006, 02:19 PM

Hi Brian

Interesting topic but I have some sympathy with whoever made the remark that you appear to have reached your conclusion before examining the evidence.

Re liturgical changes and the decline in church congregations since 60's. Could it be that the liturgical changes were a consequence of declining church attendance rather than the cause of? Are you looking at this hypothesis at all?

For example factors such as increased educational opportunities and better educated populace, the rise of the secular caring professions, the growth in rationalism and the scepticism within the church - see Honest to God, the gradual erosion of the teaching of Christian basics to generations of children in state schools, the changing role of women in society, the growth of popular culture all played a part in the loss of the Church's authority. I believe the church only changed because of these social changes - we see the same happening now. Sadly it seems the Christian church no longer drives change - it is driven by change. So my hypothesis would be that as congregations declined the church started to look inward - to be more defensive - and revamped its liturgy much as modern marketing companies rebrand goods to get us to buy more.

I simply do not believe newcomers are put off by the Eucharist centralised in worship. But then I have no hard data to support this.

Blessings
Christine

Posted by: Joe Parrish Jan 18 2006, 03:49 PM

There is a whole 'nother matter, called the 'epiclesis' (calls the Holy Spirit 'around' the elements) a part of the second century Eucharistic prayer found on a manuscript on the bottom of a flower vase in the Vatican in the 1960's I think it was. Showed the RC/AC/ECUSA etc. celebration of the HE had 'deviated' over the centuries--led to Vatican II, among other things, revision in BCPs/Missals, resurgence of HE among Protestants as a result.

I think it is discussed in most Liturgy I classes in Anglican/Episcopal and probably RC seminaries. Whether it 'killed' the church would be at least a bit of speculation, and Christine's analysis is certainly valid in my opinion.

Our experience is that many non-churched folk are not that enamored with the HE, at least not at first, so 'seeker' type services are more appropriate in that sort of evangelism. Over time, some get interested in the history of the church celebrations, fall perhaps in love with the HE, or not, as the case may be. Which

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is why we offer different 'flavors' of church on Sundays.
Peace and blessings,

Joe

Posted by: John Scholefield Jan 19 2006, 04:02 AM

A quick comment for Joe and Jayne, which is a slightly different thread, is that our public pages should give some insight to the sort of contributions which folk can find inside. The cover was updated by Russell,

maybe you should look round?

To answer Brian,

No my benefice is not unusual - all the country churches round here - 14 in the local 3 benefices - run this

alternative Sunday service. Many do not have services every week . This is the difference between

town and country. You should count your blessings to have a choice of services in one church - I

would have to drive anything from 2-9 miles to find a specific service .

In the love of Christ,

John

Posted by: John Scholefield Mar 6 2006, 06:27 AM

Thanks for a great answer Russell.

To pick up on Brian's point, a study was done a couple of years ago in Wirral (published by Grove Books) which identified a trend that we see in our own church.

We have 5 congregations! One for each service, some of these congregations overlap, but many only come to one or two services in the schedule. As a small country church we have 5 services a month in our standard rota and an occasional 6th service when there are 5 Sundays!

So for many the opportunity to attend a service that is not Communion/Eucharist, is seen as very important. Such services have our largest congregations by far (nearly twice as large as our Parish Communion and 4x the said Holy Communion at 9am).

I believe that our churches must offer both types of service, firstly to get people in through the doors and then to gradually bring them into full Communion.

John

Posted by: Christine Shilling Mar 6 2006, 12:50 PM

Hi John

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Similar but different at church where I worship. Four congregations - one for 9 am communion, one for 11 am Family communion and one for 11 am Parish communion and one for 6.30 pm Evening service (BCP - once a month).

The smallest congregation is for the Evening Service where there is NO communion - so I wouldn't agree it is Communion incorporated into services which puts people off - our 11 am congregations are growing.

Christine

Posted by: Clifton D Nedd Mar 7 2006, 11:56 AM

QUOTE(Christine Shilling @ Mar 7 2006, 10:02 AM)

Seems to me churches grow cos they meet needs. People must be made to feel welcome, hear something worth hearing (sermons in both churches I go to are always good), feel they can contribute and belong and be nurtured in their faith journey.

Christine I agree with you especially re: this statement.

Here we have one sunday service - 730am Sung Eucharist with Choir etc. and Ancient and Modern (That is our largest congregation)

We also have Mattins and Mass Monday Tuesday and Thursday at 615am and Midday Masses/Requiems as the case may be Wednesday and Friday 12noon.

There is also a very charismatic, Praise and Prayer service at 5pm on Wednesdays (no BCP, open prayer and reflection, meditation and lively singing)

Finally there is Said Eucharist and Sermon at 6pm on Saturdays (for those - like me - who prefer to sleep on sunday mornings)

And Yes! Here too... numbers drop dramatically whenever there are rumors of Morning Prayer - no mass.

The thing is that different services appeal to different people. I will agree that we can also look to including a sunday charismatic service. But by the same token I will note that many people will not attend because it is not a communion service. At the same time no doubt many who do not now attend the communion service might attend that one.

I don't think that the mass is the problem. I think that the problem lies in the type of service. Let me explain.

Some Priests (Russel forgive me, but I must say this) some priests just read the words in the BCP, no feeling, no emotion, no nothing to bring them to life to you and thereby get a response. Some Priests will not allow another hymn or another song because in the BCP it does not at that point say that a hymn may be sung. Therefore the BCP becomes, for them, an inflexible tool rather than a guide. They use the BCP to shut out the Spirit. That I see is the problem. Tell me this? Why must the mass be celebrated with a choir and organ only? Why can't the same rock band that plays for the other service also play at the Eucharist?

One more thing: I am often concerned that sometimes we go too far to try to meet people where they are... in all of Jesus' meeting people at their stations in life he never compromised his integrity as the Son of God.

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Therefore: there is no one solution: each parish is different and Russel and the other priests will tell you that even within a parish each church is different and even within a single church that has multiple services each congregation is different. The thing is that the Church of England (and by extension all of us in the Communion) has historically had difficulties providing for persons who desired more spiritual, revivalist types of services hence the reason for a methodist church separate and distinct today.

Churches grow because they meet needs. It is the duty of every parish to assess the needs of its members and attempt (at least) to provide varying formats within which all persons might meet the Lord Jesus.

Clifton