

## 10. Conclusions

Does parish communion inhibit growing the church? On the basis of the information I have gathered and the services I attended I would have to say the answer is both yes and no. It is a factor among many, I believe, that determines whether or not a church will be open and welcoming to newcomers. If everything else was equal it maybe the determining factor. However, everything else is not equal. Let me explain.

In the first instance, liturgy alone – whether the Eucharist or Morning Prayer, or a praise and worship service – will not attract anyone if it is delivered in a desultory, disinterested manner. Several, of the comments from the *i-church* group speak to this issue.

Secondly, it does not matter how wonderful the service is sung if the congregation does not know the tune. At both Good Shepherd and St. Timothy's the congregation did not know the music, and participation was, therefore, not as complete as it could have been. The difference is that St. Timothy's was taking steps to teach it to people, to increase their level of comfort. At Good Shepherd, the needs of a small group of women were being met at the expense of those of the rest of the congregation. Perhaps where congregations are small, and choir resources are few, plainsong led by a cantor may be a better music choice.

Thirdly, contextualization is critically important. At Christ the King, I witnessed a service that was crafted to meet the perceived needs of the local community. While the church was not full on the morning I attended there was a healthy congregation and I have no doubt that it will continue to grow given the level of 'electricity' and welcome I experienced. At The Rez, we have another example of contextualization; in this case meeting the needs of a Gen-X community of young families with children. The genius at The Rez is that it has been done in such a way the "First Resurrection People" are still along for the ride. St. Wilfrid's is, I believe,

an example of what can happen if context is ignored. With the best will in the world the most glorious liturgy, music and service will not attract people if it is not in a form that they already respond to. Here I keep thinking of Whoopi Goldberg. At St. Wilfrid's they first need to get some 'butts in the seats'.

There is also something to be learned from the experience of St. Michael's in New York City and St. Agnes Long Branch. They are at opposite ends of the learning experience however. St. Agnes Long Branch is on the 'evaluation for closure' list. After Fr. Myles Hunter left, what he had established was changed by the clergy who replaced him. Likely his style was not comfortable for them. It had, however, been comfortable for the congregation; and it would appear that they moved to a position of comfort, somewhere else. At St. Michael's, the return to Morning Prayer helped to rescue a dying congregation. The way it was done, following Morning Prayer with communion in the side chapel, allowed those who required communion every Sunday, at the regular service time, to have it. At the same time, those without experience of Anglicanism were accommodated. Over time the community grew strong, and returned to a full Sunday schedule of Eucharist-only services. One hopes that they did not disregard the lesson of the past too lightly.

An other factor that clearly comes to play is the charism and ability of the incumbent. The Rev Duke Viperman at The Rez, and the Rev. John Philips at Christ the King would attract a congregation wherever they served, and regardless of what kind of service they led. They have the ability to connect with the people they serve, and meet them where they are in contextually appropriate ways. The Rev. Myles Hunter is also a charismatic leader who can carry a congregation with him. In each case it is difficult to know what would have happened in the same circumstances and service offerings with another leader. In the case of St. Agnes Long Branch, we know. It was a failure.

What I have not considered in the context of this paper is the use of 'open table' for the Eucharist - in part because I am not aware of any church aggressively pursuing that option in the Toronto area, and in part because I am not sure that the church itself is ready for it. I do admit it has a considerable amount of appeal, and certainly would be in context with the practices of the very early church - Jesus and the first generation of disciples. However, with the institutionalization of the church came demands for standardization, knowledge and competence that finds its expression today in its most full manner in the catechumenical movement. Personally, I have no difficulty with such a program of discipleship; as long as there is something offered for those people who have not yet decided to become full communicating members of the church, but who have shown enough interest to come through the door. Until open table is acceptable, I believe that Morning and Evening Prayer fits that bill.

Does parish communion inhibit church growth. NO, I don't believe that it does in and of itself. However, I believe that the exclusivity which it can lead to if there is no other service offering can and does. Our mission must be, using the words of Whoopi Goldberg, to 'get some butts in the seats' to the greater glory and service of God.