

Rectors Report 11/15/2023

Worship Report

The more time I spend at St. Christopher's, the more I believe we have an incredibly strong parish. Attendance at all three services has remained stable with new faces often appearing and more regular faces. It also feels as though we've gotten further into a rhythm of what Sundays look like while also continuing to experiment and iterate.

The 8am service has moved to using a freestanding altar at the foot of the chancel stairs which seems to be working well. In addition to our usual suspects of guests, we periodically have different faces. Of somewhat regular note there are the Willis-es, a young couple with daughter Eliana who attend just about every Sunday but alternate between the 8am and the 11am. Perhaps most exciting was the attendance of Andrew Keeney and his mother Andrea and his subsequent baptism. That day we had in attendance 18 folks and they were all over the moon with how the service ran.

The 9:30am service continues to be spectacular. Coming back to St. C.'s, the notion of doing the Wiggle Worship sermon was intimidating. With that said, that time has become one of my FAVORITE moments on a Sunday (not that I don't love them all). We've done explorations of the Gospel, I've taught the Elizabethan Compromise (very proud on that one, especially because I believe it landed), and st recently we did a lesson on baptism. I think as a community we're getting better at structuring time (at least in the service) for shenanigans and wiggling as well as reverence. The kids seem to quiet down at the important stuff and the older kids seem to respond to the notion that Fr. George is ok with chaos, so when he calls for attention or says "cut-it out" they seem to listen. Pray to God this isn't wishful thinking, please.

I DO think we need to work on and I will be working on messaging around chaos in the sanctuary. I'm generally fine with wiggling but various parishioners have noticed that the wiggling at times transforms into wild rumpus-ing a la *Where the Wild Things Are*. I'll be working on messaging around this.

Finally, the 11am is pretty close to where I think it needs to be as a baseline. The big hope I've had really as of last vestry was to hold the service to 60 minutes as a means of accommodating families with kids who might want to try something more mature than the 9:30am service while also not making it daunting for those who don't have the attention span. I spoke with Ian Burch (my old boss) about this to ask if my hopes were untenable and he noted that modern audiences just don't have the attention for a service longer than 60 minutes. We've been averaging 65, which I call a win.

Most importantly, I think we're achieving both better and better structure for the service without losing its identity. The last thing I want to do is alienate those who love this service dearly and have built a community around it. I do want to communicate what has been asked of me by a few people which is to encourage silence during some period ahead of the worship itself. I'm truly thinking about putting up a sign encouraging folks to be quite once the prelude starts. I just want to think about how to phrase and present such a thing as I don't want people's first impression of St. C.s' to be "shhhhh!!" My hope is that folks can immediately get a sense of welcome (even, aspirationally, home) the second they walk in. Part of welcome though is also welcoming those who may be seeking some silence.

Finally, youth in worship. I'm struggling to break this down as, if we had all the resources in the world, I'd really say that we have three young demographics at St. C.s': kids, tweens, and teens. The kids are very well provided for through Wiggle Worship (I'm really leaning more and more back towards embracing Wiggle Worship Eucharist as the official title of the service). The teens have their own community. St. C.s' café, their work with the WW kids, and their interpersonal relationships are STRONG. They made their own TikTok account recently. The biggest question for me, and the larger Episcopal Church for that matter, is the "tween question". That is, how do we make space for those between the ages of about 9-13.

I raise this as I'm considering options to play around with. Right now though, assuming we stick we a scheme of ages 0-12 wiggle worship, and 13 and up having their own space, I think a youth group periodically during the 11am service led but Chloe and/or others could meet the needs of teens. It could get them connected to worship as well by inviting them to participate in communion once we get there in the service.

TLDR (Too long, didn't read):

- 8am service is great, particularly with new faces and a baptism showing up
- 9:30 is spectacular every Sunday as we teach both space for wiggling and for reverence, though more work to be done on the reverence piece.
- 11am is pretty much where it needs to be structure wise, clocking in at about 65 minutes without losing its identity
- I'm working on making spiritual space for tweens and teens.

Formation Report

Formation has been... fine. For kids, I think it's pretty great. Wiggle Worship is effectively a combo worship and formation space. I'm experimenting with not only preaching the Gospel as a means of formation, but also segwaying into church history (Elizabethan compromise) and ritual (baptism, check out facebook and instagram for how amazing teaching this went on Sunday). The activities we do after WW have been so fun too, and I think can't but help grow the church when people get to see kids, parents, and the priest having fun on the lawn. These activities ALWAYS connect to some theme from the service.

Adult formation has caused more restlessness for me. We've had it most Sundays though attendance is generally between 1 and 3 people. This past Sunday we had five of us as I moved it out into that circle of chairs in hopes of making it more accessible and "chill". We talked baptism, the rapture, and more which was great. That said... and perhaps it is unnecessary right now... I've wanted a little *more*. I'm thrilled to hear that a couple of parishioners (Kurt Amolsch and I can't remember who else) have had a couple of evening zoom bible studies. I've been wondering about a zoom study offering and I think we'll try this in a couple of weeks.

St. C.'s Outreach

Outreach has felt, to me, spectacular largely because of the efforts of Emily and Paul. Emily spearheaded an effort now named St. C.s' Community Migrant Closet which has been both helpful and needed. While I get the sense that Emily can't help but dive in head first to help others in outreach, she is getting help. Parents, kids, and parishioners from St. C.s' and beyond have helped sort, gather, and distribute supplies

to the migrant population (looking at you Mark and, by extension, Eileen). I've been in contact also with various folks, most of whom I saw at an emergency Community of Congregations meeting. I was called this past week by the village who asked if we were willing to host someone at our church after the crisis declaration ends in December. I told her that we have no plans to do so and should not be expected to do so, though if you feel strongly about this, talk to me. I would be lying if I said saying "no" to this question provoked all of my guilt around wanting to do more but my understanding from most is that this is not the ministry St. C.'s should be focusing on. The closet has been GREAT.

Meanwhile, Paul organized a great event Dan Doody of St. Catherine's/St. Lucy's which drew our awareness back to the perennial issues of inequity between Oak Park and Austin. I met with the president of Housing Forward for coffee last week and he is aware of my desire to live into St. C.'s relationship with housing forward. Both the St.Catherine's/St.Lucy's ministry and Housing Forward (not to mention Beyond Hunger) are long-term partnerships I hope we can cultivate, especially because the first two are starting to build a new understanding of the work their doing.

Staffing

We hired Ann Vikstrom this week officially. She'll start on December 4th. Yay :D. I want to do something for Uziel as he has been a huge help. I don't know how we would have been able to get going what's already happening at St. C.'s without him.

What I'm working on

I've felt pulled in a number of different directions this last month, largely as the migrant ministry began and we figured out what we were doing there. In addition, I have been attending my Fresh Start meetings and going to various events such as the Episcopal Charities Gala or the aforementioned Community of Congregations meeting. I'm also still meeting one-on-one with parishioners from all three services and meeting with community members. I've also been putting efforts in to organizing around the website so that we have consistent, relatively, and accessible updates. I felt further invigorated in updating our website, newsletter, and social media presence after a presentation down at the cathedral indicating this is the best way to incorporate new people using digital communications in addition to our welcome procedure at the physical church. I really hope that by summer the website will be a place where anyone in the parish can check up on our vestry meeting materials, sermons, photos, and **most importantly** refer to the calendar to see what's happening at church and when.

Coming up, I really believe that my biggest focusses need to be

- 1) Annual Meeting (1/21?) and Vestry Nominations
- 2) Assisting Stewardship
- 3) Advent and Christmas
- 4) Preliminary planning for Lent and Holy Week
- 5) Training and orienting Ann

Current Calendar of Planned Events:

11/23 Sunday – Thanksgiving Day Morning Prayer service (9am zoom)

11/26 Sunday – Christ the King Sunday

12/8 or 12/1 Advent Craft Night (Friday, 5pm) to be discussed with vestry

12/17 Sunday – Lessons and Carols (5 pm)

12/21 Thursday – Blue Christmas (7pm)

12/24 Sunday– Christmas Eve 4pm family service 10:30pm midnight mass

12/25 – Christmas Day (Monday – How Many Services? Thinking 1-2) 10 am service, 10 am

01/07 – Epiphany Pageant with Baptism for Baptism of our Lord

Late Feb/ Early March Chili cook off