

The Sunday Morning Experience from *Fill All Things*

The Sunday morning climate needs to be adult, as well as Apostolic—an adult environment that includes children. This includes worship that expects adult participation and responsibility. It means facing the challenge of ending practices that reinforce a damaging dependency and establishing practices that call for competence and commitment. Teach people how to participate, how to put the Prayer Book down for most of the liturgy, and how to use their body in worship. Stop giving instructions about page numbers, posture, and the meaning of the reading or creed. Gently move away from allowing self-administration of the sacrament (self-intinction). When you are really feeling brave, move the announcements out of the Eucharist and to coffee hour. Allow the “town meeting” feeling to take place where it fits the occasion and can have its full expression while also preserving the grace of Liturgy. This is a shift from unhealthy dependency to the interplay of creative dependency and human responsibility.

Among the purposes of the Sunday Eucharist is formation. We undermine the formation process if we tilt things toward the comfort of visitors. Excessive anxiety about the relationship between worship and membership growth often ends up distorting both processes. Try approaching this as a polarity to manage. We want graceful, rich liturgy, *and* we want hospitality. We want people to experience a liturgy that is Apostolic with the power to form our hearts and minds *and* we want to make that liturgy adequately accessible. We get better solutions once we see it as a polarity in which we want to do both/*and*.

Attend to the hospitality need by making the information in the bulletin easy to follow. Have statements in the bulletin about how visitors might want to allow themselves to be carried by the congregation in the liturgy and about how to receive communion. Instruct members about sensitivity to the needs of visitors. Show them how to notice the signals from people about being willing to receive assistance. Some are willing to receive a Hymnal open to the hymn being sung; others would rather be left alone. Find ways to nudge visitors toward coffee hour and make sure they are neither overwhelmed nor abandoned once there.

Another part of what creates the dynamic is what Kilmer Myers called “the climate of acceptance which is engendered by those who have been baptized and confirmed in the Catholic faith.” People are accepted as they present themselves. You come as extravert or introvert, as gay or straight, as single or married and we exchange the Peace with you. You come with whatever maturity of faith and emotional life as circumstances, grace, and effort have brought you to, and we share communion and coffee with you. The starting place, and the ongoing ground, for life in the parish is that we are loved and accepted.

Along with the acceptance will come challenge. The invitation to become more of what you are is one reason why people need to have an apostolic experience on their first Sunday. The liturgy and the climate of acceptance may confront something in the person that suggests they have more potential than they yet see, that there is more glory in this person than they yet know. If on that first Sunday and the weeks that follow visitors are touched by God’s glory and beauty then some will run from it and others will be drawn into God’s enchantment, be delighted and make this their home. In the years that follow people will also experience the challenge dimension in other ways. There will be the disappointment of finding that the parish is not all love and magic, there will be tensions around inclusion and influence, and there will be personal confrontations. In each, the person will advance in faith or retreat for the time being.