



## **The Power of Small Churches**

### **The Small Church as Icon**

Jen Fulton

“It was not because you were more in numbers than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you – for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors.” (Deuteronomy 7:7-8a, NRSV)

“God wasn’t attracted to you and didn’t choose you because you were big and important – the fact is, there was almost nothing to you. He did it out of sheer love, keeping the promise he made to your ancestors.” (Deuteronomy 7:7-8a, The Message)

There’s some important ecclesiological and congregational counterculture embedded in the story of the Exodus. Even at the time, it seems, the numbers mattered. Being big and important mattered. But God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, tells the people that in his economy, the numbers do not matter. Being big and important do not matter. Faithfulness matters. Above all, love matters.

Many generations later, a man named Jesus would go out into the world and call together a band of followers. The idea that there were only twelve men is false. The Twelve were important, but Jesus’ disciples were more than that and included women as well. But still, none of the Gospels refer to Jesus’ mega-movement. Beyond the Twelve, the numbers did not matter, nor did the size or importance of this band of followers. Faithfulness mattered. And above all, love mattered.

We live and move and have our being in a world in which we are told that the numbers, our size, our importance, do matter. Parishes track their numbers in multiple ways – in budgets, parish registers, church management software, programs, parochial reports. We hear, often, about how our numbers are down, about our decline and eventual death. “Grow or die,” we are told. The status of a priest is measured against the size of her parish. I hear often that bishops need to start doing their job by closing the doors of their smaller churches.

Lord have mercy upon us.

### **The holiness of small congregations**

Life and ministry in a small, family-sized congregation looks different than it does in a larger one. But difference is not bad. As long as a small congregation is healthy and strong, as long as it lives in a spirit of abundance rather than scarcity, small congregations occupy a vital place in our Church and in our world. We can talk about that in terms of the unique strengths of strong, healthy, small congregations:

We don't have the numbers to be missionally scattered. Out of necessity, we have to identify our one, God-given mission and do that well.

We are relational in nature. Everyone knows everyone, and so we live in Beloved Community, knowing and praying and caring for one another with a relational depth that is truly holy.

We live in a constant state of hope and trust that God will sustain us, regardless of our numbers. We know humility, because we have never been important in the grand scheme of this world. We are seldom noticed, we don't make headlines and people don't know our names or where we are located. Priests in small parishes usually are not invited into the big conversations. But we're not in it for that. We're in it because we're disciples of Christ.

Those qualities are all important, and they speak to the holiness of small congregations. But there's one more reason small congregations are essential to the Church today – we are icons of Godly counter-culturalism.

### **Defying the culture**

American and global culture tell us that the numbers are everything, that size and importance are everything. We defy that. And not only do we defy it, but we proclaim that God does, as well. Our existence is needed because the Church and the world need to see that one's worth is not wrapped up in numbers or importance. One's worth comes from God. Full stop. Our existence is needed because the Church and the world need to see that in God's economy, numbers and size and importance do not matter. What does?

We already know.

Faithfulness matters. Small parishes trust that God is faithful to us. And through our struggles to remain solvent, to remain relevant, to remain missional in spite of our numbers, we live in faithfulness to God and to the Kingdom.

But that's not all...

Above all, love matters.

Small parishes stand in witness to the fact that in God's economy, love matters above all else. In a world hungry for money and power, in which people strive for followers and likes, we stand in witness to the fact that above all, love matters. If we but love, we are doing God's work. The Church and the world need to see more of that. Our communities need to see more of that. We all need to see that God does not love us because of our numbers, our size or our importance. God loves us because we *are*. And we are called to do the same.

How counter-cultural is that?

And small congregations? We are icons of that Godly counter-culturalism. We point not to ourselves, but to God's economy, to God's faithfulness, to God's love.

And therein lies our strength. Icons are in or out of favor depending on your community. But the world needs more living, breathing icons. We need more people, things and institutions that point toward God. And the small parish, at its best, does that.

I am a priest in a small parish. I do not strive to make us big. I do not strive to make us well-known in the world. I encourage my congregation to be a people that when others see us, they see God at work in their lives. I strive to make us a living, breathing icon. Our very nature, our size, our numbers, our greatness make that possible. God does the rest.

*The Rev. Jen Fulton has been the priest-in-charge of St. John of the Cross Episcopal Church in Bristol, Indiana, for nearly seven years. By the numbers, the parish has an ASA of 47 and a deficit budget of \$93k. By importance – well, most people don't know where Bristol is. St. John of the Cross is a part of the small and under-resourced Episcopal Diocese of Northern Indiana, where Jen was ordained one week before stepping into her current call. If you look beyond the numbers, both the parish and diocese are vibrant and missional and, she believes, serve as icons to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. Jen senses that she is called to small-parish ministry and strongly believes that small parishes are vital parts of the Church. She is married to Brad Fulton, and they have two children, Ben and Leta. They also have a dog (Shannon), a guinea pig (Acorn) and a bearded dragon (Rocky).*

#### Resources:

- [Small Church, Big Impact](#) by Nancy Davidge as told by Edgar Gutierrez-Duarte, Vestry Papers, July 2015
- [Feeding your soul in the small church](#), by Kevin Spears, Vestry Papers, September 2009
- [Ups and downs of small church ministry](#) by Tim Schenck, Vestry Papers, September 2009
- [Small Church Feeds Big Athletes](#), by Melodie Woerman, an ECF Vital Practices blog, April 4, 2014

#### **One Body, Many Caring Hearts**

Tricia Jones

*Pastoral care is provided when a faithful person is truly present in a listening, compassionate, non-controlling manner to an individual or group for the purpose of consciously or unconsciously representing God to them and seeking to respond to their spiritual needs. – [Community of Hope International](#)*

We have a priest, why do we need lay pastoral caregivers?

Pastoral care is an important responsibility, and the ordained usually receive training in providing it. Many clergy have spiritual gifts that propel them to excel in pastoral care, but it may not be the strongest gift for others. No matter what their gifts and skills, all ordained ministers have experiences where a parishioner's needs weren't met or fell completely through the cracks. In smaller churches especially, where there is but one priest, sometimes there just isn't enough pastor to go around. The growth and faithfulness of the church today "calls for a renewed empowering of the Holy Spirit, guided by spiritually sensitive leaders, grounded in Biblical theology and solid education. We must train lay people to communicate the truth of the Gospel...with power and understanding."<sup>[1]</sup> Thanks be to God, this is actually the most ancient and authentic way for the church to minister. But over the

centuries the idea that “everyone is a minister by virtue of their baptism” became the guarded domain of the professional pastor.

Properly trained lay pastoral caregivers bring with them the resources, wisdom and authenticity of the Christian life.

### **St. Francis by the Lake meets Community of Hope**

St. Francis by the Lake is an Episcopal Church in Canyon Lake, Texas, with an average Sunday attendance of about 100 and one priest. Primarily of “retirement plus” age, we are very hospitable and relational. Seven years ago, the rector and a core team recognized there were more pastoral care concerns than one person could attend to with timeliness and regularity. They also recognized that many parishioners had caring hearts and the spiritual gifts of mercy, service, encouragement, generosity, prayer, wisdom and faith. What they needed was formation.

That need was answered when St. Francis was introduced to Community of Hope International (COHI), a nonprofit founded in 1994 in Houston, Texas, to train lay people to serve as pastoral caregivers. There are about 100 centers across the U.S. and one in Malawi, Africa. The foundation of COHI is St. Benedict’s belief that all are called to love God and love each other in community. Its mission is “creating communities steeped in Benedictine spirituality to serve others through compassionate listening.” COHI uses three paths to create and sustain communities: training, service and growing the spiritually of its participants within a nurturing community.

COHI training consists of 14 modules, ideally completed over 14 weeks. It encompasses active listening, thoughtful talk, empathy, trust, confidentiality, boundaries, debriefing/accountability, understanding systems, grief and loss, senior care and caregiver care. What differentiates COHI from other resources is the undergirding focus on Benedictine spirituality which focuses on pastoral identity, prayer, silence and the discovery of spiritual gifts and vocations.

Living in community is hard. Caregiving is draining. Without continuing nurture, there is burn-out. COHI provides ongoing support for lay caregivers at the local level through monthly “Circle of Care” gatherings, quarterly regional gatherings and an annual conference for all COHI members.

St. Francis took the steps to become a COHI center late in 2014, and it has become one of the strongest ministries of the parish. In six years, St. Francis has offered three classes and trained thirty caregivers. We presently have 19 active caregivers who use their spiritual gifts in meeting the emotional and spiritual needs of our parish and community. The parish care list is constantly in motion, but at this writing, we have 48 care receivers on our list for critical and ongoing contact ranging from once a week to once a month.

St. Francis has a broad definition of pastoral care and ministry. Pastoral care is about relationships, seeing and serving Christ in others. Pastoral care is God’s love in action. Any interaction where one is present and attentive to other’s needs is a pastoral moment.

### **Listening with the ear of our hearts**

Lay caregivers strive “to listen and attend with the ear of our hearts”<sup>[2]</sup> to the calling of the Holy Spirit, surrendering ourselves and responding in obedience. This sometimes stretches us to grow beyond our

comfort zone. Praying and trusting in the Holy Spirit to equip us for situations is often rewarded with the privilege of being present with another who feels safe enough to trust us with their deepest fears, suffering, pain and burdens.

The lay caregivers at St. Francis by the Lake participate in ministries like bringing eucharist to the homebound, visiting sick and lonely persons in various settings (before COVID-19), being present with those who are mourning and praying with and for others. Since COVID-19, in-person visits are restricted, but nevertheless, we are present with others as we make telephone calls, write notes, make and deliver prayer shawls, do drive-by porch visits, deliver meals and groceries and provide transportation for medical appointments. St. Francis is blessed to have caregivers who are active in food pantries, resource centers, homelessness ministries, veterans' support, animal support, world missions and more. These intimate encounters between the lay care givers and care receivers create friendships and strengthen our parish community. They grow our prayer lives and equip us to be bold in sharing our Christian gifts, faith and experience.

The ongoing strength and backbone of the St. Francis Community of Hope is the monthly Circle of Care gatherings where we worship, share, debrief, learn and pray. The emotional and spiritual nourishment received at these gatherings prepares us for ministry.

Good and frequent communication between the COHI leadership and the ordained leadership is imperative. It gives everyone the assurance and peace of mind that parishioners are receiving sensitive, appropriate and regular attention by well-trained lay pastoral caregivers. It also provides the necessary oversight and deeper assistance when needed.

That's how we've harnessed the power of many hearts to care for Christ's Body. That's how we've become a community that ministers.

*Tricia Jones is an active member of St. Francis by the Lake Episcopal Church in Canyon Lake, Texas. She is passionate about Community of Hope (COH), a lay pastoral care ministry that began at the parish six years ago. Through COH, Tricia serves her parish as a lay pastoral caregiver, co-facilitator and co-trainer. She serves as a regional representative to the Board of COH International for COH centers in the Texas hill country and gulf coast.*

To learn more about Community of Hope International, [visit their website](#).

#### **Resources:**

- [Pastoring In a Pandemic](#), by Angelo Wildgoose, Vestry Papers, January 2021
- [Dealing with Loss and Grief in the Midst of a Pandemic](#), an ECF webinar presented by Lynn Ronaldi, Laura Masterson and Rebecca Roesch December 2, 2020
- [Ministering From an Empty Cup: A Survey of Faith Formation Professionals and Volunteers - Part 2](#), by Patrick Kangrga, an ECF Vital Practices blog, July 21, 2020
- [Every Member is a Minister](#), by Greg Syler, an ECF Vital Practices blog, February 11, 2019

#### **Pandemic Learnings**

Audra Abt

The global pandemic changed many things for us at Holy Spirit in Greensboro, North Carolina, but it only strengthened our relationships. While, like so many congregations, we decided to stop gathering for worship at our church (a small, one-story home) out of love and concern for each other, we learned a lot in this past year. We learned about the values that keep us together, the practices that sustain our sorrowing and weary souls and the risks worth taking to be with our neighbors, who are suffering and struggling the most in the pandemic.

### **Online worship with the emphasis on community**

Early conversations about how we would worship during the pandemic confirmed that above all, maintaining and deepening our relationships with God, each other and our neighbors in our multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual context were most important.

But how? With a very small worship space and lacking the monetary resources or tech know-how to stream services from the church building, how would our small congregation do this – especially when most of our members hadn't heard of Zoom prior to March 2020 and many did not have Internet at home.

We decided to prioritize our people over full Prayer Book liturgies or polished, pre-recorded services. Instead, we created a simplified prayer service over Zoom with a couple hymns and lectionary readings, a community response to the Gospel and an extended time of communal intercessory prayers. This allowed us many weeks to help members learn the basics of Zoom, yell at our computers in frustration (and each other, if we'd forgotten to mute first) and above all, to focus on relational and interactive practices.

What did we learn? Zoom allowed people in distant cities and countries to reconnect and participate meaningfully and regularly in worship. People appreciated the simplicity and learned to respond to each other and God's Word honestly, vulnerably and worshipfully in the virtual moment. When George Floyd was murdered, we prayed for the Holy Spirit to come among us and then responded to the Gospel by sharing and listening to the raw angers, fears, weariness and yearnings of our racially diverse congregation. By God's grace, Zoom worship became the place where we spoke the truth in new ways that may not have happened without the disruption in gathering in person.

### **When the digital divide pushes us beyond Zoom**

Not all connected to our ministry have Internet at home, and not all are comfortable with English. Prior to the pandemic, we worshipped with a bilingual eucharist each Sunday, but over Zoom it was just too hard. And most of our Spanish-dominant members weren't able to get on Zoom.

We had already committed to valuing every member and to finding ways to make worship accessible. So as more hospitable summer weather arrived, we decided to work with those families not participating over Zoom to develop protocols for pandemic-safe, front-yard eucharists. We would conduct *these* services mostly in Spanish.

Focusing on the leadership and creativity of our technologically marginalized members expanded our community's worship. Putting time and effort into strengthening these commitments prepared us to respond quickly when many in our Latin American and African-American community began contracting COVID and later when vaccine roll-out began. Our Latino/a and Black members are now neighborhood

ambassadors, helping family, friends and others get access to the vaccine and sharing new love and fellowship in the Holy Spirit in the process.

### **Relationships drive mission for health, healing and abundant life**

At Abundant Life Health and Healing Ministries, a new Episcopal community and collaboration housed at Holy Spirit Church, we had to rethink how we did everything. Our weekly community health ministry, which involves a sit-down family-style meal, a pantry and drop-in visits with a nurse, became ill-advised in the pandemic.

What seemed insurmountable – many people needing to quarantine and a small leadership team still in development – became a wonderful opportunity. We called on our friends, the relationships we'd been cultivating over a couple years with larger churches, food reclamation groups, caterers, local farmers, universities and neighbors, to get the volunteer and financial donations we'd need to expand the ministry.

Within a couple months of the pandemic's start, we were able to go from serving 40-50 people to 250 people a week by delivering prepared meals, groceries, diapers, feminine products and cleaning supplies to people's homes. Other churches took up collections for our discretionary fund so we could help families whose earners had lost work as the pandemic began with rent and utilities. In 2020 we shared almost \$40,000 to help people stay housed and safe, thanks to the relationships and trust we had built in the community.

### **When setbacks become opportunities and challenge produces growth**

It took a *lot* of energy to coordinate an ever-shifting team of volunteer drivers to bring life-giving supplies to families and neighborhoods, rather than only to people who could come to the church. When we trusted God's dream for our community's health and that Christ would be with us along the way, setbacks were turned into chances to reach out to someone else. Far from restricting our ministry, the challenge of a shifting volunteer base opened us up and expanded our community.

Neighborhood leaders helped reach families who'd lost work and shared food with them. Someone with a car would come to the church and take prepared boxes of supplies to their neighbors. Delivery time became prayer time as people asked for and offered intercessions across parking lots and through doorways. Food became the vehicle for people to care for each other spiritually and emotionally in a time when social mistrust was high.

Holy Spirit gathers as perhaps 20-25 souls on a Sunday morning Zoom call, and Abundant Life is a new community in formation, made up of four loosely-tied neighborhood cell groups of 10-15 people. Our community-based nurse and food security ministry, however, now tie together over 300 people spread across our city. Our vocation is not to be "small" or "large." Our vocation is be in relationships that change us and reconcile us to each other and to God. Our vocation is to seek and serve Christ in everyone we meet, to risk our comfort for the sake of freedom and life for others and to love each person in our growing network as the beloved, Spirit-gifted and dignified human being created by our loving God and invited into Christ's abundant life.

*The Rev. Audra Abt is a priest working in the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina. She received her BA in Environmental Studies at Oberlin College, where she spent a semester studying abroad in the Amazon,*

*living for a year in Capim Grosso, Bahia, Brazil, where she discerned a call to the priesthood. For the past four years she has served as an assistant rector at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Greensboro, North Carolina.*

*[Click here to watch a video interview about Audra's ECF Fellowship]*

*As an ECF Fellow, Audra will nurture a growing Christian base community movement (home and neighborhood-oriented worship, study and mission) started by Latino immigrants in Greensboro, North Carolina. This ministry is an example of how Episcopalians from Latin America are leading the church of the U.S. into a life of worship and service that reflects the communities described in the book of Acts. Such communities rely not on their privilege, wealth or buildings but on the Holy Spirit, neighborly hospitality, and the contribution of every single member. As missioner, Audra will make a space where Latinos and non-Latinos can collaborate and influence the wider Church's life with their faith.*

#### **Resources:**

- [Pandemic Learnings in Navajoland](#), by Leon Sampson and Gerlene Gordy, Vestry Papers, January 2021
- [How are congregations being affected by COVID-19?](#), an ECF webinar presented by David King and Manoj Zacharia, October 8, 2020
- [Mister Rogers Prompts Important Questions](#), by Sarah Cowan, an ECF Vital Practices blog, July 17, 2020
- [A Reflection on the Church in COVID-19](#) by MaryBeth Ingram, an ECF Vital Practices blog, May 19, 2020

#### **A Small Congregation Confronts COVID**

Gary Cox

Santa Teresa de Avila, where I serve as vicar, had a pre-pandemic average Sunday attendance of about 55 people, somewhat smaller than other Latino congregations in the city and Diocese of Chicago. Because we were a small congregation, some adaptations during the pandemic were easier for us, while others, made by larger congregations, were not feasible. Things that worked well include quickly returning to in-person worship, continuing online worship via Facebook Live and maintaining connection among our most active members. On the other hand, online giving, general finances and participation in online diocesan events proved difficult.

#### **Lockdown and reopening at Santa Teresa**

On March 15, a year ago, Santa Teresa held its last in-person Eucharist for three months. Later that week, Illinois's governor issued a stay-at-home order and our diocesan bishop issued a directive closing church buildings for worship and other activities. When the stay-at-home order began, I downloaded software to broadcast bilingual morning prayer from my laptop at home via Facebook, but I couldn't get it to work. While I had distributed copies of bilingual morning prayer and the Lent IV readings at our service on the 15th and posted them on our website, there was no live or recorded worship on March 22nd, the Fourth Sunday of Lent. It was a Refreshment Sunday in a new sense! With the help of tech-



savvy friends, I was able to transmit via Facebook Live the following Sunday from my cell phone, which we have been doing ever since with the help of our youth and young adults.

In late May, as COVID-19 cases diminished, state and diocesan authorities allowed partial reopening with health precautions. Our diocese provided guidelines and considerations for reopening, and on Pentecost, I had a conference call with the six members of the bishop's committee who work in building maintenance, a health clinic, construction and home improvement. They offered suggestions on how to apply the guidelines, and I submitted our reopening plan to the diocese.

On Trinity Sunday, I was able to broadcast Morning Prayer from the sanctuary, and the following Sunday we began outdoor eucharists in our small church yard, observing social distancing and capacity limits. Each week, volunteers moved the items needed for worship outdoors, and when we moved inside in October, they removed prayer books, taped off some pews and placed hand sanitizer and masks at the entrances. Our relatively small space made these tasks manageable. In the fall, when a member tested positive for the virus the day after attending Sunday worship, we were able to do contact tracing quickly because of our small numbers.

### **Some things are simpler in a small congregation**

When a *Chicago Tribune* reporter interviewed me in June, I realized that it was largely because we are a small Latino congregation and we were one of the first churches in our diocese to resume in-person worship. It was easier to get six bishop's committee members together on a phone call than to coordinate subcommittees and debate details with a large vestry. Unaccustomed to the emphasis on process and bylaws common in many Anglo Episcopal congregations, Latino immigrants often just want to accomplish the task at hand, and they did.

In addition to worship, education and outreach adaptations worked fairly well. While our building was closed, I delivered Bibles, reading and activity sheets, and Easter gift bags to parents for distribution to our first communion and confirmation classes. Every other week, I called students from my home to assess and guide their understanding. After partial reopening in June, I taught socially-distanced, masked confirmation and first solemn communion classes. Thanks to donations to my discretionary fund, I was also able to give grocery gift cards to families I knew were struggling.

### **When people know one another, it's easier to stay connected**

Perhaps the most important advantage for our small congregation has been the sense of connection. Not being able to physically meet or *convivir* – to gather, talk, celebrate, and enjoy being together – has been extremely difficult, especially in our Latino culture, where personal connection and the sense of family are significant values. However, it has been somewhat less isolating in our small congregation, because more people already know and communicate with each other.

Parishioners often called or messaged each other and me in the first months of the pandemic to ask how we were doing, and given the increase in anti-immigrant rhetoric in recent years, this connection and solidarity are even more important for immigrants and people of color. Latinos have had a higher risk of infection by COVID-19, and for much of last fall, our zip code had one of the highest positivity rates in the state. Many people continued to work at their factory, cleaning, construction and other manual labor jobs, essential industries that can't be done remotely. Some weren't eligible for government economic stimulus payments. Many had family members or neighbors who were hospitalized or who

died of COVID-19. Given these social and financial challenges, expressions of care and concern from one's faith community members are powerful.

Most adult members of our congregation grew up in the Roman Catholic Church with little contact with the priest. In describing what attracted them about the Episcopal Church, parishioners often mention personally knowing their priest, which is easier in small churches. I would prefer that people identify their relationship with Jesus Christ as the primary relationship that the congregation facilitates, rather than their relationship with me or each other. Nevertheless, these valued personal relationships demonstrate the power of small churches in people's lives.

### **Some things haven't worked, but grace abides**

On the other hand, being a small Latino congregation during the pandemic has been difficult, and some adaptations used by other congregations have not worked as well in our context. For example, we had begun to offer online giving before the pandemic, but few people use this option. Many parishioners use cash almost exclusively; some have no bank account or credit card; others are not comfortable giving electronically.

Also, we applied for a Payroll Protection Program loan, but most of my one-third time vicar compensation goes to my medical insurance, which though eligible, was excluded in our lender's calculations. We have a small budget and no members with significant knowledge in finance. With few family units, our income was limited even when everyone could attend in person.

We survive by the grace of God thanks to people's contributions, diocesan support and frugality. Other efforts that have not succeeded for us include an intercessory prayer group that I began while our buildings were closed and participation in diocesan Hispanic Ministry sponsored events via Zoom, such as a posada, Lenten retreat and Via Crucis.

Amidst the many challenges of the pandemic, I thank God for using our small Latino congregation to continue our witness to Christ in ways that we could not have anticipated (Ephesians 3:20-21).

*The Rev. Gary Cox is vicar of Santa Teresa de Avila Episcopal Church and pastor of Calvary Lutheran Church (ELCA) in Chicago. He also is an adjunct instructor in Adult Education with the College of Lake County and secretary of the board of Hopeful Beginnings of St. Mary's Services, an adoption and maternity counseling agency of Episcopal Charities and Community Services. He obtained the Master of Divinity from the Seminary of the Southwest in Austin and previously worked as a bilingual teacher and music teacher in the Chicago area and as a cellist with the National Symphony of Ecuador.*

### **Resources:**

- [Stewardship During the Pandemic](#), by Annette Buchanan, an ECF Vital Practices blog, October 12, 2020
- [Prayer and Action In a Pandemic](#), by Yesenia (Jessie) Alejandro, Vestry Papers, September 2020
- [Virtual Morning Prayer Builds EDS at Union's Community](#), by Mary Barber, Carl Adair, Joseph O'Rear, Nicole Hanley and Maryann Philbrook, an ECF Vital Practices blog, June 13, 2020
- [Evangelism, Connection, and Our New \(Virtual\) Reality](#), by Alan Bentrup, an ECF Vital Practices blog, April 9, 2020

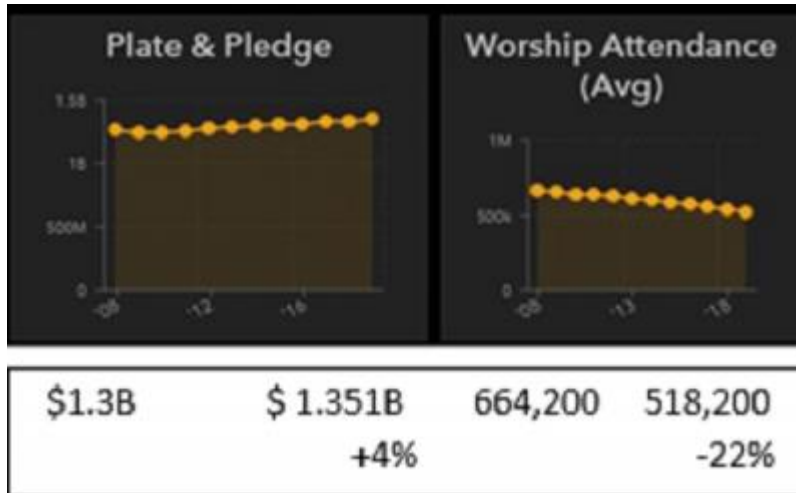
## Not Filled Seats but People Served

Ken Kroohs

Yes, average Sunday attendance (ASA) is falling rapidly in all denominations. Yes, that is not good! But – do you notice anything strange about the graphs below?

### NATIONAL EPISCOPAL CHURCH STATISTICS 2008-2019

(Please note: These include international Dioceses)



We should always first consider the reliability of the numbers. The financial information is the most accurate. Churches keep good information on their dollars!

The average Sunday attendance is probably reasonably accurate. Most churches make an effort to count every Sunday. The trend line is probably accurate since there are over 6,300 data points, even if the specific number may vary somewhat.

Yet they look *really* strange!

### Why don't plate, pledge and attendance all move in the same direction?

This has been bothering me for years. I love numbers, and when done honestly, they should present a consistent picture. These graphs do not appear to be consistent. Why would dollars collected be going up when the attendance keeps dropping? (Note: Membership numbers follow a pattern similar to attendance, so add nothing to this discussion.)

If Plate and Pledge (P&P) paralleled attendance, the total for 2019 would be \$1.01B, or 33 percent less than it is. To achieve the \$1.351B giving in 2018 with 2018 ASA would require donation per average Sunday attendance to jump approximately 33 percent. In my opinion, such a jump is unlikely.

Two explanations for the apparent discrepancy are frequently offered. First, the population is getting older, and older people tend to give more. That may be some of it, but during stewardship campaigns, I

regularly heard how retirees were on a fixed income. Some increase is probable but not the magnitude we are seeing.

Second, our older generation is passing on a great deal of wealth when they die. True. However, major bequests almost always are not to the general fund and so are not included in these numbers. In my experience, lesser bequests to the general fund seldom made up even two or three years of lost pledge income from the person who made the bequest.

I believe it would be reasonable to expect all the data patterns to move in the same direction, *unless* there is a fourth data set — average church attendance patterns — that we are not looking at. Data for this fourth graph is not very solid, so we are working on general patterns, and this analysis should be seen only as a hypothesis worth exploring.

### **Maybe it's about changing patterns of church attendance, rather than decline**

Most people agree that members now attend less often than they once did. I have seen various numbers, but for the sake of this analysis we will say the average person attended 2.1 times per month ten years ago (25 times per year), and now attends 1.7 times per month (20 times per year). On the surface that does not look like much, but it has a major impact. (Note: After lots of digging I have not found respectable research on 'times per month'. The numbers I am using are reasonable but only intended to present a theory, not a conclusion.)

A simple example using annual figures: Let's look at a church with an average Sunday attendance of 100. That works out to 5,200 'seats filled' during the year, which at 25 x per year, requires **208** people (probably not the same people each week). ( $5,200 / 25 = 208$ )

If that church follows the general patterns of a 22 percent drop in attendance, that would produce an average Sunday attendance of 78 which equals an annual attendance of 4,056.

If the average person attends 20 times per year, that means **202** persons attended. ( $4,056/20 = 202$ )  
Wait a minute — almost the same number of people are attending? Just less often?

True, the number could be somewhat different since we don't have solid, specific data. But the drop in frequency is well established so the pattern is probable.

Notice how this resolves the apparent discrepancy in the overall statistics. If a person changes from attending 25 times per year (2.1 times a month) to 20 times a year (1.7 per month) they probably will not drop their pledge by an equivalent amount. Increased giving by seniors, and others, could account for the overall increases.

For our national church the 664,200 ASA in 2008 equals 1,382,000 persons. The 518,200 ASA in 2018 equals 1,347,300 persons, a drop of "only" 2.5 percent. In support of this hypothesis is the fact that with the new estimate of persons attending, the average giving only has to increase about 6 percent, which is reasonable.

**Applying attendance patterns can produce a different picture**  
**EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF NORTH CAROLINA 2008-2018**



\$35.1M	\$43.5M	15,100	13,100
	+ 23.9%		-13.2%

If North Carolina Episcopalians followed the pattern of changing from 2.1 times per month (25/year) to 1.7 times per month (20/year), it would mean:

- In 2008, the 15,100 ‘filled seats’ each week translates to 785,200 per year which, at 25/year requires 31,408 people.
- In 2018 the 13,100 ‘filled seats’ translates to 681,200 per year which at 1.7 times per month requires 34,060 people — *an increase of 2,652 people or +8.4 percent.*

I know, people attend at various rates. The 15,100 ‘filled seats’ on an average Sunday likely consists of around 20,000 individuals.

I also know that 8.4 percent over ten years is not something to widely celebrate. During that same period the state’s population grew by approximately nine percent, so at best we almost kept pace. Assuming this analysis is correct, I believe its primary message is that we should spend time considering the implications.

#### People served versus ‘filled seats’ – ideas to consider

**1. Stay focused on our calling.** We are called to reach everyone, invite new people and share the Gospel. The numbers provide insight and information for conversation, but don’t let the numbers steer you away from our calling. Our challenge, our call, is to help disciples grow – not grow our ASA.

**2. What will post-COVID look like?** This analysis actually takes us in the direction of considering people served, even electronically, versus ‘filled seats’. COVID’s ‘silver lining’ is that it kicked us out of the tradition of providing services only at specific times and places, forcing us to make it possible for people to participate electronically on their own schedules. I suspect post-COVID attendance will be substantially below pre-COVID attendance, and not exclusively because of disinterest but because of habit changes. (Early information shows about a 40 percent drop in ASA in churches again meeting in person.) If a person finds watching the service on Sunday night or listening while commuting meets their spiritual needs, there will be less need to attend Sunday morning.

**3. What is a priority?** We need to keep in mind that every person, at every moment is doing what is their highest priority. They may wish they were playing golf, but they concluded that working is a higher priority. Therefore any reduction in involvement says another activity is a higher priority. What are the implications of that conclusion?

**4. Flexibility is key.** Our tradition of “if you want to worship with us you will come when we tell you and where we tell you” is not realistic if we want to reach people. One study I saw said 1/3 of working Americans now work on weekends at least occasionally. Plus, as the father of three soccer players I can witness to the priority challenges on Sunday mornings during the seasons! Another significant piece to consider is that a large percentage of the people working on weekends are working at low-income jobs. Since many of those are people of color, our tradition of insisting on Sunday worship may be excluding people. In what ways are we reimagining Sunday worship to exist outside of Sunday mornings? A suggestion I have is to begin counting attendance at non-Sunday services. If our evaluation, including attendance, focused more on non-Sunday services, I would expect changes that could incorporate more people.

Churches might find it helpful to deeply investigate the reasons for the reduction in attendance frequency. A nationally funded, professional study of 100 congregations is likely to find some useful patterns. That information might be used to help shape discipleship efforts as well as outreach to non-members.

The ASA plummet is important and says something – but maybe the message is more complicated than we thought.

*The Rev. Ken Kroohs is a retired third-career priest, with an MDiv from Duke University and an Anglican year at Virginia Theological Seminary. He began his professional life as a civil engineer and then a city planner. Those experiences shape his understanding of societal behavior patterns. Mr. Kroohs served two small churches in the Diocese of North Carolina, plus an intentional interim in another one. His three daughters, eight grandchildren, 90-year-old house and wife who loves HGTV – in addition to his assistance with churches seeking to grow – all keep him busy.*

#### **Resources:**

- [Beyond ASA](#), by Alan Bentrup, an ECF Vital Practices blog, February 26, 2019
- [Beyond Average Sunday Attendance \(ASA\)](#), by Tim Schenck, an ECF Vital Practices blog, October 18, 2013
- [Statistical Data on Episcopal Congregations](#), a tool by the Episcopal Church
- [Showing Up](#) by Richelle Thompson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, July 22, 2013

#### **Una pequeña feligresía enfrenta la COVID-19**

Gary Cox

Santa Teresa de Ávila, en la que sirvo como sacerdote, los domingos anteriores a la pandemia tenía un promedio de asistencia de unas 55 personas, una cifra algo menor que la de otras feligresías latinas en la ciudad y en la Diócesis de Chicago. Debido a que éramos una feligresía pequeña, algunas adaptaciones durante la pandemia fueron más fáciles para nosotros, mientras que para otras iglesias, con feligresías

de mayor tamaño, no eran factibles. Algunas cosas que funcionaron bien incluyen haber reanudado rápidamente al culto en persona, seguir ofreciendo culto en línea mediante Facebook Live y haber mantenido una conexión entre nuestros miembros más activos. Por el otro lado, las donaciones en línea, las finanzas en general y la participación en línea en eventos diocesanos demostraron ser difíciles.

### **Cierre y reapertura de Santa Teresa**

El 15 de marzo, hace un año, Santa Teresa celebró su última Eucaristía en persona por tres meses. Posteriormente esa semana, el gobernador de Illinois emitió una orden de permanecer en casa y nuestro obispo diocesano emitió una directiva de cierre de los edificios de las iglesias para el culto y otras actividades. Cuando comenzó la orden de permanecer en casa, descargué software para difundir la oración matutina bilingüe desde mi computadora portátil en casa mediante Facebook, pero no lo pude hacer funcionar. Si bien el 15 había distribuido copias bilingües de la oración matutina y de las lecturas en nuestro servicio religioso y las habíamos puesto en nuestro sitio web, no hubo culto en vivo ni grabado el 22 de marzo, el Cuarto Domingo de Cuaresma. ¡Había sido un Domingo de descanso en un nuevo sentido! Con la ayuda de amigos con conocimientos de tecnología, el próximo domingo pude transmitir por medio de Facebook Live desde mi teléfono celular, algo que hemos estado haciendo desde entonces con la ayuda de nuestros jóvenes y adultos jóvenes.

A fines de mayo, cuando los casos de la COVID-19 disminuyeron, las autoridades estatal y diocesana permitieron una reapertura parcial con precauciones de salud. Nuestra diócesis proporcionó directrices y consideraciones para la reapertura, y en Pentecostés tuve una llamada de conferencia con seis miembros del Comité del Obispo que trabajan en el mantenimiento de edificios, una clínica de salud y en el mejoramiento de viviendas. Ellos ofrecieron sugerencias sobre cómo aplicar las directrices y presenté nuestro plan de reapertura a la diócesis.

El Domingo de la Trinidad, pude difundir la Oración Matutina desde el santuario, y el domingo siguiente iniciamos eucaristías al aire libre en nuestro pequeño patio de la iglesia, observando el distanciamiento social y los límites de capacidad. Todas las semanas, voluntarios movieron los artículos necesarios para el culto al aire libre y cuando nos mudamos adentro en octubre, quitaron los libros de oración, cerraron con cinta algunos de los bancos y pusieron desinfectante de manos y mascarillas en las entradas. Nuestro espacio relativamente pequeño hizo que estas tareas fueran manejables. En el otoño, cuando uno de nuestros miembros dio positivo en la prueba del virus al día siguiente de haber asistido al culto dominical, pudimos contactar seguimiento rápidamente gracias a nuestros números pequeños.

### **Algunas cosas son más sencillas en una feligresía pequeña**

Cuando un periodista del diario *Chicago Tribune* me entrevistó en julio, me di cuenta de que se trataba principalmente de que éramos una feligresía latina pequeña y una de las primeras iglesias de nuestra diócesis en reanudar el culto en persona. Fue más fácil obtener seis miembros del Comité del Obispo juntos en una llamada telefónica que coordinar subcomités y debatir detalles con juntas parroquiales grandes. Por no estar familiarizados con el énfasis en el proceso y los estatutos comunes en muchas feligresías episcopales *anglo*, los inmigrantes latinos a menudo querían simplemente realizar el trabajo necesario y lo hacían.

Además del culto, las adaptaciones de culto, educación y extensión funcionaron bastante bien. Mientras que nuestro edificio estuvo cerrado, distribuí Biblias, hojas de lecturas y actividades, y bolsas de regalitos de Pascua para que los padres los distribuyeran a nuestras clases de primera comunión y

confirmación. Cada dos semanas, llamaba a los estudiantes desde mi hogar para evaluar y orientar su comprensión. Después de la reapertura, en junio, enseñé clases de confirmación con distanciamiento social y mascarillas, así como las primeras clases solemnes de comunión. Gracias a las donaciones a mi fondo discrecional, también pude repartir tarjetas de regalo para la compra de alimentos a familias que estaban luchando.

### **Cuando la gente se conoce entre sí, es más fácil permanecer conectada**

Tal vez la ventaja más importante de nuestra pequeña feligresía ha sido el sentido de conexión. No poder reunirnos físicamente o convivir -- para reunirnos, conversar, celebrar y disfrutar estar juntos --, ha sido sumamente difícil, especialmente para nuestra cultura latina, en la que la conexión personal y el sentido de familia son valores significativos. Sin embargo, ha sido un poco menos aislante en nuestra pequeña feligresía, porque más gente ya se conoce y se comunica entre sí.

Los feligreses a menudo se llamaban por teléfono o se enviaban mensajes en los primeros meses de la pandemia para preguntarse cómo les estaba yendo, y dado el incremento de la retórica antiinmigratoria en años recientes, esta conexión y solidaridad son todavía más importantes para los inmigrantes y la gente de color. Los latinos tienen un riesgo mayor de infección por la COVID-19, y por una gran parte del otoño pasado nuestro código postal tuvo uno de los índices de incidencia más elevados del estado. Mucha gente siguió trabajando en sus fábricas, limpieza, construcción y otros trabajos manuales, industrias esenciales que no se pueden hacer remotamente. Algunos de ellos no cumplían con los requisitos para recibir pagos del estímulo económico del gobierno. Muchos tenían miembros de sus familias o vecinos hospitalizados o que había fallecido a causa de la COVID-19. En medio de estos desafíos sociales y financieros, las expresiones de cuidados y preocupación de los miembros de la comunidad de fe son poderosas.

La mayoría de los miembros adultos de nuestra feligresía se criaron en la Iglesia Católica Romana, con poco contacto con el sacerdote. Cuando describen qué fue lo que los atrajo a la Iglesia Episcopal, los feligreses a menudo mencionan conocer personalmente a su sacerdote, algo que es más fácil en iglesias pequeñas. Yo preferiría que la gente identificara su relación con Jesucristo como la relación primaria que facilita la feligresía, en lugar de su relación conmigo o entre sí. No obstante, estas valoradas relaciones personales demuestran el poder de las iglesias pequeñas en las vidas de las personas.

### **Algunas cosas no funcionaron, pero la gracia permanece**

Por el otro lado, ser una feligresía pequeña durante la pandemia ha sido difícil y algunas adaptaciones empleadas por otras feligresías no funcionaron tan bien en nuestro contexto. Por ejemplo, habíamos empezado las donaciones en línea antes de la pandemia, pero pocas personas emplearon esa opción. Muchos feligreses donan casi exclusivamente en dinero en efectivo, algunos de ellos no tienen cuentas bancarias ni tarjetas de crédito, y otros no se sienten cómodos realizando donaciones electrónicamente. Además, solicitamos un préstamo del Programa de Protección de la Nómina de Pagos, pero la mayor parte de mi paquete salarial de sacerdote (a un tercio de tiempo) pasa a mi seguro médico, que si bien cumplía con los requisitos, había quedado excluido de los cálculos de nuestro prestamista. Tenemos un presupuesto pequeño y no tenemos ningún miembro con conocimientos significativos de finanzas. Con pocas unidades familiares, nuestro ingreso era limitado, incluso cuando todos podían asistir en persona. Sobrevivimos por la gracia de Dios gracias a las contribuciones de la gente, el apoyo de la diócesis y la frugalidad. Otros esfuerzos que no han tenido éxito para nosotros incluyen un grupo de oración



intercesora que inicié cuando nuestros edificios estaban cerrados y la participación en eventos por Zoom patrocinados por el Ministerio Hispano Diocesano, como las posadas, el Retiro Cuaresmal y el Vía Crucis. Entre los muchos desafíos de la pandemia, agradezco a Dios por haber usado nuestra pequeña feligresía latina para continuar nuestro testimonio de Cristo de maneras que no podríamos haber anticipado (Efesios 3:20-21).

*El Rev. Gary Cox es sacerdote en la Iglesia Episcopal Santa Teresa de Ávila y pastor de la Iglesia Luterana Calvary en Chicago. También es instructor adjunto de Educación de Adultos en la Universidad de Lake Country y secretario de la junta directiva de Hopeful Beginnings de St. Mary's Services, una agencia de asesoramiento sobre adopción y maternidad de Episcopal Charities and Community Services. Obtuvo su maestría en Teología del Seminary of the Southwest en Austin y anteriormente trabajó como maestro bilingüe y profesor de música en la zona de Chicago, así como violoncelista en la Sinfónica Nacional de Ecuador.*

#### **Recursos:**

- [Oración y acción en una pandemia](#) por Yesenia (Jessie) Alejandro, Vestry Papers, septiembre 2020
- [El Ministerio con trabajadores agrícolas – el Discipulado en acción](#) por Juan Carabaña, Vestry Papers, mayo 2017
- [La Importancia de Ofrecer Servicios de Capellanía en el Idioma Natal de los Pacientes Hospitalizados](#) por Ema Rosero-Nordalm un blog de ECF Vital Practices, 1 marzo 2013
- [El cuidado y la alimentación de los sacerdotes](#), por Richelle Thompson, un blog de ECF Vital Practices, 31 enero 2011

#### **Beyond the Numbers**

Aisha Huertas

“A rose by any other name would smell as sweet,” rings in my head when I think of the institution that is the Church. It’s not because the Church is perfect or because we do not have serious work to do in areas such as racism, inclusivity and loving our neighbor, but because the Church, at any size and when it truly follows the Gospel, is the strongest force I’ve ever known. No matter the number of average Sunday attendees, big, small or somewhere in between, some of our most important measures of success as a Church should be:

- Are we feeding the hungry?
- Are we serving the poor?
- Are we looking out for the incarcerated?
- Are we resisting evil?
- Are we fighting for justice and dignity?

We’d be hard-pressed to find anyone disagreeing with the above. Yet somehow, we keep falling into our traditions of colonialism and capitalism. These traditions fool us into believing that bigger is better, that more money means more security and that more people in our pews (or watching us on Zoom) means we have reached the ultimate success.

## **Time to revisit our priorities and models**

In a world clamoring for change, acceptance and thinking outside the box, the Church must revisit its priorities and models. After all, 2019 parochial reports showed that in the Episcopal Church, the median Sunday attendance is 51, and 75 percent of our churches have an average Sunday attendance that is less than 100. Now that is not a criticism or data to support the thinking that we must do more to add people to our rolls. It's an invitation to dig deeper and to stop thinking only of the numbers.

In my role as Director of Engagement in the Diocese of Virginia, I work to uplift our congregations of color, as well as to engage all clergy and congregants in the work we vow to do in our Baptismal Covenant and in the Great Commission. In that role, I get to visit all our churches, both big and small, and I am always amazed by the work being done and especially by those considered small or mission congregations.

Consider Iglesia de San Gabriel in Leesburg, Virginia, a small, mission congregation in a wealthy county in the northern part of the Commonwealth. The outbreak of Covid-19 could have been disastrous for them, but due to the ingenuity of its clergy, the Rev. Daniel Rivera and the Rev. Deacon Holly Hanback, San Gabriel prospered. They received funding to help assist the community. They fed many families by delivering groceries, and they continued providing workshops on issues like Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and health information about Covid-19, as well as classes on family planning and reproductive health, catechism and Holy Zumba!

In Falls Church, Virginia, mission congregation Iglesia de Santa Maria also thrives. It holds a program every day. Whether it's Zumba, hosting a Russian language school, Bible study or cooking classes, it feeds the heart of its community. When repairs and upgrades for the property were needed, the congregants not only provided funds, but also manual labor. Their energy and passion for the work of Christ is shown in every way that is meaningful. Yet, they remain in a category that can make them seem less than they are.

This is creative, outside-the-box thinking and living in a spirit of abundance. While it is true that we must be strategic and fiscally responsible, we must also begin thinking of the Church with a spirit that sees abundance in every way. We have enough people to do good. We have enough money to do good. We have enough. As any of us who work for the church know, a church with more money does not necessarily result in a healthier church.

## **Jesus' work is not about numbers**

In more practical ways, small churches at times provide more leadership opportunities to those who could be easily marginalized, overlooked or seen as the "other": younger people, women, people of color, the differently abled, non-native English speakers.

We are at our best when we allow seats at the table for minorities, youth, non-hetero normal individuals and those with different cultures. Why? Because the Kingdom of God is a big, inclusive, beautiful world, enriched by the gifts and talents of all its people.

In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 18 verse 20, Jesus says, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them." This really isn't a verse about how many people are needed for Christ to be present, because we know that God is with the individual, as much as God is with the 5,000.

However, it is a verse that points to the legal Jewish tradition that requires the presence of two or three witnesses to hold someone accountable for their actions. How is this relative? Because as a Church, we must hold each other and the world accountable for times when we are distracted from the good deeds of Christ and his example. It doesn't take five hundred people, it just takes two or three. Just like a rose "by any other name would smell as sweet," a church that is doing God's work, at any size, is just as valuable as any other congregation.

I say this not to begin a competition, but to reassure you that God meets us where we are. That there is room for us all, and we all have a role to play in the life-changing work of Jesus.

Years ago, I was visiting with a new vicar and his vestry who were trying to grow a historic African American congregation in the poverty-stricken and gentrifying east side of Richmond, Virginia. Its average Sunday attendance was somewhere around 30, but they were shining in their community. Among their ministries, they ran an employment program, hosted neighborhood walks to meet and pray with the neighbors and learn about their needs, and they supported a couple educational institutions, to name just a few of their good deeds. There was a lot of anxiety from the vestry about finances and the number of people in the pews, but when I asked the vicar if his goal was to fill the pews or serve the community, he confidently said, "I want to serve the community." I smiled and encouraged them to find new ways to measure their success and to define "church members." And, so they did, and continue to do, still fitting in their small building for Sunday worship but much bigger than we could count in the impact they have within the community.

"Small churches are the most normative way Christians gather. Up to 90 percent of all churches are under 200, 80 percent under 100. And fully half the Christians in the world attend small churches."<sup>[1]</sup> This recipe has worked for 2,000 years, and while there is always room for growth, it would be less than faithful to question the collective work of countless small churches that together with countless big churches serve their siblings all over the world. Yes, small churches are just as important! Let's honor and recognize them.

*As the Minister for Missional Engagement for the Diocese of Virginia, **Aisha Huertas** oversees domestic and international missions, racial justice ministries, creation care and multicultural ministries. Through her consulting business, [Huertas Strategic Consulting](#), she teaches anti-racism and offers justice and equity workshops, as well as helping organizations address issues of racial equity. Before joining the diocesan staff, Aisha worked in communications for respected nonprofits like Donate Life America and the American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia.*

#### Resources:

- [Enough Love to Go Around](#) by Jimmy Bartz, Vestry Papers, September 2020
- [Beyond Average Sunday Attendance \(ASA\)](#) by Tim Schenck, an ECF Vital Practices blog, October 18, 2013
- [Small Church, Big Impact](#) by Nancy Davidge as told by Edgar Gutierrez-Duarte, Vestry Papers, July 2015
- [Prayer and Action In a Pandemic](#) by Yesenia (Jessie) Alejandro, Vestry Papers, September 2020

## Tension and Release in the Church

Robert Leopold

“Tension and release” is big in the art forms I connect with, in improvised music, roleplaying games, suspense cinema...and liturgy. Our liturgy is full of tension and release. Structurally, the *BCP 1979*’s Holy Eucharist is a series of frustrated approaches until the *sursum corda* establishes us in the “right” liturgical neighborhood for communion – or common union – with the Divine. This tension and release mirrors the “already, but not yet” nature of the Reign of God espoused by the Early Church.

The Netflix series *Stranger Things* pressed my buttons – nostalgia for my latch-key, Generation X upbringing; creepy supernatural setting; and tension and release. I especially identified with Lucas. Our Vietnam Veteran fathers gave us a complicated relationship with all things military, and while Lucas displays some real sensitivity when his friend goes missing, he is also the one to brandish the “wrist rocket.” This slingshot serves as a good metaphor for the tension and release of the series, but perhaps also for where we are being called right now.

Not to delve too deeply into the *Stranger Things* universe or 1980s Cold War factors that wrought havoc on a generation of children (me), I do want to lift before us the crises experienced by the children in that series. Their worlds were crumbling around them, institutions they trusted couldn’t help and few grownups believed them. Maybe I’m stretching this metaphor to its snapping point, but can we bring the Episcopal Church into this conversation?

We are also at a convergence of crises. I won’t try to explain this too much, but parts of our world seem to be crumbling around us; the institution we love doesn’t seem equipped to deal; and plenty of the experts entrusted to lead us seem to doubt that any of this is happening.

### **When what we’ve always done no longer works**

In my 41 years of formation in the Episcopal Church (and on the planet), I have seen our church and our world change. Change can be a scary word for Episcopalians. It’s like that old joke: “How many Episcopalians does it take to change a lightbulb?”

“Change?”

Sometimes we don’t like change, but if we think about anything we call a blessing in our lives, it is usually accompanied by change (a new relationship, a job, birth of a child, etc.). Even though change carries with it the possibility of blessing, we resist it. We like our tension and release carefully scripted, like the *ordo* of Holy Eucharist Rite II.

And then COVID happened. Who could have scripted that?

I live in a part of the country that has been relatively insulated from COVID. I am grateful that our bishop has been protective of her congregations and parishioners. I am also aware that this virus has disproportionately affected people who don’t look like me (age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, etc.). In my context, the changes that came with COVID have exposed both my privilege and the way I am unprepared to lead when things change.

When I am at my best, I am grateful to God for gently sharing these things with me. I know institutions change, but when I was in seminary (more than fifteen years ago), I was trained to lead an Episcopal Church that hasn't existed for 50 years or so. Sure, there are some hangers-on, but by-in-large, the 21st century Episcopal Church is quite different from the one I was trained to lead.

We don't have to look too hard at the numbers to realize that we are in trouble if we expect things to be done the way we've always done them. Of all of the mainline denominations: we are the oldest (mean *and* mode), we have the lowest percentage of members with children under 18 and (while this veers from data to personal experience as someone who grew up in the Episcopal Church) our retention rate for children is pretty rank.

Feeling the tension yet?

### **Beyond metrics**

A friend of mine, Steve Mullaney, serves as the campus minister at the University of Minnesota. He is a lay person and works with young adults, which gives him freedom I don't have as a parish priest. When he and I talk to folks about the changing Church, I have been blessed to hear him ask, "Do we want to be the last Episcopalians to do church this way? Do we want to be the last Episcopalians?"

Buried in that is a place where I find release from all this tension. If we measure ourselves by the old metrics we are failing, but who said we have to use those metrics? If we are in the relationship business – and I think we are – I take comfort in the fact that relationships can't easily be measured. For that matter, what metric should we use for love?

This is the gift of COVID. The things that many of us have suspected have been laid bare for us all to see. More than that, we have had (and are still having) the opportunity to question the way we have always done it, because for broad parts of the Episcopal Church, we haven't been able to do or be Church in ways we have before.

I close by returning to Lucas's "wrist rocket." Setting aside the slingshot as a weapon (David fells Goliath with something similar), it is a pretty good metaphor for our times. Tension? You bet. Release? Sure. And if we are intentional about our time now, we might be able to control the speed, trajectory and distance we can go when this pandemic is over.

We are being called to wade into the tension of our times. Ask tough questions. Speak truths we've been afraid to utter. Listen to others. We go farther together. Be scrappy. Lift up Jesus in what we do. What are we afraid of? Change brings the possibility of blessing – tension yields release – and that *is* Good News.

*The Rev. Dr. Robert K. Leopold was instrumental in helping start the neo-Abbey movement in the Episcopal Church, serving as founding priest of Southside Abbey in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and also building a network of missional leaders who have helped start or steer other missional expressions around the country. A 2015 ECF Fellow, Bob currently serves as Priest-in-Charge at St. Andrew's in Colchester, Vermont, and Interim Rector at Christ Church in Montpelier, Vermont. He teaches a course each fall through the Center for Anglican Learning and Leadership (CALL) at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific (CDSPP).*

## Resources:

- [New Wine in an Old Wineskin](#) by Anna Sutterisch, Vestry Papers, March 2021
- [An Idea to Invite Change](#), by Linda Buskirk, an ECF Vital Practices blog, December 10, 2019
- [Take a Chance: This is Opportunity Time!](#) by Bob Leopold, an ECF Vital Practices blog, April 30, 2015
- [Digital Ministry Is Here to Stay](#) by Callie Swanlund and Jeremy Tackett, Vestry Papers, March 2021

## **Showing Up at the Holy Borders**

Ellen and Kurt Huber

The Cheyenne River Episcopal Mission in South Dakota is made up of eleven congregations in the Cheyenne River Lakota Reservation (just south of our neighbor, Standing Rock Reservation). Cheyenne River is about the size of the state of Connecticut. We arrived at the mission on September 1, 2020 and are assisted by Deacon Iva Traversie, a local tribal member. Our church membership includes four bands of the Lakota (Minnicoujou, Itazipco, Siha Sapa and Oohenumpa) spread throughout the reservation. The challenges of arriving during this pandemic are manifold, especially as our churches follow the careful COVID-19 guidelines of the Tribal Council, which until just recently, prohibited in-person services or outreach, such as providing food or other necessities, with the exception of Christmas gifts for the children. Additionally, some of the donations normally directed here have come to a halt as churches outside of the reservations struggle in their own ways.

So where does that leave the new clergy? How do we get to know the people we have come here to serve?

### **Meeting the community in times of sorrow**

We met them primarily through funerals. And there are endless funerals, many of which, including our very first, have been COVID-related. We have also buried murder victims, accident victims, suicides, death due to the elements (freezing) and of course, natural causes. Funerals are also pandemic-regulated and have gone from two-day overnight events on average to one-day events and some to grave-side only. The funerals are posted by COVID regulation as restricted to family, but here the word family is understood beautifully to encompass a wide range of connections. We would like to share one of these funerals with you as a way for you to learn more about the people here and to see how God is intimately present in their lives.

**Ellen:** The call came at ten on a Monday morning, less than two months after our arrival. It was late October and minus eight degrees with a foot of snow on the ground. It was Charlie Rook, the director of Rook's Funeral Home, calling. I hadn't yet met him, but I had done funerals there already. He said they had a funeral planned but the family couldn't reach the minister. Could I come and say a few prayers? "Of course," I said. "Okay, it's at 10:30 – you want me there in half an hour?"

"Yes." He said, and he began giving me two names.

"Wait," I said, "there are two?"

“No,” he said, “these are the parents. It’s a miscarriage.”

I flew into the shower. Kurt was on a Zoom call, but he grabbed the prayer book for me along with a funeral service for a child. And of course, my coffee.

### **Even at the grave, we make our song**

When I arrived at 10:30, I could hear the drums from inside the funeral home. I walked in, and Charlie greeted me with a hearty, “Welcome to South Dakota Mother Ellen!” In the large spacious room was a sweet family – Mom, Dad, kids, babies, some relatives and the drum circle in the back corner. I went up to the parents and introduced myself. Mom and Dad were crying, and the children were silent. I introduced myself to the kids, too, then went and sat down to quickly prepare the prayers and readings I would use. Suddenly the drumming stopped, so I knew I had to start, ready or not. I stood up and looked at this beautiful family and began:

*I just got word a half hour ago, so I haven’t had time to get to know you, but when I am at a loss for words, I look outside at the created world.*

*The world that God has made is full of answers for us, full of lessons, full of healing. When we look outside we see a world covered in snow. And we might think to ourselves – everything looks dead. The trees are dead, the flowers, everything. It is cold and nothing is alive. But we know that isn’t true, not really. Underneath the snow the seeds are waiting to grow in the spring, the animals are hibernating all snug in their dens. There is a lot of life under there, we just can’t see it.*

*Even though you can’t hold him, see him and run and play with him, this child will always be with you. His love is still here. When he was in Mommy’s tummy, he could hear you laughing and playing and all the loving things you said to him. He is a part of you and always will be. When you go sledding or playing or running, he will be with you. It’s okay to be sad or mad – you might even want to stomp your feet in anger. But that will not take away his love for you and your love for him.*

*Do not try to bury your sadness. It will visit you often, even days, weeks and years from now. Pay attention to it, and when you are sad, turn to each other, hug each other. St. Paul tells us that faith, hope and love abide, and the greatest of these is love. His love for you will never die, and neither will your love for him. He will always be a part of your family.*

We sang “Amazing Grace” together and took our places at the tiny casket. We walked him out, some carrying his casket, others carrying little stuffed animals or children on hips. The drums and Lakota singing supported our steps as we made our way to the cars and headed out to the cemetery. Under all the snow we couldn’t find the grave at first, but the Dad knew. He drove his truck in circles in the snow making a spot for everyone. We got out and we watched as he jumped into the empty little grave and started shoveling out the snow. The drummers stood with their drum at the ready. We pulled out the little pine wooden box that the casket goes into, placing it near the grave, and then brought out his tiny casket. The children ran and played as the mothers chided them for getting all covered in snow. I fished out a kid’s hat from my car and plunked it on a hatless child. They pulled out a fleece blanket with

a beautiful Native print from the hearse, and the Mom placed it around the casket, tearfully wrapping her baby up for the first and last time.

I took my place by the grave for the committal. Making the sign of the cross on the warm fleece with loose dirt from the grave, the words “earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust” never felt more raw. Following the prayer, the funeral director carefully handed the tiny casket, wrapped in the fleece blanket, to the Dad as the drummers took up their beautiful chorus. The director then helped the parents place the casket into the pine box and settle the lid on top, handing the nails and hammer to the Dad. As he knelt down in the snow, the Dad’s frozen tattooed hands struggled to carefully nail the lid on top as his tears fell onto the pine box.

Standing there in the freezing cold, watching this young father nail the lid on his infant son’s coffin, we all stood on the holy border between life and death and bore silent witness to the greatest pain a parent can endure. Dad then carefully lowered himself back into the grave, as the director handed his little one to him. And then the father and family began to shovel dirt into the grave. When it was complete, two of the older siblings placed stuffed animals on top of the grave as Mom slid his marker into the soft dirt. The little one was in his resting place, surrounded by the love of his family, the winter snow and the beat of the drums of his ancestors, into whose arms he has been received.

*The Rev. Ellen B. Huber and the Rev. Kurt J. Huber are co-priests-in-charge of the Cheyenne River Episcopal Mission in the Cheyenne River Lakota (Sioux) Reservation.*

#### **Resources:**

- [Pandemic Learnings in Navajoland](#) by Leon Sampson and Gerlene Gordy, Vestry Papers, January 2021
- [Ministering From an Empty Cup: A Survey of Faith Formation Professionals and Volunteers - Part 2](#) by Patrick Kangrga, an ECF Vital Practices blog, July 21, 2020
- [Inequity and Justice](#) by Annette Buchanan, an ECF Vital Practices blog, June 5, 2020
- [Ministry in a Global Pandemic](#), an ECF Vital Practices webinar presented by Joshua Rodriguez-Hobbs, June 11, 2020

#### **Inspiration from a Small Congregation**

Dexter Lesieur

*St. Matthias, a mission church in Devine, Texas is the only Episcopal Church in Medina County and draws its members from surrounding towns and neighborhoods. A small church with a current ASA of 16, St. Matthias has relied on supply priests for the last 25 years, holding morning prayer services two to four Sundays a month. That has meant that their lay members had to step up to leadership roles, creating a wonderful legacy of worship and community outreach.*

*St. Matthias aims to be an inspiration for other churches. In the video below, the Reverend Dexter Lesieur, vicar of St. Matthias since last December, explains how its members use their talents and gifts to assist those in need and to invite and welcome others into their community of faith.*



*This Vestry Papers article is a video. Watch the video [here](#) or read the transcript below.*

**Transcript:** Hi, my name is Dexter Lesieur, and as of December, I have served as vicar of St. Matthias in Devine, Texas. In this VLOG, I'll be talking about the power of small churches.

Up until my posting at St. Matthias, they relied on supply priests for the last 25 years. They held Morning Prayer services two, three and sometimes four Sundays a month. This meant that lay members needed to step up to leadership roles, and this created a wonderful legacy of worship experience and community outreach. Instead of projects vying for attention or competing with each other, members could take an idea and run with it. This was a fantastic way to get people involved. Our ASA is 16. Devine is nestled in South Central Texas among several ranching and farming communities with a 35 percent poverty rate. St. Matthias is blessed to be a small mission church. Being a small church doesn't mean we do things small. We're always willing to use parishioners' talents and gifts to try new things in an effort to enhance our community of faith.

We have several community outreach programs. We provide hygiene products, women's and children's clothing, car seats, children's toys and recovery journals to the county Women's Shelter. Another outreach we're involved with is HANK (Helping Abused and Neglected Kids) by providing toys, backpacks and clothing to their children. We also provide care packages and letters to deployed military overseas in our military ministry. We're a part of the Diocesan Military Ministry in which I serve as co-chair. We're part of the community food pantry ministry, we serve up to 16,000 clients annually. We've had four parishioners serve on their executive board including president and ministry coordinator. As part of the Devine Ministerial Fellowship, which includes 20 area churches, parishioners can join with other Christians in a vast array of local community events and projects like the annual Mission Devine program that helps repair the homes of lower income and disabled folks.

And it doesn't matter that we're a small church. We enjoy taking the lead in initiatives. We volunteered and were selected to be the test model for rural areas for Project Mend. We collect used medical equipment that they sanitize and refurbish for veterans and their families. We had an outpouring of support from the surrounding communities – electric scooters, walkers, CPAP machines, wheelchairs. We received so many items. It was a true success story and we continue to collect items today. When hurricane Harvey hit the Texas Coast, we found many area churches wanted to help but didn't know how. Taking a cue from the Diocese, we became the rallying point for churches in the surrounding towns to donate emergency kits for folks recovering from the hurricane. We had churches of all faiths donate kits that were desperately needed.

I found the power of the small church in the parishioners, who are very willing to try anything for community outreach. This is where their creativity and innovation come into play. Everyone with an idea for improving the community of faith is listened to. If it works, great, and if it doesn't, well...we tried. As a small church, we are truly all-inclusive. We had a same-sex couple call and then come for a visit. They didn't feel welcome at other churches, and after they visited us, they told me they felt St. Matthias could be their new church home. Fast forward a couple of years, and they're now married. One is our church treasurer, and they've adopted a wonderful young teen who is our first acolyte in 15 years and was baptized on Easter.

We've taken advantage of our 80-year-old Army barracks, now our sanctuary, by embracing all military and veterans and their families. I'm retired from the Air Force, and we're recognized as a veteran-friendly church. We have a sign out front welcoming veterans and trifolds on the entrance table listing

all the bios of the military and veterans connected to St. Matthias. We also present Armor of God Challenge coins to any veteran that visits us.

When the pandemic hit, we instantly went to a cell phone propped up on some books for our first online services. We saw the power of the Holy Spirit as our online numbers steadily increased with viewing our services through Facebook, Facebook live and YouTube.

Our parishioners are motivated at handing out church contact cards (like this one) to everyone they meet, like contractors, repairmen, anyone who might be having a bad day or someone that's having a really good day, without the fear of people having to talk about their faith. It's so easy now – they just have to say, "Hey, we're online; would you like to see one of our services?" We hand out polo shirts with our St. Matthias logo to our parishioners and they wear these when they're out and about in the community.

We've had folks attend our services who first watched online. Gone are the days of walking into an unfamiliar church not knowing anyone. Folks can watch the service, see the people and even engage with each other during the service. As a result of our online and parishioner efforts, we realized we were reaching folks from different faiths, states and countries who had family members that were once connected to St. Matthias.

We started asking folks at the start of our service to list their names and we would share their names at announcements. This started real engagement and making connections for our online community. Not only did we see Pat watching from New York who would say hello to Doug in Devine, but Julian in Florida would say hello to Sarah in Georgia and Robert in San Antonio would say hello to Alex in Slovakia.

We try to be an inspiration for other churches. We hope visitors who see or hear what our small church of 16 does, will feel inspired to carry that enthusiasm back their churches. It's a mindset. Enthusiasm is really contagious, and we hope to infect everyone. While we happen to be a small church, we aren't defined by our size. We have the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through our people.

*The Reverend Dexter Lesieur is currently the Vicar at St. Matthias, Devine, Texas, co-chair for the Diocese of West Texas (DWTX) Military Ministry, and member of the DWTX Congregational Development Committee and Core Teams. He retired from the Air Force (SMSgt) as a Czechoslovakian cryptologic linguist and motivational speaker. He is an Air Force 12 Outstanding Airman of the Year, Jimmy Doolittle Fellow, Military Family of the Year and coach of two world-champion problem-solving teams. Fr. Dexter has been married to Meg for 36 years and has two children and three grandchildren. He enjoys wine making and collecting ancient stone tool artifacts.*

#### **Resources:**

- [Feeding your soul in the small church](#), by Kevin Spears, Vestry Papers, September 2009
- [Small Church Feeds Big Athletes](#), by Melodie Woerman, an ECF Vital Practices blog, April 4, 2014
- [Reimagining Leadership in Small and Rural Churches](#) by Kelsey Schuster, Susan Daughtry and Karen Olson, Vestry Papers, July 2017
- [I'm Excited to See the Potential in the Rural Church](#) by Peter Doddema, an ECF Vital Practices blog first published in [Faith & Leadership](#) and reposted with permission September 11, 2015

## **Más allá de los números**

Aisha Huertas

“La rosa no dejaría de ser rosa, tampoco dejaría de esparcir su aroma, aunque se llamara de otra manera”<sup>[1]</sup>, me suena en la mente cuando pienso en la institución que es la Iglesia. No es porque la Iglesia es perfecta ni porque no tenemos trabajo serio que hacer en aspectos como racismo, inclusión y amar al prójimo, pero debido a que la Iglesia, independientemente de su tamaño y cuando realmente sigue el Evangelio, es la mayor fuerza que hemos conocido. Independientemente del número promedio de asistentes los domingos, grande, pequeña o algo intermedio, algunas de las medidas más importantes del éxito de una Iglesia deberían ser:

- ¿Estamos alimentando a los hambrientos?
- ¿Estamos sirviendo a los pobres?
- ¿Estamos ocupándonos de los encarcelados?
- ¿Estamos resistiendo el mal?
- ¿Estamos luchando por la justicia y la dignidad?

Nos resultaría difícil encontrar a alguien que no estuviera de acuerdo con lo que antecede. Sin embargo, de alguna manera seguimos cayendo en nuestras tradiciones de colonialismo y capitalismo. Estas tradiciones nos hacen creer erróneamente que más grande es mejor, que más dinero significa más seguridad y que más gente en nuestras bancas (o viéndonos por Zoom) significa que hemos alcanzado el éxito máximo.

### **Es hora de reexaminar nuestras prioridades y modelos**

En un mundo que clama por el cambio, la aceptación y en pensar de maneras innovadoras, la Iglesia debe reexaminar sus prioridades y modelos. Después de todo, los informes parroquiales de 2019 demostraron que en la Iglesia Episcopal, la asistencia media dominical es 51 y que el 75 por ciento de nuestras iglesias tienen un promedio de asistencia dominical de menos de 100. Eso no es una crítica ni datos para respaldar la idea de que deberemos hacer más para añadir gente a nuestras filas. Es una invitación a profundizar y a dejar de pensar en solo los números.

En mi rol de Directora de Participación en la Diócesis de Virginia, trabajo para elevar nuestras feligresías de color, así como para hacer que el clero y los congregantes participen en el trabajo que prometemos hacer en nuestro Pacto Bautismal y en la Gran Comisión. En ese rol, visito todas nuestras iglesias, tanto grandes como pequeñas, y siempre me sorprende el trabajo que se está realizando, especialmente el de las que se consideran feligresías o misiones pequeñas.

Considérese la Iglesia de San Gabriel en Leesburg, Virginia, una pequeña feligresía misionera en un condado pudiente en el norte de la comunidad. El brote de la Covid-19 podría haber sido desastroso para ellos, pero gracias a la imaginación de su clero, el Revdo. Daniel Rivera y la Revda. Diácona Holly Hanback, San Gabriel prosperó. Recibieron financiamiento para ayudar a asistir a la comunidad. Alimentaron a muchas familias entregando comestibles y siguieron proporcionando talleres sobre temas como Acción Diferida para Llegadas de Menores de Edad e información de salud sobre la Covid-19, así como clases de planificación familiar y salud reproductiva, catecismo y Zumba Sagrada.

En Falls Church, Virginia, la feligresía misionera de la Iglesia de Santa María también prospera. Tiene un programa todos los días. Ya sea Zumba, un programa de enseñanza de ruso, estudios bíblicos o clases de

cocina, alimenta el corazón de la comunidad. Cuando fue necesario hacer reparaciones en la propiedad o mejorarla, los congregantes no solo proporcionaron fondos, sino también trabajo manual. Su energía y pasión por el trabajo de Cristo se demuestra en todas maneras en que es significativo. Sin embargo, permanecen en una categoría que puede hacer que parezcan menos de lo que son.

Esta es una manera de pensar creativa e innovadora y de vivir en un espíritu de abundancia. Si bien es cierto que debemos ser estratégicos y fiscalmente responsables, también tenemos que empezar a pensar en la Iglesia con un espíritu que ve abundancia en todo. Tenemos suficiente gente para hacer el bien. Tenemos suficiente dinero para hacer el bien. Tenemos lo suficiente. Como lo sabemos todos los que trabajamos ahora en la iglesia, una iglesia con más dinero no siempre resulta en una iglesia más sana.

### **El trabajo de Jesús no es sobre números**

De maneras más prácticas, las iglesias pequeñas a veces proporcionan más oportunidades de liderazgo a los que se podría marginar fácilmente, pasar por alto o ver como “otros”: gente más joven, mujeres, gente de color, los capacitados de diferentes maneras, los que no son anglohablantes nativos. Estamos en nuestro mejor momento cuando hacemos lugar en la mesa para las minorías, los jóvenes, los no heteronormales y los de diferentes culturas. ¿Por qué? Porque el Reino de Dios es un mundo grande, incluyente y hermoso, enriquecido por los dones y los talentos de su pueblo.

En el Evangelio según San Mateo, en el capítulo 18, versículo 20, Jesús dice, “Porque donde están dos o tres congregados en mi nombre, allí estoy yo en medio de ellos”. Éste no es realmente un versículo sobre cuánta gente se necesita para que Cristo esté presente, porque sabemos que Dios está tanto con una persona como con 5,000. Sin embargo, es un versículo que apunta a la tradición legal judía, que requiere la presencia de dos o tres testigos para responsabilizar a alguien por sus actos. ¿De qué manera esto es relativo? Porque como Iglesia nos debemos responsabilizar entre nosotros y al mundo por las veces en que no estamos prestando atención a los buenos actos de Cristo y a su ejemplo. No se requieren quinientas personas, solo dos o tres. Al igual que una rosa “no dejaría de ser rosa, tampoco dejaría de esparcir su aroma, aunque se llamara de otra manera”, una iglesia de cualquier tamaño que está haciendo el trabajo de Dios, es tan valiosa como cualquier otra feligresía.

Digo esto no para iniciar una competencia, sino para asegurarles que Dios nos encuentra donde estemos. Que hay espacio para todos nosotros, que todos tenemos un rol en el trabajo de ese Jesús que cambia vidas.

Hace años, estuve visitando a un nuevo párroco y a su junta parroquial, que estaban tratando de incrementar una feligresía afroamericana histórica en el lado este de Richmond, Virginia, una zona pobre que se estaba gentrificando. Su asistencia promedio los domingos era de alrededor de 30, pero estaban brillando en su comunidad. Entre sus ministerios, tuvieron un programa de empleo, fueron anfitriones de caminatas en el barrio para reunirse con vecinos y orar con ellos y para enterarse de cuáles eran sus necesidades, y apoyaron un par de instituciones educativas, por nombrar solo algunos de sus buenos actos. Había mucha preocupación en la junta parroquial sobre las finanzas y el número de personas en las bancas, pero cuando le pregunté al párroco si su objetivo era llenar las bancas o servir a la comunidad, me dijo con seguridad, “Quiero servir a la comunidad”. Yo sonreí y le motivé a que encontrara nuevas maneras de medir su éxito y de definir los “miembros de la iglesia”. Y así lo hicieron y lo siguen haciendo, y siguen cabiendo en su pequeño edificio para el culto dominical, pero son inmensurablemente más grandes en el impacto que tienen en su comunidad.

“Las iglesias pequeñas son la manera más normativa en que se reúnen los cristianos. Un 90 por ciento de las iglesias tienen menos de 200 personas, un 80 por ciento menos de 100. Y la mitad de los cristianos del mundo asisten a iglesias pequeñas”<sup>[2]</sup>. Esto ha funcionado por 2,000 años y si bien siempre hay espacio para crecer, sería carente de fe cuestionar el trabajo colectivo de innumerables iglesias pequeñas, que con innumerables iglesias grandes sirven a sus hermanos en el mundo entero. ¡Sí, las iglesias pequeñas son igualmente importantes! Honrémoslas y reconozcámoslas.

*Como Ministra de Participación Misional de la Diócesis de Virginia, **Aisha Huertas** supervisa las misiones nacionales e internacionales, los ministerios de justicia racial y los ministerios para el cuidado de la creación y multiculturales. Mediante su empresa de consultoría, *Huertas Strategic Consulting*, enseña antirracismo y ofrece talleres de justicia y equidad, y además ayuda a organizaciones a dirigirse a temas de equidad racial. Antes de unirse al personal diocesano, Aisha trabajó en el ámbito de comunicaciones con entidades sin ánimo de lucro respetadas, como *Donate Life America* y la *American Civil Liberties Union de Virginia*.*

**Resources:**

- [Oración y acción en una pandemia](#) por Yesenia (Jessie) Alejandro, Vestry Papers, septiembre 2020
- [Hacer crecer nuestra Iglesia](#) por Estela López, Vestry Papers, julio 2015
- [El Ministerio con trabajadores agrícolas – el Discipulado en acción](#) por Juan Carabaña, Vestry Papers, mayo 2017
- [Ni Santos, Ni Héroes, Ni Mártires](#) por Chas Belknap, Michael Butler, Jane Morley y Judith Rees Thomas, Vestry Papers, julio 2014