

During my recent three week sabbatical to San Francisco I experienced life in the Episcopal Church of America in three particular contexts. The first was Grace Cathedral where I had the privilege of celebrating the Eucharist and preaching. I also shared the Liturgies of Good Friday in the Cathedral and met with a number of pilgrims from all over the world who had come to walk the Labyrinth at the west end of the building. Secondly, I shared in the worship of a traditional Anglo-Catholic Church, namely, The Advent of Christ. I participated significantly in ministry to the poor those addicted to drugs and alcohol. Thirdly, I shared worship, pastoral ministry and fellowship with the people of St Gregory of Nyssa Anglican Church, a newly planted Church expressing in a unique way the ministry of all God's People.

The deacon's announcement on Palm Sunday (and at every other Mass) was simply "Jesus welcomes everyone to his table, so we offer communion to everyone, and to everyone by name." This set the context of my deliberations and soul searching. Serving under an ordained priestly leadership, the People of God share many of the deacon's traditional liturgical duties at St Gregory's: welcoming people into the service, setting the Table, announcing the Gospel, leading music and prayers, and helping distribute communion. Those words of welcome and acceptance began to resonate in other ways as I spoke them aloud myself in the various and many liturgies and experienced the lively and very moving liturgical dance routines.

Moreover, they found a significant place when I experienced and participated with the weekly Food Pantry. This is an initiative which has evolved over the past few years providing free groceries for the needy – week by week in the church sanctuary itself.

Basically the Food pantry looked like St. Gregory's on any Sunday—a great, humming, chaotic blur of people moving together around the Altar Table, under the icons of the Dancing Saints and the Tabernacle containing the Blessed Sacrament, close by.

The Food Pantry was communion. I understood it as a Sacrament as I helped to unload pallets of oranges, tomatoes and tinned soups, assembling the goods on tables around the Altar. (Incidentally, the same Altar which serves the Bread of Life in the Divine Liturgies also serves coffee and cakes to God's people after worship.

During the Food Pantry event, which lasted most of the day, God's people arrived with buckets, suitcases and sacks in which to transport their goods home. I was privileged to administer the cabbages and carrots into the outstretched hands of the needy. It was a very humbling experience and connected significantly with my giving of the Sacrament of Holy Communion to God's People week by week for the past twenty-eight years of ordained ministry.

Each of us, at some stage in life, have been rejected for being too young, too old, too poor, too queer, too crazy, too difficult or too sick to play a significant part in the church. In the American Episcopalian Church I soon recognised, however, (far more abundantly than the Church of England) that gathered around God's table we become right together; the cornerstone of something God is building. Service is thanksgiving, because it means not only giving freely, but understanding how greatly we're loved. Such generosity, affirmation, unconditional love and warmth of welcome would certainly enable many of our churches to become authentic witnesses for the Living Lord.

Thank you so much for your contribution towards my making this short sabbatical. It is much appreciated.