



ST. LUKE'S
Episcopal Church

BUFFALO,
Wyoming

I am part of a program that works to support and strengthen clergy for the challenges we face. My group has clergy from Virginia, Alabama, Wisconsin, New York (near Buffalo!), and Nebraska. None of that is important, other than to say that clergy in vastly different settings tend to share the same issues.

I met with my group facilitator last week and she talked about her time in Burundi, Africa. While there the bishop of the Anglican Church made a trip to England and Wales. When he returned, she asked him, “What was it like to be in those English cathedrals or churches where you only had a handful of worshipers compared to the several hundred you regularly have here?”

After thinking about it for a moment, she said, he replied, “I was amazed at the faithfulness of those few people.”

I attended a Resolution Committee hearing on Sunday as we reviewed several resolutions that will be brought before the Convention. The one that got the most attention and discussion was a resolution about how we spend our money at the diocesan level. One of the speakers was bemoaning the fact that church numbers were dwindling and if we didn't address that, there was no point in arguing about how a shuttered church will spend its money.

And while there is a decline in church membership across all denominations, if we focus on trying to get people to attend and pledge so we can keep the doors open and lights on, we will be focusing on the wrong thing. The mission of the Church isn't to pay the electric bill. The mission of the Church is to “restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ” through “prayer, worship, evangelism, and the promotion of justice, peace, and love.”

There is something about the Episcopal Church at large, and Saint Luke's

in particular, that continues to draw people in. We have a particular message to proclaim and a particular way of living out our faith. It is this faith and hope in the midst of widely publicized despair that we live and move and have our being.

Numbers aren't the only indicator of a vital church. Do we serve others? Do we publicly proclaim the gospel? Do we provide love and support? There are other indicators, but you get the idea. The point is this: Yes, numbers are helpful, but what is more important than simple numbers is whether or not we are being faithful to the gospel and our mission. It will be that faithfulness that grounds you and encourages you, and it will be that lived faithfulness that will attract and draw people in.

Our challenge, as it always has been, is to remain faithful even in the face of despair.

Blessings,

Todd+
