

St. Alban's Special Eucharist
June 18, 2009
Report on Reflections
Submitted by Robin Rudd and Edward Hayes

On the evening of Thursday, June 18th, a special experimental Eucharist Service was held in order to try out some new language and experiences on participants. Approximately 45 parishioners attended along with all clergy.

The purpose of this special service was to introduce inclusive language, silence and musical changes for possible implementation at the 11:15 service in the fall. There is the pervasive sentiment in our wider church that our Elizabethan tradition can be very inviting. However, there is also a feeling that some parts of our service can be off-putting to others. This trial was an attempt to both blend the old and to add some new. It was also an honest attempt to obtain feedback from our loyal parishioners.

We want to thank the parishioners who came to the Eucharist and stayed to spend time giving their serious feedback to this project. We also want to thank Sally Craig, Lacey Gude and Liz Leland for serving as additional focus group leaders that night.

Summary of Focus Group Feedback

Five separate focus groups were held after individuals filled out feedback sheets (summarized below). Several people in different groups expressed gratitude for being asked for their feedback. They responded by giving thoughtful comments as is shown in this summary.

Participants

Forty-one (41) people attended the groups. Of this number, twenty-nine (29) were regular worshippers at the 11:15 service. Of the remaining, 7 attended the 9:15 regularly and 5 went back and forth between the two. Participants were so eager to talk that vigorous discussion developed quickly and the suggested questions were not followed by the groups. However, all points seemed to be covered.

Several groups commented that the changes were not as dramatic or different as anticipated.

The Use of Silence

All of the groups reported positive reactions to the use of silence in the service. There were comments about the sense of "gathering" prior to the Processional in order to focus.

Several groups commented on the need for silence in the Narthex before the Processional so as not to disturb the silence in the church. Some people wondered when latecomers might be seated. Others worried about how to deal with children.

It should be noted that there were a few people in three groups who either did not like the silences or thought that they were too long. While these persons appeared to be in the minority, their perspectives are worth noting.

Psalm

Across the board there seems to be confusion about the psalm. Comments essentially were that the congregation needs better direction, as does the choir. There were also comments that the focus on the way the psalm is sung affects the congregation's ability to take in the meaning since the breaks do not seem to fall naturally at the phrasing.

Prayers

Responses were mixed for the prayers. Many people in the groups liked being asked for their own prayers to be said. Many liked the silences. Several also wanted the responses reinstated.

One group suggested that the language be, "Your prayers for others are invited," striking the word, "now." Also it was suggested that individual prayers should be invited aloud or silently.

Some people commented that there should be more time between the announcement that we were about to pray and the actual prayer so that people could assume the kneeling position and not miss the opening words of the prayers.

Offertory

There was a possible mistake made in the service during the offering. The ushers thought that there would be an offertory, but it was taken. The acolytes did not bring out the plates and the choir began to sing. However, the ushers, however, remained in the aisle throughout the Eucharistic prayer and there were many comments about that and the fact that people couldn't see the alter.

Language

Across the groups there were comments about the choppiness of the language of the confession.

Some groups reported out that that they didn't know why we needed inclusive language. Others didn't know where it was. Other groups appreciated it.

Music

The quartet was outstanding. Feedback was that people seem to want familiar hymns. Several people commented positively on the Agnus Dei.

Overall Service

Comments from the various groups seemed generally positive. The pace seemed good. Some people found the service more reverential.

General Comments

This was a self-selected audience. It was a group of curious, motivated people who chose to come to a service to give feedback. They were grateful for the opportunity. It might be useful to try it again. Several people commented both in the individual sheets and in the groups that this Eucharist should be tried again at 8AM and 10AM. If there is time, the 10AM would be great!

With respect to music, this is a tricky area. Given the faith traditions that different people come from, what is “familiar?” And how do things become familiar? How did “I am the Bread of Life” become familiar?

Also in this experimental time, it may be a time of teaching. There were some comments asking clergy to explain what is the “correct” way to worship. Times have changed. The tent is broader. There are still limitations but the times when a priest stood in charge and told a parishioner when to kneel is not here anymore. With empathy, we need to help people feel comfortable. This topic may be a Daily Cup topic after this report gets circulated.

Summary of Individual Feedback

1. How did you find the service similar to what you expect in the worship service?

The comments made to this question were overwhelmingly positive. People said that not much had changed. All of the essential elements were included. People seemed to like the familiar music. One person mentioned liking moving from serious to joyous music as the service moved along.

Several people mentioned the inclusive language. One thought it was overdone. One said that the language “tracked.”

Several people said that it was more reflective or relaxed. One even said that it “clocked in” at 60 minutes.

2/3. How did you find the service different? What would you like to see changed?

The respondents seemed to really like the silences. They commented that it allowed them to be more reflective, peaceful, centering or meditative. Having said that, several people also wanted the response reinstated in the Prayers. Others did not want it there.

Generally people said that they liked the idea of praying names aloud during the Prayers of the People.

There were some comments about how the Psalm is done. Whether more direction needs to be given to the congregation or to the choir is not clear but folks do not feel that the psalm is effective. Some even commented that they didn't feel that the choir knew what to do.

Several people liked the beginning in which there was an invitation to the service, silence and then the Processional hymn. Some commented that it made them focus for the service. The length of time of the silences for some too long and for others too short.

There may have been a misstep in the service in which there was no offering taken. The ushers remained standing in the aisle through the Eucharistic Prayer. Several people made comments about that and how their view of the altar was blocked. The offering should have been taken.

There were several comments on the language of the confession of faith being difficult or choppy.

There were several comments asking for the Payer of Humble Access to be used. Also there were comments saying that they liked this form of the Agnus Dei and that they wanted a more familiar form.

A couple of people missed the summary of the Law.

4/5. What challenged you but you could get used to? Additional Comments.

All comments here were redundant or have been included above. A transcript of all comments is attached in the appendix to this report.

Submitted: August 13, 2009