



## ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

### SERMON ANNUAL MEETING – JAN. 27, 2013 St. Andrew's in the Pines

Let's start out with the stuff that can be recorded and read and saved. In 2012 there were five weddings, 5 funerals, 6 baptisms, 9 confirmations and one reception. There were 99 Eucharists celebrated at the church and 12 privately. 47 of our communicants in good standing are 16 years old or younger. This past year we sadly lost some wonderful members of the congregation to death, moving, marriage and other circumstances – people like Tom Davenport, Cally and Jordan, Gail Randall, the Steinbrenners, Tim Crawford, Corbisiers, Paul Andrews – a count of 21 people in all. That is a hole in our midst.

Thankfully, in the past year and 1/2, 24 newcomer bags have been given out and we show a count of 30 new people who have attended at least 3 times in this past year. These wonderful newcomers are people who our intentional hospitality and welcome and invitations to participate in our functions will make a difference to the life and health of the church. At this time, we can count 165 communicants in good standing for our Parochial Report this year. That's wonderful.

Now let's move on to the narrative – the story and stories about who we are, of what might be told about us at this moment in our life together.

When Mary Caucutt left as your rector about 9 years ago you had slowly grown to an average Sunday attendance of 65 people. Over the next three years, during the time of the gas development boom, attendance grew to an average of 74, then slid a little to 73-72 people. After a dip in attendance during the year after Wes Shields left, we have averaged 71 worshippers a Sunday for the past two years.

There is a reason I tell you these numbers. Because in the story of congregations, priests, writers, the “professionals” talk about Family Size, Pastoral size, Program size, and Corporate size churches. I realize these are terms that can be only be used with great flexibility and varying interpretations but I want to use some of them with you today.

When a congregation grows to over 50-60 worshippers they are no longer considered a family sized church – they are on the edge of becoming a pastoral sized church. These numbers can dip back and forth and not until 5-8 years down the road does the transition from one level to the next start be taken for granted or as solid.

During this period of transition there is often some grief, discomfort, uncertainty, many adjustments to new ways of doing things, longing for things to be like the used to. For in a family sized church there is a feeling of connectedness, of a unity because folks feel like they know everyone and they do things together. In this cohesive unit, the priest is there to mostly baptize, marry, and bury. They either are accepted into the community or they are not, but it doesn't matter too much because folks know their roles and their place in the family and they carry on. There are many wonderful things about family sized congregations, but sometimes the sense of cohesiveness/connectedness can be a barrier for new folks to get welcomed into and often the idea that we all do things together is not really accurate. Yet in general, programs and activities undertaken do have to have the support of about everyone or they won't happen.

Now, pastoral size. These congregations worship around 60-120 people. The priest becomes the permission-giver, the coordinator, the communicator, the go-to person. Not everyone is needed to do everything in order to have it happen. There are more choices of activities, there are more people to select from for vestry members and committee members. Groups can form varying by ages and interests. There is more flexibility and less cohesiveness. It is easier to integrate newcomers because there is often more to offer in choices.

I give you all this background because you have made the transition to living as a pastoral size church. This has been your story. And in the past five years many of you have grieved the transition for different reasons. You older members do not know everyone, we do not have large groups doing everything together, and we now have two worship services. While the changes have meant new members and more opportunities there has been discomfort and also much to celebrate. You are a healthy, stable congregation filled with people of all ages. You have so many gifts to offer to Pinedale and to each other.

Where do I fit in to this story? I am happy. I have entered into the life of this church at a stable time, a healthy time. John and I love living here, we love the friends we have made and are making. In fact, I am so happy that that was one of the requests I made for advice from the other clergy while on the retreat. Should I feel guilty about my delight, my happiness? Did it mean I was too comfortable or in danger of becoming lazy? I think that is a cutting edge for me to pay attention to – but they answered my doubts and I realize that in the flow of life there will be times of sorrow, times of challenges, times of discomfort – but for now – I delight in being here with you. I experience you as a gracious, inclusive, humble, charitable, strong congregation.

There is an old song – Deep and Wide, deep and wide, there's a river flowing deep and wide. That is my hope for our time together. Deep and Wide – let us grow together deep and wide.

Let's grow wide by continuing our gift of reaching out to include others, reaching out with welcome, reaching out with shelter, reaching out to incorporate new people into our life.

And let's go deep in our spiritual maturity. There are many levels of stories we can share with each other. We can enjoy each other through easy conversations at a coffee hour, or a 7@6 dinner, or while working together on a project. Those are the stories of comfortable friendships and wonderful to have.

Then there are the stories that are learned and told as we participate in learning opportunities like different studies, serving on vestry, taking care of each other in times of struggle. These are the stories and experiences that weave us together with deeper understanding and emotional bonds. They are life giving when we share them.

Then there are the stories of hurts, wounds, grudges, resentments. They happen in every community. They happen here. As we grow in depth, here is where I challenge you, I ask you to consider forgiveness, reconciliation, renewal of relationships, new growth. Deep and wide, let our lives flow deep and wide.

Then there are the stories and experiences that happen when we live more fully sharing our spiritual gifts. This is the vision Paul shares with us in Corinthians. Remember ALL of the GIFTS are present in EVERYONE! If we each go deep enough and are thoughtful and prayerful and are encouraged – we could become a body that is so knit together with all of the gifts active amongst us – that the life we'd experience, the ministries we'd be sharing would astound this town. Once again, it would be my image of utopia.

I realized- while on retreat- that I had been treating all of you and myself in a manner that hindered our relationship together. I felt that in my first year I kept picking up the message, request to me – What do you want to do? Just tell us. I think you were doing that because that is the older model of the Priest on the pedestal and because you are so gracious and generous and you want your priests to be happy and to stay in Pinedale.

But I resisted and kept saying – what do you want to do? Because that was my vision of a healthier church – harnessing your passions and energy.

But now I realize the question is what do each of us want to do – including me. I need to be sharing my own passions and energy and gifts. I love pastoral care and think Stephen ministries might be a good program for us. I love social justice ministries and at this moment am waiting for opportunities to do more there. And you – all of the gifts are present in all of us. That means we have teachers, preachers, healers, workers, prophets, prayers, hostesses, leaders, miracle workers, evangelists, charisms of tongues and interpretation. Just like Jesus in the gospel reading – we are all anointed to share the good news. Let us all be doing what we like, what we are gifted with, what gives us a rich life. Deep and wide. That is my hope. That is my prayer. Thanks be to God.