

Annual Chaplains Report - 2015

February 1, 2015

“No Idol In The World Is Real”

- *1 Corinthians 8:4*

“No idol in the world is real . . . but we have become accustomed to idols.” This section of Corinthians has in it the famous question about eating meat sacrificed to idols. Paul said, “well, yes you can; maybe.” “Yes you can; but you probably shouldn’t, so as not confuse the weaker members of the community.”

Why is this a question? Gentile converts had begun joining Jewish believers in local communities. If an individual or a family made a private sacrifice to mark a wedding, or the birth of a child, or their recovery from an illness, part of an animal might be burnt on the altar of the appropriate god. Part was given to the priest, and the rest consumed at a celebratory meal back home. Obviously many of the Christians in Corinth had family members and friends who organized such events. They faced a difficult decision; to go and eat meat sacrificed to an idol or to stay away and offend their non-Christian relatives. Besides, meat was a real treat. There were no drive-thru’s.

There were also many public sacrifices to the gods in Corinth. A part of the meat was again burned, the priest took his cut, and the rest was distributed to local officials. Both the priests and the officials sold surplus meat to the town butchers. It was almost impossible for customers to know whether the meat they bought was sacrificed to idols or not. It was, obviously, not kosher.

No idol is real, says Paul. But we have become accustomed to idols. So let’s keep up the appearance that these idols have power, so that people will not be scandalized. Something like the manners at Downtown Abbey.

It happens today. Poor Pope Francis says, “who am I to judge” gay and lesbian persons, or that Roman Catholics “don’t have to breed like rabbits”, only to then have Roman officialdom walk those statements back. They are “clarified”.

We have our idols.

Purdue believes in competency, efficiency; and metrics to measure the same. We are a business and we believe in establishing synergies with other corporations who need employees with certain skill sets. The most recent issue of The Chronicle of Higher Education has a wonderful story about the day American higher education changed. On Feb 28, 1967, Governor Ronald Reagan (Mitch Daniels worked for Ronald Reagan.) said that we shouldn’t be “subsidizing intellectual curiosity”. Higher education is about getting a job. We believe that.

Indiana and Kentucky love Daniel Boone; or at least the romanticized version of the man. We believe in an American “rugged individualism”. We believe in the American entrepreneur, a current incarnation of the self made man. Daniel Boone was the iconic father our “manifest destiny”. He ran away from so-called civilization. Our heroes carry guns. America is an exceptional nation. No matter what our national rankings, Indiana is an exceptional state. Because we believe the individual, standing on his own two feet, is god.

The nation believes “wealth’ and “virtue” are synonymous. It always has. It is very Old Testament. It is Calvinism and predestination. It is the Protestant work ethic. It is Andrew Carnegie and The Gospel of Wealth. Do not try and redistribute wealth. The poor are stealing from us. Many who don’t believe in evolution believe in social Darwinism. Community is communism. We believe the rich are holy.

A nice summary of Good Shepherd’s job at Purdue University here in West Lafayette, IN might be to say out loud “no idol in the world really exists, even though we have become accustomed to them.” “There is no god but one.” Jesus brings a new teaching; one with authority. No idol in the world really exists.

To efficiency we bring ritual. We can waste time each Sunday waiting for everybody to show up and get a cup of coffee. We can tell the old stories. We can act out an old story.

We can question the self-imposed poverty demanded by our efficiency, our frugality. There is a great story that you may have heard, perhaps told in a slightly different fashion, about the senior Purdue official who went to Indianapolis for a legislative budget hearing. This person outlined to the legislators what the university needed to do to bring Purdue up to the level of its peer institutions. The chairman said, “You know, if that’s what it costs to be great, we’ll settle for good.” Our efficiencies meant autistic children were off Purdue’s insurance. That’s not “good”.

To individualism we bring community. We practice it every Sunday. We believe in communion. We believe in the particular magic of the inter-disciplinary, multi-generational academic community.

I’ve told you this story before. I love to tell it because we worship STEM and it is about a STEM god. Our daughter Molly went to the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow. One of her classmates, Ishbel McFarlene, found a job as the poet-in-residence at Edinburgh’s Traverse Theatre. A lunchtime regular at the Traverse Theatre pub was Peter Higgs, he of the Higgs boson, that tiniest elemental particle in physics, and the very large Hadron collider. He came to Scotland because he loved to hike the hills. He came to Edinburgh because he loved its theaters. He sat, said the poet, in the “dark and sparky” basement of the Traverse, and impressed the wait staff as quiet and kindly, which led to her poem that runs in small part:

With the order he makes

The order she takes

Every day

Every day

Chicken wrap

Apple juice

Glass of tap water

No ice

The house spins in around him

The best bit? Ishbel writes that the bar staff told Prof. Higgs that she had done this and he requested a copy of the poem, which she provided. This remarkable man once took her by the hand and said, 'Hello Ishbel, I like the world you chose'. Waiter. Physicist. Poet. Together.

To our "right sized" modern capitalism, we bring free food. We do it each Sunday. A whole donut. Bread and wine. We take it out and put it on top of banana boxes at the local food bank. We are not afraid to politic for free food, for the sake of the poor, for the sake of the sick. We are not afraid to remember that land grant universities were meant to be points of access.

I love the old "land grant" quotes.

Andrew Draper at the University of Illinois: "The universities that would thrive must put away all exclusiveness and dedicate themselves to universal public service. They must not try to keep people out; they must help all who are worthy to get in."

Charles Eliot at Harvard: (Okay, not a land-grant, but I like the quote) "I want to have the college open equally to men with money, little money or no money provided they all have brains."

Ezra Cornell (Cornell): He hoped for a university where "any person can find any instruction in any subject." The classics might have a salutary effect on engineers. The pipe organ belonged with pharmacy. An equality of position and privilege would be given to all courses.

Then there is what was called the "Wisconsin Idea" The University is a force for civic virtue.

Charles Adams (Cornell/Wisconsin): "The university is not a party separate from the state. It is part of the state, as much a part of the state as the state capital itself. As much as the brain and the hands are a part of the body."

Edmund James (Illinois) "The state university is a great civil service academy, preparing young men and women of the state for the civil service of the state, the country, the municipality, and the township, much as West Point prepares for military posts."

Andrew White (Cornell) He thought a person should be trained in politically oriented public service. "Nobody expects to get a majority of the men educated as I propose into office at first, but if we only had plenty to stand outside and fire into the people, and especially those in office, they would certainly be obliged, sooner or later, to surrender."

Higher education is not free, not a philanthropy; it is a business. It is not a part of the State; it is the servant of the corporations. It is not meant for service, it is meant to train for profit. Here, we still believe in grace. Most things here at Good Shepherd are free.

Well, not quite free.

"No idol in the world really exists." It would make a great billboard. But **somebody** would have to **pay for it**.

Who is that "somebody"? Well, us. Who is "us"?

From the annual parochial report, in 2013 we reported 93 communicants. For 2014, the "us" we will report is 102 communicants. Our "active baptized members" (this number includes the Purdue student list) will grow from 125 in 2013 to 147 in 2014.

Average Sunday attendance will stay the same (53 people). Easter attendance is down slightly from 105 in 2013 to 98 in 2014.

If there are more members, shouldn't the attendance go up? You'd think so. But folks just don't come to church as regularly as they once did. Those who did come regularly are now often physically unable to do so. So, we always need more people than the year before to even have attendance stay the same.

The "pay for it" part is also getting a little trickier.

In 2014 the diocesan program grant totaled \$48,801. In 2015 it will be \$50,181. (Remember that the diocese also pays my salary and benefits.)

But last year our gifts slumped from \$4145 in 2013 to \$2725 in 2014. Our pledges have gone down too, as has the pledged amount. In 2014 we had 39 pledges worth \$56,360. In 2015 we have 32 pledges worth \$46,360. Now, the budget committee had already reduced their pledge "guess" to \$53,000. But that still shortens our income by several thousand dollars and cuts our proposed budget surplus in half. The good news in that sentence is that we still have a projected budget surplus of \$7000.

Why fewer gifts? Well, no Gene Robinson. Bringing Bishop Robinson to campus was a pretty attractive cause to support. Still, we depend on the US mail and their address corrections to keep our mailing list, and so our solicitation list, up to date. That works less well each year. We also mail bulk rate; that is increasingly less reliable.

Our on-line giving is limited to PayPal and Network for Good, and both PayPal and Network for Good is costly for the user. We need to make it easier for folks to give on-line.

A big red DONATE button on our web site home page?

The endowed congregations in the diocese are using fund raising services like "Secure Give" which has long supported Christian mega-churches. There are fees involved here too. But you could get a "giving kiosk" in the lobby; something like St. Tom's ATM.

We need to do something, because our long time donors with permanent address are aging out too. An example; Susan Miller, whose daughter Elizabeth went here decades ago and is now a high school principal in California, gives us a nice donation each year. She has just turned 80. It is much harder to track Elizabeth and then solicit a contribution from her own growing family.

More important than the gift income is the pledge income. This is our real money. It pays Mark's salary. It buys the pizza. (The diocese pays the mortgage and keeps the lights on.) If it goes under \$50,000, our life gets harder.

Ideally, if you have 45 communicant families (and that is what's on our green sheet), you should have 45 pledges. We have 32. It isn't necessarily 1 to 1. We no longer expect a pledge from Karen Lauterbach. Amanda and Gary Chalk have moved to Maryland. (Perhaps next year we will send them a fund raising letter – maybe with a first class stamp on it – and get a gift back.) Some regular monthly gifts we count as pledges. But pledges = family units is a fairly standard measure in this "business".

Is there a fix?

1) Ask yourself if you filled out a pledge form. If you filled it out, did it make it here to the church? Let's begin with that! If you did fill it out, did it go up from last year at least a little? If you're not sure, ask Mark. We have a list.

2) Did you keep last years pledge? Ask Mark; we have a list!

3) It may be that I have gotten too casual about asking you for money. YOU ARE BLESSED. LUCKY. You don't pay my salary. You don't pay the mortgage. You only "buy" our program. (Plus depreciation and maintenance of the building, but let's not quibble.)

So I hardly ever have to run around with my hair on fire (bad analogy) asking you for money. But this is serious business. Particularly over the next five years as I slowly move toward retirement. You need to be sure that the program is self-sustaining, so that when the diocese comes to manage your transition they don't start looking to cut costs. This would mean not just quartering the donuts. One favorite is "combining office functions" with a near-by parish.

My longevity here gives me a kind of tenure, and in many ways protects our status quo. (I am also chair this year of the Diocesan Administration Committee; it used to be called Budget and Finance. So it is unlikely that someone will come before Admin and suggest that Good Shepherd and St. John's go back together like they were in the 50's. I would scowl.)

But you can't say, "no idol in the world really exists" if there is no one here to say that, and say it rather loudly. We are a community that challenges many of the idols honored in the places where we live and work. We have done that since 1956. We do that with "Ritual, Community, and Free Food".

Finally, the awards portion of the program!

Our first award is the Angela Falzone Award, named after an early and noteworthy student senior warden. It usually goes to an active undergraduate. This year I am happy to give the award to ESA (Episcopal Student Association) president Erin Kelly. A native of Virginia, Erin is a cradle Episcopalian. We don't get many of those. Maybe you saw Erin cheering with the Paint Crew at the IU game. Perhaps you tie-dyed a shirt with her on the picnic table out back. Perhaps you will sign up with her to join in this spring's Real for Life. In thanksgiving for the energy she gives us, I am happy to present the 2014 Angela Falzone Award to Erin Kelly.

Do you like the new floor? How about the fact that the center pews are just a little wider now? Then I know you give thanks with me for our 2014 Kathleen Johnston award winners, Jack and Carol Warner. Jack is our senior warden, and he and Carol shepherded our church's new nave floor through several bids and the occasional mess up. In every generation this community has had someone like Kathleen Johnston deeply involved in it's common life. (Kathleen donated the kitchen upstairs just before she died.) In this past year, those people have been Jack and Carol Warner.

A reminder that as soon as possible after the service we will begin our annual meeting upstairs. Bring your coffee and your whole donut upstairs.

An organizational meeting of the new vestry will take place immediately after that here in the front of the church.

Amen.

