

## **JOHN KITAGAWA'S OBSERVATIONS OF AND REFLECTIONS ON A VISIT TO THE "CHURCH IN THE ROUND" ALL SAINTS' CHURCH, PHOENIX**

Rosalind Garcia, Director of Children, Youth and Family Ministries, Mariel Watt, Kathy and I worshiped with the congregation of the "Church in the Round" at All Saints' Church, on Sunday, 10 May 2009, at 10:00 am. This service is held in a large parish hall with high ceilings and a wall of windows through which a lovely Memorial Garden can be seen. It should be noted that this service is celebrated every Sunday concurrent to a service in the church.

09:35 am Arrive and park. Kathy and I immediately notice a canopy with large canopy with red lettering—"Welcome Center". We walk towards it, and notice that there are reserved parking spaces for visitors. (Neither of us had noticed directions at the entrance guiding visitors to these parking spaces.) Very friendly people greeted us warmly, asked us to fill out a name tag, offered us a map of the campus, and offered to answer any questions.

Lori Brooks, Exec. Ass't to the Rector, appeared, said we were expected and kindly offered to show us where the service would take place, the church, and anything else we might be interested in. We accepted this offer and appreciated Lori's openness in talking about the parish.

It is worth noting that one of the activities for the Church School this day was a tour of the lesser known parts of the facilities, such as the sacristy and clergy robing room.

09:50 am Upon entering the parish hall, saw Kay Burrill, a long-time friend, greeted her and learned a little about the genesis of the "Church in the Round", its growing pains, and its successes to date. I thought the most important thing I heard was the growth of the Sunday School and the increased regular participation of families with children. I also had a chance to greet (retired Bishop of Rochester) Bill Burrill (preacher), who expressed some concern that the congregation would be small due to Mother's Day. I was later told he has been a great advocate for this worship service.

The space was set up with long rows of movable & comfortable chairs shaped in an elongated bow. The altar was simply set up with fair linen and candles. The "back wall" was covered with children's art from the Day School. The p.a. system worked well

10:03 am It appeared that Bill's concern might come to pass, but at the last minute a rush of people came into the space. Interestingly, the movable chairs made it possible for families to move or borrow chairs to permit them to stay in family units. As the chairs were filled, members of the congregation got up and set up more chairs.

The liturgy began a little after the appointed hour. To quiet and focus the congregation, the liturgy began with a “holy hum” (Amazing Grace). This worked very well. *Joyful, Joyful* was the processional hymn—unvested young acolytes; and, preacher and celebrant (vested). Don Monson, retired priest, was celebrant.

The liturgy was straight Rite II Eucharist from the B.C.P., and all the hymns were from the Hymnal 1982. There was one lesson (Epistle), and a Psalm read/led by adult lay readers; and, the Gospel read by clergy. Burrill pitched his homily beautifully to all age groups in the congregation, keeping the theme uncomplicated but compelling. At the Offertory, a children’s choir directed by a teen sang a lovely “thank you parents” song. Communion was administered at two standing stations in front of the altar. Chalicists were adults.

The liturgy ended with announcements and a special presentation to the retiring head of the Day School.

While there was nothing particularly distinguishing about the liturgy, it was clear that something was working. First, there was a good-sized congregation (125?) with lots of kids, not too many teens. Observing the body language, both parents and kids were comfortable in the environment. I saw a number of kids leave their parents and wander around the back of the room. Parents seemed okay with letting the kids do this, or to take a wiggly child and stand in the back. With a large number of kids, there were no disturbances at all. Secondly, the way extra chairs were set up, and the quick clearing of chairs after the service indicated some ownership by participants. I think the bottom line is that this is their service, and that it is distinct from the “stiffer”, more formal and longer liturgy in the church.

10:50 am We enjoyed the opportunity to visit with a number of people, including Cristina Hatton, the Director of Children and Family Ministries. Several people were pointed out who were not parents with kids, or grandparents of All Saints’ kids. They attend this service regularly, if not exclusively, because of the less formal and freer atmosphere. My conclusion is that the “Church in the Round” is developing its own culture or subculture, consistent with but distinguishable from the dominant culture and tradition. With this All Saints’ appears to be growing and strengthening a constituency.

I am fairly sure that we would do the liturgy differently, using the resources we already use such as *Enriching Our Worship*, *Seasons of the Spirit*, and material from other Anglican Prayer Books as well as the *Wonder, Love and Praise* hymnal and other music resources. That said, All Saints’ is onto something in what I posited as the “Church in the Round developing its own culture or subculture, consistent with but distinguishable from the dominant culture and tradition” as a key not only to developing a constituency, but I suspect also in helping less adventurous parishioners to feel comfortable supporting a move in a new direction.

I am grateful for this opportunity to observe and explore. I am thankful that All Saints' has ventured forth and started something St. Philipians can experience and have our minds opened and our horizons expanded. Doug Spurlin visited on Sunday, 19 April 2009. I believe Tom and Sue Cross may be visiting on Sunday, 24 May 2009. I am told attendance will diminish during the summer, but the service will continue throughout the summer. So, others may want to visit and observe for themselves. I look forward to pursuing a conversation with St. Philipians about what is possible and desirable to further develop our family worship experiences.