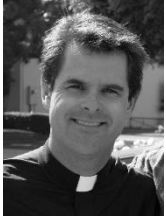


THE MAGDALENE



From the Desk of Fr. Neil...

REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING CHURCH, Pt. 1

Don't let the title of this article fool you. I am not writing to offer reasons to stay home on Sundays or quit Church all together. In fact, quite the opposite. As you may know the Ligonier Survey that appeared in the last two issues of The Magdalene was read with great interest, and I have been told by numerous people that they learned a lot from the findings. Therefore, since we are in a 'survey' mood I would like to offer, over the next few months, some results from a different survey that was given to me that I also found to be interesting and insightful.

Baptist pastor Rick Warren, conducted a survey many years ago before he founded his Church and since then has continued surveying un-

churched people. He found that the responses to the question "Why are you reluctant to visit a Church" have remained pretty much the same. This month I will tackle Complaint #1:

"Church services are boring, especially the sermons. The messages don't relate to my life. Why should I go? I don't understand it and it doesn't really help me."

I will take an approach which I hope addresses both the un-churched person as well as church-going Christians.

Let's take this first response piece by piece, "People say they don't go to Church because the service is boring..." I hate to have to break the news, but Church is NOT INTENDED to be exciting. If someone is looking for excitement, Church is not and should not be the place to be looking. This is not a fault of the Church; it is the nature of a mature, reverent and devout Christian worship style. The desire for fun and entertainment in the secular culture is now infecting the Christian Church. The Church has turned to fun and entertainment in order to attract people. To those of you who are un-churched and have been invited by a friend to attend a Church that says it is going to be 'fun' please don't go. You will be disappointed at the lack of reverence for God. You will be disappointed at the fun they are purporting to have, and you will only end up back home. I have been told and have read time and time again that many who do not go to Church, don't go because the Christian Church has a reputation of being silly, irreverent, and a makes a poor attempt at imitating secular pop-culture. Too many Churches believe that they have to

*St. Mary Magdalene Anglican Church
205 So. Glassell Street
Old Town Orange, CA 92866
www.stmarymagdaleneacc.org*

Rev. Fr. Neil Edlin, Rector



*Sunday Services:
8am Mass
10am Choral Mass &
Children's Sunday School*

*Wednesday Service:
9am (except Christmas Eve)*

trick people into attending by enticing them with gimmicks and making it fun. This is an insult to those who are un-churched. The Church should assume that those who do not attend are mature intelligent individuals who are looking for true, deep, meaningful worship, and we, as the Christian Church, must step up to the plate and offer that.

The Church's job is to educate the un-churched on why it should be a place "not of this world". Each Sunday once our service begins, we are to have our minds not on this world, but on the world to come. We are in the presence of God and the awe of that fact should reach deeply into our souls.

This has been a primary attracting feature for St. Mary Magdalene Church. Anglican worship is not only ancient and authentic, but it is a form of worship that appeals to all of the senses as well as the intellect. It is not fun, but contemplative, reverent, and God-honoring. Anglicanism is a form of worship that requires the individual to use not only their heart, but also their mind and body. We kneel to pray and worship (we don't sit...unless we are unable to kneel). We stand to sing and recite what we believe, holding a book in our hands. We sit to listen to Scripture and sermons.

The next piece of the response was: **"The sermons are boring and don't relate to my life. I don't understand them and they don't help me."**

This may be absolutely true. Some pastors preach this way. Some pastors preach sermons that are hard to understand and only offer tips for good living. This may have some relevance to life, but life is more than that. Life has greater challenges, like death, illness, persecution, loneliness, abuse, sadness and other things that are not how the world should be.

Preaching is a primary aspect of a pastor's calling and it is an important part of worship. It is the vehicle through which the message of our faith is delivered to the hearer. It is the vehicle through which the Good News of what God has done for us in the person of Jesus Christ is delivered to the hearts of people. It is the way life's most difficult and sometimes agonizing situations are addressed, and coped with, and it is through *hearing* that the solution is trusting in a faithful God through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. It is a message that eternal life is a place where death and pain is taken away forever.

As I prepare each sermon, my prayer is that God would guide my preaching to be true to what He has revealed in Scripture and that it will be pleasing and glorifying to Him and edifying to His people. I trust Him to be faithful to me in supplying those needs. If preaching is seen as God speaking to His people through me, then understanding, truth, salvation, relevance will follow.

Preaching is not storytelling, joke making, psychological analysis or tips for better living. If you are un-churched, and are looking for God's expectation of how a sermon should be, please look in the Book of Acts and other places in the New Testament. Sermons are a message of proclamation. They are the proclamation that Jesus Christ died to save mankind. The most relevant news anyone can hear, is not that we can attain a right relationship with God or enjoy eternal life unless we learn from a preacher how to live better or how to cope with difficult situations. The message of Christianity, which is the **most relevant message ever given to mankind** is that we are all in sin and we are unable to save ourselves and we can only be saved by believing and trusting in the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

To the un-churched reading this, I encourage you to not stay home, but to find a church where the Sacraments are rightly and reverently

administered and the Gospel of Jesus Christ is rightly preached. That is where true Church is to be found. I pray that in time, God will lead you to find Him and only then will what I am saying make sense. It WILL relate to your life and WILL be understandable and WILL be helpful in ways that you have never imagined. +

SHORT STUDIES

THE COUNCILS OF THE CHURCH, Pt. 1

Throughout the early history of Christianity, the Church gathered to hold meetings, which are referred to as Councils. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church says that a council is “A formal meeting of bishops and representatives of several churches convened for the purpose of regulating doctrine or discipline. General or Ecumenical Councils are assemblies of the bishops or of the whole Church. The decrees of such General Councils are held to possess the highest authority which the Church can give...” Thomas Oden writes, “We learn something very important from them [councils]: how the teachings of the prophets and apostles were consensually received by comparing Scripture to Scripture to grasp the meaning of the whole narrative of the history of salvation.”¹ There have been seven Ecumenical Councils that every branch of the church recognizes today, whether Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant, and there have been fourteen additional Catholic Councils throughout Church History.

The first Church Council can actually be found in the Book of Acts in the Bible. Turn to Chapter 15 and there you will find what is known as the Jerusalem Council, held around the year 50 AD. The very early Church, still in its infancy is at this time hammering out differences and issues. At this time, Jewish converts were still very concerned about the Mosaic Law. They

believed that Moses gave the Law and that even though one now believed that Jesus is the Messiah, one must still be circumcised in order to be a full member of the Church. The Apostles, led by James, convened. Peter made an impassioned speech declaring how God has called all men, both Jew and Gentile alike to salvation and that these ritual practices are no longer binding. All are called now to faith, rather than ceremonies. Peter says in part, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” (Acts 15:7-11 ESV) Good news for both Jew and Gentile.

But as the Church matured, certain men would pop up, or new movements would develop based on false teachings that went against what Jesus taught and what the Apostles taught and what was laid down in Scripture. And once again, Councils had to be convened to straighten out the errors. Because the council of Jerusalem made the decisions it made and allowed these changes to be put into place in **all** of the churches that were represented, it prevented individual leaders from requiring churches **they** led to conform to their own ideas about certain issues and doctrines. These and subsequent decisions were not considered to be case-by-case decisions, but decisions made by the Church with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and to be universal in scope and authority.

As a result of these Councils, we inherit what we know today to be orthodox Christian doctrine and teaching. “The first four Councils are by far

¹ Oden, T. Know the Creeds and Councils by Justin Holcomb. Zondervan. 2014. Forward by T. Oden.

the most important, as they settled the orthodox faith on the Trinity and the Incarnation. The fifth Council, which condemned the Nestorian heresy, is a mere supplement to the third and fourth. The sixth condemned Monothelitism. The seventh sanctioned the use and worship of images.”² (The latter we will discuss in a later issue of the Magdalene). Nestorianism, mentioned above in the fifth council was the heresy taught by Bishop Nestorius that said that although Jesus Christ was one person (God and man united), his two natures (one human and one divine) existed side by side and hence were separable.

Monothelitism (from Greek meaning "one will") is a teaching about how the divine and human relate in the person of Jesus, that formally emerged in Armenia and Syria in 629 AD. Specifically, Monothelitism teaches that Jesus Christ had two natures but only one will. After the sixth Council, the Church declared the orthodox position that Jesus Christ has both a Divine and a human will.

As you can see the issues that the Councils took up were complex, and centered much of the time on who or what Jesus Christ is. Even today there are many conflicting views of who Jesus is. Cults have formed like Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses, to name just two, who have ignored the teaching of the Church, and rather teach doctrines contrary to what the Bible reveals and the Councils have decided. For example, according to Mormonism, Jesus is the spirit brother of Lucifer. An absolutely blasphemous statement about Jesus Christ and unfathomably believed by millions of Mormons!! This is found in the Mormon publication by Milton R. Hunter, *The Gospel Through The Ages*, P. 15) The Church, on the other hand, declared (and has always believed even before the Nicene Council) that Jesus Christ is eternal and is the creator of all things,

including Lucifer. (Colossians 1:16). Jehovah's Witnesses make an equally blasphemous claim that Jesus is not eternal but a creature, an angel, created by Jehovah God. They further teach that He is not God in the flesh, denying the incarnation. Here are some quotes from official JW sources. "Jesus was an angel who became a man (*Watchtower*, 5/15/63, p 307)." "He was just a man, however -- not God in the flesh (*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, 1985, p 306)." And there are countless more heresies out there regarding the Lord Jesus as well as the Holy Spirit and the Father.

Needless to say, Councils are a necessary and proper institution of the Church. They brought together educated people from all over the world, from many different backgrounds. Different viewpoints were present, in an attempt to make sure all were fairly represented. Because Councils are made up of human beings, sadly, politics and dissention and even the use of force were present from time to time at Councils. "Contrary to the everyday perception that the church devised a dogma and then imposed it on the unwilling masses, the story of the councils is one in which the complexities and ambiguity of Scripture is defended time after time against oversimplifications that would have lost something crucial to the faith."³ The Councils were instrumental in keeping the Church orthodox in its early days, and in solidifying what we believe to this very day, almost 1700 years removed from the Nicene Council. We owe a great debt of gratitude to those men who would fight, even at great peril to their lives, for the orthodox faith. One of the most important questions Jesus posed to His disciples was, "Who do men say that I am?" "Who do you say that I am?" The answer to this question has eternal consequences. It DOES matter what we believe about God and Jesus. We too, as Christians need to know what we believe, AND

² Schaff, P. *The Creeds of Christendom*. 6th Edition. Baker Books. 1993. P. 44.

³ Holcomb, Justin. *Know the Creeds and Councils*. Zondervan. 2014. P. 22.

who we believe in. In the next issue we will look at the first Ecumenical Council held at Nicaea. There we will see what issues were at stake and what the result of that Council was. +

RECAP OF THE RECTOR'S VISION FOR 2015

This past year, though being successful and financially sound, has not been a year of significant growth. This year, 2015, my vision is centered on Evangelism and Church Growth. My goal is to refocus our efforts and expose St. Mary Magdalene to the local community and to others both church and un-church.

From time to time, I receive literature from friends and acquaintances concerning general church topics. One in particular caught my attention and I want to share it with you. Most of us have heard of Baptist Pastor Rick Warren and his mega-church. He recently released a survey he conducted concerning, "Why people don't go to church". I want to provide you with my thoughts on how we could take another look at the church community we have created here at SMM.

First, consider that sometimes new people do not understand scripture verse, God's word, or his meaning and his intention in our lives. All of us need to be able to help new people to understand what a Sermon is all about. This is why it is important to attend either a bible study or our monthly group sessions so we can get accustomed to talking about scripture as it relates in our lives.

Consider engaging others in these types of conversations during coffee hour instead of the latest movie you've seen or sporting event. I am not promoting only this type of dialogue but when appropriate.

This year we have to double our efforts to welcome visitors. It is especially hard with a

small church because new people are very visible. Allow them room to sit where they like and discover the service at their own pace. Be warm and welcoming.

Concerning finances, all churches have an income stream and business expenses. Here at SMM, we keep our records very transparent. You as a parishioner should have a good understanding of how we get our money, and what we spend it on. Know this, every dime we receive in the plate goes to the church's operating expenses, and any money given for outreach to missions, the homeless, etc. is raised. Giving of your money and your time is a statement about your faith and your commitment to preserving God's church. Giving is to be done prayerfully between you and God. With that said, attendance is as important as giving.

It is everyone's responsibility to become educated on how our children's ministry works. Those children 5 yrs old and younger are provided a nursery room with live video feed of the mass so that parents who do not wish to leave their children with our attendant can still participate in mass. Children who are 6 – 11 yrs old are provided the opportunity to attend Sunday School. Children who are confirmed are expected to participate in mass as a full member of the congregation. Children in this age bracket are given the opportunity to be trained as an acolyte or Sunday School reader.

I want to again emphasize that our goal is to be more engaged with others about our faith. When you speak to your neighbor or your local grocery store clerk, is your faith a visible part of your conversation? If we truly believe everything we hear and pray and say week after week, doesn't it make sense that you would want to share your church life with someone? If so, take the risk and let us see how far it will take us towards our goal for 2015.

GUILDS, GROUPS & EVENTS

SHROVE TUESDAY BETTER THAN MARDI GRAS!



Feast on juicy bratwurst, polish and Italian sausages, potatoes, desserts AND delicious pancakes. Stuff them with whipped cream and fruit or drown them in syrup or chocolate. Wow !!

How about a little fun. The games are a riot!

Tuesday, February 17th, 6:30pm until the last pancake is gone. \$6.50 - Adults, \$5.00 - Kids (4 - 18yrs old), Toddlers - Free.

NEW2YOU SALE

St. Martha's Guild next NEW2YOU sale is set for **Saturday, February 7th** from 8am until 2pm.



Volunteers are needed to help sort merchandise before the sale on Thursday, February 5th from 4:30pm – 6:30pm; and are also needed on sale day.

Please contact Elizabeth Sneddon if you would like to help.

Remember, all NEW2YOU proceeds go to Outreach charities. Please help us make a difference.

WOMEN'S DEVOTIONAL

What is a Devotional? It is simply a time devoted to God. Our Group, lead by Karen Carlson, uses this time to understand God's word as it is related to our daily lives from a woman's perspective.

The topic for this month is "In the world but not of it". **Please join us in the Parish Hall.** No more climbing the stairs! We meet after the first service at 9:00am and we end at 9:50.

LATIN STUDIES

The Men's Christian Fellowship group are meeting on Thursday mornings at 9:00am in the Parish Hall to learn Latin. The class is one hour and requires you to obtain a book. Please contact Lou Carlson or the Church office 714-532-2420 to get details on this class and how to obtain the necessary books and other materials.

BIBLE STUDY & EVENING PRAYER

Those attending our Bible Study are currently enjoying a robust discussion on the Book of The Acts of the Apostles. Bible study meets every Wednesday of the month at 6:30pm, except the 2nd Wednesday. Evening Prayer follows at 8:00 in the church. Bible Study resumes Wednesday January 21st, at 6:30pm and ends on February 4th.

THE CRAFT GUILD

The Craft Guild has a new look and feel about it. Yes, we will still be knitting but much more. Come to the February meeting on Sunday, the 15th at 11:30am and find out what great projects we have in store for 2015.

If you like to cook, bake, garden, make floral arrangements, quilt, knit and so much more, make sure you come to our next meeting.



THE SEASON OF LENT

ASH WEDNESDAY

The first day of Lent is Ash Wednesday, named so because of the ceremonial use of ashes, as a symbol of penitence, during Ash Wednesday Mass. The ashes are obtained by burning the remains of the palm branches blessed on the previous Palm Sunday, are placed in a vessel on the altar and blessed before Mass. The priest then invites those present to approach and, dipping his thumb in the ashes, marks them as they kneel with the sign of the cross on the forehead, with the words: "Remember, man, thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return." This ritual is derived from the early church around the late 10th century.

Mass will be held at 9am and 7pm.

LENTEN PROGRAM

Father Neil will be conducting a Lenten Program on Friday evenings at 7:00pm. Each Friday we will share a Meatless Soup Supper followed by the Stations of the Cross, Evening Prayer or a Biblical Lecture.

Please check the "Calendar At A Glance" on the back page for more details.

MEATLESS SOUP SUPPERS

Looking for support and a little fellowship during Lent. Come to our meatless Soup Suppers. We serve two different soups and such as a simple meal before Fr. Neil's Lenten service.

If you would like to volunteer to make a soup or meatless dish, please contact Anne Peterson.

LENTEN OUTREACH

Our Lenten Outreach program this year will be directed to the Homeless and the Poor. Mary's Kitchen is first on the list for consideration.

Your donations do make a difference. Please be generous. Your support does make a difference! Watch for an announcement in the narthex.

NOTES & REMINDERS

A GIFT FOR OUR BABIES

Thank you to the Bell family for our new Baby Changing Table that has been placed in the narthex Women's Restroom. Our new Moms will make great use out of it.

OFFERING UP OUR PRAYERS

During the mass, Fr. Neil leads and facilitates us in prayers for the people in sickness, sorrow or other need. You might wonder "Do we know who these people are?" Yes, we do! These are friends and family of our church members, and yes, we can all pray for your loved ones as well. Just fill out a prayer request card from the pew rack, and place it in the offering plate as it comes by. Thanks to be God for hearing our prayers!

FOURTH SUNDAY BRUNCH

Sorry no Fourth Sunday brunch during Lent. Watch the Sunday flyers for information about upcoming brunches after Lent.



Daylight Saving Time is Sunday, March 8th. Set your clocks **AHEAD** on Saturday night so you aren't late for church!

CALENDAR AT A GLANCE

FEBRUARY		
Men's Christian Fellowship	2/1	9:00am - 9:30am
Women's Devotional	2/1	9:15am - 9:50am
New2 You Sale	2/7	8:00am - 2:00pm
Women's Guild	2/8	11:30am
Vestry Meeting	2/11	7:15pm
Craft Guild	2/15	11:30am
Shrove Tuesday Feast	2/17	6:30pm-8:00pm
Ash Wednesday Services	2/18	9am & 7pm
Fri Soup Supper/Stations of the Cross	2/27	6:30pm
Bible Study Wednesday	2/4	6:30pm
Evening Prayer	2/4	8:00pm
MARCH		
Men's Christian Fellowship	3/1	9:00am - 9:30am
Women's Devotional		9:15am - 9:50am
Fri Soup Supper/Evening Prayer	3/6	6:30pm
Women's Guild	3/8	11:30am
Vestry	3/11	7:15pm
Fri Soup Supper/Creation Video & Talk	3/13	6:30pm
Craft Guild	3/18	11:30am
Fri Soup Supper/Evening Prayer	3/20	6:30pm
Open House	3/24	7:00pm
Fish Fry/Litany	3/27	6:30pm
Palm Sunday (Procession & Passion Play)	3/29	10:00am Mass

FR. NEIL'S VISITING HOURS AT THE OFFICE

Monday 1pm – 4pm

Tuesday 1pm – 4pm

Please call to schedule your visit.

Friday & Saturday the Office is Closed