

THE MAGDALENE



From the Desk of Fr. Neil...

REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING CHURCH, Pt. 2

As I mentioned in last month's article, there are four main reasons why many people don't go to church. The first reason was: "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." In that article I addressed this by pointing out that in many churches, entertainment, comedy and rock concerts have replaced Biblical, historical, reverent worship. I theorized that some don't go because they rightly see this sort of worship style as irreverent and shallow. However, this can also be a symptom of the type of preaching and teaching some are exposed to. So we can't allow them to take all of the blame in not going or not coming back a second time.

I also said that these articles would address both

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

Wednesday Service: 9am

those who don't attend church and those who do...for different reasons, of course.

To those who do attend, and have given me some good feedback on the first article, I would like to say here that as Christians who are faithful with church attendance we are not to look at these answers and think that since we don't have irrelevant sermons, money issues, unfriendly members or a suspicious childcare system, then we are ok. I'm glad that members find St. Mary Magdalene Church doing well in all four categories. However, these reasons for why many don't attend church are legitimate to some degree and we have to always be mindful of ourselves and do what we can to make sure that we don't fail in these areas and subsequently give people a reason to stay home or not return.

These findings are not only designed for us to look at and gauge how we are doing, but they are, more importantly designed to remind us that there are souls out there who actually believe one or more of these things. They don't go to church, and they are consequently eternally lost. Those who hold to one or more of these reasons need to be informed about what true Christianity is and where they can find it. We are to keep these answers in our minds and know how to address them...not just sit back and relax because we may think our church passes the test.

Response #2. Question: "Why are you reluctant to visit a Church?" Answer: "Church members are unfriendly to visitors. It feels like a 'clique.' If I ever went to church, I'd want to feel welcomed without being watched or embarrassed."

Once again, these can be valid complaints. This is a common objection. In defense of this answer, I too have visited churches and have noticed this sort of thing, and have found it distracting. Some churches smother the newcomer with attention the minute they step in the door, offering to practically escort them to their pew. Some will approach newcomers with paperwork to fill out, a pile of tracts to read, assignments to take on or other things that distract from the true reason they are there. Visitors come to look at a new church, to see what sort of worship style it offers, what kind of childcare it offers (if applicable), and meet people of like mind. Overly attending to their needs can be off-putting.

On the other hand, in defense of the Church, not attending to their needs can also be off-putting. We should keep in mind and ask those of you who are reading this, who are thinking about visiting to keep in mind that the Church is made up of human beings. Human beings by nature are imperfect. They sin. They can even be cruel, and hateful not to mention, uncaring, unfriendly and “cliquey.” This is not to be an excuse, but it is a reason. Christians, because we are human, can and sometimes are guilty of the same sins as those who are not Christians. St. John tells us that we sin and if we deny it, we are liars and we make God out to be a liar. St. John also tells us that we must constantly be repenting of our sins, seeking forgiveness, intending to lead a new life in love and charity with our neighbors and, following the commandments of God. Moreover, everyone knows that when you are a new person ANYWHERE, people are going to look at you. If you are uncomfortable being looked at when you are out of place, then you should avoid all places where membership is part of the organization. It can be difficult for us when looking is considered pressure and not looking is considered rude. What are we to do?

We are pleased that a visitor has chosen to come to our church. We should not be overly attentive on the one hand, and yet, definitely not distant on the other. Actually, friendliness to visitors should not have to be something we need to be reminded of or work on! We should be pleased that they have visited us because we are concerned that they find a church home, get involved, and most importantly, find salvation. If we do not welcome visitors, what does that say about our belief? If we truly believe that we have been saved by God in Christ “even while we were still sinners,” is this not a good enough reason to welcome visitors so that they might also find a home and a place where they can encounter the living God and find salvation? That is our primary concern, not numbers. Church growth can be exciting. We love it when we get a visitor or a new family. But our mission, as I have said from the time I took over the leadership of St. Mary Magdalene Church, is to be faithful over all other concerns. Faithful to what Scripture teaches as of first importance, and faithful to our Anglican heritage and Book of Common Prayer. If God is pleased to bring us visitors and new members, then we will give Him thanks. If He decides that we continue in a season, seeing no newcomers or even shrinkage, then we, again, must still be thankful to God. Thankful for His sustaining grace and with what He *has* given us. Whether we grow or shrink is up to God, not us. Again, we are called, to be faithful with what we have been given. We are to be concerned about the souls of those who are perishing outside the church. We are to see ourselves as one body, not divided into cliques, age groups, and ethnic groups. We are all one in Christ Jesus. Let us then reach out with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the reconciling love that comes with it. Let us welcome visitors and newcomers, making them feel welcomed and yet not watched. Let us simply do our best to be a welcoming parish and see what God will do with us next. +

SHORT STUDIES

THE COUNCILS OF THE CHURCH, Pt. 2

As promised last month we will begin in this issue to look at the Council of Nicaea. Nicaea is in present-day Turkey. Perhaps of all of the Councils the Church has held, the Nicene is the one that most people are familiar with. This Council settled the question of how Christians can worship one God and also claim that God is three persons. It was the first council to obtain universal authority in the church. It improved on the language of the already existing Apostles' Creed by including a number of more specific statements about Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. We recite the Nicene Creed each Sunday and the Council of Nicaea is where the majority of the Creed was developed.

In AD 324, Emperor Constantine reunited the Roman Empire under a single throne. Constantine had recently converted to Christianity according to his own testimony by seeing a vision of a cross in the sky. Constantine convened this first council. Only seven years prior, a priest by the name of Arius caused quite a bit of trouble by publicly proclaiming that Jesus Christ was not God. Jesus was, to Arius, a creation of God, who in turn was present in the creation of the world. In other words, Arius taught that Jesus was not eternal. To be fair, Arius was merely attempting to correct what he thought was a problem or a misunderstanding about Jesus. He reasoned that if God was eternal and unchanging and Jesus on the other hand, when on earth, learned and grew, how can the two be of the same essence? One of Arius's bishops, Alexander argued that the title *Father* is an eternal attribute of God. Therefore, for God to possess the title *Father* meant that He had to have offspring. To be a father means you have to have a son (offspring). Jesus does make reference to his being subordinate to the Father in John 14:28 "You heard me say to you,

'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, *for the Father is greater than I.*" Yet Jesus also makes claims to be both equal and divine like the Father. "This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, *making himself equal with God.*" (John 5:18 ESV) So the debate revolved around the question "How can Christians worship Jesus and worship the Father, when both are different from each other on the one hand and still claim to be monotheists (one-god worshippers) on the other?"

As the Creed came down in its almost-final form, (remember the final form that we confess today is a product of the next Council in Constantinople as well), it greatly emphasized the attributes of both God the Father and Jesus Christ. Notice our Creed's emphasis on certain things about Jesus. God of God, Light of Light. Very God of very God. Begotten, not made. Attributes of Jesus were drawn from Scripture passages like John 1 and many others. In other words, Jesus was not made or created, nor is he a product of the Father, but He is truly and God. Arians were able to finagle their way around the details of the wording to this point, and go along with what was affirmed thus far. But, once the statement that Jesus is, *Of one substance with the Father* was affirmed, the Arian position was now distinguished from the orthodox Christian view. The Greek word *homoousios* means *of the same substance*. Prior to this, the term *homoiousios* was used to refer to Christ as *of similar substance*. Do you see the iota (the letter i in the middle of the word?) Some have postulated that sayings like "It doesn't make one iota of difference" have their origin in this Council, this debate, and this choice in wording. Either way, we are grateful that the Holy Spirit was present at this Council and that the true nature of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity was affirmed as eternal with the Father and the

Holy Spirit. "If the early Christians had lost their nerve and conceded the 'lesser divinity' of Jesus, whatever that might mean, then the work of God in Christ for our salvation would have been rendered meaningless. No mere man, nor half god, could possibly intervene to save fallen and sinful humanity, let alone restore all of creation. Only the Creator can enter creation to fix its brokenness and redeem its original, latent purpose."¹ +

GUILDS, GROUPS & EVENTS

EXCITING NEWS FROM THE CRAFT GUILD

The Craft Guild is off to a rousing start. In February, our Crafters who knit have selected the "Infinity Scarf" as their next project. Bright colors and unique yarns are completely acceptable because we will be making these scarves to sell at the year end New2You Jewelry Sale. Our goal is to have 20 scarves by the end of the year. All proceeds, of course, will be given to our Outreach missions.

March's meeting on Sunday the 18th is a field trip to the Dragon Fly and Tour in Old Town Orange. Meet in the Hall at 11:30 and we will walk over. Don't miss out on the fun.

If you like to cook, bake, garden, make floral arrangements, quilt, etc. and want to share your craft with the women, please contact either Robin or Sharon.

FR. NEIL'S LENTEN PROGRAM

Father Neil will be conducting a Lenten Program on Friday evenings at 7:15pm. Fr. has selected the following Sermon topics for the season:

Week 1 (2/27) - A Watchman for Israel, *Ezekiel 3:16-27*

Week 2 (3/6) - The Valley of the Dry Bones, *Ezekiel 37*

Week 3 (3/13) – "Privileged Species" DVD

Week 4 (3/20) - The Lord's Coming Salvation, *Isaiah 52:1-10*

Week 5 (3/27) – "Miracle of the Fishes"

LENTEN MOVIE NIGHT

Privileged Species, How the Cosmos is Designed for Human Life

On March 13, during our commemorative Fish Dinner, we will be viewing Privileged Species, a 30 minute video which "...explores growing evidence from physics, chemistry, biology, and related fields that our universe was designed for large multi-cellular beings like ourselves." Geneticist Michael Denton narrates this documentary in very understandable terms. This fascinating Video obtained from Biola's School of Apologetics, will begin at 7:30pm sharp followed by Fr. Neil's commentary.

"Though science can never prove the existence of God, we can still benefit from the findings which continually point to an intelligently designed and created universe."

MEATLESS SOUP SUPPERS

Looking for support in your Lenten disciplines and desire a little fellowship at the same time? Come to our meatless Soup Suppers. This simple meal is served promptly at 6:30pm before Fr. Neil's Lenten Program at 7:00pm.

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

SOCKS FOR THE POOR

Have you ever worn sneakers or a pair of boots without socks? Have you ever been

¹ Holcomb, J. Know the Creeds and Councils. Zondervan. 2014. P. 38-39.

embarrassed because you wore a mismatched pair of socks? There are poor men and women who go to work every day with worn tattered socks or with no socks at all. Could you bear the blisters from wet work boots and no change of socks? This is a call to prayer and giving during this Lenten Season. A Giving Box is located in the Narthex for brand new socks for men and women. All donations will be given to Mary's Kitchen and Day Shelter.

"Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard. Proverbs 21:13"

Your support does make a difference!

COMMEMORATIVE FISH DINNER

"Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. ... The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off. ... When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread." John 21.

Join us on Friday, March 27th for a Commemorative Fish Dinner as Fr. Neil speaks about some of the miracles performed by Jesus Christ. Look for the sign up sheet in the Narthex.

PASSION OF THE CHRIST LIVE

Participate in a dramatic interactive reading depicting the Passion of Jesus Christ. Come to 10am Mass on March 27th and relive His entry into Jerusalem, His trial, suffering and death.

If you have a palm tree and want to donate to this service, please contact Lou Carlson.

NOTES & REMINDERS

OFFERING UP OUR PRAYERS

During the mass, Fr. Neil leads us in prayers for the people in sickness, sorrow or other needs. 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!

WOMEN'S DEVOTIONAL

The Women's Devotional begins after the first service at 9:00am until 9:50am. The women meet to understand God's word as it relates to our daily lives from a woman's perspective. This month's topic is, **"In the world but not of it"** a continued discussion from last month. **Please join us in the Parish Hall.**

LAST CALL FOR LATIN!!

The Men's Christian Fellowship group is well on their way to becoming proficient in Latin so if you have an interest and want to join them, please do so quickly. Newcomers will only be accepted into the class up to March 8th. The group meets on Thursday mornings from 9am to 10am in the Parish Hall. You are required to buy a book. Please contact Lou Carlson.

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 the next morning!

CALENDAR AT A GLANCE

MARCH		
Men's Fellowship	3/1	9:00am - 9:30am
Women's Devotional		9:15am - 9:50am
Fri Soup Supper/Evening Prayer	3/6	6:30pm
Men's Group	3/8	11:30am
Women's Guild	3/8	11:30am
Vestry	3/11	7:15pm
Fri Soup Supper/"A Privileged Species" Video & Discussion	3/13	6:30pm
Craft Guild – Field Trip/Tour of the Dragon Fly	3/18	11:30am
Fri Soup Supper/Evening Prayer	3/20	6:30pm
Fish Dinner/Litany	3/27	6:30pm
Palm Sunday (Passion Narrative)	3/29	10:00am Mass
APRIL		
Maundy Thursday	4/2	7:00pm
Good Friday Mass (Blended Mass)	4/3	12 Noon
Good Friday (Stations of the Cross)	4/3	7:00pm
Easter Services Solemn High Mass	4/5	10:00am
Vestry	4/8	7:15
Men's Group	4/12	11:30am
Women's Guild – Knitting & Fellowship	4/12	11:30am
Craft Guild	4/19	11:30am
New2You Sale	4/25	8:00am – 2:00pm

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.