

Dear Friends,

On Saturday I flew to Washington, D.C. to make my planned visit to the Church of the Epiphany as part of my clergy renewal leave. I flew into the Baltimore-Washington Airport since it was significantly less expensive than flying into Reagan Airport (or National Airport as it used to be called) in Washington. I had gotten up at 4:30 a.m. in order to get to the Indianapolis airport for my flight to Baltimore – another early morning.

I was walking through the terminal in Baltimore and thinking, “Now why was this visit to another parish such a good idea when we wrote the grant proposal?” Those thoughts were coming after the two months of travel and walking through five other airports (most of them twice). It was also after the 23 hours of travel that got Virginia and me back home in Indianapolis at 10:30 p.m. on Wednesday night. I was back in another airport – and would be sleeping in another strange bed – about 2½ days after we got home. I had been home long enough to get a haircut, have an eye examination and do a few chores. I had been pleased to drive my own car (even though it was too cool to put the top down), and it had felt good to sleep in my own bed. Now, I would be driving a rental car and sleeping in a guest room at Virginia Seminary. “So, why was this such a good idea?”

Then, Sunday was another early morning. I was up at 5:30 a.m. in order to get to the Church of the Epiphany before 7:00 a.m. Epiphany begins their ministry to the poor and homeless of Washington, D.C. – The Welcome Table – at 6:00 a.m. when they open the doors of the church. At 7:00 a.m. there is a Bible study, an AA/NA meeting or persons may just sit in the church if they want. Preparations for the Welcome Table Breakfast start at the same time. The Welcome Table Holy Eucharist is at 8:00 a.m., and the Welcome Table Breakfast is served immediately after the Eucharist. This morning they served breakfast to about 150 people. After I ate breakfast with the guests, I joined in helping in the continued serving (it takes two seatings to feed everyone), and in the clean up. The breakfast is well organized in order to feed everyone in about an hour. Clean up continues until the second service. Their Welcome Table Ministry is the focus of the first part of the morning, and there are lots of volunteers involved.

In mid-morning the congregational participants change as most of the homeless leave after breakfast. There is a community Bible study at 10:00 a.m. and at 11:00 a.m. is a more traditional Holy Eucharist with organ and choir. And, of course, there is a Coffee Hour after the service. What Episcopal Church doesn't have coffee hour? (Well, there probably are some that don't, but not many that I know.) I left Epiphany at about 1:00 p.m. to drive back to Virginia Seminary.

By the time I left Epiphany, I was able to remember why this parish visit was a good idea when we wrote the grant proposal – and is still a good idea! I was able to spend some time watching another parish carry out their ministry. And in a small way join in that ministry through sharing in worship, education, fellowship and service – and in a few hours. I started to get a feel for what Epiphany is like and what their ministry is about. I will spend more time at Epiphany on Monday and Tuesday, including attending a Vestry meeting and join in “Street Church,” another part of their ministry to the homeless of Washington.

Epiphany is significantly different than Nativity since it is an urban parish with a special ministry to the poor and homeless of their community. What I have been able to see so far is how they use their gifts and talents to reach the community around them with the love of God and the Good News of Jesus Christ. They are ministering in their context in a way that is appropriate for

them. The ministries they have would not work at Nativity since our contexts are so different. Yet, aspects of their ministry are appropriate anywhere. For example, they have a strong ministry of hospitality as they welcome the homeless and a very diverse core congregation. A ministry of hospitality can take place anywhere – just the details may be different.

Seldom do parish clergy get to see and experience how another parish functions and to share in their worship and ministry. This visit provided me with this opportunity at Epiphany, and I am looking forward to visiting another parish next Sunday in Denver, Colorado.

Epiphany is a church facing challenges – like all parishes today. (Randolph Charles, the rector, indicated they are facing an \$110,000 deficit, which is a major challenge for any parish.) Epiphany is also a church that is alive and vital, with a sense of renewal – and living out the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I was able to see how God is renewing, today, this congregation and the whole church.

That is why this parish visit was such a good idea

Peace

Bruce +