



The Vergers Voice

The news blog of the Vergers Guild

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Saturday, January 24, 2015

My Diocese Doesn't Have a VGEC Chapter. Help! - Part 2 or "Can we Talk About the Verger Ministry in my Small Parish?"



The Rev. Martin Wright III presiding at St. Mark's in Johnstown, PA on Easter morning 2012.

By Ken Holloway, News Manager, VGEC with Cindy Leap, verger at St. Mark's in Johnstown, PA

On October 31st last year, we observed the benefit of meaningful conversation among vergers and how Cindy Leap, after becoming a Fellow of the Guild, stepped up her journey as the current verger at [St. Mark's Episcopal Church](#) in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Cindy was corresponding with Nicholas Birchum, head verger at the [Cathedral Church of Saint Matthew](#) in Dallas, seeking advice, when your News Manager became aware of this great story. As can happen, the real title of this article might best be, *Can we Talk About "Vergering"?*

Nicholas had advised Cindy, in part, to start with the basics. He suggested categories like the church building layout and its systems, and the design of the liturgy as practiced at St. Mark's. He said, "If I were in your position, I'd consider two main categories to define the role: (1) your verger skills and (2) building constrains at the parish. Additionally, I'd consider helping to design the liturgy for Sunday worship, preparing the nave for each service, lighting the candles or assuring that they are lit (and extinguished at the conclusion of the service), helping with altar guild duties as appropriate and tending to the sound system."

We ended our last installment as Cindy was about to meet with her new rector, the Rev. Nancy Threadgill, in an effort to define the verger's role at St. Mark's parish. Time has passed and Cindy recently commented on how she is supporting Rev. Threadgill in defining the verger ministry there.

Cindy writes, "The current building that is St. Mark's Episcopal Church was built in 1890 following

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the Great Johnstown Flood of 1889 which wiped out most of the city of Johnstown along with the former Church, Rectory and the Pastor, his wife and family."

"St. Mark's is considered a 'downtown' Church in a rural city. The building seats over 300 people and used to be very robust, but over the past 15 years, we have gone from over 150 people per service to less than 40 on a really good Sunday. The next closest Episcopal Church is over 30 miles away in any direction."

"Currently, our Choir has less than 10 members and usually one of them is either a reader or Chalice bearer during the service. The Gospel book normally sits on the Altar."

"I did look through the listing of Vergers in the Dioceses of Pittsburgh. There are 4 listed in the membership. Two of them have memberships that have expired and I'm the only one that has completed the course. So, for now, organization of a VGEC chapter in our diocese may be problematic."

"Rev. Nancy has given me the task of organizing her installation. That includes everything from the announcement to the Diocese, sending special invitations to local and community Churches, setting up the service bulletin as well as juggling a previously scheduled event (same day) to another time, and organizing the reception to follow. Needless to say, I've been a little busy. I'm enjoying the task and am really happy I can do this for her."

"I am also working with her on keeping a schedule of upcoming events. She has said that she struggles to look ahead, and looking ahead is one of my strengths so we are a good team. I see a lot of good things happening and am looking forward to the journey."

Additional comments about the role of a verger in a small parish have come in from other guild members. I'll be covering more adventures in "small-setting verger practices" in a few months time, and we'll hear more from Cindy later in the spring.

In this story, the theme is actually the same as it is in very large Episcopal churches, the verger is called to serve the rector and attending clergy. As such, we vergers work with the clergy leadership, doing whatever is necessary, to provide the best worship experience possible for the attending congregation.

Abstract: Some of our older churches have been through really difficult periods. Take, for example, the events of May 31st, 1889, when, an upstream dam near South Fork, PA, collapsed during a sustained heavy down pour. This catastrophe, the well-known "Great Johnstown Flood", was responsible for the deaths of 2209 persons in Johnstown, including Saint Mark's rector, Alonzo Potter Diller, his wife, and two children. Approximately one-half of the entire membership of Saint Mark's Church perished in the flood. Over time, the church was re-built and has held services continually for more than a hundred years, now assisted by one of the newest Fellows of the VGEC. As a new rector settles in, how can the (only) verger at St. Mark's best assist that acclimatizing process? By starting with a conversation.

Posted by [Ken Holloway](#) at 12:37 AM  

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[Geoff Brown](#) January 24, 2015 at 9:12 PM

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