



The Vergers Voice

The news blog of the Vergers Guild

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Friday, May 26, 2017

A Retired Verger's View from the Pew



David Jette with members of the All Saints' Church Altar Guild: Sally Steere, Carol Walsh, and Patricia Row

By David Jette, Retired Verger, davidrich1950@yahoo.com

My retirement after 30 years as Head Verger of [Trinity Church Wall Street](#) in New York City was soon followed by a move to [Peterborough, New Hampshire](#), a lovely town of 7,000 people in the Mount Monadnock region of the state. After settling into a new home and different surroundings it didn't take me long to enter [All Saints' Church](#), my first Sunday in Peterborough.

There I discovered an absolute gem of [Gothic Revival architecture](#) beautifully maintained and appointed. The liturgy, true to our tradition, was comfortably familiar and by the time of the sharing of the Peace I realized the church was full of people, a very healthy sign, and many greeted me warmly as an obvious newcomer. This welcome, though not overdone, was just right to assure my return. I have missed only one Sunday!

After some time, I arranged a meeting with The Rev. Jamie Hamilton, our rector, and we agreed that my involvement would be measured and in no way commence a verger's ministry in a place where no verger has served. I breathed a sigh of relief and knew this was just right. Of course Jamie and I discussed liturgy, my experience at Trinity, and how I was adjusting to life in small town New Hampshire. I agreed to serve as an occasional lector and work with her on upcoming special services.

I have long believed and have stated many times in verger gatherings that ninety-five percent of our ministry is rightly carried out "behind the scenes." Our principal role is not to merely don quaint eighteenth century quasi academic garb and lead processions. The ministry of the verger is much more complicated and challenging and I believe more holy than that. To regularly worship from the pew (and I must point out that All Saints' has chairs rather than pews), has reinforced the truth of this belief and has heightened my discipline to both appreciate the detail needed to offer any

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meaningful liturgy and to see the larger symbols at work.

This year's Holy Week observance was the first for me in forty years that I was not an active participant. Before Palm Sunday, I must admit, the rector and members of our altar guild and I walked through all the services but my role through the week was very minimal and appropriately out of view. Let me share with you my images upon entering the church for the Liturgy of Maundy Thursday.

I arrived early and slowly walked down the aisle of the nave and simply gazed at the altar and its furnishing beautifully prepared for the rites of Maundy Thursday. Items needed for the stripping and washing of the altar were in place. A few things including large and very heavy pavement candlesticks had already been removed in order to avoid any awkwardness later. Chairs, basins, a ewer and towels were near the pulpit for the foot washing. The altar of repose in the Lady Chapel was banked with a beautiful assortment of flowering spring plants, a small bank of votive candles was in place for the all night watch that would follow the service and a schedule of those keeping vigil was in a small binder at the entrance to the chapel.

As I returned to the nave and as people were arriving I noticed three members of the altar guild seated quietly together in the front row all dressed in black clothes. I smiled at them recognizing that they in their way had fulfilled the ministry of verger for that time and for that occasion. Everything I observed had been carefully, reverently and quietly carried out by these three very special women before the first person entered the church.

Toward the end of the service when the Blessed Sacrament was carried to the altar of repose and as a cantor from the choir began chanting the familiar words of Psalm 22, these three people with great dignity and purpose in a darkened church removed everything we had used for the foot washing and the Eucharist. To most of the people gathered, I am certain their movements and actions were largely invisible. Well not to me.

As the rector finished the final Gospel reading describing the scene in the garden of Gethsemane, the last action of the liturgy, I offered a quiet prayer of thanksgiving for the work of vergers and all those who with grace and dignity worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness unseen and largely unknown.

The 2017 VGEC Annual Conference will take place in Atlanta, Georgia from October 12th through October 15th. We hope you can join us! Click the big red button to register today. You can also [read more about the conference](#) and [book your hotel](#).



Abstract: David Jette, retired Head Verger of Trinity Church Wall Street and new resident of Peterboro, New Hampshire, has long believed that ninety-five percent of the verger ministry is rightly carried out behind the scenes. He says, "Our principal role is not to merely don quaint eighteenth century quasi academic garb and lead processions. Our ministry of the verger is much more complicated and challenging and I believe more holy than that." David reflects on this experience at his new parish, All Saints' Church, Peterboro as a retired verger happily situated (mostly) from the pew.

Posted by [Scott Smith](#) at [7:42 AM](#)



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