



The Vergers Voice

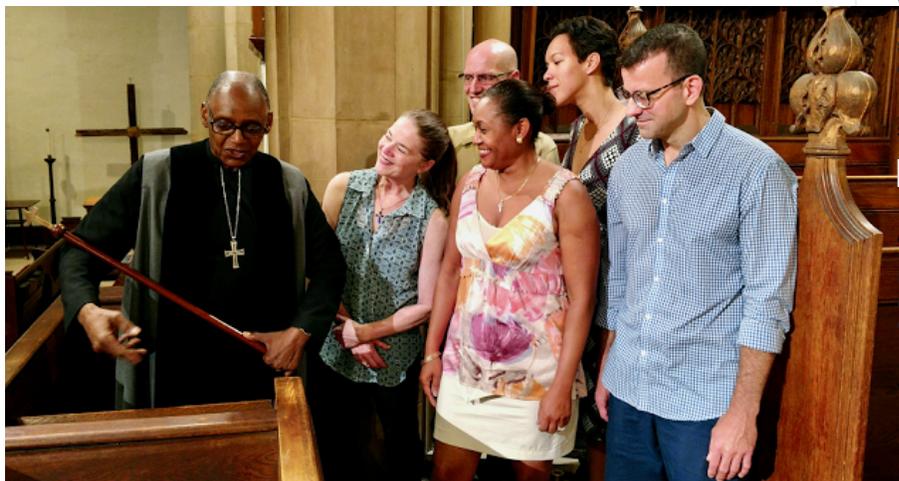
The news blog of the Vergers Guild

Welcome to the [Vergers Voice](#), the official news blog of the [Vergers Guild of the Episcopal Church](#). Also known as the VGEC, we are located on the web at [vergers.org](#) and [facebook.com/vergerguild](#) the #1 online resources for vergers world-wide.

For information about submitting news and announcements to the blog, click [HERE](#) or contact ideas@vergervoice.org.

Friday, September 1, 2017

My First 100 Days: Reflections of a new Verger



Godfrey tries out the Verger's Stall at St. Luke's Montclair with friends onlooking

By Godfrey Gregg [FVGEC](#), St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Montclair, NJ - gregg@adelphi.edu

Easter Sunday, 2017 was a glorious day here in northern New Jersey. I awoke early, prayed, and prepared for my first verger experience. Prior to the start of the Great Vigil the night before, the rector had asked if I would like to verge tomorrow. Easter Sunday! My internal dialogue was, "Excuse me, what did you just ask me?" Following the Vigil, I grabbed a glass of champagne, approached the rector, and gave my reply, "Sure."

I am a life-long Episcopalian. At the age of ten I became a choirboy. Because choirboys received a monthly stipend, the parish (i.e. The Episcopal Church) was my first employer. I attended Episcopal Church schools, and like many of my generation I walked away from the church as I got older. Fortuitously, a couple of decades later, like the prodigal, I was welcomed home with open arms. I found a church that was inclusive and for twelve years I thrived in an Anglo Catholic experience. Following a move to New Jersey I was drawn to [St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Montclair, New Jersey](#) in August 2010. After a year I joined the Healing Ministry.

The thought of becoming a verger occurred to me after two life altering events. First, in January, 2015, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer and required surgery. I took a sabbatical from teaching, reflected on my new identity, and recommitted myself to living. In the fall of 2015, I returned to the Healing Ministry and celebrated my deliverance from illness. The second event, in April 2016, occurred while I sat vigil on Maundy Thursday into Good Friday. St. Luke's was completely dark except for one candle. Suddenly I became aware of not being alone. The eyes of the faithful departed were upon me. I had not experienced such an intense examination since defending my dissertation. I am not psychotic! To self soothe myself I recited Robert Herrick's Litany to the Holy Spirit, "In the hour of my distress, When temptations me oppress. And when I my sins confess. Sweet Spirit Comfort Me!" As I sat my thoughts were often on the vergers. Indeed I was seated near the verger's stall.

St. Luke's was established in 1860 and the present edifice consecrated in December 1892. The parish had its first verger in 1917, J. G. Chesterman, who was also sexton and carpenter. There is a virge handmade in 1918 by Mr. Chesterman. The most recent verger died in October 2013

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Past issues of the Printed Vergers Voice

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and his death created a huge void and sorrow, and the verger's stall remained vacant until Easter 2017.

During the summer of 2016, I approached the rector regarding the verger position and over the next few months we discussed the role. My oldest friend, from choirboy days, is a verger in Atlanta. His advice was, "Don't do it alone. It's a lot of work and if not careful you can/will get burned out. Think a team of vergers..." My rector also had a verger team concept but life circumstances and waning interests reduced the team to just me. The rector continued to encourage me. I read everything available, researched YouTube, and found services from Westminster Abbey. The vergers.org website was a treasure trove.

I joined VGEC in the fall of 2016 and started the [training course](#). Additionally, in February and May of 2017, the [Diocese of Newark](#) conducted training for vergers. I started to wonder when I would have my first verger experience...

April 16, 2017, I arrived at St. Luke's with a checklist in hand. Being a former flight attendant, I was accustomed to having a checklist and/or preflight and I suspect most vergers have something similar. Neither the rector nor I had informed anyone about the new verger. Consequently, when I arrived in the vesting room and began to vest - there was silence. And that's when it hit me: I was wearing the cassock and chimere of my predecessors (ironically we were all about the same size and build) and I was holding the virge made by Mr. Chesterman in 1918. Plus it was the 100th anniversary of the verger position at St. Luke's: 1917-2017.

At 9:50 am I took my place and prepared for the procession. Easter Sunday - standing room only - dear Lord deliver me. Although everything went well, I recall the sense of relief at the conclusion of the service. I could breathe once again.

As the 100th day of my being verger approaches, I have served on thirteen Sundays and for one funeral. There is so much to learn! I have made mistakes. There are always comments regarding the role: you've got big shoes to fill; are you comfortable in the role; why don't you smile, Godfrey; good to see the verger's robes being used again - you wear them with dignity. I have questioned my decision to accept the verger's mantle but I always arrive at the same conclusion: you are in the right place and you are fine.

I confess there are occasions on Sundays when my eyes swell with tears. To be in service to Spirit is indeed a calling - Grace. This Grace is most deeply felt as I spend time alone in the church. I go to the church and polish items: the font, the crosses, collection plates, and other jewels that have gone unnoticed. I have discovered inscriptions on crosses and pews in memory of the departed. As I polish these inscriptions I sense a connection to those who have come before me - the lineage - and who have made contributions. The polishing is as a prayer - an Intercession. St. Luke's is a living museum and I have been chosen as curator. As verger I have the honor to serve both the living and the departed.

I enjoy research. Therefore I have spent numerous hours probing through the church archives. I have found cancelled checks from the late 19th century, photos of choirs, rectors, and vergers. And now I too am a part of this history.

Soon after Easter I asked the rector about ordering new verger robes. I have reverence and love for my predecessors as I occupy their stall and carry their virge. However, I did not wish to wear their robes. Although I will wear their black chimere and black cassock during Lent and for funerals, I chose a blue cassock and grey chimere with blue piping for regular use. I felt the need to make my own mark. Thus far the congregation has given approval. And yet, there are moments when I wonder if I have moved too fast? Did the desire for individuality inappropriately replace tradition?

Each new verger must find her or his own way. We must stumble and question. We must turn to more experienced vergers for guidance and comfort. We must maintain faith that the Lord will illuminate our paths. I am hungry to learn more. I am excited to meet others at the Atlanta conference. With faith I enter my next 100 days...



Did you know that you can submit your own story about the verger ministry for possible inclusion in the [Vergers Voice](#) blog?

We are always looking for interesting topics, ideas, and creative ways of demonstrating the power and enjoyment of being part of the fellowship of the VGEC and our ministry of service.

If you have any ideas, or if you would like to take your turn at writing a post and sharing ideas, send them to ideas@vergersvoice.org!

The [2017 VGEC Annual Conference](#) in Atlanta is coming very soon on October 12th to October

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15th. Registration is **\$275.00** per person. The deadline to [register](#) is **Monday, October 2, 2017**.
We cannot accept on-site registrations!



Abstract: Recently, vergersvoice.org asked the members of the Vergers Guild to consider submitting ideas and manuscripts for the blog. This post was submitted by Godfrey Gregg, a new verger at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Montclair, New Jersey. A busy man, he also recently completed the VGEC Training Course and is a Fellow of the Guild and will be recognized as a new Fellow of the Guild at the Annual Conference in Atlanta on October 14th. Read more about his journey to the verger ministry.

Posted by [Scott Smith](#) at [9:20 AM](#)



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