

# Pastor's Corner: Who's Got the Good China?

January 13, 2013

After 25 years of being a priest in the Episcopal Church, some things get ingrained in you. For example, at least once a year I would go into my "Paul Revere" mode.

You see, according to canon law, Episcopal bishops are required to visit each parish in their diocese every 18 months (most make it a yearly visit). It is a VERY big deal for the parish. So, once I would get the notice that the bishop was coming, I would run about the parish hollering, "THE BISHOP IS COMING, THE BISHOP IS COMING!!" And everybody would go into "bishop visitation mode."

Out comes the good china. The silver gets polished. Somebody starts baking scones, and another person is dispatched to find the Devonshire cream and fresh strawberry preserves for the "cream tea." I get a haircut, dig out my best suit and take it to the cleaners to be pressed, and spit shine my shoes. Then we all wait like little kids at Christmas for the bishop to show up.

Confirmation classes have been completed, so as soon as the bishop arrives, the shiny-faced confirmands are presented to him before the service (I never had a female bishop). If we've been able to find a baby to baptize, the parents and godparents are brought in to meet the bishop, too. After a prolonged liturgy, there is an afternoon luncheon, after which the vestry (the church council) and the wardens (the president and vice president of the congregation) always have a few moments with him.

Lutherans are a bit different on this.

When the message goes out that "the Bishop is coming," folks respond, "Oh. Okay."

Well, maybe I exaggerate a bit, but bishop visits in the Lutheran Church are very different experiences. For one thing, confirmation is not reserved for the bishop;

the parish pastor does that. When Bishop Payne came shortly after I arrived, she asked me to preach that Sunday. That would be unheard of in the Episcopal Church. To the casual observer, it might seem like it is no big deal that the bishop is coming – but that's only to the casual observer.

Lutherans are just more “laid back” than their Episcopal compatriots. But that doesn't mean Episcopal visits are not important. As with many of the things I've experienced since coming to Advent, “it's the same... just different.”

When Bishop Hazelwood said he could come visit us on Friday 25 January at 2:00 in the afternoon, I was skeptical. I was afraid we'd have three people here, including me. But as it has been talked up, I find that people are taking an afternoon off work, adjusting travel plans, and just generally making sure that, if at all possible, they can make it. Can everybody be there? No, of course not, but not everybody makes the Bishop's visit in the Episcopal Church either. (In fact, some stay home because it gets too involved for them.) But I believe we will have a good portion of the congregation here to welcome him that Friday.

At any rate, I hope you can join us. There is no agenda; he simply wants to come and have a conversation with the parish, to find out what we are all about and let us meet him. Rumors of food have begun to circulate, and I am sure it will be a good time. So, if you can, please come and enjoy a couple of hours with our new Bishop.

And please forgive me if I can't totally shake my Episcopal Church heritage on this. I'm already spit shining my shoes.