



How do we fill the pews?

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The Holy Spirit had come. Those gathered were filled with the Spirit. They spoke in different languages but understood each other. People were astounded. Peter, an ordinary, common, uneducated follower of Jesus addressed the crowd, with no reservation or fear, filled with courage and boldness, influencing many who sought baptism.

Then, not only Peter, but the other disciples began to “do signs and wonders.” These ordinary, common people with no special high intellect or IQ taught and healed. They spoke to councils and high priests, the educated of society. They welcomed people who gathered to be church, urged them to share what they have, as they shared theirs. They organized to serve the neglected and the forgotten of society. They welcomed everyone, including an Ethiopian eunuch considered unclean, even as God spoke to Peter in a vision ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane.’ They were growing the Church that the Spirit birthed on Pentecost. People’s lives were changed, communities were transformed because of their ministry.

And all that time, the disciple never once asked, *how do we fill the pews?* They did the ministry, they preached the good news, they loved and served their neighbor, they became agents of change – changing hearts, lives and communities, and the rest... they trusted the Holy Spirit.

Today, especially in the midst of uncertainty, it is important that we trust the Spirit and ask the right questions. Asking, *how do we fill the pews?* is not the right question or the right issue for our day and time. In fact, it never has been. The Church is vital not when the pews are filled but when hearts, lives and communities are changed

and healed, when God is encountered and experienced, when we embody Jesus to one another. Besides, pews are hardly ever the most comfortable seats....

So, Instead of asking - *how do we fill the pews?* Ask, how can we be the best possible church we can be, the most loving, most gracious, most healing church? Ask, how can we be Chris in the world? How can we embody Christ and be love in the world so the world is loved to wholeness, justice, peace? Ask, instead of expecting people to come to our building, how can we go where people are, how can we each out, encourage, befriend, and heal? Ask, how can we make this church a sacred place where people encounter and experience God, so empowered they can work for a loving and just society? Ask, how can we live our faith with courage, and continue to bring the Good News of God’s love for all to all people becoming an Easter people of resurrection and new beginning? Ask, how can we move from being a “customer service church” to being a “Christ in the world church”?

Jesus did not say - *go out and fill the pews.* Jesus said, go and make disciples of all nations. The Holy Spirit did not send the disciples to go and fill the pews. The Spirit empowered them to heal and free people, to share what is given to them, to feed one another, to cry and laugh with each other, to work for justice and peace for all, to preach and teach to transform hearts, lives and communities.

The Spirit has been calling us to a new time, to be a new resurrected church.