How can we increase the number of priests available to help congregations cover their principle weekly service?

Part 2 of our series on finding priestly coverage.

I was reminded the other day that in a conversation with the vestry at St. Patrick's in Cheektowaga I said, "if you want a wider choice for clergy coverage, change the time of your weekly service away from Sunday morning." They listened to me and moved their Sunday morning at 10 am service to 4:30 pm on Saturday. St. Michael and All Angels made a similar decision and hold their principle weekly service on Saturday at 4pm. They have regular coverage by a priest. You, too, can find the "clergy pool" deeper if you move your principle weekly service to a time other than 8 am-10 am on Sunday.

Want to increase your choices for coverage? Move away from Sunday morning.

Or (or maybe, additionally) share a priest with other congregations. There is the more familiar structure of two congregations sharing one priest. For many years, St. Andrew's Burt and St. John's Wilson shared one priest, Now St. Andrews's and St Paul's, Lewiston share a priest. St. Paul's, Harris Hill and St. Michael and All Angels share a priest, but because Harris Hill has two services on Sunday morning, St. Michael and All Angels moved their regular service to Saturday afternoon.

But what do you do if you have five congregations that all need Sunday coverage? Well, you get creative! In the Genesee Regional Deanery the congregations of St. Paul's in Holley, Christ Church in Albion, St. John's in Medina, St. Paul's in Stafford and St. James in Batavia share a clergy team made up of several priests and two deacons. Each congregation worships on Sunday morning so none of the congregations have a celebration of Holy Eucharist each week, but they do receive Holy Communion three Sundays out of four. If a couple of those congregations would move their service to another time/day they would have Holy Eucharist weekly.

What's the common denominator of congregation's receiving communion on a regular basis? **Flexibility.** The math is clear: we don't have enough clergy to cover all our congregations. As it is, we have a number of clergy in their late 70's and 80's serving congregations and in two cases, clergy over 90.

This is not sustainable.

To keep your congregation receiving regular clergy attention you must be flexible. And you never know, you may end up serving a whole new demographic your Sunday morning Eucharist never would! Keep the faith my friends, the way of Jesus Christ is dynamic, attractive and engaging---let's make it available at different days and different times. You never know what will happen!

Submitted in sure and certain hope,

Canon Cathy