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The Bishop Speaks

The Sanctuary – Center of Worship

As you go into any Anglican Church your eye is usually drawn to the front of the church. Right in the center is God's Table. It is called the Altar, or the Communion Table or the Lord's Table. No matter what we call it, during the Communion Service it becomes the center of worship.

What is it?

It is sad to say that in our teaching we have often forgotten to teach about the symbolism in our worship. Many treat the Communion Table simply as a place to put the bread and the wine so that we can have a Communion Service. It is nothing special. This has led many of our churches to treat it like any ordinary table. I have been into churches that care little for the table. It is often dusty. The linens are not clean or ironed. There are all sorts of things on the Communion Table. I have seen open pop cans, guitars, toys, piles of books, broken candles, hats and miscellaneous pieces of garbage on the table. I have seen the Communion Table become hidden for most of the service by projection screens. This tells me that many either do not know what is going on in the front of the church (called the sanctuary) or that they have little respect for the God they worship.

The Sanctuary – The Presence of God

When we worship we ask God to be among us in a very special way. Jesus said that wherever two or three are present, he is in their midst. In a church, much of the furniture are symbols of the presence of God in our midst. The Cross teaches us who Jesus is and what he did for us. It teaches us that he is alive today. Posters and hangings help us to focus on God. The smoke of the burning candles reminds us of our prayers going up to God. And right in the middle is the Communion Table. On it, we celebrate Holy Communion. In Holy Communion we believe that Christ is present in a very special way. When we take the bread and the wine we remember that Jesus is present and are strengthened by the Holy Spirit. The table is the center of our worship during Holy Communion and it is the center of teaching that speaks of God's presence among us. It is because we believe that God is present in a special way that we expect that the Sanctuary and all its furnishing will be treated with care. I want to list some suggestions for parishes in caring for the sanctuary and its furnishings. By taking care of these things that are dedicated to God and used to worship him, we show that we respect and

honour God.

The Communion Table

At the Communion Table the bread and wine are consecrated. At the Communion Table we remember the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. During the Communion Service we believe that the Lord Christ is present in a real and special way. This makes the Communion Table a place of honour in the church. In Holy Communion we meet with Christ, we are strengthened and fed with spiritual food. It is a meal that we have and share with the rest of the Christian family present.

The Communion Table should be kept clean. The linen on the table should be clean and ironed. Rips should be repaired. The table should not be cluttered with ornaments and other things. When there is no Communion Service it is to be kept bare. Normally there can be linen, candles, flowers and a bible or prayer book on a stand, but nothing else.

During the Communion Service wine, water and bread should not be kept on the communion table but on a small table beside the communion table. This is called a **Credence Table**. Only wine and bread that is to be consecrated should be left on the Communion Table during the service. All wine and bread left on the Communion Table during the prayer of consecration should be considered consecrated.

The Brass

The brass could be the candle holders, a cross and sometimes the collection plates and vases to hold flowers. Often these are not polished and are allowed to become dull, stained and blackened. This makes things look ugly indeed. Brass should be cleaned and polished at least two times a month in order to keep its shine. Cleaning is done with hot water and a liquid or paste cleaning product that is made for cleaning brass. In the north the most common is "Brasso". At first polishing takes up a lot of time and effort. However, if it is done regularly and frequently then it takes a lot less time and effort. Light reflects off clean brass and draws people's attention to the front and towards the presence of the Almighty.

Candles

Use proper candles in the candle holders. Proper Church Candles have a high percentage of bees wax in them that make the candle burn longer and cleaner. Cheaper candles drip messily and are quickly used up. Using tapers help prevent dripping and makes the candles last longer. (Tapers are glass or brass tops that go on the top end of the candles.) Replacing candles before they get too short also improves their appearance. Never use different size candles in a pair of candle holders. Take the time and trim the candles so they are the same size and give balance to the Table.

In order to buy the right candles you need to know the size of the cup on the candle holder. At least for the first time order candles with tapered bottoms in case you get the

size wrong.

Candles can be ordered from the Anglican Book Center/Augsburg Fortress Canada (800-265-6397) or St. Andrew's Church Supply (sales@standrewschurchsupply.com)

Hangings

Hangings and posters in the sanctuary can be very beautiful and provide a chance for teaching. Some churches change the hangings according to the season. Others have the same hangings up all year. I think hangings that change with the seasons can enhance our worship. They can be a source of teaching and remind us of our faith. There are many designs that speak a general message and can be put up at any time of the year. Others, however, are designed with a special season in mind. Some hangings are made for Christmas, Easter or Lent. These hangings can look out of place if they are put up in the wrong season. They can distract people from worship, wondering why they are up there. Therefore hangings and posters should be appropriate to the season you are in.

Changing the hangings and posters also gives variety to our worship. It is also a way in which sewers and crafts people of the church can give of their skills to the church. It takes skill, imagination and patience to make church hangings and I am thankful for the people who give of their efforts to beautify the church in this way.

Hangings should be kept clean and in repair. If a hanging becomes dirty or unsightly it should be cleaned. This may mean having it cleaned professionally which for many parishes means sending it out to a dry cleaner's.

Cleanliness

Remembering that the church building is God's house - we should keep it clean. The sanctuary should be cleaned regularly. If there are rugs on the floor they should be vacuumed and cleaned as often as needed.

Treat with Respect

People use the church as a place to pray. They focus on the Cross or the Communion Table. This helps them in their prayers. When we are in the church we need to treat it with respect. Jesus got very upset when people behaved in an inappropriate way in the temple. We need to respect the church and the sanctuary for what it represents: the presence of God. We need to respect the people that come to pray. In treating the sanctuary properly, in keeping it clean and behaving as we should when we are in it we honour God and we make it possible for others to do the same.