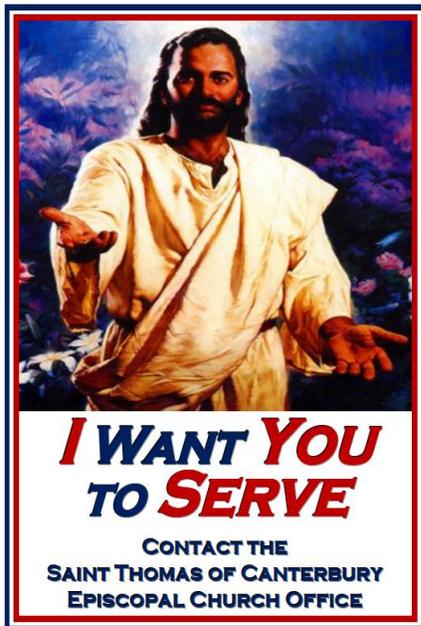


Why I Don't Serve...



You've seen this poster in the narthex and around the church. It's a call to come forward and be "all that you can be" in service of our Lord and—as our Lord commanded us—to your fellow church family members as acolyte, altar guild member, chalice bearer, choir member, greeter, lector, intercessor, lay Eucharistic visitor, or usher. Of course, service at the altar or during Holy Eucharist is not for everyone – some of us do not feel this is our calling, and there are those who may feel called but feel other limitations that prevent their answering the call they feel. Let's talk about some of the reasons people give for not serving. Perhaps the discussion may give some of us cause to reconsider our position.

"I don't want to take someone else's job ..."

Attending the Holy Eucharist services on Saturday, Sunday or Wednesday, we often see the same individuals doing the same tasks week after week. That can possibly lead to thinking those individuals have ownership of those tasks. Each one who serves performs the duties undertaken with a joyful heart, because it is a mission of love and devotion and will do whatever's necessary to support their church family. However, often the devoted are at the altar many times because no one else is available. ***Those who serve know that others are also called to service and are more than glad to share responsibilities— there is room for all who wish to serve.***

"I'm too old to serve ..."

Age is not a limitation to being an acolyte, chalice bearer or any other role. A priest, Father Harrold C., tells of a 90-year-old acolyte in his former parish in Benicia, CA; 90+ and still serving at the altar!

There may be physical limitations, some temporary and some long term, that must be considered. For some roles (acolyte, altar guild member and chalice bearer), the ability to ascend the altar steps safely carrying the cross, chalice or cruet is required. Other functions—choir member, greeter, lector, intercessor, and usher—can have accommodations made to assist those of us with physical limitations, including chairs for greeters and no processing for choir members. ***"You're only as old as you feel," the cliché reminds us.***

Why I Don't Serve...

“I'm too old to learn something new ...”

As a former boss liked to say, “Whether you say ‘I can’ or ‘I can’t,’ you’re right either way.” Having the desire to serve the Lord at Holy Eucharist is the first step. None of the roles at the altar or in the choir are too complex to learn. With God’s help, willing hearts can go a long way to saying “I can.”

New acolytes receive several hours of training in what is required before, during and after Holy Eucharist. When ready, new acolytes will serve with experienced acolytes, participating more actively as ability increases.

New altar guild members receive training and guidance from an experienced altar guild member. In fact, at least two and sometimes three members are scheduled and make short work of setting up, clearing, and cleaning up the altar and the linens.

New choir members are invited to attend choir rehearsal and sing along until they feel comfortable. Professional singing ability is not required, only the desire to use your voice in devotion to the Lord. ***“You’re never too old to learn,” as many of us know from experience.***

“I don’t have the time ...”

Service at or for the church basically takes little more time than is already spent attending Holy Eucharist. Certainly there is training, practice and an occasional meeting, but these are minor compared with the time we spend at Church services. Acolytes receive instruction as needed and then serve at the altar with guidance from an experienced acolyte. After the initial instruction, all service centers on normal Eucharist times with acolytes arriving 15—20 minutes before the service to vest, to confirm specific roles in the service and to receive any last minutes instructions from the celebrant. ***You’ll be surprised at how little time you’ll spend!***

“I’d join the choir if I had time ...”

Joining the choir has never been easier. There is no longer a regular mid-week rehearsal, so the time commitment is mostly confined to Sunday mornings. The choir meets one hour before service time, at 9:15 for the 10:15 AM service. There are occasional Thursday evening rehearsals, approximately once each quarter, to prepare for special holiday music. To join the choir, all you need to do is show up on a Sunday morning with a desire to sing! ***You’ll be surprised at how fast the time passes!***

“I’d join the choir, but I can’t read music ...”

You might be surprised to learn that ***NOT everyone in our choir reads music!*** We do have some very skilled singers in our choir, and you’ll be astonished at how fast ***you’ll learn the music just by standing next to someone who is a good reader.***

Why I Don't Serve...

“I'm afraid of being up at the ambo or at the altar; everyone will see me ...”

Stage fright or fear of making a mistake can be an impediment in serving at the altar, reading at the ambo or being in the choir. And it can be a real limitation. But, who hasn't been nervous or made a mistake? We know our Lord is forgiving and loving; and our church family is accepting of each and every one of us, mistakes (warts) and all. If we choose to do something to serve, with practice we improve and grow in confidence. No one is perfect and no one should expect perfection. We can do only our prayerful best; ***God provides the ability.***

As far as being seen by everyone in church, what a great example for the younger members of our congregation. As the old adage goes, “Actions speak louder than words.” We want our children and youth to learn Christian values and share in the life of the Church. That's why we bring them to Sunday School and encourage them to participate in church activities. ***What better ways to show the children our love for Christ than to be active in the life of the Church?***

“I can't speak in public; I'm afraid I'll make a mistake; big words and difficult names scare me ...”

Fear of being a lector or intercessor? If you're scared, don't feel bad; most people are. But remember, we are reading—sharing—the word of God with a family of friends. God is there to help and others are there, too. If words or Biblical names present difficulty, a Biblical pronunciation guide is in the narthex desk. ***Trust that God provides the ability and comforts the inability.***

“I like to do something, but ...”

I still have some reservations about serving at Holy Eucharist but want to take a more active part. Many ministries in the church don't require service at the altar. Collar someone that looks active, and discuss what you're interested in. You're sure to find someone who'll be glad to direct you into something you'll find fulfilling (and maybe kind of fun).

A couple of areas of service always in need are ...

- Volunteers to staff the nursery during worship or teach Sunday School.
- Regular participating members on a coffee team for after service hospitality; this only requires a once-a-month commitment.

If something even less visible is more to your liking, just take ‘the bull by the horns’ and start by straightening up the area around you after service: putting the Book of Common Prayer and Hymnals neatly in place under the seat in front of you, replacing pencils, cards and envelopes in their seatback holder, disposing of any paper or items on the floor or in the pew pockets... although not a major effort, it's a way to help keep our church clean and reverent. And ... ***everyone can do it.***

Why I Don't Serve...

“I don't know enough about how to join in church service activities ...”

Just ask someone who is already in one of these ministries or mention your reluctance to Father Robert or a Bishop's Committee member. You can also contact Roberta Schell at the Church Office by phone (951.302.4566) or email her at AdminAsst@EpiscopalChurchTemecula.org .

Think about it, pray about it, and do it!