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## *Altar Calls And A Procession Of Pledges !!*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

I have rarely felt as wonderful and as proud of the Cathedral of St. Philip as I did last Sunday morning, All Saints' Sunday. Have you heard what we did?

For one, we had an altar call. At least, that's what I like to call it. I tell my Sunday school classes all the time that the Episcopal Church does believe in altar calls. In fact, I say, we have an altar call at every Sunday service. We call it receiving the body and blood of Christ, or Holy Communion, or the Holy Eucharist. We invite people to get up out of their pew, go down to the altar rail, and accept Jesus Christ into their lives. That's what communion is. That's what an altar call is. We do it weekly in the Episcopal Church. It's powerful.

But this past Sunday, many of us went to the altar twice. Here's the background. During the first centuries of the early Church, Christians came together to share a sacred meal together which came to be known, first, as an Agape Meal. Each would bring a contribution to the meal and to the provision of the Christian community. Some would bring bread. Others would bring grapes or wine. Some brought olive oil, or cheese. Some brought alms (money). Others brought other kinds of food or gifts.

As they came to "church," Christians would bring their various gifts directly to the altar and lay them there. The presider, the priest, would then say a long prayer over all the gifts. The people would receive back the blessed body and blood of Christ; but they would also share together the Agape Meal ("agape" is the Greek word for divine love). That ritual became known as what we do today: the Holy Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper.

On a usual day here at the Cathedral, we no longer bring various particular items that will feed ourselves and others. In fact, we use currency and checks and electronic transfers to make our gifts to the Cathedral. But we do make pledges of financial support!

So, this past Sunday, I invited members and friends to get up out of their pew and to join the Offertory procession with their completed-or intended-financial pledge card for 2009. That pledge card was to be a symbol or token of their annual support of the church for our next year, 2009. I had no idea who would actually rise.

But what a marvelous procession that Offertory became! At the 8:45 service in particular, that procession is long; because the children usually follow directly the bread, wine, and alms. And after the children came all sorts of individuals and families, each placing a completed pledge card-or a card indicating their desire to pledge-at the altar. It was wonderfully moving, and I was as proud as I have ever been. There were people crying, like one always does at an altar call. People moved, and people were moved!

Throughout that long procession, we sang the familiar hymn, "For All the Saints." And what I saw were saints, all sorts of saints, each contributing as they could to the Christian Church and to our mission throughout the world. I was proud, and I was moved. During these recent times of economic uncertainty, last Sunday may have been one of the most touching experiences of my ministry at the Cathedral. I was proud of our church. We are givers and investors in the right things; we

are committed to the long term.

Of course, not everyone was at church last Sunday. That is okay. In our larger community, very few of us are at the Cathedral on every single Sunday of the year. So, we accept gifts and pledges throughout the year! We will be asking for (and receiving!) financial pledges of support for 2009 for several months.

If you were not at the Cathedral last Sunday, fear not. You can repeat the experience personally the next time you are at the Eucharist. At the Offertory, you may place your pledge or gift in the regular offering plate that we use. In fact, on every Sunday you can symbolically place your very life on the communion altar with the bread and wine and alms. Place whoever you are, and whatever you have. God will receive whatever gift you have. Your gift might be only five loaves and bread and two fishes; but God will bless your gifts and turn them into food for thousands.

That is the power of the gospel. I saw it in action last Sunday at the Cathedral, and it was wonderful! There is still room in the procession of saints. Join us!

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler