
Altar Calls

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

I loved our altar call last Sunday!

For the past several years, we have observed one special Sunday on which we bring our pledge cards to church. These are cards which have been mailed to us, and on which we write our intended financial commitment to God through the Cathedral of St. Philip for the next year. I trust that people have prayed, and discussed with others, what the nature of their pledge might be. Can it be raised this year? Can it approach a higher percentage of one's income? (The word "tithe" does not mean "gift;" it actually means ten per cent!)

Whatever its amount, every pledge, and every single contribution, is critical to the ministry of the Cathedral. We simply do not rely on some huge endowment, or some magic account, to supply our operating costs—and it costs money to keep our organism, our community, alive. It is great fun, actually, keeping our community alive!

This past Sunday, we had an altar call. Our usual Offertory procession consists of ushers and representatives walking forward to the altar with bread, wine, and weekly contributions. At the 8:45 service, children join the procession, walking into the nave from the children's chapel. But on All Saints Sunday, I invited every parishioner—all the saints!—to get up out of their seats and join the procession to the altar—bringing their signed pledges of financial commitment to the Cathedral's ministry for the 2013 year.

What a grand procession it was! There was no established order to it. There was no need for elaborate priestly instructions or verger organization. Just get up from your church pew and walk to God's altar. And you did that. It was glorious!

It was an altar call. Quite simply, an altar call is that event where people walk forward to a holy place and make a commitment to God. We did that on Sunday. Thank you so much for those commitments. Those commitments, your commitments, are what make this church the Body of Christ.

In some traditions, an altar call is defined as going up to the altar to receive Christ. Well, that is our Episcopal tradition, too! For, I believe that we have an altar call every Sunday. Every Sunday, the priest invites people to the altar to receive the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist, which is the Body and Blood of Christ. Every Sunday, we invite you to get up out of your pew and come to the altar and receive Christ. And you do! It is our version of the evangelical altar call, and it works!

We have other altar calls in our Episcopal tradition. On Ash Wednesday, we come to the altar twice: once for Eucharist in the accepted way, but first in order to confess our sins and be marked with the dust of mortality. That Ash Wednesday repentance is also an altar call. Some of us come up to the altar for special prayers; on baptism Sundays, we also invite parents who are expecting children to come to the altar for special prayers of blessing. And they do!

Altars are where holy things happen: repentance, blessing, commitment, and nourishment. It is a happy thing to be called to the altar, and I am so glad you responded this past Sunday.

And, thank you. Thanks to each of you who is making a financial pledge to the Cathedral of St. Philip for the 2013 year. The world needs the Cathedral of St. Philip, and the Cathedral of St. Philip needs you!

Sam Candler signature



The Very Reverend Sam Candler

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