

Collect of the Day

Almighty God, on this day you opened the way of eternal life to every race and nation by the promised gift of your Holy Spirit: Shed abroad this gift throughout the world by the preaching of the Gospel, that it may reach to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.



St. Matthew's Cathedral eNews

Christ + Compassion + Community

From the Dean

Have you Read the Pew Religious Landscape Survey?

Last week, the Pew Research Center released a report on its most recent survey of religion and the American people. It captured quite a few headlines. The one in the Dallas Morning News proclaimed, "Millions in U.S. lose faith in Christianity."

Ouch! What are we to make of it? Worry that other people know something that we don't?

One thing to remember about headlines: they are written by newspaper copy desk people, not the writer of the story. Here the Dallas Morning News printed an article found in the New York Times. The headline may or may not carry the intent of the writer of the story.

The trend has been pretty clear. In fact, I have preached on this phenomenon from time to time, that is, the rise of the "nones." People are moving away from denominational affiliation but not necessarily from Christianity. The people who are "los[ing their] faith in Christianity are not the committed but those whose Christianity is nominal. Many people who would attend church at Christmas and Easter have shifted to the "none" category. Meanwhile, church attendance rates have not really changed much.

Before the survey was released, Conrad Hackett of the Pew Forum said:

"To some extent, this seems to be a phenomenon in which people with low levels of religious commitment are now more likely to identify as religiously unaffiliated, whereas in earlier decades such people would have identified as Christian, Jewish or as part of some other religious group."

It is true that the mainline denominations are losing people. The Roman Catholics are losing a few but holding fairly steady because of the large immigrant influx. However, the internal shift seems to be from mainline to more committed evangelical churches. (From 2007 to 2014 the number of evangelicals in America rose from 59.8 million to 62.2 million. Hmm.)

And, of course, the big variable in all surveying is: how was this survey conducted. Pew conducted its research among people with landlines. Now, with one out of three people using a cell phone only and no landline, literally one-third of the population goes unreported. When you consider that in Texas wireless phones are the primary means of receiving calls in 52.8% of homes, one wonders at a survey that gathered data only via landlines.

So, what are we to conclude from the Pew Survey?

First, Christianity is neither dying nor at risk in this country. The shift we see is from nominal Christians to none.

Second, we are seeing a rise in committed Christians within the Christian community.

Third, the traditional, organized church is failing to keep the attention of millennials.

Fourth, some of the results are none the less questionable because of the landline vs. cell phone phenomenon. We simply don't know the fuller picture. We DO know that the research companies predicting the last two elections in the United Kingdom, the last election in Israel, and the last two elections in the United States got it woefully wrong.

Fifth, Jesus is still Lord, and one day "every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Philippians 2:10.