



About the Author

The Reverend Ken Kroohs is a retired third-career priest, with an MDiv from Duke University and an Anglican year at Virginia Theological Seminary. He began his professional life as a civil engineer and then a city planner. Those experiences shape his understanding of societal behavior patterns. Mr. Kroohs served two small churches in the Diocese of North Carolina, plus an intentional interim in another one. His three daughters, eight grandchildren, a 90-year-old house, and a wife who loves HGTV—in addition to his assistance with churches seeking to grow—all keep him extremely busy.

About *Vintage Voice*

Vintage Voice is a monthly publication for retirees of the Episcopal Church who, in sharing their stories, help deepen the sense of community. We hope you enjoy these articles and find them helpful. Stories are published with the authors' permission. If you have a reflection about your life in retirement, consider writing for the *Vintage Voice*! Send your submissions to vintagevoice@cpg.org.

VINTAGE VOICE



Inviting Others In

by the Reverend Ken Kroohs

A “conversation” about the current state of the Episcopal Church can be very fruitful—even if it’s months-long! In the January 2019 issue of *Vintage Voice*, Judy Wright Matthews wrote about the many ways the Church is changing, involving so many more types of people, especially women and minorities. Then in April, Barry Verdi explored the pain associated with churches closing due to declining numbers of congregants. I’m now continuing the dialogue by reflecting on the implications of the well-stated observations of both of them.

Yes, it is wonderful how the Church has expanded its reach and yes, it *would* be even more wonderful if the number of people in pews greatly increased. Yet it is not just about numbers. It is about helping people, including ourselves, grow closer to God.

Let me begin with my deeply held beliefs: 1) God created all of us with the desire to be in a relationship with God, 2) deepening such a relationship occurs best for most people within a community, and the Episcopal Church offers the community that many people seek, and 3) the numbers suggest that we are not fulfilling the role God gave us.

The Episcopal Church is not the right path for 100% of people. Not even 50%. Our niche is certainly not tiny, but it is not universal. I have read plenty of articles documenting how many people, even many millennials, are seeking traditional, liturgical practices. Personally, I tend to be “broad church,” leaning toward the more contemporary belief that we should be open to what people need.

Our biggest challenge—and failure—in increasing our numbers is that we don’t do a good enough job of telling people who we are and what we do. We are proud of our social justice actions. But how many people are aware of them? Great programs for young people are common in dioceses and congregations. Who knows about them?

Judy Wright Matthews wrote about our congregants of different races, about the priests, lay people, deacons, and teenage acolytes

who serve communion, about our election of a female and then an African American Presiding Bishop, about our food pantries.

But who connects these things with the Episcopal Church?

I am not talking about bragging. I am talking about actively, intentionally inviting others to join in. Keeping ourselves a secret is not being humble. Frankly, it is being exclusive. We offer what many people seek!

Retirement has allowed me to live into my passion for our Church. I have been offering workshops and various (generally free) consulting services to churches seeking to reach out to new people. When talking to unchurched people, I have found that the primary problem is not that they don't want to be part of a spiritual community, and not that the Episcopal Church is unattractive, but rather that we generally do not appear to be interested in reaching out to new people.

To those who believe the Episcopal Church is dying, it is not. We are killing ourselves.

Strong words, I know. Allow me to clarify. When I say we do not seem truly interested in reaching new people, I'm thinking about the person who wants to become healthier—but never exercises. Members of a vestry at one church I visited enthusiastically welcomed me and said that this topic came up at every meeting. I asked them to tell me one thing they had done over the last month to invite or incorporate new people. After a painful silence, they said they had held services.

Like getting regular exercise, reaching out to new people need not be painful. I always discuss very effective efforts that take less than two minutes a week. True, the personal contact is most effective but other things can help too, and retirees can play a pivotal role in this process. For instance, if you can stay in touch with your grandchildren on Facebook, you can say nice things about your church on Facebook! Or what if retirees partnered with the Episcopal Church Foundation or another organization to help local churches reach out to new people?

Make no mistake: I am very proud of where the Episcopal Church is today. However, I believe that we need to try much harder to share this gift that God has given us.



19 East 34th Street
New York, NY 10016
www.cpg.org