

The Powerful Presence of God

I have been asked to share a personal experience.

3 years ago, my sister Electra asked me to get involved with the 6th grade confirmation class. I did. And that led to teaching a class, then another class, then to rewriting the curriculum, then to running the whole program for 2 years. It has been one of the most meaningful things I have ever done in my life.

Now, that Disciples Class has gotten even better under new lay leadership from this parish. Right now they are meeting, as they do every Sunday of the school year, in the theater. There are, right now, 5 directors, a dozen coordinators, 40 teachers, a handful of youth interns, and a 97 6th graders sitting in the Theater in a class on what it means to live the life of a Christian. And every Sunday, we have another 20 or so random adults attend, who have found that the best adult Sunday school class in the church is the Disciples Class. That's 200 people in that one class every week!

But here's what's really cool: there are more 6th graders attending the Disciples Class than we have on the official church records. How can that be? Because the Disciples Class is drawing in 6th graders - and their parents - and their brothers and sisters from outside our parish family. Some are coming from other churches, some are coming back after having left his church; some are brand new to church. But friends, they are coming here to this place - to encounter the powerful presence of God.

So here is the fact: We don't have enough space for that Disciples Class. We have outgrown the Theater. We have to be out of there promptly at 10:45, even though the small group discussions that follow the presentation could easily continue another 30 minutes if we had the space to meet.

We all know that the real relationships, the mentoring, take place in small groups, the tribes, which comprise 3 teachers, the intern, and about 8 6th graders. Here is the problem; we don't have the

space to do it. About 5 groups can huddle together in various parts of the theater before the noise level becomes unbearable. The other 7 tribes go outside to the parking lot, or into the hall, or sit in the few empty rooms around here.

The simple truth is that every room, every space, every single meeting area in the church is occupied on Sunday morning. We need more space right now for this one class alone.

I tell you about my experience with the Disciples Class not because of how great it is, but just the opposite: how common it is. What I mean is that every one of us, each person sitting in this sanctuary is here right now because, like those of us in the Disciples Class, you have been touched God in this place.

Each of us has had an experience that was driven by the powerful presence of God in this place. This space, this building and the people we encounter here, has a special quality: it is charged with the powerful presence of God. And if we are here today, it is because we have experienced something here, and we want to be a part of that power and that presence. We want that powerful presence of God, found in this place, to continue to inform us, to inspire us, and nurture us. That's why we are here.

And finally, I have learned – from you, in this place- that the proper response to a situation such as this is to fix the problem. That's what we do -- real well.

We have said, and it's in our Strategic Plan, that the youth of this parish are a priority and that we want more programs for youth. We want to stop losing families to other churches with better youth ministry programs.

And we don't want to wait.

For the current juniors and seniors in high school, there is no next year. We need this space now. Of course, we must do what we can do to improve the youth ministry at Saint Michael.

We are that kind of parish. We are the kind of Christians that respond when faced with a challenge, especially when the solution to the challenge is well within us right now.

Let's admit it: We have been blessed with incredible gifts, vast financial resources. The proper response to these blessings is to devote them to the glory of God. A real good way to do that is to build some more of this *special space* so that more people can encounter-here at Saint Michael - the powerful presence of God.

Stewart Thomas