
AWE! Average Weekly Engagement

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by Dean Sam Candler**

I know that times have changed.

It used to be that one was counted a regular churchgoer if he or she attended church three to four Sundays a month. Even if you showed no other interest in any other church activity throughout the week, you were a regular churchgoer if you were at church, roughly, eighty percent of the Sundays throughout the year.

These days, surveys show that many people continue to count themselves “regular churchgoers.” Wonderful! However, when a second question is asked, “How many Sundays a year do you actually show up at church?” the same people say “one or two Sundays a month.” The standards of what it means to be a “regular churchgoer” have changed!

I don’t believe that commitment or loyalty has changed. In fact, many people who are not at church on Sundays are indeed at church throughout the week – at a Bible study meeting, or in some mission activity, or serving in some capacity! Others are listening to podcasts, and tuning into websites, or even watching live streaming. They want to participate even if they are not physically present on Sundays. Again, commitments have not changed. But times sure have.

Some people ask me if this is a problem. They actually accuse me with the question, “Why are fewer people at your church on Sunday mornings?” as if spirituality is waning, and as if that lack of Sunday attendance indicates that our church’s influence is waning. My response is this: “Do you watch the 6 p.m. news on your television set every evening?” A generation ago, much of our culture gathered in a particular spot, at a particular time, each day to receive and share news. Today, I daresay, that common time of day no longer exists. This does not mean that news is no longer important, and it does not mean that major networks are no longer effective. It simply means that times have changed.

Churches, like ours at the Cathedral of St. Philip, work seven days a week to offer gospel and community to the world. I remember being admonished to do this a generation ago. “Why is your church open only on Sundays?” they accused us. Well, we heard them. We are open, and serving, and learning, seven days a week now, usually at least fifteen hours a day. I do not worry about “Average Sunday Attendance.” Instead, I work towards “Average Weekly Engagement.” Not “ASA,” but “AWE.” I want people, and the world, to engage the Church weekly, even if that engagement is not necessarily on a Sunday.

Of course, we do want people to worship on Sundays! And, at the Cathedral, we work in a major way to celebrate the Lord’s Day, Sunday, the Day of Resurrection, each week. We enjoy giving ourselves over to celebrating the feast!

When we do observe Sunday worship, we notice a beautiful rhythm in the themes the Church offers us. The themes of a couple of days each year are obvious: Christmas and Easter! But how many of us know that the theme of the Sunday after Easter Day is always related to St. Thomas? (So-called “Doubting” Thomas, though he was really “Believing Thomas.”) How many of us remember that this Sunday, the Fourth Sunday of Easter, is also known as “Good Shepherd Sunday?” (The 23rd Psalm, the Shepherd’s psalm, is always heard on this Sunday!)

Still, we don’t actually have to be physically present, here at church, to sense that rhythm. Sunday after Sunday, week after

week, we can follow the church year even from afar. And if we observe the feast regularly, we find ourselves in a holy rhythm.

God is still active, and serving, and engaging the world, through the Christian Church. The Church is very much alive! Just not on Sundays alone. Attending church on Sundays is wonderful, but there is more – much more. Receiving the Christian rhythms of life through the Church, engaging them, and then delivering them to the world—all week!—is even more satisfying. Join us on Sundays! But join us throughout the week, too! Read the lessons. Say prayers. Love one another. May your AWE, your average weekly engagement with the Holy, be eternal.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip