

What to Do With the Interdenominational Service

On a recent cruise on the *M/V Galaxy* of Celebrity Cruises, I was assigned Mass for each day of the 10-day cruise, and interdenominational services for the days that the vessel was at sea, as well as on Sundays. The ship had a printed interdenominational service, but I knew that if I was going to do more than two Sunday services, I would need additional resources.

On Sunday, with more than 50 folks in attendance, I asked what was the Christian spectrum in the room. It ran from Four-Square Bible Church to the United Church of Christ. To say the least this is a very broad spectrum, and very threatening even for a Protestant minister. In addition, I realized that just standing there in my clerics and leading the service would make some folks uncomfortable.

I chose to use the first reading and the Gospel for the first Sunday in ordinary time. However, instead of using the missalettes, and reading from the lectionary, I passed out the Gideon Bibles, and read the same passages from the Bible. This allowed folks to follow along in the Bible, as many would in their own ecclesial communities.

The structure of the service went like this:

1. Two Opening Praise Songs taken from the missalettes. There are numerous songs that have come from non-Catholic communities, and are well known to a broad spectrum of Protestants (sing all the verses)
2. First Reading from the lectionary, but read from the Gideon Bible
3. Gospel Reading from the lectionary, but read from the Gideon Bible
4. A short homily (5-10 minutes)
5. Open the deck for faith sharing by those in attendance with short commentaries by myself placed in an ecumenical context that moved the sharing along, and prevented one person from dominating the sharing.
6. Intercessory prayers
 - a. Three or four lead by priest
 - b. Open the deck for additional intercessory prayers from those attending
7. Our Father with the "Thine is the Kingdom" ending
8. A collect prayer by the priest
9. A closing song to send them on their way

Because of the sharing and intercessory prayers, the services ran between forty minutes and fifty minutes. In addition, word seemed to get out, because the number of people attending the services grew each day. In addition, each service was different, and we avoided a situation that appeared to make the interdenominational service just a tacked on quickie service. Using the Bible as the source for the scripture readings, and structuring the service as a Liturgy of the Word service seemed to give a quality that was very familiar with most of those attending.

The interdenominational service was the high-anxiety time on the cruise ship, but as each day passed, using this structure, it became easier, and those people attending participated more each day.