



Advent's Look - Watching and Waiting

By Bishop Greg Mohr
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What does Advent look like? If you had a blank piece of paper and could draw what a church sanctuary would look like for Advent, what would you draw?

We often think of Advent wreaths and blue paraments. But I'm talking about how you might situate yourselves. How do you arrange the seating? And what seating arrangement could you come up with that says, "Aha! This is what Advent looks like!"

How we arrange ourselves, matters. Sitting in a circle says something, while sitting with your back to someone says something else entirely. So how would you arrange yourselves to indicate Advent?

The two congregations I served as a parish pastor experimented with this idea. We explored ways by which our seating arrangement could teach us something about that particular season of the church year. We asked ourselves what Advent might look like, and then we explored what the Christmas and Epiphany seasons might look like. We did the same exercise for Lent, Easter, and the lengthy Pentecost season.

This might seem rather mundane or impractical for some of you. Long, heavy wooden pews sometimes get in the way. But for those of you who have movable furniture, give some thought to this.

If Advent is to help prepare the way, if it is to help us get ready for the celebration of Christ becoming incarnate among us, then what will Advent look like? How do you arrange the chairs to say "waiting" and "watching"? How will the seating arrangement visibly show that you are waiting for something, for someone, to come into your midst? It seems to me that there should be some space in the middle — open space, empty space — that declares that Advent is a time of hope in the midst of brokenness, of longing in the midst of fractured lives.

Try arranging the chairs so that you have to look across this empty space and see another human being. You will see others who also are longing for something, others who have hopes and dreams, others who also are watching and waiting.

Empty space: it is a sign of brokenness, perhaps a sign of dis-connection from one another.

Then imagine what might happen to this seating arrangement when it is time for the Christmas Eve service. No longer is there empty space between you. There is an altar right smack dab in the middle. And there are candles prophesying that the light has come into your midst. Light in the midst of darkness! The seats are arranged in the round. The circle is completed and Emmanuel — God with us — is celebrated. There is word and sacrament, there in the centre of this circle. There is incarnation depicted.

The way we gather, the way we arrange ourselves, helps to highlight what is being celebrated. Christ has come to us, is present with us and among us. Christ lives in the midst of us, in the midst of our church community.

We look across and beside us, and we see sisters and brothers, companions on the journey. We no longer sit across from each other in our Advent seating. We sit beside one another, and as we sing our Christmas songs and look around us, we see faces reflected in heavenly light.