

## **First and Center**

Pastor's Blog

April 24, 2019



[https://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx?g\\_source=link\\_NEWSV9&g\\_medium=TOPIC&g\\_campaign=item &g\\_content=U.S.%2520Church%2520Membership%2520Down%2520Sharply%2520in%2520Past%2520Two%2520Decades](https://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx?g_source=link_NEWSV9&g_medium=TOPIC&g_campaign=item &g_content=U.S.%2520Church%2520Membership%2520Down%2520Sharply%2520in%2520Past%2520Two%2520Decades)

If you click on this link (or google *Gallup Poll Religion April 2019*), you will discover that the latest polling indicates that only 50% of people in the US belong to any organized religious group (Christian denomination of any kind, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, etc.). This does not mean that half of Americans are not in some way spiritual; indeed, many of those polled believed in God in some way, but not in religious institutions. The percentage of those unaffiliated goes higher as the age group is younger. In fact, because the church-leaving began with Baby Boomers, there are sometimes two generations in any family who have *never had any affiliation with organized religion*. They have no idea what a church is all about, no familiarity with the Bible except in negative terms from news articles, no understanding of what happens in worship, no idea at all what they are missing.

Some have had church experience; sadly, often negative. From destructive (sexual abuse, misogyny) to church fights (over money, power, sexuality, or other social issues) to exclusive theology out of touch with their lives, to downright boring services of worship and poorly organized and endless meetings, why would they want to be part of a religious institution? To a large extent, we in organized religion have done this to ourselves.

And yet, underneath all this is the incredible core of good news that crowds come out to hear on Easter Sunday, even if they are not part of a church. Good is stronger than evil. God loves us, always. Grace exists. Love one another really is the greatest commandment. Like the dandelions I saw coming out from the middle of the brick wall around the Burying Ground on Easter, the core in the midst of the "stuff" we have put around it is that God is love, and that core still sticks out with determination.

Time to reclaim the core and begin all over again, as at the first, teaching, inviting, embodying this core. We may have to get rid of a lot of accretions to truly do this. Time to take some risks, no?

~ The Rev. Shelly Stackhouse,  
Transitional Minister