

**Sermon – Fr. Bob Gross’ Installation**  
**Monday, April 18, 2016**  
**St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, Hurst, Texas**

A young school boy wrote an essay on geese. It read:

“Geese is a low heavy set bird which is mostly meat and feathers. His head is one side and he sits on the other. Geese can't sing much because of the dampness of the moisture. He's got no between the toes and he's got a little balloon in his stomach to keep him from sinking.

Some geese, when they get big, has curls on their tails and is called ganders. Ganders don't have to sit and hatch but just sit and loaf and go swimming. If I was goose, I would rather be a gander.”

Now why this talk about geese for the Installation of your Priest-in-Charge, Fr. Bob Gross? While there may not be direct references to geese in the Bible, we can certainly find references encouraging goose-like behavior. You see, geese are social

creatures and depend on each other to survive. Did you know that geese can fly further than eagles do, primarily because they work together and help each other? There is a purpose for their V-shaped pattern of flight. They fly in V formation because the flapping of the wings of one goose creates an uplift for the goose immediately following. Flying in this formation adds at least 71% greater flying range than if each goose flew alone. When the wings of the goose in front begin to tire, another goose will take over the lead position. The geese in the back will honk their encouragement to those up front.

While we may like the image of an eagle - mighty, fierce and strong - soaring almost effortlessly at great heights, we actually get much further when we function together as geese. There are times to be as eagles -- Fr. Bob can be an eagle on his day off, his Sabbath, soaring alone at great heights, refilling his

spirit and being alone with God, but the rest of the time, he is the lead gander of this flock (correctly termed, “gaggle”) of geese.

If you listened closely to the reading of Ephesians, you heard the phrase “for building up the body of Christ”. Those graced as apostles, prophets, evangelists (and yes, there are some of those in the Episcopal Church!), pastors and teachers are gifted so in order to “build up God’s people” and help them grow in spiritual knowledge and unity. The church is composed of many individuals, all of whom have an important part in the functioning of the body. As Paul says, “...joined and knitted together by every ligament..., each part working properly, promotes growth and building up in love.”

“Each part working properly” – we don’t think too much about ligaments until we injure one and find our mobility and functioning interrupted. Ligaments are individual parts, each serving a unique purpose, but essential to the functioning of the

whole. Every goose in the V-shape matters – the leader, the followers, the encouragers and the caregivers.

Yes, geese are even caregivers.... If a goose gets sick or is wounded, a couple of other geese may drop out of formation to help and protect him. They will try to stay with the disabled goose until he dies or is able to fly again. They will then either fly together or join another formation until they can catch up with their group.

And if a goose gets the notion to try and fly solo like an eagle, and drops out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to fly alone. It quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front. Geese have strong affections for others in their group. Unity is a must in order for them to get where they are going in migration. They travel anywhere from 2500-3000

miles one-way, sometimes at speeds of 70 miles an hour if the wind is right. But this would not be possible without unity.

What does unity mean? According to dictionary.com, unity is a whole or totality combining all its parts into one. Unity does *not* mean being exactly alike. It is a diversity of parts coming together as a whole.

I especially like the definition as it relates to literature and art:

“Unity is a relation of all the parts or elements of a work constituting a *harmonious* whole.” And we know that harmony does not mean sameness – There would be no harmony if every choir member sang tenor. Harmony is the beautiful sound of many voices singing one song. As the Psalmist said, ‘it is good and pleasant when kindred live together in unity... in harmony’.

Again, all the various parts contribute to the functioning and beauty of the whole.

Tonight we are here to install your Priest-in-Charge, Fr. Bob Gross, who knows a thing or two about harmony, about many instruments/one band, having been a band director for many years. Bob, you know a bit about leading and facilitating groups of folks toward a common goal. The church is like a marching band in many ways – I am sure you could make more comparisons than I, but the things that come to mind immediately are: There are those whose desire is to work hard, do their best and “play well” with others; then there’s always that one instrument that plays louder than everybody else, and the one whose sound is needed, but will not turn up the volume. You have those who follow the leader and those who turn right when everyone else turns left, or turn left when everyone else turns right. Bob, you have experience that equips you to lead God’s people. God has called you to St. Stephen’s and assigned you to be their shepherd, their band director, their lead gander.

The scriptures you chose for tonight offer great guidance for priests. Jeremiah is told by God, “Do not be afraid of them... I am with you.” Now these look like a nice enough bunch of folks, but there may be occasions where the way is not clear or the path gets bumpy, so remember God is with you... fear not.

And just in case you are among the clergy who think they have to do it all, take Paul’s words to the Ephesians to heart – your gift is to “*equip* the saints for the work of ministry.” You are not called to do it all and be all to this parish, but to prepare them and assist them in the work of Christ -- to *furnish* them with the knowledge and skills necessary to love God, love one another and be God’s love in your community and world.

Fr. Bob, you are not alone in this ministry. Jesus sent his disciples out in pairs, two-by-two, as reported in the gospel of Luke. We are not intended to do this work alone. Remember

you have colleagues to consult and call on as needed. You have a wonderful bishop and canon on your team. So should a time arise when you feel alone, remember Jesus' initial sending was not solo, but teams, and reach out to those who are in this blessed work with you. Be steadfast in lifting your hands in prayer so that should a time arise when you feel like throwing your hands up, it will be to the holy places, to seek and bless the Lord. Remember your Sabbath day and keep it holy --- get out there and soar like an eagle in order to come back strengthened and ready to go the distance with this wonderful gaggle of geese that is St. Stephen's Episcopal Church.

May God bless you, Bob, and each of those you are called to serve. Amen.