

CHURCH TURNOUT DROPS OVER TIME CLOCK CHANGE, POST-HOLIDAY TO BLAME

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Some people didn't even know the time had changed. That lack of information made a number of parishioners arrive at noon for 11 a.m. mass last Sunday morning at Church of the Resurrection Roman Catholic Church in Dania, according to Olga Iravani, the church secretary.

Not only that, it was the week after Easter when attendance normally drops off. "I think it was a combination of both factors," explained Dave Ingram, Associate Pastor of Rio Vista Community Church in Fort Lauderdale, "but I attribute most of our drop to the time change." Ingram's attendance dropped from an average of 300 per week to 265 this past Sunday morning.

"It always affects us," said Dr. John Stauffer, Pastor of First Christian Church in Wilton Manors. "People just oversleep."

Not all churches reported a drop following the holiday. "We were packed out on Easter, but our attendance was pretty good last Sunday" said Terri Folmar, Ministry Associate at Flamingo Road Church, a Southern Baptist congregation. "We didn't expect it to drop and it didn't." Folmar said that they have had worse attendance some Sundays when the church's parking lot was blocked by construction.

Pastors seem to take the post-Easter attendance blip and the problems with the first Sunday of daylight time as natural. "It comes with the territory," reflected Rev. Sharon Rogers-Groggett, pastor of First United Church of Christ in Hollywood. "It doesn't make me angry, people are people," she said.

What does disturb Rogers-Groggett are the conflicts that outside events create. "I'm more frustrated when school sporting events and mandatory practices are scheduled for Sunday morning," she said. "I understand that the youth want to participate in these events, but the mandatory events on Sunday morning means that church events have to take a back seat."

Ingram wondered why the time switch is always scheduled for Sunday. "I don't know the rationale for the time change on Sunday, but I think it would be wise to do it on a Friday night-Saturday morning," he said. "At least that would be better for the Christian churches." Ingram's church is a member of the Presbyterian Church in America.

Ingram said that while he is glad that so many people chose to attend church on important holidays such as Christmas and Easter, he wishes that people would see the value of attending church every week. "We have a lot of exciting things happening in the life of the church throughout the year. If people would come every week, they would be able to see and appreciate what is going on."

Stauffer said he doesn't see the peak of attendance at Christmas and Easter in a negative light at all. "It's great in that it shows the meaning that those seasons have for those who attend," he said.

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