

An essay by Garrison Keillor

We make fun of Episcopalians for their blandness, their excessive calm, their fear of giving offense, their lack of speed and also for their secret fondness for macaroni and cheese. But nobody sings like them.

If you were to ask an audience in Des Moines, a relatively Episcopalianless place, to sing along on the chorus of "Michael Row the Boat Ashore," they will look daggers at you as if you had asked them to strip to their underwear. But if you do this among Episcopalians, they'd smile and row that boat ashore and up on the beach!And down the road!

Many Episcopalians are bred from childhood to sing in four-part harmony, a talent that comes from sitting on the lap of someone singing alto or tenor or bass and hearing the harmonic intervals by putting your little head against that person's rib cage. It's natural for Episcopalians to sing in harmony. We are too modest to be soloists, too worldly to sing in unison.

When you're singing in the key of C and you slide into the A7th and D7th chords, all two hundred of you, it's an emotionally fulfilling moment. By our joining in harmony, we somehow promise that we will not forsake each other.

I do believe this, people: Episcopalians, who love to sing in four-part harmony are the sort of people you could call up when you're in deep distress. If you are dying, they will comfort you. If you are lonely, they'll talk to you. And if you are hungry, they'll give you tuna salad!

Episcopalians believe in prayer, but would practically die if asked to pray out loud. Episcopalians like to sing, except when confronted with a new hymn or a hymn with more than four stanzas. Episcopalians believe their Rectors will visit them in the hospital, even if they don't notify them that they are there. Episcopalians usually follow the official liturgy and will feel it is their way of suffering for their sins.

Episcopalians believe in miracles and even expect miracles, especially during their stewardship visitation programs or when passing the plate. Episcopalians feel that applauding for their children's choirs will not make the kids too proud and conceited.

Episcopalians think that the Bible forbids them from crossing the aisle while passing the peace. Episcopalians drink coffee as if it were the Third Sacrament.

Episcopalians feel guilty for not staying to clean up after their own wedding reception in the Fellowship Hall.

Episcopalians are willing to pay up to one dollar for a meal at church.

Episcopalians still serve Jell-O in the proper liturgical color of the season and Episcopalians believe that it is OK to poke fun at themselves and never take themselves too seriously.

And finally, you know you are a Episcopalian when:

- It's 100 degrees, with 90% humidity, and you still have coffee after the service.

- You hear something really funny during the sermon and smile as loudly as you can.

- Donuts are a line item in the church budget, just like coffee.

- When you watch a Star Wars movie and they say, "May the Force be with you," and you respond, "and also with you."

- And lastly, it takes ten minutes to say good-bye

(NOTE: Garrison Keillor attends *St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church* in St. Paul, Minnesota)