

The Sanctuary Dressing in Christmas Finery

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The first Sunday of Advent always brings sights of surprise and awe as we gaze upon the transformed sanctuary. Somehow, during the previous week, our place of worship turned, Cinderella-like, from its familiar appearance into a space of Christmas expectation. Last year I wondered how the miracle was accomplished. This year I set out to find out.

Our publications announced the decorating would happen at 9 am on Saturday. I planned to arrive at 9:15, assuming it would take a while for the workers to get coffee and get organized. I was sure wrong. When I arrived, the sanctuary already was cluttered with greenery, tree parts, colorful statuary, and a twelve-foot stepladder.

I was disappointed because I wanted to see if what I had been told was true – that all the Christmas decorations are kept under the chancel. I wanted to see how that could be possible. And even more interestingly, how it was removed from that wide but low space by a bunch of full-sized adults. I never did find out how everything got pulled out.

Did they recruit the tiny munchkins in pajamas who were eating pancakes in the gym? I doubt it. But I should mention the surprise at finding our parking lot completely filled when I arrived and people everywhere with various projects going on – some from our church, some from the community. It added to the excitement happening in the sanctuary.

Everyone seemed to know what to do. Angie Allen had the long green swags stretching along the tops and sides of the pews where she was “fluffing” the green extensions, bringing them to life after a year of compact packaging. At the same time, she handled the tedious job of removing old gold tinsel used in the past and pulling off thin gold threads whose origins I never understood. I helped with that for a very short while, and if any gold tinsel remains in the back pews, I apologize. I cleaned them up as much as I could. When finished there, Angie moved to the Narthex to hang wreaths and add other items.

At the front of the sanctuary, Annetta Carter was putting together five multi-sized trees to go around the base of the glass cross. Already, the green coverings and banners had been replaced by their purple Advent counterparts. Mitchell Smith and John Gretz were everywhere, taking care of this or that. At one point the men knelt around the moveable podium, figuring out how to fix a mechanical glitch in it. They discussed what to do about the leak in the skylight.

As the big tree was put together, predictable boyish humor appeared in the small group of men who gathered around. “The huge beautiful tree is new to us,” David Allen, co-chair of the Worship Ministry Team, explained. It was donated by a company (to remain unnamed) who was moving to a new location. The men found with glee that the tree could gleam with all white bulbs or be changed with a click to multi-colored lights. They clicked them back and forth, back and forth, laughing about the chaos they could cause during the service. Angie calmed their fun by declaring the lights needed to be all white. But the subject and demonstration came up whenever someone new came in.

Then the real decorating started. I lost my enthusiasm as I watched in horror as the top was put on the tree. The tree – and maybe David – wove dangerously overhead but, thankfully, then safely settled. That was only the beginning. It was Ward Ransdell’s turn. He had already attached the wreaths around the sanctuary with a huge pole which forty years ago was stenciled with “Crestwood Worship Committee Wreath Hanger.” No one would dare appropriate it and forget to return it! It was time to attach the swags.

At this point I am faced with a dilemma. Ward ordered me not to use his name (he’s very humble and is embarrassed by appearing in many Spotlight articles). And upon my leaving, he warned, “Don’t you dare get me in trouble at home!” But really, I can’t resist, and the story is completely bland without telling about his exploits. Sorry.

Next time you are in the sanctuary, give the swags on the side walls some attention. Notice how very high up they are. Notice how narrow the side aisle is. Think about how a big wobbly step ladder would, or would not, fit in those spaces.



I will say this. Every time Ward headed upward, someone would yell, "Go hold the ladder. If his wife comes over she will kill us all" (even though they know that Linda is a kind, gentle soul). Mitchell, the large, solid, former policeman became the primary ladder holder. However, when the ladder was balanced on the pews rather than the floor, my nerves weren't calmed by Mitchell's strong grasp. At times I couldn't watch.

As the swags were placed in each hook, Angie and others directed the procedure, making sure each loop was equal to the others. Hooks remain in place, out of sight, throughout the year. Wreaths were examined again, turned, and errant bows or twigs were tucked in. As the procedure was nearing the end, and everyone was obviously getting physically exhausted, someone pointed out an earlier swag was slightly down an inch or so. "Well, if anyone complains, they can come adjust it," someone on the ground wisely replied.

Through all of this, people were coming and going, watching the progress as they were involved in their own Saturday church activities. I turned around and found our Pastor Kory on his hands and knees trying to fix the electricity to the light of the little tree I had proudly earlier "fluffed." Former pastor Bill McDonald dropped in and I chatted with him about past decorations. He said that when he came on board, the decorations had always been silver and blue. He laughed that he's "always been a green and red man" so he talked the Board into bringing in the colors that have adorned the sanctuary since.

I had to leave before things were finished, so I was thrilled to see the completed product when I entered on Sunday morning. The tree had been decorated with only the bottom left without ornaments. As part of the morning service, the children filed in with ornaments to do their part in preparing for Christmas. The creche scene and wisemen statues had been properly arranged. The advent candles had been added, taking me back many decades when it was our family's turn to light a candle.

The sanctuary is beautiful. The hard work of unsung people brings pleasure and gratitude to us all as we entered this meaningful season. The hard work of the worship committee may bring back warm memories of untold stories of Crestwood Christmas' past. Working with the Spotlight makes me increasingly aware that learning about the quiet efforts that are done by our congregation add to my gratitude of being part of this vital church.

Sunday, pay attention to the ornaments on the tree. If I can discover what I need, the Spotlight will be back next week to talk about them.

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If there is some area of the church you would like to know more about, please share your ideas with me. Let's explore together. [Gaye Holman](#)



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