



The Great Crowd: A Love Story About a Large Urban Parish

Michael J. Tan Creti

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The Great Crowd is a social history of All Saints Episcopal Church of Omaha, Nebraska. Founded in 1885, precisely at the moment when Omaha was experiencing a spurt of rapid growth, the parish has continued to succeed as a religious community deeply enmeshed in the life of the city. It was from the beginning a distinctly urban parish and, as change came for the city, underwent its changes, including a major relocation of its facility. It also found itself navigating the changes in national culture and in the character of the larger Episcopal Church. Curiously, very different rectors-eight in all, with different configurations of lay leadership drawn from across the city-responded to these successive waves of change, and yet, they held on the conviction that they had maintained the unique identity of the parish that they had inherited from those who had gone before them. They did so in no small part by telling their story. Drawing from the parish archives, including its vestry minutes, correspondence, and publications the author, himself one of the eight rectors, has taken up a critical retelling the story bring up to 9/11, 2001. These pages contain a strange tapestry of names and faces, from Omaha's cowboy mayor to its storied lawyers and devout bus drivers who melded themselves in that strange unity called a parish. In the author's telling, the story becomes a critical tool for understanding how a Christian community works and for providing a basis for a critical assessment of the purpose and meaning of religious community in American life.

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