

David W. Lloyd: Emmanuel, God is with Us

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Let me begin by saying that Seekers Church should express our thanks to the second congregation that meets here at 2025 for its hospitality, generosity, support, prayers, and love all these years. Today is a special day for us Seekers – a day commemorating the impending departure of Seekers' Church from this building to our new location on Carroll Street in northwest D.C., next to Takoma Park, Maryland.

For some of us, the first Sunday that we worship in Takoma cannot come soon enough. We have been in limbo for three years while we waited with increasing impatience for the architectural designs to be completed, for the contractor to be selected, for the city permits to be issued, and now for the renovation to be completed. There have been times when I was reminded of the trials the people had rebuilding Jerusalem after the captivity in Babylon, as recorded by Ezra the prophet: "Then the people of the land caused the Jews to lose heart and made them afraid to continue the building; and in order to defeat their purpose the people of the land bribed officials at court to act against the Jews." But all through these three years and the accompanying trials, our strength has been "Emmanuel, God is with us."

Some of us have felt ourselves cutting our emotional ties to this building, but not yet able to develop ties to the new building, sort of like being seniors in college who cut some of their ties to their hometown but are unable to develop ties

to the location where they will live after they graduate. For our mission groups such as Learners and Teachers and Living Waters, it has meant developing plans for events this spring with no certainty as to whether they would be held here or at Carroll Street. And in that uncertainty, our whispered refuge has been "Emmanuel, God is with us."

For others of us, our last Sunday of worshipping here will be sad, and we are having difficulty cutting our emotional ties to this building, for to us it has been an especially holy place. Sharon and I first entered this building in the spring of 1972, as newlyweds looking for a church that would engage both of us in our spiritual journey. We were living in Northern Virginia then, and had visited any number of congregations during our engagement and the first few months of our marriage. Sharon needed a conservative, evangelical church and I needed a more liberal church. I know that it is hard to believe that I wanted a more liberal church than Sharon did. I am not sure whether you all moved left and took her with you, or whether I moved rightward, or whether both happened. Sharon's faith had been nurtured in Orthodox Presbyterian and Baptist congregations, and she wanted a church that "preached the Gospel." My experience was more varied, I grew up in Lutheran and Presbyterian churches, worshipped in Methodist churches here in D.C. when I was not worshipping as part of an ecumenical service on the campus of American University, and had worshipped at the mass of Catholic missionaries in Ethiopia during my Peace Corps days. I wanted a church that emphasized liturgy and social action, had a choir I could join, and had tasteful decor.

On that Sunday, we entered this brownstone building, noting the brass sign outside that identified this as the Headquarters of the [Church of the Saviour](#), and not sure that

there was worship here. Gordon Cosby's sermon and prayers satisfied both of us, and we particularly noted how many announcements there were about meaningful social action – mission groups, work parties, lectures, etc. We sat on the piano side of the room, more or less, about where we do now. We took our first School of Christian Living class in this room, Mary Cosby's class on the New Testament, which we had never experienced in that way before. Moreover, almost nothing in my years in various churches has stirred my soul like the first time we witnessed the members and intern members making their commitments on Recommitment Sunday. The choice of books for sale in the office was not what either of us had seen in the churches of our youth! Back then, the School of Christian Living filled the dining room and the foyer, and meals were elaborate. I remember the night Sharon took it upon herself to cook crepes for 60!

Within a few years, Sharon was also spending time in the kitchen on Sunday mornings, learning how to arrange flowers for the altar from Alice Fenn, who passed away last month. Eventually Sharon did a number of altar floral arrangements by herself for Seekers. Some of you may remember the Sunday that she had a beautiful arrangement of fall flowers, stalks and leaves, unknowingly including some bright red poison ivy leaves. I found myself frequently visiting the [FLOC](#) offices on the third floor during the week. Along with my experiences in representing abused, neglected, and delinquent children and youth as a law student, my meetings with the FLOC Rehab Commission group upstairs and the summer staff meetings when I represented the FLOC Child Advocacy Center clarified that God's call on my life was to help bring about justice for children, specifically, to address child abuse and neglect.

I treasure the photograph of me holding our daughter Meredith

as a baby in my arms in the dining room on the Sunday we dedicated her to God during worship. Like some of you, I have taught children's classes on all three floors. I remember the map of the world that gave the World Room its name, and can still see Mary Youry slouched on the couch during our Learners and Teachers mission group meetings there. I still think of the PC&CC office as Joe Knowles' office, where I went for therapy for a while, and remember the abstract painting that hung over the sofa there. In addition, I remember the clowns coming to an empty building on a Saturday to practice our skit for the next day, and getting into costume and makeup on the third floor or in the World Room. Several years ago I sat in this room with tears in my eyes as our younger daughter Erica preached about her summer experience in teaching children in Mississippi.

These are some of the good memories of this building. I am sure you have some, too. Of course, not all the memories of this building were good. I do not remember with particular fondness the times several of us struggled to move the TV and its cart from the third floor Seekers room to the dining room for a class, and then back upstairs. Nor do I give thanks for the times that some of us had to help Emily Gilbert's friend Sharon and her electric cart up and down the outside rear stairs because the building had neither a ramp nor an elevator. Moreover, far too many times I have lugged tables from the third floor and from the furnace room here to the first floor for our meals on Christmas Eve and Easter. I remember more than one occasion when I left the building after a mission group meeting or Seekers Stewards meeting in anger, or in deep hurt, or in anguish or upset that I had caused pain to someone else. You may have some not so good memories of this building, too. Holy space is not always conflict-free space.

Of course, there have been minor irritations between various users of the building. There have been times when silence in our worship has been interrupted by unintentionally loud voices from those getting ready for the 11:30 service. Times when those getting ready for the second service have been frustrated by an overlong Seekers service, or by our failure to move quickly upstairs for coffee so that they can arrange the chairs in the foyer. Times when different activities from several sister congregations both needed the dining room, World Room and the sanctuary at the same time and hadn't been scheduled properly. I also remember the time when we came in for mission group and to prepare dinner for the School of Christian Living and were surprised to discover drop cloths and painting supplies all over. And I still haven't figured out why all the spoons, soup spoons, and forks that our Learners and Teachers mission group buys for our School of Christian Living's dinners disappear so quickly from the sideboard in the dining room and from the kitchen.

Soon we will be gone. We do not quite know what to expect, what our first few Sunday worship times and meetings will feel like, other than unfamiliar. And I suspect that during those awkward times, when the building doesn't yet feel like home, our catchword will be "Emmanuel, God is with us."

I mentioned that this building is a headquarters building. From the beginning, the Church of the Saviour has understood that it is not solely confined in this room, or in this building, but is always engaged in ministry to the world. When I see the headquarters sign, I am mindful that Jesus was incarnated to bring about the healing of the world, not merely to worship in the Temple grounds. That call to bring about the healing of the world is also our call as members of the Body of Christ.

During the Civil War, General Pope, who commanded the Army of the Potomac, boldly proclaimed that under his leadership the Army's headquarters would be in the saddle. This prompted wags in both the North and the South to remark that General Pope had his headquarters where his hindquarters should be. A headquarters is primarily a place of vision, of seeing the big picture, of strategic planning, of allocating resources, of interpreting the information received from those doing the daily work, and of evaluating whether the strategy has been successful.

I believe that this building has been used as a place of vision, and not just Gordon Cosby's vision, but a place where all of we Seekers have shared our visions, too. We have used it for strategic planning and allocating resources to our various missions. We have interpreted the information we receive from the daily engagement in mission through our sermons, our prayers, in meetings, and sometimes in School of Christian Living classes. Nevertheless, I wonder how frequently we have used this building to evaluate whether our strategies have been successful. I believe that this evaluation is also part of our commitment to accountability. If we are not careful, we can celebrate the joys from the week's efforts at mission so much that we do not take the time to see whether these are adding up to being effective. I am not saying that our goal is primarily about success as the world measures it, but I am saying that we should take stock to see if our gifts are being used most effectively to bring about the kingdom of God.

I believe that Seekers Church will be especially challenged to ensure that we think of our new location on Carroll Street as

a headquarters building. We have as a primary value our worship together each Sunday, and we have given a lot of thought to the appearance and use of our new headquarters for worship. We have also given some thought to how the building can be used by our mission groups and by other groups. We have spent some time exploring potential missions outside the building, but I hope we will spend even more time after we locate there to ensure that significant parts of our missions will also take place outside that building. I believe we could be tempted into seeing our building as a temple, rather than as a headquarters. I believe we still have a lot of work to do with figuring out how the building will work for its primary purpose: our ministry to the world as it is lived out in Takoma, Takoma Park, Langley Park, and Silver Spring, northern Virginia, the nation, and the world.

That leads me to think about the need to minister in the immediate neighborhood of our new location. At Carroll Street, the Metro station is a hundred yards away. There is a new condominium going up several doors from us. There is a hostel next door, and a funeral home down the block. How can we be present to them?

We can ask the same about this building, 2025. In the years we have been here, have we missed opportunities to minister to the people in this neighborhood and grow spiritually from them? I think that I have been eager to enter this building that I was not fully aware of this neighborhood. This building sits almost equidistant from the Embassy of Morocco, a Muslim nation struggling to build its institutions in a way that incorporates Western freedoms, and the Embassy of Indonesia, the most populous Muslim nation. Both struggle with violent rebellions and terrorism. In the aftermath of 9-11 and the War on Terrorism, no one seemed called to reach out and engage

them in dialogue about our mutual desire for peace. Next door is the headquarters of a Jewish organization. We missed opportunities to engage them and our Muslim neighbors in dialogue to seek a peaceful settlement in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. Less than a block down Q Street is the memorial to Gandhi and the Embassy of India. Weren't there opportunities to learn about how we could build upon the legacy of Mother Teresa and the Sisters of Mercy?

Several doors away on Massachusetts Avenue is the office of the American Academy of Family Physicians. Did we ever explore the possibility of discussing the relationship between faith and medicine in the healing process, or in the grieving process, with them? Moreover, although this is an affluent neighborhood, there are working poor. Was no one called to minister to the chambermaids and janitors who work every day in the two hotels within a block of this building, some of whom may live in Langley Park?

The corner behind us houses the Phillips Gallery, one of the world's great collections of impressionist art, and scattered up and down the blocks are several other galleries. We never took the opportunity to engage formally in dialogue with the curators on the connection between art and spiritual journeys. We never asked any of them to stage a show of contemporary religious art in this building.

We know that God has been present in this building. Surely, God is present in the people who work in the nearby blocks outside this building. As we enter and leave this building during this time of Lenten penitence, perhaps we can ponder whether our eyes were too blind, our ears too deaf, our hearts too closed so that we missed God's signs that we should invite them to travel with us on spiritual journeys that may be

parallel and may converge from time to time.

Although we had hoped to be in our new home by Christmas, it may not be coincidental that we are celebrating our transition from this building to Carroll Street today. This week we entered the season of Lent, the time of transition for Jesus and the disciples as he moved from ministry in Galilee to confronting the religious and political establishments in Jerusalem.

Seekers Church is no stranger to transitions. The first was our very first year of being our own congregation, under the leadership of Sonya Dyer and Fred Taylor. We spent months creating a style that felt comfortable, that became our own. We used the circle time in the foyer before moving into this room to try all sorts of things, including practicing hymns and acting out the scriptures for the day. We were very focused on supporting the religious education of our numerous young children and on FLOC as a key mission, and then on feminism, both as feminist Christianity and as its own theology. In a few years, Fred left Seekers, and we entered into a second transition with a leadership team, but with Sonya clearly as our primary leader. Later we had a transition with our sister congregations into becoming incorporated churches. Like some of the other churches that sprang from the womb of this congregation that has worshipped here for a half century, Seekers has members who never experienced the thrill and challenge of worshipping in the "Old Lands" of the Church of the Saviour. For them, the transition may not have meant much. For some old-timers, it may have meant a lot more. Did Seekers Church take enough time to help everyone work through this transition? Several years ago, Seekers went through yet another transition, as Sonya and Manning moved to Charlotte. Our understanding of our Servant Leadership Team changed and

deepened as we went through a staff needs discernment process. We are in the midst of yet another major transition as almost all of our children and youth have become adults and left us for campuses and other homes.

And through it all we feel the subconscious thought, "Emmanuel, God is with us."

The congregation that has worshipped in this space at 11:30 so faithfully for so long is now facing its own transition. The Church of the Servant Jesus has disbanded. Gordon's regular preaching will be ending at some point in the not too distant future. Is that congregation grappling with the transition to something different? The Ecumenical Council is wrestling with the future of this building. Is that congregation addressing that potential transition as well? Seekers has found its transitions challenging, and I wish that congregation well as it engages in its own transitions.

So to you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, as we in worship in a time of transition in holy spaces in the most powerful city of the most powerful political entity in the world, I say, remember the words, "Emmanuel, God is with us." For as Paul wrote to his brothers and sisters, who worshipped together in holy spaces in the most powerful city of the most powerful political entity in the world of his time, "For I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths – nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."