

Kate Cudlipp: Intentionally on the Way

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The call of Seekers Church says, "Seekers are not persons who have arrived, but persons who are intentionally on the way." What does it mean to be "intentionally on the way"? To help answer that question I would like to use a concept of Letty Russell's. In her book, *Church in the Round: A Feminist Interpretation of the Church*, she describes a process for churches that seek to become ever more faithful to God's vision for the world. She calls the process a "spiral of action and reflection."

She defines the beginning of the process as actions by a community that come in response to our experiences in society and in our church. Of course, every community acts, but Russell is encouraging us to act with more awareness, more intention. As we are acting, she asks us to reflect on our actions, seeking to connect them to our Christian tradition **and** to people who are struggling for life: outcasts, those whom society marginalizes, the forgotten, the broken-spirited. Based on our reflections, we are to ask what our faith calls us to next, and the answer to that question is the basis for future action. The process is a spiral because it is always covering new ground, integrating new experiences and insights into new, (but still provisional) understandings of what God wants in our lives.

In the gospel story for today, we see the spiral of action and

reflection at work in an individual. I would like to ask you to look with me at the story through the eyes of the person who returned to Jesus to praise God for being healed. I do not want to dwell on the fact that the person was a Samaritan, or a leper. Rather, I would like to look at the person as just that – a person – who had lived with a certain condition, probably for many years. (To make the story a little easier to talk about, let us say the person is a woman so we can use personal pronouns.)

This woman had probably gotten used to her life, perhaps hoping for a change but not really expecting a major departure from what she knew. We get this sense when Luke tells us that while she was on the way to see the priests, the woman was healed of leprosy but she did not know it immediately. Our translation says that the woman, **“realizing what had happened,** came back praising God in a loud voice, then fell down at the feet of Jesus and spoke his praises.”

The woman, together with her fellow sufferers, had taken action – calling out to Jesus – based on what she knew about her own condition and had heard about Jesus. That action brought results. The woman had to stop and take in what had happened and then she had to act again, returning to Jesus to praise him. In a moment of inaction and receptivity, she receives his blessing and the impetus for her next action: his command to “Go your way. Your faith has saved you.” She is now newly equipped to return to action, to take a new role in helping create the realm of God.

Using the spiral of action and reflection as a lens, let us examine “the way” – the path – that Seekers Church has been on for the past decade and let us see what we can say about our intentionality.

It has been quite a journey to get here! [In his sermon in June](#), Keith reviewed for us the period from 1995 to the present: the decision to move from 2025, the off and on search for a building, the decision to buy this place, and the four and half-year renovation process that has finally brought us here.

We made the decision to leave 2025 for what seemed primarily practical reasons: the [Church of the Saviour](#) had made the decision to sell the building (not quickly, it turns out!), and we did not want to wait to be forced out. We were intentional about our community processes for finding a property, and tried to discern something about who God wished us to become as we considered various options. However, we had no collective vision of what we would be planting in our new location other than Seekers Church, as we knew it.

Yet in spite of the fact that we did not have a powerful vision of what we were moving toward, circumstances – might this have been the Holy Spirit? – prodded us to leave our rather comfortable situation as renters in a neighborhood in which we had no particular responsibilities or connections. Appropriating an insight Brenda shared in her sermon last month, we could say that we perceived, however dimly, that to stay too long in a comfortable place would misshape us, diminish our vitality and imperil our ability to grow.

Perceiving dimly, or perhaps more accurately, perceiving diffusely, is a characteristic of Seekers Church. From our beginnings, we have sought to discern God's word for us through many voices. This is a contrast to the prophetic

tradition we sprang from, where one clear voice was the guide for a community. In the Church of the Saviour, Gordon was (and still is) the dominant prophetic voice, holding up God's vision for the world, calling new missions and churches into being, and denouncing injustice in myriad places in the city, the nation, the world, and in ourselves.

That has not been Seekers way. In a conversation I had with Sonya a couple of years ago, she gave as good a description as I have heard of how we understand ourselves. She said, "Fred and I began to realize that the form and shape of community would emerge from those in community. When you sound a call for community, people come toward it, and those who come begin to shape it. Who the people are – what they bring – will inform the gospel message that that particular community will be about."

(It would take another sermon to examine the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the prophet-led church and the many-voice church, but I think it is fair to say we know which one we are.)

Now our church is here, at Carroll Street. We are a finite band of seekers in a space that, for the moment, is bigger than we are – bigger physically and bigger spiritually. This building is a lovely, physical metaphor for what Pat reminded us of in his sermon two weeks ago: God expects much from those to whom much has been given – and that means us!

The "much" that God expects of us includes growing into this space, physically and spiritually. It means assuring that this

building is used widely and well. It means welcoming newcomers who will help inform the gospel message God wants us to **be** in the world.

As I stop to reflect on what God expects of us now that we are here, I think of a quote Deborah offered us more than ten years ago: "First we shape our space, and then our space shapes us." A good question for reflection, and a springboard for our future actions is, "What is God inviting us to in **this** space in **this** location?"

I believe we are engaged in the next turn on that spiral, the action steps needed to begin to answer those questions. We are getting to know our neighbors. In fact, I would say that we have put more effort in the past three months into getting to know our neighbors and inviting them to get to know us than we did in the entire 28 years we worshiped at 2025:

- Martha conceived the idea for a summer art camp for neighborhood kids and recruited Jean, Roy, Alan and several other Seekers to make that happen for a week in August.
- In September, we set up a booth at the Takoma Park Folk Festival where we could rub elbows with our new neighbors, and a week later, we welcomed new acquaintances, as well as old friends, to our open house.
- Just last night we hosted a concert that was publicized throughout the area. The concert benefited a neighbor, the Silver Spring Interfaith Housing Coalition.
- Margreta is leading six weekly Seekers gatherings to which she has invited neighbors who represent many different interests in our new community. At the first meeting last Tuesday, the mention of possibilities for

Seekers to become involved with schools in our area caught the attention of some.

- Through contacts by several Seekers, and especially an ongoing conversation that Jeanne Marcus is engaged in, the Old Takoma Business Association, a coalition of small businesses and nonprofit organizations on both sides of the DC-MD line, will hold the first of what we believe will be frequent meetings in our space. In addition, the staff of OTBA has expressed an interest in talking to Seekers about being a tenant in our office space.

If we think back over the several initiatives I have just listed, we see the calls and personalities of many Seekers at work. I see in the way we are living into this new stage of our life as Seekers Church, confirmation of who we say and believe we are: “When we sound a call for community, those who come toward it will inform the gospel message that community will be about.”

Of course, if we really intend to be faithful, we need to recognize not only who we are, but also our need to be transformed. We need to be a confessing church and a confessing people. As we move more deeply into God’s call on our lives, we see more starkly how hard it is to let go of our fears and our need for security, comfort, control and success as the world defines it. Confession is part of our reflection on past actions and a springboard for different actions in the future.

[In his sermon two weeks ago](#), Pat offered me, and I would guess, others, an occasion for confession when he described the need for us as Christians to **care**. He elaborated on what

that demands of us:

We have to care enough to hold our privileges lightly. We have to care enough to be generous because of solidarity rather than charity; we have to care enough to move from ownership to stewardship as a way of living in the world. We have to care enough to get hurt sometimes, to lose things that matter, to go places we would rather not go and see things we would rather not see. We have to meet others with respect and not merely with compassion. We have to care enough to feel the pain in ourselves and in others, and then we have to breathe through the pain. The saving word of Jesus is that pain is not the last word; death is not the last word. Love is the first word and the last word.

Our new home invites us to new opportunities to care. First, the space offers us Seekers a **center**, a place to meet one another in new ways, as many of us bring parts of our lives that take place outside the church into this space. Already we have experienced Virginia with the Mosaic Harmony Choir and Tiffany with her body/movement classes. In the near future, we will have Sue and InterPlay, Jesse's live music, and who knows what else.

As I have already mentioned, this place has the potential to become a center for people who, while not members of this community, open doors to communities with whom we can make common cause and who can help expand our capacity to care.

Whether we've realized it or not, the members of Seekers Church now have one ministry and mission in common – the faithful stewardship of this property and its potential for good in the world. We may participate in this ministry in different ways and to varying degrees, but we are all a part.

As important as anything that goes on **in** this building, I believe, is what comes out from it: people who, in the words of our call “disperse with a common commitment to understand and implement Christian servanthood in the structures in which we live our lives.” In addition to the structures in which we already live our lives, I pray that we will seek out or create other structures, ones that break down the barriers that fragment our society and keep us walled off from, and fearful of, each other.

Being here is helping me see more clearly next steps on my way: Welcoming the stranger, being willing to be the stranger and ask others in our new community to welcome me, being more aware of what goes on outside my relatively secure sphere of activity. The next steps may be different for each of us as individuals, but I fervently believe that God, through us as one small expression of the Body of Christ, is doing a new thing.

Yes, we have arrived at Carroll Street – but this is not our final destination. We are still intentionally on our way!