

# Marjory Zoet Bankson: Headquarters or Home Base?

## Headquarters or Home Base?

### Scriptures:

*Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20* Jesus sent out "70 others" to go ahead of him in pairs, to every town where he himself intended to go, saying "... Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person: but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'

*1Kings 5: 1- 14* Naaman almost misses a cure for his leprosy because Elisha's prescription is too simple.

On this day, 28 years ago, Peter and I arrived in Washington, D.C. It was the nation's bicentennial, July 4, 1976, but the moving van still pulled up to our house at 8am and by late afternoon, our new house on Tennessee Avenue was full of boxes. We stood on our postage-stamp back porch that night and watched a few of the highest fireworks dot the dark sky. We wondered what life in the nation's capital would bring.

in [Faith@Work magazine](#) during the 1960s. Moreover, in the early 70s, when we lived in Springfield, Lil Wilson, (who was

a member of the Shepherd's group for the School of Christian Living), was part of a mission group with us at Grace Presbyterian Church in Springfield. We admired Church of the Saviour from afar and dreamed about going there some day. Now we had a chance to do that.

What we did not know...but soon discovered...was that 1976 marked a new beginning at Church of the Saviour. It was in the process of dividing into five little churches. By that fall, just as the CofS Council approved the call of Seekers Church, we came to Seekers because of its commitment to have a man and a woman presiding at worship...and because it was open to seeing God's call manifest in four particular areas: work, family, citizenship and service through the church. That made Seekers different from the others which focused on a single corporate mission and we were intrigued enough to come back.

Now, as we gather to celebrate our first communion in [our new building](#), it feels as though we have completed a 28-year transit to the New Land that God has given Seekers. We have learned a lot about living out of call in the areas of family and work, citizenship and service through the church. People have come and gone, but we trust the angel of Seekers is ready for this new home on Carroll Street. What a wonderful way to celebrate Independence Day together!

## **I. Headquarters? Or home-base?**

The Gospel lesson for today holds up a challenge for us as we move into this new space. Will this be a "headquarters" building for mission in the world...or a "home-base" for extended family and stranger alike?

[Last week](#), Keith named this place as our home, as a place to invite all kinds of people to the table. We have come from a "headquarters" building at 2025 Mass Avenue, where many rooms

stood empty all week. Is that all we want to be? On the other hand, can we also invite people in, to expand our ministry in this place through hospitality and welcome without demanding homogeneity?

The danger of thinking about this place as “our home” is that we think of it primarily as a place where “the family” gathers. However, if we see this home through Jesus’ eyes, then it could be a place to welcome strangers, to feed those hungry for creative worship and spiritual companionship and to celebrate Jubilee with all who come in the name of peace. I am hoping for that!

Jesus sent his disciples out on pairs, advising them to stay where they are welcomed and not to move around. “Eat what is set before you,” he says, “Don’t go looking for better fare.” I have always identified with the disciples in this story, going out with the good news that **all** are welcome at God’s table. However, this time, as we move into our new building, I am struck by Jesus’ invitation to become a householder, welcoming those who come toward us with a message of “Peace.” Can we offer space without demanding credentials first? What will it take to welcome the stranger?

Jesus clearly wants to establish new communities of peace, to cultivate a core of believers who will put their roots down in a new place and nourish the realm of God together. It reminds me of Bill Moyers new book, *Moyers on America*, which describes the community consciousness that it takes to sustain a democracy. It seems to me that the class on non-violent communication, which just ended last Tuesday, is a good place to start! We will need lots more practice to greet the world that way.

Our chrism has been inclusiveness. Now, as we move into a new neighborhood and settle here, **can we call forth the kind of leadership and structures needed for a different kind of ministry than we have had before?** Can we find ways to be good

citizens of this community? Can we reach out to young people at the Electric Maid community space next door on our right? Can we reach out to people hanging out at the 7-11 across the street? Can we reach out to foreigners at the India House youth hostel next door on our left? Are there ways to invite relationship even as we settle in?

Jeffrey has already paved the way for civic involvement in this community. In addition, Paul joined the board of [Silver Spring Interfaith Housing Coalition](#) along with Steve Marcus. Surely, our struggles to get a certificate of occupancy have given us a taste of what other people go through with local bureaucracies without the resources that we have in this community. Could these be the seeds of call? Maybe they point to our family here.

**I see citizenship as a matter of stewardship...of managing resources for the public good.** Sometimes that will bring us into conflict with the dominant system. Sometimes God's call means creating new models. This building confronts us with both!

- We have chosen a space in which we could double the size of Seekers at worship. Moreover, we could make this space available for concerts, plays, dance, yoga, seminars and urban retreats if people will step forward to take on that responsibility for Seekers.
- We have chosen a space with street level entry for some type of business and new opportunities for children. I hope we can be generous in finding a weekday partner already in ministry here.
- We have chosen a space that could offer retreat and reflection on the third level...if we find someone with a call to manage the building and keep it open during the week.

I believe that we can practice our call to citizenship by making this place our home base for our going out and our

coming in.

## **II. The Kingdom of God is near**

The Hebrew scripture for today tells a story of healing that was almost missed because Naaman expected something bigger, costlier and more demanding. He was a general, used to pomp and circumstance. He could not believe the simple solution that the prophet Elisha suggested-that he dip himself in the Jordan River seven times.

This is a political story, set in the "domination system" to use Walter Breuggemann's term. The King of Israel tears his clothes because he interprets the request of Naaman's king as a trick to pick a quarrel and maybe start a war. However, Elisha knew that God could heal Naaman and he was willing to act as a peacemaker. Elisha understood that God's power was not exclusive, not limited to Israel. He offered healing instead of political advantage.

When Naaman was about to leave because he felt dishonored by the simplicity of Elisha's direction, the servants step in. Actually, they step in twice because the initial guidance to seek help from Elisha came from a young girl who had been captured on a raid. She was a POW who was willing to care for her captor! She too knew that the God of Israel was not exclusive, not a national totem figure. In both cases, the servants are willing to speak for the common good. They are evangelists, messengers for a God that was bigger than any single nation.

When Naaman is willing to do the simple thing that Elisha suggested, he is healed. Presumably, Naaman did not have to be a believer, but he had to let go of his preconceptions and do

what Elisha said. All of these people are acting within the dominant political system, but the servants and Elisha come to their work with an “alternative consciousness”— to use Brueggeman’s term for the believing community. That, I think, is what Seekers holds up for us: **an alternative vision of what it means to be a good citizen.**

We live in a land where the President’s idea of good citizenship is to go out and spend money on things we do not need to keep the economy going. The alternative vision that I see among Seekers is this: Trish working to extend health care for the elderly and Peter is working to keep kids in school; David is working to protect military families from abuse and Kate steering [For Love of Children](#) through transition. Many Seekers have chosen work in line with our belief that public institutions **can be shaped** to bring greater justice and mercy for all. That is citizenship in service to call.

Others reach beyond our borders to act on the belief that God cares for the **whole world** and not just those who claim to be Christians. I am reminded of a conversation that I recently had with Julie Arms’ father, Dr. Cliff Starr. After he retired from an active medical practice in Wisconsin, he and his wife, Nancy, have been going down to Guatemala twice a year to offer medical help in a Maya village on Lake Atitlan, San Lucas Toliman. He said, “It’s like practicing medicine 30 years ago, when I really have to listen and look to make a diagnosis. It’s much more satisfying really, because we make such a human connection.”

Our conversation made me think about the adulation of former President Reagan several weeks ago and how little was said about his policies in Central America, where our government actively supported Rios Montt and the slaughter of Maya villagers labeled as a “communist threat.” As a US citizen then, I did nothing to raise my voice in protest. Indeed, I hardly knew where Guatemala was. Now I do.

In two weeks, Sandra, David and Sharon, Peter and I, will be going out from this home base on Carroll Street, traveling to Guatemala on a [Faith@Work work](#) pilgrimage as a small way to undo the damage that our government did in the name of "democracy." I go because it feels like call and an act of loyalty to the ideals expressed in our Declaration of Independence. I go because I know those villagers will welcome us even though we do not deserve it. I go because I will see the face of God in our meeting.

I would like to end with a poem that came out of our last trip there:

It's titled *Via Dolorosa Guatemala* by Mimi Lang

*It is a long way to the bottom of the hill,  
pushing a wheelbarrow full of sacred earth.*

*It is tricky to control the heavy loads pulling us  
down the hill.*

*As the piles of freshly dug earth accumulate, I  
think of the path*

*as a via dolorosa for Guatemala.*

*Each pile along the way a very small sacrifice,  
an offering from us to the silent, slaughtered,  
indigenous people.*

*Can we be redeemed by our labor, absolved by the  
dust on our boots,*

*the stretch of our muscles?*

*We wonder how martyrdom could have come to the relatives*

*of the bright-spirited, beautiful Mayan people we have met in the village.*

*We all know the history, the saga of the US-sponsored massacre*

*of nascent sustainable communities.*

*We feel a swelling mea culpa in our hearts as we walk along the sorrowful path.*

*But we find hope in the light brought to our lives by Ingrid, Milton, Rolando, Brenda, Gladys, Mida, Latiza, Lilliana, Selina, Victor, Sonya, Daisy, Hershan, Mario, Maria, Oscar, Anna, Elmer, Miguel, Byron, Minor, Marvin, Erlinda, Evalina, Elmer...*

*Thanks to the children of the village who have touched our hands and hearts*

*and granted us forgiveness.*

For me, the gift of going out and coming back to a community that cares to hear our stories of call makes this a **home base** for **ministry** rather than simply a headquarters for mission. For me, the difference is relationship and mutuality.

**As we gather round the communion table this morning,** let us hold the promise of this place in our hearts as we break bread together.

Amen.