

Marjory Zoet Bankson: Ten Things to Take Along

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Scripture: Acts 2: 1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind...And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?" ... I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit...

Today is Pentecost Sunday, the birthday of the Christian church. Pentecost completes the great liturgical drama that begins with the crucifixion and resurrection of Easter, includes the mysterious appearances of the post-Easter Jesus to his disciples and his ascension into heaven – the ancient understanding of where God lived. If Jesus moved God's presence out of the Temple as an itinerant rabbi, then Luke's version of Pentecost poured God's spirit into a whole crowd of ordinary men and women from all over the ancient world.

In the Hebrew Testament, Pentecost was celebrated fifty days after Passover as the Feast of Weeks. It was a harvest

festival to commemorate the giving of God's law to Moses. Paul, the first to write about the presence of Spirit after Jesus' death, mentions Pentecost only once in First Corinthians, saying that he planned to stay in Ephesus until "after Pentecost." I suspect he was speaking of the Feast of Weeks, not Pentecost as we know it. Neither Mark nor Matthew mentions this outpouring of Spirit. Moreover, John describes it as an appearance of Jesus to his disciples, in which he "breathed the Spirit on them." It was not a public event.

However, the author of Luke-Acts does make Pentecost a very public event. Luke transforms a traditional celebration of the Law by filling it **full** of God's spirit – as wind and fire and amazing speech. Instead of unifying everyone with the same ecstatic tongue (as Pentecost is often preached), Luke makes a point of naming Jews from every part of the Ancient World, each with a different language, now able to understand that God would meet them in their local idiom. Luke's version of Pentecost makes ethnic and social diversity the norm!

If Jesus began the movement out of the Temple, away from the religious hierarchy and into a chosen few disciples, then Pentecost completes the direction from **one** to **many** – a totally different understanding of God's realm right here on earth, among ordinary people – male and female, young and old, slave and free. It's a complete reversal of the ancient worldview and one we still debate. Is God up there and far away, or is God here, now, among us? Pentecost points to the latter.

When I began working on this sermon, we were going to complete this Pentecost service and then walk five miles to our new home in Carroll Street. In addition to the cross and banner that we will carry whenever we do make that march, I began to

identify other things we would be taking with us from our life as a congregation in this place. Each starts with a certain orthodoxy or Law and moves toward Spirit fulfillment. I call it **Ten Things to Take Along**. In each, there is the imprint of Pentecost.

First, the call of Seekers.

From the beginning, Seekers claimed Christian servanthood in “the normal structures of our daily lives” rather than only corporate mission to the poor. As a second-generation [Church of the Saviour](#) community, Seekers drew people whose paid work was serving the poor and the most vulnerable in society. Families with children were also drawn to Seekers because they knew parenthood was a call to service that Jesus demonstrated in his welcome to children. We wanted a church that would challenge us to grow as whole persons in all the areas of our lives – work and family, neighbors and citizens. The [call of Seekers](#) challenged us to see our lives as whole and holy.

Second, shared leadership.

Fred Taylor and Sonya Dyer called Seekers together around their model of a lay/clergy, male/female team. It’s easy to forget how revolutionary their partnership was in 1975, when Fred asked Sonya if she would consider teaming with him to start a new community. Fred was still working full-time for FLOC, so Sonya’s pastoring gave Seekers a special flavor of widely decentralized leadership. Sonya blessed emerging gifts wherever she saw them. As an extrovert, she liked interaction and constantly pushed the community toward participatory engagement, so shared leadership meant more than Fred and Sonya’s partnership. It meant leadership offered by many people at the point of their particular gift. We might call that the Pentecost Principle in action!

Third, the open pulpit.

All of the early members had experienced the power of Gordon's regular preaching, but Emily in particular had experienced the liveliness of more informal worship at the Potters House on Sunday mornings. In the beginning, Fred claimed his prophetic preaching about half the time and to keep alive our ties with the other communities, we invited others to share the pulpit. Fortunately, for us, Sonya did not want to preach, so we did not fall into a pattern of hearing only from our two paid leaders.

I remember that Fred asked me to preach when he was going to be away...and how hard I worked to make those periodic sermons worth listening to. Other women, Joan Dodge and later Lois Stovall, also became regulars in sharing the pulpit with Fred. Then some men in Seekers began to want a voice too. The issue of pay equity between Fred and Sonya had some impact on the development of an open pulpit at Seekers because Fred identified his main contribution as sermon preparation and delivery, even though nobody else was paid to preach. Pressure increased to pay everyone – or no-one – and in 1988, Fred resigned from his staff position. Seekers has had an open pulpit since then.

Fourth, worship design moved from Sonya's particular interest to being a mission of Celebration Circle.

In the early days, Sonya and Mary Carol often wrote the liturgy. Emily and David were also involved, and Mary Clare Powell kept raising her concerns about the image of God being portrayed in the prayers. Bulletin covers were hand-drawn and printed. Different people offered things for the altar from the Liturgy Committee, but it was not until 1979 that [Celebration Circle](#) was formed to hold responsibility for the

whole worship experience. Peter joined then as the old Shepherd's group from Church of the Saviour disbanded.

Sonya's sensitivity to wanting male/female visibility as the whole image of God led to Peter's regular participation as the male liturgist when women from Seekers began preaching more regularly in the early 1980s. Sonya and Peter held the container for our prayers and provided continuity in worship for more than 15 years as the pulpit opened to more and more voices. Then, when Sonya left, Celebration Circle opened the liturgist's role as well.

Fifth, the primary teaching function moved into the School of Christian Living.

In 1976, the School of Christian Living remained as a mission of the ecumenical church, but within a couple of years, the Shepherds Mission Group disbanded and [Learners & Teachers](#) formed to sponsor the Seekers' school. At first, its main mission was to prepare people for membership in the old CoS pattern but I think the clown class disrupted that routine. By 1980, we had an active group of clowns at Seekers and the School attracted people from other churches in northern Virginia and the District.

The school typically offered three classes each term...a biblical class, a spiritual growth class and a mission class. As the pulpit opened to more voices in 1988, L&T added preaching classes. With an open pulpit after 1988, we could not depend upon preaching to provide a single direction for the community, so Learners & Teachers became the locus for learning at Seekers.

In 1994, the School offered four basic classes in Belonging, Decision-making, Stewardship and Sacred Space, which involved almost everyone in Seekers! It changed the way we thought about shaping our life together.

Sixth, the theology of Seekers is Spirit-based.

Because our initial call invited servanthood in the ordinary structures of our lives, there was from the beginning a broader understanding of Jesus' call to mission than most other CoS churches had. Inclusiveness was the guiding principle at Seekers. First, it was children. Then it was the dialogue between feminism and traditional language for God. Then issues of gender and sexual orientation influenced a change in our call to be "welcoming and affirming." Now I would say that we are facing the challenge of how to include our elders in new forms of ministry. In each phase, I believe the "Pentecost principle" of blessing diversity has deepened our understanding of God's love for the whole world and not just some special corner of it.

Seventh, membership in Seekers is open to anyone who chooses an intentional path of discipleship.

From the beginning, Seekers were uncomfortable with the simple separation of "members" and "non-members." We tended to speak about "core members" and "other members," though the discussion was tangled in the wider debate among the nine CoS churches over what was meant by "integrity of membership."

After it became clear that some "non-members" were giving at a

sacrificial level, participating fully in mission group life and wanted more of a voice in shaping the direction of Seekers, the issue of “belonging” became more critical as we considered taking on stewardship of 2025. In 1997, Seekers renamed the core group as Stewards and welcomed all as Members who wanted to claim an intentional path for inner growth, giving to the community and outward mission.

Eighth, our paid staff became a Servant Leadership Team.

The difference may not seem obvious, but when Sonya left in the fall of 2000, Peter and Kate were simply called our “paid staff.” When Jeanne felt a call to offer more than she was giving from Learners & Teachers, a “Staff Needs Discernment Group” was formed to examine our needs. We spent much time and copious amounts of paper trying to name the difference between the voluntary leadership that all of us exercise in Seekers, and the particular gifts of part-time paid leadership. In the end, we agreed that Seekers needed what Robert Greenleaf described as SALT: a Servant-as-Leader Team. For Greenleaf, servanthood came first, but leadership was essential. Since then, Brenda has also been confirmed as a member of SALT for Seekers.

Ninth, mission groups are the primary form of spiritual formation in Seekers.

Although we have a number of important ministry teams for particular purposes, mission groups remain as the ongoing structure for accountability and commitment in Seekers. It is the place where we practice non-violent communication when we can remember to stay conscious, confront our shadowy projections because we are invested in working together and grapple with the difficulties of what it means to be a “body

of Christ” in the solo-culture that we live in. While mission groups are not for everyone, we continue to affirm their importance for integrating the inward and outward journey.

The tenth thing to take with us is an understanding of sacred space.

When Church of the Saviour voted in 1995 to disband and to sell 2025 within three years, Seekers saw the “for sale” sign on the only home we had known. As the last of the small churches to be worshiping here, we were the most affected by the vote. Some of you will remember visiting different churches, looking for space to share. Some will remember the community meetings that we had to discuss whether to rent, to share or to buy space for ourselves. Some will remember making an offer on 1101 Pennsylvania Avenue in Southeast. All the while, Peter kept reminding us to “[keep praying](#).”

Now we are about to move to our new home on Carroll St. in Takoma. The latest estimate is one month from now. The long years between 1995 and 2004 have taken a toll and toughened us up as well. Our worship continues to be vital and lively. Our children have grown up. New mission groups have been born. Giving continues to be strong and we have enough money in the bank to complete renovation of Carroll Street. As Deborah said some years ago, first, the space shapes us...and then we shape the space. On the other hand, maybe it was the other way around: first, we shape the space...and then the space shapes us. Whichever way it goes, we know there is a song of the Spirit that resonates in the chamber of our gathered community.

Jesus said, “I came not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill

it.” Pentecost filled the Feast of Weeks with an amazingly democratic Spirit that gave everyone the power to hear the good news of God’s love in his or her own language. Pentecost tells us that **diversity is the dream of god**, not sameness nor uniformity.

Ten things to take along as we move:

- First, the call of Seekers.
- Second, shared leadership.
- Third, the open pulpit.
- Fourth, designed worship.
- Fifth, the School of Christian Living.
- Sixth, our Pentecost theology.
- Seventh, membership for all.
- Eighth, servant leadership by SALT.
- Ninth, mission groups.
- Ten, sacred space...and a mosaic to symbolize it.

In the last few months, Peter and Kathryn have helped us make a [mosaic](#) for the front of our new home. It is made of broken plates from everyone here at Seekers. Many hands have placed the pieces into one overall design, which we will hang on the outside wall: a visible sign of the sacred space inside. The pattern comes from a communion set and collection plate that I made for Seekers back in 1977, when I wrote this in my journal:

Waves and circles. In the beginning, God’s spirit brooded over the face of the deep. Then, centered by Jesus, we come to know God’s love for the world and our part in the sacred process of continuing creation.

That, to me, is the core of what we take with us as we leave

this place. Ten things ... and the promise of a place in God's continuing story of creation.

AMEN.