

# Meet Peter Bankson

*Peter, a long-time member of Seekers, shares some wisdom from Dr. Seuss*



I came to Seekers Church in the fall of 1976, just as we were claiming our separate identity as one of the sister congregations of Church of the Saviour. In 1978 I joined the Shepherds Mission Group, which supported the Tuesday night School of Christian Living for the Church of the Saviour community. I became a Member (now Steward) in 1980 and promptly took a leave of absence to serve my final active duty assignment as an Army officer, two years as a senior planner at the US European Command Headquarters in Stuttgart, West Germany.

In 1982 I returned to Seekers Church and joined the Celebration Circle mission group. In 1989 I responded to a call to servant leadership in Seekers and was confirmed as a member of our staff team (now the Servant as Leader Team.) I was a member of the Seeds of Hope mission group for its 3-year life, from 2002 to 2005. In 2006 I joined Time & Space mission group.

My Call

March 2007

God's call on me is to support and nurture the life of Seekers Church, and help us grow into God's emerging vision for us as one small part of the Body of Christ.

Late last October, just after I was diagnosed with prostate cancer, I polished up my spiritual autobiography. In Chapter One of that autobiography I wrote of Marco, the boy in "To

Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street” by Dr. Seuss. Marco had a wild, wonderful imagination, but he learned very quickly that he got along much better if he kept it buttoned up inside his head.

For a long time I’ve been aware, like Marco, of two paths, two life-style choices, two structures for understanding God’s call on me. One is the path I have walked, the path of responsibility, holding the container for someone else, being the good staff member, the good scout. Before my first assignment in the Army I learned that “the commander is responsible for all his unit does or fails to do.” It was good guidance for leadership where life is on the line.

The other structure for understanding God’s call on my life is the narrow, twisted path that Marco explored all those years ago, the path of the imagination. This is a path of discovery, one of those experiences where wandering around in strange territory can lead to fresh understanding, new metaphors, exciting opportunities.

I carried my clear sense of responsibility over into my service here on our Servant Leadership Team. Since the Spring of 1989, even as I tried to stay in the background, I have felt responsible for what this faith community did and failed to do. Only recently have I begun to realize that this is the body of Christ, that God is the commander here, that while I am responsible for my own actions I am not responsible for yours ... or ours. That fresh insight makes it easier to see that there might be another way to be supportive besides trying to be the container. I can, for example, choose to see myself as another form of support, like a tent pole.

Tent poles do their part, but they don’t do it all. Most tents have more than one pole. Modern tents have wild, flexible poles of different lengths. You can fly a flag or a kite from a tent pole, or hang your sox up to dry. My call to support the life of Seekers Church might look very different if I see

myself as more of tent pole than a container.

The word "scout" is also beginning to point me toward a different direction. In the language of folks who venture into new territories, scouts are those who wander around in the territory to see what they can find, then send back reports of what they are discovering. Scouts are in the business of finding routes that can be used by others and helping those others understand how to follow the route, and what they can expect as they travel into new territory. A scout doesn't carry anyone else along, or even go with them necessarily. In this sense of the word, a good scout is one who can venture into fresh territory, experience what is there and get an understandable report back to those who want to learn about that new place.

How does this fresh language about being a scout help me live into God's call on me to "nurture" the life of Seekers Church? If I can risk going into new terrain and stay connected enough to report what I've found in ways that encourage – or warn – others about what to expect, would I be nurturing the community? Would that be as supportive and nurturing as doing a good turn every day? The very thought of this fires up my imagination!

So, in short, God's call on my life is to support and nurture the life of Seekers Church, and help us grow into God's emerging call for us. For most of my 18 years of service as a member of what we've come to call our Servant as Leader Team I've understood that as being a container to hold our creativity, and being a good boy scout – doing a good turn for Seekers every day.

But my prostate cancer diagnosis stirred my awareness that I have entered a territory where my old language is inadequate. I'm beginning to see that living out God's call might be inviting me to be a tent pole, holding up some new part of the fabric of our community, or, perhaps more radically, to serve

as a scout, exploring what is waiting for us in this new territory – these new “New Lands” – and reporting back to the rest of you in ways that will help all of us grow into God’s emerging call.

I may have this all wrong. That’s how it is in unknown territory: it’s easy to get lost. Even good scouts need to learn how to say “I don’t understand.” But I finally got a cell phone for Christmas. I’ll stay in touch.

... keep praying ...

Peter Bankson