

Peter Bankson: The Body of Christ in the World

Seekers Church

A Christian Community

Peter Bankson

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The Body of Christ in the World

Summary

The call of Seekers Church is to be a faith community "which comes together in weekly worship rooted in the Biblical faith, with shared leadership; and disperses with a common commitment to understand and implement Christian servanthood in the structures in which we live our lives." The Spirit gives gifts to individuals within community for preparing the saints, doing the work of ministry and building up the Body of Christ. How are you experiencing the gifts of the Spirit within this faith community? And what are you being called to offer back into the world – to help nurture and prepare others, to care for those in need, or to reconcile community, culture and creation?

Scripture

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. Therefore, I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" And no one can say, "Jesus is Lord" except by the

Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities but it is the same God who activates them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and me? My hour has not yet come

John 2:1-11

Spiritual Gifts

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prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

The Spirit gives gifts to individuals within community to support the inner spiritual journey, to support our call to ministry in daily life, and to strengthen the Body of Christ within the culture. In his letter to the Church at Ephesus, Paul describes this is another way: "But to each of us grace has been given as Christ has apportioned it. ... It was Christ who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that so that the Body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Child of God, and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:7, 11-13)

Gifts differ so that the Body may do many things. As Paul says in the passage that follows our Epistle reading for this week: "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, yet they form one body. So it is with Christ. ... Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has arranged the parts of the body, every one of them, just as God wanted them to be. (1 Corinthians 12:14-18)

So it is with us. We are all parts of the Body of Christ. Each of us has been given gifts for the health of the Body and its work in the world. Some of us parent, others work for justice

in systems we did not create and do not control, others teach, advocate, nurture, care for those in need, or look for ways to reconcile community, culture and creation.

We are not alone in exercising the gifts we receive from the Holy Spirit. Part of our work as a community is to help each other recognize and live into the calling that flows from the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The Call of Seekers Church

The call of Seekers Church is to be a faith community "which comes together in weekly worship rooted in the Biblical faith, with shared leadership; and disperses with a common commitment to understand and implement Christian servanthood in the structures in which we live our lives."

Often, though, that is not as easy as it sounds. We aren't always ready to claim and act on the gifts we receive. If you look at the Gospel lesson for this week, Jesus didn't think he was ready to go public at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. It often takes others in the community to see and encourage us to exercise the gifts that we are receiving from God. Others in our community can sometimes see in us what we are not ready to claim in ourselves. Like Mary at the wedding feast, we learn to recognize and affirm each other in the exercise of different gifts. We need each other just as the eyes need the ears.

Every week we experience these connections. We hear it in the prayers we offer to God. We hear it in the Word that we offer to each other. And through our connections in friendships, mission groups, classes in the School of Christian Living, and our families, we help each other grow toward that fuller maturity, so that we might know ourselves more fully as interconnected parts of the Body of Christ, called to serve God's whole creation.

This Epiphany season we are focusing on Seekers as part of the Body of Christ "In the World." It is a time for us to look within ourselves for signs of where the Spirit is at work, empowering us to care, nurture, serve and celebrate. It is a time for us to see more clearly how we are knit together, and how the Spirit enlivens us. It is a time to understand more fully how we are being called to offer back into the world – to help nurture and prepare others, to care for those in need, or to reconcile community, culture and creation?

An Image of the Parts and the Whole

Two weeks ago at the core members' meeting we began to look at how we are experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit in the three ways Paul identifies in his letter to the Ephesians. "Preparing the saints" is the inner journey. Our experience there grows out of our commitment to spiritual practices like prayer, meditation, journaling, reflection and spiritual direction. "Doing works of service" is the outer journey, where we seek to understand and implement Christian servanthood in the structures in which we live our lives. "Building up the Body of Christ" includes both our care for the community and our effort to invite others to share community with us.

At that time I started building an image of these three areas. Since then the image has grown into the mobile hanging in the middle of the sanctuary. Think of the gold chain as the Holy Spirit, which holds up the entire life of the community, and appears all over – a few links here, a short piece there...We can think of the silver as our call to service. This is balanced by our spiritual practice, our individual inner work, represented today in blue. And the red can represent our community life.

This morning I want to give us an opportunity to reflect on how Seekers is living out our call in the world around us. We will have three times of silence to focus on different

elements of how we are exercising the gifts being given to us by the Holy Spirit.

How does Seekers Church build up the Body of Christ, or nurture the life of the community?

Think about the ways you experience community here, and what we do to encourage that. Think of what we do to encourage others to worship with us. I invite you to use the gold sheet with our call printed on the front to take notes for yourself and to share with others later this morning.

Some observations include:

- Community worship (Open pulpit, various readers, inclusive participation, art, music)
- Liturgy that strengthens personal spiritual growth and corporate growth
- Circle time (including time for kids' reports)
- Coffee hour
- Prayer in community for the community
- Meals (Christmas, Easter)
- Overnights
- Sing-along
- Informal entertaining & connecting
- Women's/men's breakfast groups
- *Soundings*
- School of Christian Living
- Spontaneously and without programmed effort reaching out to visitors and newcomers
- Mission groups
- Sensitivity of individuals, without programming, to the needs of others (spontaneous opportunities to listen and be heard)
- Safe and challenging
- journaling
- Spiritual direction
- Reading

- Celebrations (birthday parties, etc. of individual and corporate milestones), community quilts
- Retreats
- Mourning with each other
- Core group meetings that focus attention on the needs of the community
- Confronting reality and living at the edge
- Making space in structures for many gifts
- Reflecting to the community during worship aspects of people's journeys in context of the community
- Strong spiritual core – not just a bureaucratic group
- Caring and opening to one another; a setting that offers love; safety to share
- Supporting acceptance and inclusion; gender and sexual orientation
- Welcoming/enfolding newcomers
- Shared leadership; a cooperative rather than hierarchical philosophy
- Valuing and displaying many gifts and aesthetic contributions
- Sunday School; taking children seriously; children's program
- Creating a shared conversation that constitutes an envelope of meaning in which my own sharing makes sense
- Listening and linking
- Letting things die – letting people leave with authenticity; annual recommitment
- A different way of being church
- Sharing life by recognizing transitions
- Yeast-starter: providing the starting spark to pull elements of community from those yearning for it
- Interdependent
- Method of celebrating Eucharist
- Using our space for community gatherings: concerts, slide shows, etc.
- Opportunities for new activities

I'd like to invite you to move to the second area.

How does the Seekers Church nurture the spiritual growth of individuals?

Here again, I invite you to think of your own experience and what you know of the experience of others. Use the little gold "journal" to catch your reflections.

Some of these observations include:

- School of Christian Living
- Printing sermons
- Web site
- Shared lectionary
- Mission groups
- Great worship which includes wonderful altars, liturgies, sermons, music, communion
- Prayer and reflection during worship
- Daily prayer
- Implying prayer works;; offering role models of people who do pray
- Examples of prayer in mission groups, School of Christian Living
- Liturgy that strengthens personal spiritual growth and corporate growth
- Stories told – formally or informally – of folks on an inner journey
- Holding up the radical love of God for all God's creatures, including us
- Dance, music, clowns, etc. included in worship
- A spirit of commitment to spiritual growth and openness to share about it
- Disciplines
- Spiritual accountability; spiritual direction
- Spiritual autobiography
- Valuing spiritual growth; encouraging use of disciplines to grow

- Retreat
- Individual relationships that focus and challenge us
- Expecting me to be accountable
- Challenging me and my journey
- Encouraging people to have their deepest wants
- Dayspring
- Community; safe place
- Not rejecting people due to their pain
- Valuing listening and story
- Radically offering the (oft doubted) value of our lives and stories
- Encouraging reflection, reading
- Sharing in core meetings
- Overnights
- Sing-alongs
- Shared meals (Christmas, Easter)
- Listening for the still, small voice – especially in the questions of newcomers
- Common language and common expectations
- Maintaining high standards
- Change – creative tension that keeps things fresh
- Do-it-yourself church

Let's turn to the third area.

How does the Seekers Church nurture our call to service, to ministry in daily life. As you think about this, consider all the places where we live out our lives, and what it means to reconcile community, culture and creation?

Some of the ways Seekers encourage our call to ministry in daily life include:

- School of Christian Living
- Growing Edge Fund
- Mission group
- Rituals

- Sharing the journey, especially through preaching
- Strengthening missions such as Hope and a Home
- Providing support for individuals for their work in the world
- Providing a framework for understanding the point and significance of work
- Providing a place of support and retreat; opportunity to hear God's call
- Moving out in the world together – trip to El Salvador
- Having it in the call of Seekers Church
- Seeing me as a whole person
- Asking about and expecting me to articulate my outward journey
- Encouragement to use my talents
- *Soundings* highlights opportunities for ministry
- Announcements during circle time highlight opportunities for ministry
- Worship supports us in our ministries
- Common weekly scripture readings encourage our ministries
- Seekers equips us for dealing with the issues that must be confronted
- Supporting some values I try to carry over into my work, which is my mission
- Seekers' financial support flows through direct involvement
- Bulletin board
- Concern for families
- Other people who know my work and make it visible
- Overcome "lay/clergy" split
- Advocacy
- Mail
- Evangelism
- Creating a shared conversation that constitutes an envelope of meaning in which my own sharing makes sense
- Community expectations
- Seekers web site

- Taking responsibility at the point of call
- Links and resources
- The witness of other Seekers
- A different way of being church
- Encouraging new calls
- Values all of life – multi-dimensional
- Speaks of social responsibility and the possibility of hope
- Seeks to engage the reality of NOW

CONCLUSION

I want to leave room for you to share your reflections, so I'll stop. Over the next several weeks I will be sharing the results of our visioning and sharing about who we are and how we see our call. I'll welcome your journals if you are willing to share them with me.

The call of Seekers Church is to be a faith community "which comes together in weekly worship rooted in the Biblical faith, with shared leadership; and disperses with a common commitment to understand and implement Christian servanthood in the structures in which we live our lives." The Spirit gives gifts to individuals within community for preparing the saints, doing the work of ministry and building up the Body of Christ. How are you experiencing the gifts of the Spirit within this faith community? And what are you being called to offer back into the world – to help nurture and prepare others, to care for those in need, or to reconcile community, culture and creation?

Amen.