

THE KAIROS COMMUNITY

In Kairos, the local community in which a student lives and works is the primary community that gives form, shape, and direction to a student's journey of discipleship. At the same time, however, all participants are part of a global community of Jesus followers who are learning about and participating in the mission of God.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

KAIROS COMMUNITY - INTRODUCTION	3
<i>Written by Greg Henson, President, Sioux Falls Seminary</i>	
PRACTICING THE WAY OF JESUS, PT. 1	4
<i>Written by Matt Styles, Alumnus; Lead Pastor, Trinity Baptist Church, Sioux Falls, SD</i>	
PRACTICING THE WAY OF JESUS, PT. 2	5
<i>Written by David Williams, President, Taylor Seminary</i>	
PRACTICING THE WAY OF JESUS, PT. 3	8
<i>Written by Tony Blair, President, Evangelical Seminary</i>	
THE MANY AND THE ONE	9
<i>Written by Kenny Wallace, Kairos Affiliate Professor</i>	
THEOLOGICAL HOSPITALITY	11
<i>Written by David Williams, President, Taylor Seminary, Tony Blair, President, Evangelical Seminary and Greg Henson, President, Sioux Falls Seminary</i>	
A MOVEMENT, NOT AN INSTITUTION	16
<i>Written by Greg Henson, President, Sioux Falls Seminary</i>	
LOCALIZED AND GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT	17
<i>Written by Greg Henson, President, Sioux Falls Seminary</i>	
DIVERSITY AND UNITY	19
<i>Written by Greg Henson, President, Sioux Falls Seminary</i>	

KAIROS COMMUNITY - INTRODUCTION

All learning happens in community. In Kairos, the local community in which a student lives and works is the primary community that gives form, shape, and direction to a student's journey of discipleship. At the same time, however, all participants are part of a global community of Jesus followers who are learning about and participating in the mission of God.

As a global community, those who are part of Kairos engage in practices that 1) help each individual grow in one's understanding of one's local context and the knowledge required to flourish in that context and 2) foster an awareness of how God is moving and working in the lives of others who are also a part of this community. These practices help us be one community while recognizing the value of the many smaller communities that also exist within Kairos.

Throughout this white paper, we are going to look at the practices that help us achieve these goals. They are:

Theological Hospitality: Our practice of theological hospitality strives to welcome, appreciate, and desire the contributions of different orthodox Christian theological traditions. In this way, we encourage people to develop, understand, and share their theological convictions with epistemic humility and a sense of God's sovereignty.

Diversity and Unity: As a community, we are centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ and the unshakeable truth of God's Word—we are unified around Jesus and who he calls us to be and to become. With Christ as our center, we embrace the fact that we are a "fellowship of differents." Our practice is to highlight, rather than diminish, the diversity of our community while simultaneously calling everyone to follow Jesus.

A Movement not an Institution: Kairos is not a monolithic institution. It is not a collection of processes, policies, and budgets. Rather it is a movement—specifically a distributed network of people seeking to practice the way of Jesus on their educational journey. In practical terms, this means the journey is more "messy and organic" than "rigid and predictable."

One and Many: As a collection of partners (legacy, contextualization, and operating), Kairos is comprised of many groups. It is also one community, one organization, and one team.

Local and Global: Members of the Kairos community represent nearly 30 different countries and are located on six different continents. We are a global community but the entire educational process is rooted in the fact that standards of excellence are contextually defined. In practice, we embrace and foster a global understanding of the Body of Christ while allowing local communities to play the lead role.

Practicing the Way of Jesus: Most importantly, we must practice the way of Jesus. In our work, we must exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, embrace peace as a way of being (not an outcome), and proclaim the Gospel through word and deed. [Back to top.](#)

PRACTICING THE WAY OF JESUS, PT. 1

“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” ~ Romans 16:20

I can hear some of you singing the church camp song already. For those of you who have no idea what I am talking about, there is a camp song that starts out by repeating the phrase, “Romans 16:19 says!” The song then continues by practically quoting Romans 16:19-20 and ends with an emphatic grunt to emphasize the stomping of Satan under our feet.

Head crushing for the Kingdom! Pretty intense stuff! And although we may know what Romans 16:20 says, I think it is important to wrestle with what it is saying. How does one go about head crushing for the Kingdom of God?

I think some Christians assume that the way you crush the head of the ancient serpent is by filling your tank with rage and bitterness against all forms of evil in the world. When we interpret the passage this way, Christians attempt to launch a holy hostility campaign against the forces of evil, doing whatever it takes to crush the serpent’s head whenever it pops up. A real-life version of whack-a-mole, but in this case whack-a-serpent. If we continue down this path of interpretation, we quickly conclude that God intends to make peace by unleashing his people’s fury and rage upon evil. The idea is that if we do whatever it takes and show no mercy towards evil, we will defeat it and arrive at peace. When you read the passage like this, “peace” becomes a destination that you can arrive at by means of “doing whatever it takes” to “crush Satan.”

But what if peace is less of a destination and more a path? Less of a result and more of a way of being? Less of an end and more of a means? What if peace is not simply the result of crushing Satan’s head, but the way God crushes Satan’s head? What if every time you try to make peace without practicing peace, you not only fail to crush Satan’s head, but you end up becoming another one?

If that is the case, then we will never arrive at the destination of peace unless we also learn to walk in the way of peace. And this is what Jesus came to do; to guide our feet into the path of peace. At least that’s what Jesus’ uncle, Zechariah said. Jesus came “to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide our feet in the path of peace” (Lk. 1:79).

Peace is not simply a result, but a path; a posture; a way of being. This path of peace is what Jesus taught his disciples. They had heard that you could crush evil by seeking an eye for an eye and hating your enemies. But if they really wanted to crush Satan, then Jesus tells them they must do more than seek peace. They must practice it.

This is why Jesus taught his followers to not retaliate against an evil person (Mt. 5:39), and to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them (Mt. 5:44). This is why Jesus rebuked James and John when they wanted to call down fire from heaven to devour their Samaritan enemies (Lk. 9:54-55). This is why Jesus wept over Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, saying, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace" (Lk. 19:41-42). This is why Jesus disarms Peter's attempt to make peace with the sword when Jesus is arrested (Mt. 26:52). There is no way to arrive at peace without practicing it.

Jesus not only guides our feet into the path of peace, he perfectly embodies it on the cross. As humanity raged against him, he did not return the favor. Instead, he practiced peace and prayed for his enemies, "Father forgive them, they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). Jesus practiced peace unto death, even death on a cross, and as a result crushed the head of Satan and the powers of evil. As Paul puts it in his letter to the Colossians, "Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:15).

Jesus shows us that peace is not only the result of crushing; peace is the way to crush. And this Prince of Peace guides our feet into the same path. This is why Paul writes, a few chapters before Romans 16, in Romans 12, "Do not repay evil for evil...As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone...If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:17a, 18, 20-21).

Do you see what Paul is saying? Peace is not what happens after we overcome. A peaceable life is the way God overcomes. Any hope to arrive at peace must start with the practice of peace. This is how the God of peace will soon crush Satan under our feet. That is what, "Romans 16: 20 says!" [Back to top.](#)

PRACTICING THE WAY OF JESUS, PT. 2

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law (Gal. 5:22-23 NIV).

Jesus is the Prince of Peace who brings a kingdom of peace and calls those who follow him to the way of

peace. Peace is not merely an end/destination, but it also characterizes the way that end/destination is achieved. The destination is the journey. That is, the peace of Jesus can only be found by following the way of peace. This is underwritten by Jesus' claim to be "the way, the truth, and the life." We take this claim very seriously in Kairos. The way of Jesus is at the very heart of what it means to be a disciple. Jesus is the road one journeys in order to find one's way to God.

Let's continue with Paul's writings and what it means to follow Jesus. We are going to focus on Galatians 5 and Paul's teaching about the "fruit of the Spirit." Much of my early adult life I hadn't really seen much of a connection between what Jesus taught about the kingdom and Paul's writing. In fact, sometimes I got the impression there was a disjunction between what Paul taught about being a Christian and what Jesus said, specifically in terms of what it meant to be a follower of Jesus.

So, I was quite surprised to find that not only does Paul mention the kingdom of God in his letters (14 times!) but in the final verse of Acts Luke characterizes Paul's message as one of "proclaiming the kingdom of God."

He [Paul] lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance (Acts 28:31).

What I came to see was that Jesus' message and Paul's message were actually the same thing. They both proclaimed the kingdom of God. So, it really shouldn't surprise us to find rich parallels between Paul's teaching about living the Christian life and Jesus' teaching about living in the kingdom.

This is certainly true for Paul's teaching about the fruit of the Spirit. In fact, if you parallel all five of Paul's list of Christian virtues to Jesus' beatitudes, you will find a striking resemblance. [Back to top](#).

Jesus's Beatitudes

humility and meekness
righteousness
mercy
purity of heart
peacemaking
suffering persecution for
justice and Jesus' sake
(blessed are you)

Paul's virtues

humility and gentleness
righteousness
mercy
purity or goodness
peace, tolerance, unity, patience
endurance

joy

(From Gushee and Stassen, Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context. 2nd Edition, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2016, p. 37.)

This really makes sense since Jesus was concerned to teach his disciples what life in the kingdom was to look like now that the reign of God had become a reality. Paul was concerned to teach these believers what their new life in Christ was to look like. Both were deeply concerned about character and, particularly, how their character was displayed in relationship to each other.

Have you ever noticed how many of the qualities listed in the fruit of the Spirit verse involve our relationship with another person? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, none of these have much meaning outside of a relationship with another person. They tend to name the way we treat one another. What is "love" if there isn't one whom you love? What is "patience" without one with whom one must be patient? What good is it that one is "gentle" if that gentleness isn't expressed to another person? The truth is these character qualities all imply relationships in which they are displayed. What is striking is that Paul calls attention to this at the end of the passage in verse 26: Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

In the journey of Kairos, we have a great opportunity to live out the way of Jesus by exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit in our relations with each other. Hearing the admonition we too need to be guided by the Spirit in all our interactions with each other and in so doing to display the way of Jesus to all those around us.

PRACTICING THE WAY OF JESUS, PT. 3

Marketers have become expert at presenting their products and services as welcome news to their audience. “Good news! This product is now on sale!” or “Good news! We’re better than the competition.” Sometimes they’re telling the truth, but sometimes not, and it is the “not” times that have made our world cynical about messages of good news, even or especially the good news of our faith.

But God does indeed have good news for the world, especially now, and that it is to be found in Jesus. In parts one and two, we have noted two aspects of the way of Jesus—the way of peace and the fruit of the Spirit. I have deeply appreciated these encouraging reminders of the counter-cultural, perhaps even counter-intuitive nature of Jesus’ message and call upon us. Today we look at a third aspect of that way of Jesus: The Gospel in Word and Deed. To practice the way of Jesus means to proclaim the gospel not only with our words but also with our actions – with how we treat one another.

One of the important reasons I embrace Kairos with such enthusiasm, is this community of which we are a part is committed to a mature understanding of the gospel. That means we understand, first, that it is good news. That’s what the word “gospel” (originally “godspell”) means. What Jesus was saying was better than any of his original listeners had imagined. Their reaction is a good litmus test for us: If what the world is hearing from us does not sound like really good news, then maybe we need to examine our message! Too often the message the Church has communicated to the world, in both our words and our deeds, has looked and sounded like bad news, even ugly news.

Second, the good news is Jesus himself. Mark introduces his gospel as “the beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.” That’s why his account, along with those of Matthew, Luke, and John, are titled “gospels” to this day. Their gospels include the stories of his death and resurrection but they declare that the whole life and ministry of Jesus is part of the good news. Jesus was gospel and remains gospel, and will be even greater good news to the world when his kingdom is fulfilled.

That’s because, third, the gospel of Jesus is that God is with us. Jesus embodied this. He was proclaimed at his birth as Immanuel, the physical sign that God is indeed with us. He began his public ministry by announcing that “the Spirit of the Lord is on me” (Luke 4:18, NIV). He proclaimed that the kingdom of God was among us, right here, right now. He taught his disciples to pray that God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In other words, God is involved, God is present, and God is active. Leonard Sweet suggests in his theology of evangelism, *Nudge*, that Jesus’ teaching can be summarized as “Look and listen! God is here! Notice, and pass along the good news to others.”

And for those that might be alarmed by the imminent presence of a holy God in a broken world, Jesus had yet more good news... God is FOR us. He's on our side. When announcing his own ministry, Jesus read what Isaiah had prophesied: "The Spirit of the Lord... has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:19). Jesus was emphasizing the bias of God in the favor of humanity, and especially in favor of those whose experience of life might have convinced them otherwise. He came not to condemn us but to save us (John 3:17).

The rest of Jesus's ministry illustrates what this good news means for those who receive it and participate in it. All of the assumptions about how life works are turned inside-out: "The first will be last, and the last first." Blessed most are the ones who seem less blessed. There is nothing to fear; God's abundance is around every corner. The world gives trouble but God gives peace. God's people are known by how and whom they love. Death leads to life. And so much more! It was all extraordinarily good news then, and still is today...so good, in fact, that the Church has often shrunk from its implications. We've added things to it. We've deleted things from it. We've turned it into propositions (words) and forgotten to live it (deeds). And every time we do so the world sees from us less than the goodness of the true gospel.

In the journey of discipleship that is Kairos, we have that same awesome opportunity to "look and listen!" to this extraordinarily good news and to operate as if it were actually true and actually good.

- We share power freely with others rather than hoarding it for ourselves.
- We challenge conventional wisdom of how things ought to be.
- We remain in relationship with others, even those with whom we disagree.
- We prefer to collaborate with others rather than to compete with them.
- We bridge the gap between the Academy and the Church.
- We break down the walls between faculty, staff, administration, and students.

In these and other ways we share the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, with our words and we share in the gospel with our deeds. [Back to top](#).

THE MANY AND THE ONE

In Romans 11, Paul uses an analogy that is striking when placed in the context of the diversity of denominations, and sects of denominations, and subsets of sects. He talks of an olive tree with many branches. Some of the branches are natural, and others are grafted onto the root. Either way, they grow side by side and should produce good fruit. Now, Paul is referring to the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's story, but

there is a salient point that applies to the Church and to our context, Kairos. “Do not be arrogant toward the [other] branches.” See, the whole point of grafting in other branches was so that there would be a more plentiful harvest. The whole tree is better off when there is diversity and multiplicity among the branches. However, when we view that multiplicity with skepticism or fear, what was intended as a blessing becomes, at best, a place of suspicion, and at worst a curse.

The Kairos Project is like a bough off the root that is Christ. This bough itself has many branches, such as all the legacy and collaborating partners that work together within Kairos. As a global community, we function as one organization – one community – with one mission and a collaborative, kingdom-minded way of being. For example, as one organization we utilize one educational philosophy (i.e., CBTE) and one way of operating (i.e., a platform). It is this commonality that strengthens our bond as one. Just as our commitment to Christ and the way of Jesus strengthens our bond as a community of Christ followers. At the same time, we are a global movement composed of unique, local communities of faith that were often birthed by particular denominational faith traditions or particular needs within a context. In this way we are both one and many. One organization and one community but also many organizations and many communities. We are branches that come together to be grafted into the root that is Christ. The intention of this multiplicity is that students are able to engage in theological education that is specific to their context while experiencing the blessing of multiple contexts. The harvest from this bough has the potential to be prolific because the branches bring together people from all stripes of life: Canadians and Colombians, Lutherans and Baptists, pastors and pilots, chaplains and chairpersons. While each of the contexts are unique and specifically designed by the Great Creator, when they come together in the Kairos Project they benefit each other and a new, greater thing is produced.

But why diversity? Why even bother with grafting? Most Christians have committed to memory the Lord’s Prayer in some form. However, when something becomes rote, we often take for granted what we say. “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” We pray, regularly, for God’s heavenly intention to be manifested in the here and now. Throughout God’s story we can see a thread of the inclusion of “the other” as part of the covenant people, and in Revelation, before the throne we see in splendid detail the variegated and multifaceted throng of people from every tribe, tongue, nation, and dare I say seminary, worshiping God together. It was God’s intention to have the eternal worship service include a multiplicity in unity. Every act in the divine drama, from day one of creation to the diffusion of the gospel throughout the earth, led to that scene in the heavenly city.

Applying that expansive vision to Kairos, then it is God’s design to have African-American students from Texas being shaped and formed into the servants God would have them to be alongside Canadian students from central and rural swaths of Ontario. God delights to have students learning from female theologians like Dr. Susan Reese and from mentors in the global south like Dr. Guillermo MacKenzie. It was the Lord’s intention to allow students to take a traditional course on ethnohermeneutics or to adapt an assignment to sit with a Tribal band council and reflect on how the study of anthropology leads to the church’s involvement in community action. The Kairos Project is many branches but one bough connected to Christ because the eschatological vision, enacted in the here and now, drives us to strive for the most plentiful harvest of well-developed, competent, followers of Jesus who will flourish in their vocations as they proclaim the gospel in word and

deed.

One could ask, how practical is it to try to be “the many” in one institution? Does it work? When Jesus called together the disciples, I am sure people were asking the same question about his choices. Really, Jesus? A zealot and a tax collector? Fishermen and a doctor? Nevertheless, that group of diverse followers went on to establish churches from which we continue to benefit today. It was not without its struggles and sacrifices, but the benefits far outweighed their differences. So too do the partnerships that form the collective known as Kairos. As a single school that arose through a common commitment to affordable, accessible, relevant, and faithful theological education, we have been intentional about how we work together. This includes rebuilding the board of trustees, hosting frequent vision and operational sessions that create space for open dialogue between people across the community, and reimagining how programs are developed and supported across the organization. In our experience, the blessing Kairos can be for the students, mentors, and partners far outstrips the laborious work of melding various institutions into one way of being. Kairos is an institution that engages in competency-based theological education; we know that competency comes as a journey. Likewise, the process of the many becoming one takes time; time well worth it to achieve competency. As a community we are engaging in the very development process that students and mentors are invited to use while walking through their journeys of discipleship.

Kairos, well grafted to the root of Christ, is seeing God produce amazing fruit around the globe. The branches connected to Kairos are flourishing as they create “one out of the many.” We heed the warning not to be arrogant toward the other branches, whether they be legacy, contextualization, or operating; indeed, we welcome each other as we journey together. [Back to top.](#)

THEOLOGICAL HOSPITALITY

In Kairos, we speak much about “theological hospitality.” It is one of our defining practices and is essential for us to do the work God has called us to do. In this white paper, we attempt to articulate just how important the practice is, and why.

Let’s begin with what theological hospitality is not. Theological hospitality is not theological neutrality. We don’t expect anyone in the Kairos community to take a neutral stance on anything that is important to them or their tradition. We don’t ask participants to check their commitments at the door so that they can participate in a learning journey with us. Instead, we strive to welcome, appreciate, and desire the contributions of different Christian theological traditions. In this way, we encourage people to develop, understand, and share their convictions. We value difference. We believe those who are different from us have something to contribute to us.

Theological hospitality is actually crucial for having a deep understanding of ourselves. Most people think that identity is most powerfully formed in communities of like-mindedness. That, no doubt, has its place and offers benefits as well. But what we are discovering is that without diversity we don't really understand the important things which make us who we are, at least in comparison to others. We need each other to challenge each other, to hold each other accountable, to learn to see what we can't see without those who see differently than we do. It is in communities of difference that we more deeply learn what is most determinative about who we are. The Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas talked about it as the "epistemic necessity of the other."

How, then, do we actually practice this? We acknowledge that theological hospitality is very difficult to do at all times, and especially now, in a world and a Church that are highly polarized. Committing to its practice, and the living it out in real relationships, requires extensive re-orientation, a radically different way of looking at ourselves, others, and the conflicts that seem to permeate so much of our world. Thankfully, God has given us at least three "lenses" through which we can better see, understand, and appreciate the practice of theological hospitality.

A Christological Lens

It is all too easy, when we see ourselves in the right, to attempt to use power to defend ourselves or our positions, or to try to protect "our side" from all challenges. Christians are not alone in this. The canvas of human history is a mural of great evil done in the name of defending good, or even defending God. That mural is filled with images and metaphors of battle, of conflicts both verbal and (sometimes) violent. The Epistle of James pointedly addresses this pattern, which is evident even among believers: "Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it, so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it, so you engage in disputes and conflicts" (James 4:1-2).

But Jesus invites us to do otherwise, and showed us how. We can thus call his perspective a Christological, or Jesus, lens. Paul gives us a glimpse through this lens with his dramatic description of Christ's letting go of power, and its consequent invitation to all of us: "Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:5-8).

The way of Jesus is not to use one's power for oneself, but rather for the sake of others, even others we think are wrong. This is extraordinary. Submission to, rather than domination over, is the appropriate response to difference. Of course, this is harder the more convinced we are of being right, but that's exactly why Paul points out that proclaiming "a crucified [submitted] messiah" is "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:23). Except for the witness of Christ, it simply wouldn't make sense to approach

conflict by submitting to each other, even giving one's life for others. It would be perceived, often even in the Church, as either weakness or foolishness. But Christ has shown us that better way and asked us to walk in it.

Therefore, epistemic humility—the awareness that, no matter how certain I may feel about what I think, I may indeed be missing the point—is embraced by us with the hope that God may actually break through our occasional self-deceit to correct our own errors. Through humble listening and mutual submission, we may become more like Jesus.

An Ecclesiological Lens

Some differences, however, aren't really a judgment of right or wrong. This next lens invites us to see differences in a much more constructive way. It comes from what Paul was trying to help the Corinthians to see regarding another kind of difference that was wreaking havoc within their Christian community: the use of spiritual gifts. He reminded them that "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 all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).

What is important for us to hear in this context is that there are differences that can actually serve the common good. There is substantial, important diversity that is necessary to achieve the good God wants us to achieve. Paul develops this way of thinking about difference into one of the most powerful metaphors for the church: the human body. There are many different parts to a body and each is necessary for the body to function as it should.

In Kairos, we recognize that the Spirit activates differences among Christians so that the Body of Christ may do its fullest, best work in the world. We can thus call this an ecclesiological, or Church, lens. What Paul asked the Corinthian believers he asks us as well: "What good would it be if the whole body were but an eye, a foot, or an ear? What would become of the work of the body?" (1 Corinthians 12:17). We thus believe that we should be hospitable because inhospitality may cause us to reject something good the Spirit is giving us, something necessary to do the work the Spirit has called us to do. The body can't do its work without all the parts.

A Pneumatological Lens

With the third lens we see that theological hospitality helps us remain open to new things the Spirit is doing in our midst. We call it the pneumatological lens, or simply, the Spirit lens.

Scripture gives us a wonderful example of the use of this lens. It's not an overstatement to say that the most significant theological conflict for the New Testament church was how the earliest believers (all Jewish, originally) were going to incorporate the new Gentile believers into their communities of faith. So, imagine

yourself in Peter's place in Acts 10. As a Jewish man, Peter knew that the dietary restrictions of the Torah were central to what it meant to be faithful to God.

Nevertheless, in a vision God tells him to eat things that God had consistently and very explicitly told the Jews to not eat! How could that be? Imagine the confusion he must have been experiencing. Imagine the challenge to everything he knew to be true about being faithful to God. With a knock on the door, though, Peter discerned correctly that the vision wasn't actually about what he should eat, but about God's love for the Gentiles. Specifically, at this moment, it was about whether or not Peter would accept the invitation to be a guest in the home of a Gentile named Cornelius. He chose to go, and the story of the Church changed dramatically that day.

Of course, it didn't take long before the inclusion of the Gentiles turned into a conflict—a difference—regarding eating as well. Imagine the disruption to the early Church as they struggled with the tension between the Torah's teaching about clean and unclean food, their traditions about how Jews were to act around Gentiles, and about the deep meaning of their circumcised bodies. What could they let go of? What should they hold onto? What did love of God, and love of their Christian brothers and sisters, require of them?

Following Jesus was turning upside down the worlds of both Jewish and Gentile believers. We, of course, know the end of the story. The Jerusalem Council discerned that all this disruptive change was actually the work of God's Spirit in their midst! They concluded after long discernment that "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..." to honor what God was doing among people who had always been different. We are the beneficiaries of their hearkening to the Spirit.

This is instructive for theological hospitality because sometimes conflict comes when the Holy Spirit is doing something new and it just takes time for everyone to get on board with it. This probably happens any time God does something new. It takes time for the Spirit to work throughout the community. And, who would have thought of the magnitude of the changes the Spirit would inspire in these early believers!

Jesus had told the disciples to expect this very sort of thing! He said that the Spirit would come and "guide them into all truth" (John 16:12). Their story is reminiscent of a well-known scene from the movie "A Few Good Men," where Jack Nicholson's character is being badgered on the witness stand by a defense attorney (played by Tom Cruise) to "tell the truth." At last the witness explodes in frustration: "You can't handle the truth!" Let us imagine the disciples likewise pressing Jesus to explain just what truth the Spirit would guide them into. His response would have surely been, "You can't handle that truth! Not yet. So trust the Spirit, who will continue to reveal truth to you."

Theological Hospitality at Kairos

With students, mentors, and partners located in many different contexts around the world as well as in North

America, the Kairos community is obviously increasingly diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, age, geographic location, cultural realities, and socio-political perspectives. We are also diverse in other ways, particularly in our theological affirmations. We can't list here all of hundreds of denominations that are present within Kairos, but they include various kinds of Baptists, Wesleyans, Anglicans, Lutherans, Anabaptists, Presbyterians, Pentecostals, Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Brethren, Quakers, and many not affiliated with any particular denomination.

In other settings, these expressions of diversity would perpetuate a growing polarization we see in the world. Instead, we see it as opportunity. Most of us have been taught or encouraged to gather or relate to only with people with whom we already agree, or who look like ourselves, the Kairos community seeks to be different. We need to be different. What unifies the Kairos community is our shared commitment to becoming more faithful followers of Jesus under the authority of Scripture as guided by God's Spirit. And we recognize that we interpret that authoritative Scripture differently at times. Yet we believe each person committed to this kind of radical hospitality is welcome to fully participate in this community, because we see our differences as an opportunity to learn from each other, to grow in our understanding of what God is doing in and through the diversity of God's people in the world, and to practice the way of Jesus.

The three lenses discussed above—Christological, ecclesiological, and pneumatological (or Jesus, Church, and Spirit)—provide us both the rationale and the means for the practice of theological hospitality in Kairos (and, we would argue, for the Church at large). As we said, it is not an invitation to abandon deeply-held beliefs and commitments. It is not reducing ourselves to the lowest common denominator. Rather, it is a robust, courageous practice of maintaining radical fidelity to truth and, simultaneously, radical commitment to love. It is a mystery that such a thing is possible at all, and it is a deep joy when we experience it in reality.

So, in summary, why do we practice theological hospitality within Kairos?

... Because its posture of humility is the posture of Jesus himself, and we are called to become more and more like him.

... Because the love displayed through hospitality is the divine love that binds the Church together as one body.

... And because the new thing offered to us through hospitality is the work of the Spirit, who guides us into all truth.

This is what we are called to do, and this is who we are called to be, as a faithful community of God's people in an often-inhospitable world. [Back to top.](#)

A MOVEMENT, NOT AN INSTITUTION

While earning my MBA, I spent a lot of time studying organizational systems and how they are formed, changed, and led in light of specific goals. One of the aspects of this area of study that always bothered me was how formulaic it seemed. While it is true that certain practices can create somewhat predictable results when it comes to working with people (e.g., meetings are often shorter and more productive if everyone is standing during the meeting and a clearly stated strategic direction can help people choose what to ignore and what to pursue), the reality of working with humans seems to be much more organic, unpredictable, and fluid – or at least I think it should be – especially for those of us who consider ourselves to be followers of Jesus. As disciples of Christ, we are invited to be in a constant state of discernment. We are following Jesus on mission – at all times and in all places. In practice, this means we are called to move in concert with the movement of the Spirit. In the Kairos community, we embrace the fact that we are a movement – a community of people with a shared set of values that is discerning, responding to, and participating in the work God is doing in their vocational context.

Engaging in the practice of being a movement is not always easy. While it can be invigorating, exhilarating, and encouraging to see distributed networks of people responding to the work God is doing in their midst, it can also be frustrating, stressful, and concerning – especially if we have been shaped and formed by the western ideals of “institutional sustainability.”

I could be alone in this line of thinking but in my experience with and study of organizational systems, the driving force behind the work conducted in those settings seems to be ensuring the institution survives. We tend to make decisions based on money rather than mission and focus on policies rather than values (i.e., principles) and practices. I know that may seem like a trivial distinction, but I would suggest it is not. Policies and principles create structures and resource allocation mechanisms designed to mediate power and control in a centralized fashion. As institutions, we can use these structures to control everything from what we say in marketing material to what it means to be a customer. In the context of education, it means we can control who is allowed in the fold and what counts as “excellent.”

A movement, on the other hand, gathers around principles (i.e., values) and practices that in turn give direction, shape, and form to the movement but which empower participants to engage in them without the need for “management” or centralized control. A movement may have organizations that are part of it, but those organizations are not the lifeblood of the work being done.

In the context of Kairos, there are communities around the world living out local expressions of contextualized journeys of discipleship. At the heart of the movement is the person and work of Jesus Christ and the fact that we are invited to join God on mission. Sioux Falls Seminary is not the center of Kairos. It is not even the driving force. Yes, we have a common set of principles and practices and yes, the Legacy Partners of Kairos have had a significant voice in the articulation of those principles and practices. But, as it turns out, Kairos in the United Arab Emirates and Kairos in Brazil are not identical. Rather, the communities around the world who are part of Kairos embody the principles and practices in ways that are most conducive for stewarding followers of Jesus in their context.

As a movement, we are not a collection of processes, policies, and budgets. Rather, we are a distributed network of people striving to practice the way of Jesus in their context while seeking to deepen their understanding of what it means to flourish in their vocation. In practical terms, this means the community is more “messy and organic” than “rigid and predictable.” It also means it will always be changing as we discern where God is moving.

It can be tempting to strive for centralized control. Often it is easier to manage because the answers to most questions seem more straightforward. I would suggest however, that such control tends to lull us into the belief that we are, in fact, in control. The plain and simple fact is that we are not in control. As a movement of Jesus followers, we should delight in the fact that our God reigns and then hold on tight for a wild ride! [Back to top.](#)

LOCALIZED AND GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

In a recent article published by In Trust, Karen Stiller wrote that Kairos, “Has touched down on six continents, lives out in four languages, and educates nearly 1,000 students through an outcome-based, highly individualized educational experience that is deeply and personally contextual for each Kairos student.” She went on to write that the Kairos network is “larger than 90 percent of the accredited seminaries in ATS, with students drawn from over 70 different denominations ...shepherded by more than 1,000 mentors.”

To put it plainly, we are a global community. However, the entire educational process is rooted in the fact that standards of excellence are contextually defined. In practice, this means we embrace and foster a global understanding of the Body of Christ while allowing local communities to play the lead role. We call that “localized global engagement.”

But what does that practice look like on a day-to-day basis?

As we have been on this journey for the better part of a decade, it seems that localized global engagement requires a few intentional acts: 1) developing a movement-oriented network, 2) reading local contexts, and 3) learning from others. Let’s touch on each of these briefly.

Developing a Movement-Oriented Network

Earlier, I mentioned that Kairos is a movement, not an institution. As it turns out, institutions tend to struggle with localized global engagement because in their efforts to sustain themselves they tend toward local communities or global endeavors. A movement-oriented network may have institutions within it who have a global focus or a local emphasis, but the movement itself has both. The added benefit of a network enables

the local expressions of the movement to interact with and be leavened by the movement as a whole. In practice, this means we listen to discern what God is doing in our local communities while being attentive to the fact that God may be doing something else in another community that is part of Kairos – which brings us to the next aspect of this practice.

Reading Local Contexts

With its focus on contextually defined standards of excellence and a commitment to helping participants engage in and be shaped by local communities of faith (as opposed to trying to replace their community with that of the institution), Kairos creates space for students, mentors, faculty, and members of the network to learn, develop, and practice the skill of reading local contexts. If we are honest with ourselves as North American seminaries, we have not done a great job when it comes to helping people read local contexts. Yes, we have had great courses in contextual theology, cultural exegesis, and much more. Those courses, however, have often been rooted in a western understanding and practice. For example, in a recent conversation I had with several faculty who teach at a seminary located in a country where the culture is more collective than individual, the faculty said that even though their culture is very different from that of the United States, the educational assumptions within the seminary tend to be very similar – that is western. When talking with Kairos students, mentors, and partners around the world, this seems to be a common refrain. Many of the western ideals and assumptions about education have shaped and formed the educational practices within theological education around the globe. As a result, our methods for reading local contexts often stem from a Western perspective on reading a local context. In the practice of localized global engagement, the invitation is to create space for reading local contexts by first not imposing a definition for what that means. It means we must listen more than we teach.

Learning from Others

Listening more than we teach is hard – especially when we have been trained to teach or when we imagine that the primary role of a university is to teach. Yes, teaching is important and it is part of what we do as a school. It cannot, however, be the most important thing we do. We must first listen – to students, to mentors, to voices from around the world, to the leading of the spirit, to each other. It is by listening that we can learn from others. As the final aspect of localized global engagement, the act of learning from others is an invitation to refrain from being myopic or self-centered or even arrogant. Yes, Kairos creates space to develop hyper-contextualized journeys of discipleship and customized definitions of proficiency. However, if we pursue those ends without intentionally learning from others within the movement who do not look like us, think like us, or live near us, we run the risk of creating a journey of discipleship that excludes “the gentiles” or “requires circumcision.” In practice, this means we lean into conversations with others through things like case studies, Kairos gatherings, creative learning experiences, educational opportunities from around the world, etc.

With a commitment to being a movement-oriented network that creates space for reading local contexts and invites participants to seek opportunities to learn from others, Kairos engages in the practice of localized global engagement. This practice invites us to leverage the unique learning that can happen when we pay attention to what God is doing in our local communities while drawing on the wisdom of the Body of Christ located around the world. Next, we will look at how a local and global community brings new opportunities for

thinking about diversity. [Back to top.](#)

DIVERSITY AND UNITY

You may have noticed several references to the global and diverse nature of Kairos. There are students and mentors spread out around the world representing over 70 different denominations. Participants in Kairos are following Jesus in vocations ranging from congregational ministry to church planting to real estate development to entrepreneurship and much more.

As we look across the history of higher education in North America, we often see a deep desire for diversity. Accreditation standards require schools to pay attention to it and entire departments are often birthed with the goal of enhancing diversity. It is safe to say that diversity has been a stated goal of the "western" academy for many years.

At a recent Kairos board meeting, one of the newest board members (who leads the health and productivity group at a large energy company) stated that it can be helpful for organizations to think more in terms of "inclusion" rather than simply diversity. She remarked, "diversity is like being invited to the party while inclusion is being asked to dance." As a new voice in the community, she gracefully put into (better) words our practice of unity and diversity. I believe her words help us better understand the goal we have in mind.

In our push toward diversity within the academy, we have tended to define diversity in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity. While those are indeed worthy of significant attention, they do not automatically lead to a culture that leverages the blessing of diversity. Without intentionally including diverse voices in the process of forming, shaping, and leading a movement, we will have a "multi-faceted" community but still a "mono-cultural" one. Within Kairos, there is a desire to cultivate a "fellowship of differents" wherein diverse voices join together to discern the leading of the Spirit and to celebrate the fact that the Spirit is moving in southern Brazil in ways it may not be moving in the Pacific Northwest. This is only possible when we move past diversity and toward inclusion.

The challenge with inclusion as a goal is that it requires a continual release of power, prestige, and our general sense of "rightness" or "certitude." It is this epistemic humility that fosters unity. We are unified around the person and work of Jesus Christ but humble enough to embrace the fact that our voice is not a privileged one. Each of us is one among many, one part of a mosaic, one member of the body.

Unity in the context of diversity is not sameness. We are not striving to develop a "diverse" community that thinks or acts the same way. Rather, we are welcoming the mosaic beauty of the body of Christ. We practice

inclusion because it raises voices that have long been diminished and recognizes that unity is found in the bond of Christ, rather than in our abstracted theology or policies. Theology is important. Following Jesus is important. The unshakeable truth of God's Word is unavoidable. The Gospel is to be proclaimed in Jerusalem, Judea, and the ends of the earth. We practice inclusion because the Spirit uses it to open our eyes, hearts, and minds to what God is doing in our midst and through the body of Christ around the world - and in our neighborhoods. [Back to top.](#)