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.
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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, integrated, collaborating, 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!”

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.
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.

**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

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
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, integrated, collaborating, or operating; indeed, we welcome each other as we journey together. Back to top.

THEOLOGICAL HOSPITALITY

In the Kairos Project, we talk a lot 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 post, we are going to dig deeper into theological hospitality to correct some potential misunderstandings and to better understand just how important the practice is.

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 theologically 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 the Kairos journey with us.

Over against theological neutrality, theological hospitality values deep theological differences and creates a context for each person to bring their theology into conversation with people of different views. When we launched Kairos in 2014, we engaged in conversations with an array of folks dedicated to many different traditions in order to cultivate learning outcomes that Lutherans, Methodists, Wesleyans, Reformed, and
several other theological traditions could journey together toward without denying their own deepest impulses.

Our practice of theological hospitality strives to welcome, appreciate, and desire the contributions of those from different Christian theological traditions. In this way, we encourage people to develop, understand, and share their theological convictions. We value difference. We believe those who are different than us have something to contribute to us. No, theological hospitality is not an aspiration to be theological neutral. There are many other things it is not, but we will save those for another day.

Theological hospitality is a practice that requires humility. It is an invitation to care about our posture toward others as much as our theological position. Theological hospitality is difficult because it cultivates fellowship in the midst of difference. It is quite easy to see difference as a direct challenge – a challenge to ourselves, to truth, or to one’s community. We experience this challenge as being about right and wrong, as “us” good and “others” bad, or about truth and error. It is shaped by the metaphor of the battle where we take “sides,” “attack positions,” and “defend” our position. This approach situates difference as essentially a power struggle. It is reflected in James 4:1-2,

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.

As followers of Jesus, we know that it is all too easy to use our power to defend ourselves, to build ourselves up, or to protect “our side” against all challengers, especially when we believe we are right. The canvas of human history is a mural of great evil done in the name of defending good. Jesus teaches us to reject this approach to power. Our suggestion is to view difference through a Christological lens.

Paul draws on Jesus’ revelation of this truth in Phil 2:4-8 where Paul admonishes the Philippians:

4 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. 5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

6 who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
7 but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
coming born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
8 he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross. (NRSV)

The way of Jesus is not to use one’s power for oneself, but rather for the sake of others. Submission, rather than domination, is the appropriate use of power. Of course, this is hardest when one is convinced of being right, but that’s exactly why Paul points out that proclaiming “a crucified messiah” is “a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:23). It simply doesn’t make sense to approach these kinds of conflicts by submitting to the other, even giving one’s life for the other. It is perceived as either weakness or
foolishness.

It is when we face difference perceived as error that we most need a good dose of “epistemic humility.” Epistemic humility is the recognition that as sure as I am that I am right about something, I could be wrong. I don’t think I am (obviously!) and I have good reasons to think the way I do (or I wouldn’t be so convinced of them), but nevertheless I could be wrong. Such a posture provides us opportunity for mutual submission as we invite others to help us see where we might be getting it wrong. There may be flaws that we cannot see. There may be errors to which we are blind.

If we are honest, we know it’s the case because we know that there have been times that we didn’t want to see the truth even though it was right before our eyes. This reality is reflected in the prophet Jeremiah who reminds us that “the heart is deceitfully wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9). We must embrace humility with the hope that in taking such a posture toward things we believe to be true it is more likely that God may actually break through our self-deceit to correct our own errors and by the power of the Spirit make us more like Jesus.

And that is the goal. At all times and in all ways, we are seeking to follow the way of Jesus while inviting others to join us on that journey. Back to top.

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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 vacation. 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!

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.

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.