

A Time of Prayer: Consider

April 2024 Edition

CONSIDER: I'M A CHURCH SOCIALIST. THERE. I SAID IT.


A reflection by Lutheran Pastor and Author Nadia Bolz Weber¹

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:32-35, NRSVA)

Recently I was helping a synod in the ELCA (my denomination) undergo an evaluation of one of their church plants. Anyhow, there I learned about an event the synod had put on to try and get local "resourced" (read: those with money) churches to start building relationships with local church plants (read: those without much money). The thing with starting a church in the ELCA is that there is, rightly so, an expectation that local established churches will give financial help to the church plants. [House for All Sinners and Saints](#) has had great luck with this...receiving needed financial help from about 8 or 9 other congregations. But the event that was held was one in which 6 churches that have a lot of financial resources attended a lunch where the 8 new churches put together 4 minute presentations about who they are and what they are about; the idea being that the resourced churches would then choose who they wanted to possibly give money to.

Before I get back to my thoughts about this kind of event, I should say this: new churches need the help of existing churches. But existing churches need new churches too. We might not have much cash, but new churches are nimble. We don't have to deal with recalcitrance, committee structures "we've always done it this way-ness" and other barriers that established churches face. (We have the same number of problems mind you, just not always the same kind of problems). I know that at House for all Sinners and Saints we attract a population that, for the most part, would not darken the door of a nice suburban mainline church. It is also a population I call the "over-educated/voluntarily poor" meaning they mostly are graduate students, full-time volunteers, non-profit workers and inner-city school teachers. Out of 140 people at HFASS we might have about 8 white collar incomes. But what we do have is a ton of freedom to play around with and reinvigorate the tradition in ways that have been eye-opening and helpful to more traditional churches. We are the innovative edge which is bringing new life to the core of the church. If the whole Church was innovative edges without a core it would collapse. But the opposite is true as well. Without new growth on the edges the core will die. We need each other, you know...like a body needs all it's parts. (HT: Paul of Tarsus)

¹ Nadia Bolz Weber, "I'm A Church Socialist. There. I Said It.", December 29, 2011, accessed March 21, 2024 at <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/nadiabolzweber/2011/12/im-a-church-socialist-there-i-said-it/>



So...back to the resourced churches/new churches speed dating event. I propose the following changes:

Resourced churches should be invited to commit to financial support of new churches above and beyond the money they tithe to the denomination. Then the tables should turn and the churches with resources should prepare a 4 minute presentation about who they are and what they are about which will be presented to the new churches who then get to choose who they partner with. Why you might ask? Because of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The first shall be last and the last shall be first. The ways in which I myself and the Church in general believe and behave otherwise is pretty whack.

So, if you serve or attend a church that happens to be flush financially then I propose that the money is not yours with which to build an even bigger sanctuary for your congregation. Maybe it belongs to The Church and could (perhaps, should) be redistributed to help churches that serve populations with less resources.

Yep. I'm a church socialist.

P.S. We at HFASS, even though we rely on support from others, give \$1,000 of our yearly offerings to a church which is even newer than we are ([The Humble Walk](#)...you should go look them up. I love, love love them). Again, we have our own problems and are not a shining example of perfect church-ness, but if your church isn't doing this give it a try. It's awesome.