



This Religion column is a regular feature written for the Gallup Independent by Gallup area residents, representing different faith communities, who share their ideas about bringing a spiritual perspective into our daily lives and community issues. For information about contributing a guest column, contact Elizabeth Hardin-Burrola at The Independent: (505) 863-6811 ext. 218 or lizreligion01@yahoo.com.

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Streams of Living Water

Since our return to New Mexico nearly 6 years ago, my wife Colleen and I have adopted a routine regarding church attendance that is, at the very least, unusual. It is one that we would not even recommend to others, though it has enabled us to address a need and desire that we believe important. We attend a different church nearly every week!

What would prompt us to adopt such a pattern? Most practically, we enjoy visiting the churches where our students come from. It helps us meet their families, and enables us to get a sense of the spiritual climate of our community. Further, we desire to most often worship cross culturally, and thereby we see the marvelous variety of the Kingdom of God which the Bible describes in terms of every tribe and tongue and nation.

In the process, we have met wonderful people and pastors. We most often come away encouraged by the gospel that continues to be faithfully preached and professed in an incredible array of churches. The worship styles and habits are wonderfully diverse, and we depart admiring what we learn from each of these congregations.

Now two Sundays ago, we visited The Door, also known as the Gallup Christian Center. One would think that a couple of Dutch Reformed folks, fairly stiff in our worship style, would be mighty uncomfortable in the midst of these of tongue-speaking revivalists. To the contrary, it felt very good for a whole bunch of reasons. As is so often the case, one sees patterns in one congregation or tradition that so badly needs to be imitated in others.

- The Door has to be the most integrated churches in our region. What appeared to be about 1/3 Native, 1/3 Hispanic, 1/3 white folks with 3 or 4 African American families mixed in, it defies the tragic maxim that the most segregated hour of the week is 10:00 on Sunday morning.
- The previous day, this congregation had sent out 30 of their members to Flagstaff to help their daughter church canvas the neighborhoods and bear witness in the parks. They had another 30 people doing the same in Gallup. These folks have a passion to share their faith.
- We saw whole families worshipping—dads, moms, kids! Yes, Dads—lots of them. And the kids were not sitting like lumps unwilling to sing a word! They were engaged, clapping, taking the offering! And the congregation was intergenerational—old guys upfront playing guitar!



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- This particular service was the beginning of a week of revival, and the congregation was challenged to repent in a number of areas. The subsequent altar call was not individualistic; rather, whole families went forward to kneel and pray. Pride and pretense seemed to melt in favor of pleading with God for his favor.
- While unclear as to exactly how many other churches they have planted in their 30 years of existence, one sensed it was in the 20 range, both in the Southwest and around the world. One wonders if there is any other congregation in our region that could come close to that?

If we attended the Door on a weekly basis, we would surely discover their weaknesses—they are human like every other church. But let's not dwell there—let us celebrate their strengths, let us be quick to respect and learn from Christian traditions different from our own.

It has been said that “every heresy is the result of an unpaid bill.” In other words, nearly every church split comes about because the mother church was neglecting something. Thus, we find a wide variety of congregations and denominations, each with a certain appeal depending on ones theological and worship background and instincts.

Richard Foster, the well-known writer from an evangelical Quaker tradition, has written a book entitled “Streams of Living Water.” His thesis for this now 10 year old book is that there are essentially six spiritual traditions flowing within the history of the Christian church, and that each of them has unique contributions to make. While we must continue to strive for theological Truth, let us add that none of these traditions has a corner on the truth, though each has a corner of the truth.

So we walked out of the Gallup Christian Center giving thanks for the stream of living water flowing out of that body into the greater Gallup community and far beyond.