

# THE Ekklesia Project



## **Learning Christ Together** A Report from Gathering 2007

### **Dear Friend**

This newsletter is devoted to Gathering 2007. Our [website](#) will be the primary place for material on the past 3 days. There you should soon be able to find audio and video downloads, as well as texts of some talks. Here we hope to give you images of The Ekklesia Project, which means pictures of people listening and talking, singing and playing, laughing and learning Christ.

## We Gathered from All Over



Here are friends from two San Francisco churches, Grace Fellowship and Redeemer. They include in the front row Doug and Amy Lee, Chi-Ming Chien, and Cindi and Danny Fong. Visibly smiling on the row behind is Patti Hom, and beside her is her sister and our opening preacher Sharon Huey (also a member of the Gathering planning team). Farther back are Rich Irwin from North Carolina and Brian Logan from Church of the Servant King in Eugene, Oregon (along with several other folk I didn't recognize).

## We Worshipped



Here is a photo of the musical team that led worship from behind the gathered congregation. David Butzu (seated at the piano) and Jim McCoy (closest guitar player) were members of the Gathering planning team. Between them is (I think) Wes Arblaster and behind is Craig Farmer. David was our primary worship planner, and he even wrote new music for the Gathering.

We did a lot of worshiping at this Gathering--an opening and closing service, morning prayer on Tuesday and Wednesday, and a service of footwashing Tuesday night. We were intentional about worship both because adoring God is

our calling, and because it is one of the central practices of congregational formation.

## Jesus the 'Highest Common Denominator' of Our Friendship



Early in this year's Gathering Phil Kenneson offered a presentation titled "What Are We Doing Here?" in which he successfully mixed academic lecture with stand-up comedy. It is hard to imagine anyone attempting to explain the EP and its history without employing elements of both. I always delight in spending time with folks who are attending for the first time, who are often bursting with questions. For example, one person new to the Gathering asked me what the EP's

"position" is on abortion. I answered, accurately I believe, that if he asked ten endorsers for their views on abortion, he would get at least 11 different answers, all of them theologically well- informed. It is sometimes hard for new folks to understand that we do not expect to agree with one another on every particular of faith and practice, and yet we cherish one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. It is especially challenging for those accustomed to finding "ecumenical fellowship" only by descending to the lowest common denominator ("we all agree that God wants us to be nice and that Jesus said many wise things") to discover that in the EP we may comfortably disagree with one another precisely because our Christian friendship is based on sharing the highest common denominator: we all seek to be formed into faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. When we gather together in worship, and most particularly when we sing together, words of explanation are no longer necessary: we gather above all to share the joy of being the Church of Jesus Christ. John McFadden, editor

## **Formative Workshops on Formation**



On Tuesday, 4 workshops were offered in the morning and afternoon. Michael Bowling and Susan Adams of Englewood Christian Church offered "Sustaining Congregational Conversations for the Long Haul." David Butzu and Ben Lee, ministers at Hopwood Christian Church in Tennessee, presented "Forming Young People Through Worship." Phil Kenneson opened the 'CFI toolbox,' offering insights into the materials and process developed in the course of the four year Congregational

Formation Initiative he has been directing for EP. Mark Lau Branson, shown in this picture, presented "The Formative Power of Congregational Narratives." Though the photo doesn't show it, the room was packed.

## Panel on Congregational Formation



Though it was called "Wisdom from the Trenches," our Tuesday afternoon panel actually sat on a small platform. From left to right are moderator Therese Lysaught (chair of the EP Board), Jon Stock, Sally Johnson, Doug Lee, Kyle Childress, and Stan Hauerwas.

## Missing Mike Budde, Making New Friends



The empty chair beside Stan Hauerwas is a reminder of a Gathering first: EP instigator (and our first coordinator) Mike Budde was not able to be present. We missed Mike greatly, but rejoiced in the abundance of old friends and new. On Stan's left sit new friends Wayne and Fran Iba, participants in the Congregational Formation Initiative at All Saints-by-the-Sea Episcopal Church. In the row behind are Mike and Lisa Bowling of Englewood Christian Church (Mike is our treasurer and Lisa was this year's registrar). In the row in front are Steve Fowl, who gave two plenaries on "Learning to See Through Christ-Focused Lenses," then Brent, Wesley and Missy Laytham. (Brent coordinates both the Ekklesia Project and what color shirt he and Steve will wear each day.)

The Gathering is a wonderful place to meet the varied kinds of people who make up The Ekklesia Project. On Monday I met Gabriel Santos, a sociologist who found us through Bill Cavanaugh's work on torture. He took time off from his research into ecclesial responses to disaster (specifically to hurricane Katrina) to come to Chicago for the Gathering. I also met Celina Varela, who is part of Reba Place Church (Mennonite) in Evanston, Illinois. Celina coordinates the ten week

summer intern program of Reba Place Fellowship, an intentional Christian community.

If you were here, I hope I met you. If not, I hope you might come to Gathering 2008, tentatively titled "Church without Borders." Either way, I hope these photos and words are a small glimpses of the many ways we continue together to learn Christ over the long haul.

Grace and peace,,

Brent Laytham  
Coordinator, The Ekklesia Project