

Seeker of Souls Area Faith Community

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For several years the parishes of St. Gertrude's and St. John's have been working through the process of becoming an Area Faith Community. Recently the name of Seeker of Souls was approved for our area faith community.

So who are we as members of the Seeker of Souls Area Faith Community? Criteria of the name was that it should be a reference to Christ. Seeker of Souls, unlike the Good Shepherd or other references, is not one that most of us are familiar with.

The name or reference to Christ is found in **Prayers before the Blessed Sacrament**, in the **Litany of the Holy Name of Jesus**: "Jesus, seeker of souls, have mercy on us". Other than that it is difficult to find a direct reference to "Seeker of Souls"

In May 1880 Cardinal John Henry Newman visit gave a homily at Oxford; "Cardinal Newman selected as his text the 10th chapter of St. John, verse 14, and following verses: "I am the good Shepherd". After numerous references to shepherds he continues," We know that in the Prophet Ezekiel a great deal is said about bad shepherds, those who hold office of pastors, and did not fulfill it. Of course, in the New Testament, too, every minister, ***every seeker of souls is especially called a Shepherd.***

Shepherd is a term we are more familiar with. We can find many references throughout the old and new testaments to the characteristics of the good shepherd.

In another sermon, "Come and See" by The Very Rev. Tracey Lind on the Third Sunday of Lent, on February 24, 2008, Rev. Lind talked on John 4:5-42. He said, "In John's Gospel, both a nameless Samaritan woman and Jesus are confronted and exposed, accepted and affirmed, nourished and quenched, welcomed and received, known and loved. Through our Lord's brief encounter with an anonymous, lonely woman, ***God is revealed to us as an unbounded and indiscriminate lover and seeker of souls***, and the path of evangelism (the sharing of the good news of Jesus) is also revealed".

"I received a gift like the account we heard this morning on 42nd Street in New York City one cold January afternoon. Jesus met me as he did the Samaritan woman, a young woman feeling unworthy and thirsty. I had a similar conversation. He told me all that I had ever done, naming those innermost wounds. He told me who he was, and he instructed me to tell my brothers and sisters, that God is there for each and every one of us. God loves all of us - no strings attached."

Probably the best description I have been able to find is in a 3 page document by **Andrew Murray**. Andrew Murray (1828 - 1917) was a South African writer, educationist and Christian pastor. Over the years he has influenced many, including Jessie Penn-Lewis a key figure in the 1904-1905 Welsh Revival. Murray authored over 240 books.

"Every believer ordained to be first and foremost a soul-winner. Simple though it sounds, it will cost much to many before it has mastered them..."

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They must know it in its intensity, and know what it is to continue in it till their whole being realized that love can reach all, and melt all. It can make even the coldest and weakest child of God a lover and seeker of souls. In that intense and continuous fire a pastor, a leader, can learn to witness in power to the truth - *Every believer a soul-winner...*

If the Church is really to take up its work, it is not enough that we speak of the obligation resting upon the present generation to make Christ known to everyone. True education must always deal with the individual mind. To the general command must always be added the personal one...

The missionary appeal must go deeper and seek to deal with the very root of the evil. If there is no desire for soul-winning at home, how can the interest in the distant unevangelized be truly deep or spiritual?...

The only answer to that question-the key to the whole situation appears to be the simple truth: *The missionary problem is a personal one.* The Lord Jesus Christ is the Author and Leader of Mission. Whoever stands right with Him, and abides in Him, will be ready to know and do His will. It is simply a matter of *being near enough to Him to hear His voice and so devoted to Him and His love as to be ready to do all His will...*

At first it may appear as if we are aiming too high. In many congregations the response may be very weak. Let the pastor give himself to study the missionary problem in this light. Let him put it to his people, clearly and perseveringly: You have been redeemed to be the witnesses and messengers of Christ's love. To fit you for it, His love has been given you, and shed abroad in your heart. As He loves you, He loves the whole world. He wants those who know it to tell those who don't know it. His love to you and to them, your love to Him and to them call you to do it. It is your highest privilege, it will be your highest happiness and perfection. As Christ gave Himself, *give yourself* wholly to this work of love.

Two prominent Catholic figures have had literary document written about them that included "Seeker of Souls" in the title: Saint John Bosco, A Seeker of Souls, by F.A. Forbes and SEEKER OF SOULS

By SUBIR BHAUMIK AND MEENAKSHI GANGULY/CALCUTTA AND TIM MCGIRK/NEW DELHI on the life of Mother Teresa in Time Magazine

"Souls in search of final blessing often came to the temple of a powerful Hindu goddess in Calcutta. But nearby, many discovered another source of solace: a small woman, wrinkled and bent, a willing companion to the dying. She tenderly cared for the abandoned and the sick, washing their wounds, soothing their sores, preparing them for death. "They must feel wanted, loved," Mother Teresa said. "They are Jesus for me."..."

"She soon asked the Vatican if she and her followers could take a vow supplementary to those of poverty, chastity and obedience: "to devote themselves out of abnegation to the care of the poor and needy who, crushed by want and destitution, live in conditions unworthy of human dignity." It took Rome two years to say yes, and in 1950 the Vatican formally established the Missionaries of Charity, commanding members of the order "unremittingly" to seek out the poor, abandoned, sick, infirm and dying. Teresa warned that it was work few persons could endure; each volunteer was told that only a "burning fire" would succeed. With the establishment of the order, Sister Teresa became Mother Teresa, leading a ministry to the destitute, doomed

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and dying. The order's guiding theme was her own: "Let every action of mine be something beautiful for God."

The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco is contained in 19 volumes and I am sure would provide an adequate description of a Seeker of Souls. *Saint John Bosco, A Seeker of Souls*, by F.A. Forbes contains a sufficient amount of information to explain why John Bosco is called a Seeker of Souls.

Msgr Paul E Campbell, M. A., Litt. D., Ed. D. reviewed the book and provided the following comments:

"Don Bosco spent himself wholly, from his very childhood, in healing human modern miseries. He threw himself headlong among the youth of the lower classes, pointing out to them the only way to a better place in this life and in the life to come. He did not talk much; he acted."

"By a kind of surprising intuition," continues Archbishop Pittini, "Don Bosco knew that selfishness, bearing injustice and hatred, was at the bottom of this modern society, forever prattling about equality, philanthropy, and fraternity. He felt the sting of the sarcasm and of the tragedy of the common people proclaimed 'sovereign' in theory, in fact reduced to slavery by this blustering modern liberalism, which raised the flickering torch of human 'Reason' against the eternal light of the stars. Don Bosco set himself to bring back the multitudes to the only 'Heart' that understood their needs. He is the greatest pioneer of Christ in modern times."

"Father Auffray mentions here the fact that Don Bosco wanted to put his Congregation under the protection of one of the most versatile and congenial saints of the Church, St. Francis of Sales. His ever gentle spirituality pivots on love and is imbued with optimism. He "humanized" virtue, clothing it with charm, making it loved by all. Don Bosco followed the same path. Like the saintly Bishop of Geneva, he emphasizes love and joy as dual means toward a fruitful apostolate. Therefore he called his congregation "The Society of St. Francis of Sales," and his sons became "Salesians."

"Don Bosco's industry as a student had made of him an excellent preacher. He was not eloquent in the ordinary sense of that adjective, but he spoke with great warmth, kept his voice under good control, and his general tone was one of serenity, gravity, and sadness, indefinably blended."

"He was never more pleased than when his talks were instrumental in bringing back to the faith one who had wandered away from it. He had much success in dealing with the Waldensians and frequently drew them away from their lapse into heresy."

"About twice a month he wrote pamphlets for popular reading. These pamphlets gave a serene exposition of Catholic teaching and delivered the Catholic public from the danger of falling away from their faith."