

# The spiritual roots of working together and building community

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The Oxford dictionary defines ethos as “characteristic spirit of community, people, or systems.” The Creator Spirit is present and active with power and meaning in groups of people as well as in the personalities of individuals. This is true of all communities, not only religious ones. And in every community the ethos created by the Spirit can be improved by the intentional action of group members. The ethos created by the Creator Spirit can also be damaged by action “against the spirit.” As long as communities have human beings in them who are free and capable of resisting the grace of the spirit there will always be room for growth in the spirit. Thus, theologians say of the Christian church that it is “*simul iustus et peccator*,” “at the same time just and sinful” and “*semper reformanda*,” “always being reformed.”

As the spirit gives vocational power and meaning to individuals so does the spirit give vocations to communities. The ethos of the good groups we belong to is centred on some vocational objectives. There is no limit to the variety of objectives that the ethos of different groups can pursue, everything from healthy sport to aesthetic creativity, from fair working conditions to spiritual contemplations.

The prophet Joel proclaimed that God would pour out the Holy Spirit on all flesh. (Joel 2:28) Jesus speaks most often of the Kingdom of God which is an unthinkable metaphor if it was taken to refer to only a small segment of humanity. Spirit surely extends over all the systems, communities and groups in existence, even when the ethos of those collective groups is only fragmentarily reflective of the spirit.

An example of ethos existing in a small group of people can be seen in a group such as one I know that provides Meals on Wheels in Sooke. For about 25 years this group has worked together, week in and week out, to serve the needs of people who have difficulty getting good food on a regular basis. Ethos is really important for the volunteers who keep the system going. The small teams who each work one day a week every other week have to have team spirit or the job gets difficult. The whole organization including executive members, supply buyers, soup and dessert makers, cooks, helpers, dish washers and meal delivery people have to be bonded by community spirit. Members of all community service groups have the spirit of friendship, the spirit of service, and the spirit of loyalty and creative imagination to keep their Meals on Wheels on wheels or doing whatever vocation the group has. There is genuine pleasure and joy in being part of this ethos. Members of all groups with a good ethos will affirm the blessing of the spirit that brings their group together.

One of the largest groups with ethos that we belong to is our nation, Canada. We like to think Canada is a country with good ethos, friendly, sensible, caring, just, generous and welcoming of those who seek refuge here. It is a tall order to honour this ethos consistently and not give in to the inclinations we may have to be not so friendly, or sensible or caring or just or generous or welcoming. Patriotism can be selfish as well as noble.

We need to concentrate regularly on the good spirit of ethos in our country or it can erode and diminish the presence of the Creator Spirit in our country. Some of do that by remembering Jesus and his wisdom and compassion. Others do it by worshipping other spiritual traditions. Our “spiritualities” may differ but we can be united in the ethos that makes our country Canada a good member of the family of nations. In that way we help make the ethos of Humanity what the Creator surely intended it to be.



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