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## What Does it Mean to be Pentecostal?

*By Jeff Bonzelaar, Executive Director*

What images come to your mind by the term “Pentecostal?” A tongue-talker? Someone who believes in faith-healing? A person who sings praise songs and raises his or her hands in worship? Or worse, one of those holy-roller types who bounces up and down church aisles? Someone who is anti-intellectual and emotionally unstable? Perhaps a snake-handler or poison-drinker?

While I am a minister in a Pentecostal denomination (I mean “fellowship,” oops!), my background lies in the Reformed church. I am familiar with liturgy, catechisms and creeds, and the psalter (i.e., hymnal). I am deeply grateful for my heritage and still find much of value in this tradition.

So switching tracks was not easy. Theologically, I have always been on the conservative side of things. I am more reserved when it comes to physical expressions of affection (just raising my hands can feel awkward). And I do NOT typically enjoy two-and-a-half

hour services or singing the same song twenty-five times in a row (I’m exaggerating, . . . sort of).

***“ Being Pentecostal isn’t about church affiliation. . . . Nor is it ultimately about ecstatic utterances or gifts of the Holy Spirit.”***

But being Pentecostal isn’t about church affiliation. It is not about the kind of songs we sing or the way we sing them. Nor is it ultimately about ecstatic utterances or gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:1 states, “When the day of Pentecost came,

they were all together in one place.” The believers’ *togetherness* is the first important fact author Luke notes. The second is that these believers were together “when the day of *Pentecost* came.” Here a vital link between Pentecost and togetherness is established.

When the Holy Spirit descended on the first disciples in Acts 2, the church of Jesus Christ was born. The Spirit’s baptism incorporated believers into a community where they began sharing a common life and became bound to one another in a blood-bought union stronger than any family tie. Paul expounds on this theme in 1 Corinthians 12:13: “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were given the one Spirit to drink.” Paul then launches into a lengthy discussion about the body of Christ. He points out that while this body is made up of many distinct parts, a single unit is formed—all owing to the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost was God’s way of reversing the alienation that began in the Garden and culminated at Babel. Pentecost is about God’s reuniting of a divided and fractured people. Pentecost is about community. The test of whether or not a person has been “filled with the Spirit” is whether he or she is a committed and caring member of the body of Christ. This is what it means to be Pentecostal.

***“Our ‘witness’ is our most telling witness.”***

The varied *signs* of Pentecost must not be confused with or allowed to overshadow the *substance* of Pentecost. Signs, however important, are for the purpose of promoting and strengthening the substance but should never become the focus. The Spirit’s mission is to bring to realization Christ’s deepest longing as expressed in this prayer offered to His Father on the eve of His betrayal: “I pray . . . that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you” (Jn. 17:20-12).

Being Pentecostal may look different in various faith-communities, but it always results in a faith-*community*.

Why is this important? Because the most telling and convincing witness of the reality of Jesus Christ is believers living in harmony with one another. Our “witness” is our most telling witness. This is the greatest sign and wonder.

Near the end of Acts 2, Luke writes, “All the believers were together and had everything in common” (v. 44). The result: “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (v. 47). Former Chaplain to the United States Senate Richard Halverson notes, “When relationships are right in the fellowship of faith, evangelism is automatic.”

Community creates conversion. As we model Christ-centered unity before the world, we reflect the loving and holy community of the Trinity, and that witness has a converting effect upon others.

There is no greater miracle than when brothers and sisters of different personalities and backgrounds and generations come together as family in unity. When Jesus talked about receiving power from the Holy Spirit to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8), the dynamic to which He was referring had to do largely with *koinonia*. The power of our proclamation as the people of God rests in the quality of our community (i.e., *koinonia*). It is our oneness in Christ that will cause the world to believe that Jesus truly is the Lord (see Jn. 17:21).

What a tragedy that the one doctrine meant to unite has caused so much division!

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*“Lord, send the old-time power, the Pentecostal power!  
Thy flood-gates of blessing on us throw open wide!  
Lord, send the old-time power, the Pentecostal power,  
That sinners be converted and Thy name glorified.”*

## Testimony

**Aaron Weinand**

“I was born and raised in a loving Christian home. My parents were prominent members of the church we attended, and I was involved in everything from Royal Rangers to Christian summer camp. I accepted Christ as my Savior at the age of nine and was baptized at thirteen.

Shortly before entering high school my curiosity for the things that I was taught to stay away from became overpowering. I began experimenting with drugs and alcohol. I liked the way they made me feel. This was the beginning of a four-year battle with addiction. I could not go a day without using.

After graduation, I recommitted my life to Jesus Christ. I became involved with church once again and began serving God wholeheartedly. I went to college, started a career, got married, and even bought a house. I was truly blessed.

In August 2003, I lost my mother to cancer. I was devastated. It felt like my world was falling apart, and I didn't know what to do. Rather than turning to God for comfort, I turned away from Him.

I tried grief counseling and psychotherapy, but nothing eased the pain of my loss. I was given some medication for a back injury. I knew if I took enough it would numb my emotional pain as well. It wasn't long before I was completely addicted.

My tolerance grew and soon the pills were not enough. That is when I discovered heroin and crack cocaine. It was the beginning of the end. I lost everything, including my wife. I supported my habit by hustling, stealing, and selling drugs. My life had turned out exactly the opposite of what I had planned.

My father would let me stay at his house occasionally. One day he brought up the idea of Life Challenge. They had come out to my church several times. I knew how disciplined the program was and that I would have to commit to one year. I also knew that I would have to totally surrender. I was too proud to do that. I still thought I could make it on my own.

Things went from bad to worse. After overdosing for the second time, I cried out to God and asked Him what He wanted from me. The answer became clear: If I wanted my life and my relationship with Him to be restored, I needed to go to Life Challenge. This time even my pride could not stop me, and I took the first step towards my new life.

Since entering the program in June 2006, I have been completely transformed. Not only has God brought healing to my mind, body and spirit, but He has restored my relationships. I kicked against the 'goats' many times while in the program, but in the end the Lord Jesus had His way. I am so thankful for His unfailing love, grace, and mercy. Glory to God.”

*P.S. Aaron completed the program in June and stayed on to do a six-month internship. He alternates between the kitchen and working in the Men's Division.*



Please continue to pray for us as we “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

Together for souls,

*Jeff*