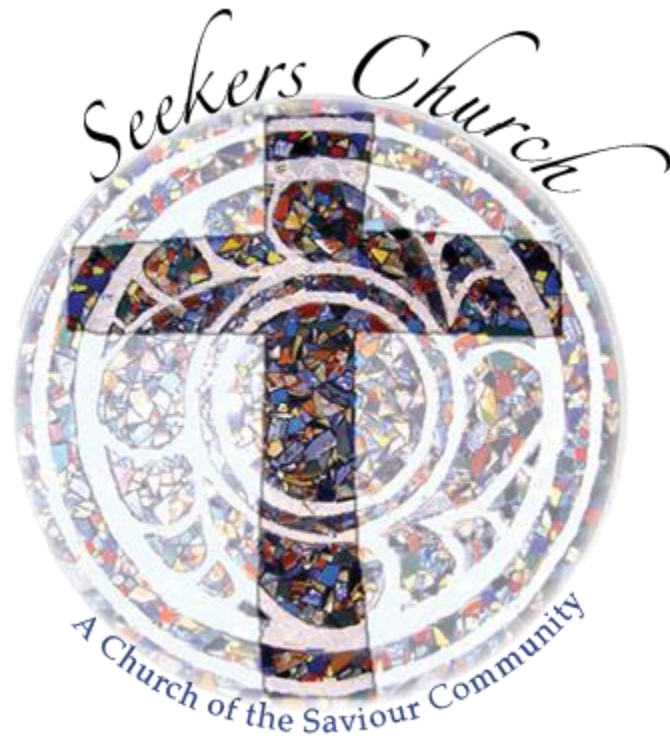


A Guide to Seekers Church

A Church of the Saviour Community



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INTRODUCTION

Seekers Church is one of the small, intentional Christian communities born out of the Church of the Saviour (CoS) in 1976. Gordon and Mary Cosby, who founded Church of the Saviour in 1946, led the community through a long, positive but challenging discernment process to focus more deeply on God's call. This process resulted in the formation of six sister faith communities from the original CoS congregation. Although the resulting faith communities incorporated separately in 1995, they are still part of CoS, members of the Ecumenical Council of Church of the Saviour and co-owners of Dayspring Farm.

Gordon Cosby spoke of call as being "seized by the power of a great affection." We are not people who understand God's call as a mandate to some burdensome, tiresome obligation. We live in the mystery of Christ's teaching that while he carried the cross, his yoke was easy and his burden was light. To walk with Christ in an obedient life of service is to find rest for our souls and joy in our hearts by responding to God's call on our lives (Matthew 11:28-30).

The life of Seekers Church is based on an amazing belief: each one of us is called by God to a particular area of service. Young or old, regardless of experience, skills or education, despite our past successes or failures, God calls each of us to a life of love and service. Concretely, it is a highly individual desire, placed by God in the heart of each person, to be about particular works in the world and in the church. People may have multiple calls and recognizing this is important to us in Seekers Church. The spiritual journey for individuals in Seekers Church grows out of a commitment to answer "Yes" to a call from God as part of this faith community.

It is in following our call that we experience the mystery of God's presence in our community and an ever-deepening friendship with God in our inner lives. If it is truly God's call on our lives, the river of grace flowing from God through us will bring us to peace and joy at our deepest level. We grow in our faith, find rich fellowship within Christian community, and experience new life and healing, all by following God's call as part of this faith community.

Later in this guide you will find more detail on how our life together as a faith community supports each of us as we care for one another, engage with the needs of the world around us and deepen our solidarity with those in need. This community journey is a path of action and reflection, graced by many expressions of art and creativity.

In Seekers Church, commitment to community is understood as an important part of an intentional Christian life lived in the context of this time in history. A deeper level of commitment—to membership as a Steward—is a commitment to supporting and maintaining the church as the vessel that carries us together on our journeys of growth and service. The commitment to membership as a Steward responds to a call to nurture Seekers Church, a particular instance of Christian community, as a part of one's inner and outer journey. Being a Steward is a commitment to maintaining a place where all who come can be welcomed, nourished and empowered to live and celebrate God's call on their lives. The preparation needed to make the commitment as a Steward of Seekers Church is described in more detail later in the guide.

This guide is our effort to explain how Seekers Church is living out its call. In describing ourselves, we have tried to say who we are and what we do rather than who we ought to be. Material for this guide has come from many Seekers, and we thank them all. Since Seekers Church is a small part of the living Body of Christ, by the time you read this guide, we may be doing church differently, but this is how we see ourselves at this moment in time.

For the Stewards of Seekers Church
February 2019

CALL

The Call of Seekers Church

The life of Seekers Church is defined by our call:

Our call is to be a “Seekers community” which comes together in weekly worship rooted in the Biblical faith, with shared leadership; and disperses with a common commitment to understand and implement Christian servanthood in the structures in which we live our lives.

By “Seekers community” we mean an intentional body which sees Christ as our true life source. Koinonia with one another and genuine self-giving to the world are the ways we can be in Christ today. Seekers are not persons who have arrived, but persons who are intentionally on the way.

By shared leadership we mean empowering the gifts of women and men to help our worship flow out of and feed into the life of the community. We are committed to evoking and giving space to new gifts of preaching, liturgical leadership, creative worship forms, giving, mission and other acts of faith.

For us, Christian servanthood is based on empowering others within the normal structures of our daily lives (work; family and primary relationships; and citizenship) as well as through special structures for service and witness. We desire and welcome participation in Seekers Church of women and men of every race and sexual orientation. In Seekers Church we will equip and support each other in all of these areas and seek a balance among them.

The Seekers Church community sees itself called into Christ’s ministry of deliverance from bondage to freedom in every personal and corporate expression. We recognize the value of each individual and seek to heal any wounds of discrimination inflicted by our society and church.

Seekers Church is committed to participation by persons of all ages. We see children, youth and adults of all ages as valuable and valued parts of our community, and desire their inclusion in our care, our ministry, and our life together.

- Issued by Seekers Church Founding Members in July 1976
- Revised by Seekers Core Members in November 1989
- Revised by Seekers Core Members in May 1991

Why We Named Ourselves “Seekers Church”

In 1976, when we were thinking through what it meant for us to be a separate and distinct part of the Church of the Saviour (CoS), Robert Greenleaf was writing his book, *Servant Leadership*. In that book, he wrote about the connections between prophecy and servant leadership:

I now embrace the theory of prophecy which holds that prophetic voices of great clarity, and with a quality of insight equal to that of any age, are speaking cogently all of the time. Men and women of a stature equal to the greatest of the past are with us now, addressing the problems of the day, and pointing t

o a better way ... to live fully and serenely in these times. The variable that marks some periods as barren and some as rich in prophetic vision is in the interest, the level of seeking, the responsiveness of the hearers. The variable is not in the presence or absence or the relative quality and force of the prophetic voices. Prophets grow in stature as people respond to their message. If their early attempts are ignored or spurned, their talent may wither away. It is seekers, then, who make prophets, and the initiative of any one of us in searching for and responding to the voice of contemporary prophets may mark the turning point in their growth and service.

- Robert Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, page 22

This passage spoke deeply to Fred Taylor and Sonya Dyer, our founding members. They decided we should name our church “Seekers” because we are a people who are intentionally on the way and committed to bringing forth prophetic leadership from the gathered community.

We are committed to structuring our worship and mission life to support those seeking response to the voices of prophets of our time. We want to help make the Realm of God alive and visible in the ways we treat each other, even in the midst of competing priorities or disagreements.

There are times when we succumb to the tendency to marginalize the prophets in our midst because we don't like their messages or prophetic actions, and we recognize that it is easier to hear prophetic words about the wider world than it is to be welcoming of challenges within our community. As a family of faith, we want to be welcoming and inclusive as we work for peace and justice, and we hope to encourage each other to listen for the deeper truth. Our Eyes to See, Ears to Hear Peace Prayer Mission Group helps keep us conscious of this commitment.

OUR LIFE TOGETHER

The more organized aspects of our life together include worship on Sunday morning; Sunday School with the children and youth; the Tuesday night School for Christian Growth; and regularly meeting mission groups sponsored by Stewards of Seekers Church.

The more informal aspects of our life together include prayer, study, work, spiritual accountability, fun, and encouragement of the multiple callings of individual members. We celebrate Holy Days, and encourage participation in silent retreats at Dayspring Retreat Center (in suburban Maryland) as well as active retreats at Wellspring Center or Overlook at Dayspring, or Stillpoint at Rolling Ridge (near Charles Town, WV) by groups of Seekers.

We engage in transformative listening and conversation as we support and encourage walking distinct paths along our shared understanding of the Christian Way. We engage in a great deal of broadly shared pastoral care in times of injury, illness, emotional distress, bad treatment, and common life problems. When we encounter conflict, within the community or in the wider world, we seek ways to engage it with conscious compassion, seeking a way forward on common ground. We encourage each other to be artistically expressive, environmentally responsible, to engage in healthy practices, and to explore new callings (sometimes with financial support from the Growing Edge Fund). On occasion, we support each other financially in times of need in a variety of ways.

In 2004 we moved from the headquarters of CoS to an old building that we renovated, near the Takoma Metro station in Northwest Washington, DC. Our building has beautiful spaces for worship, for children, for art, for education, and for fellowship, and is accessible to those who need to use wheelchairs.

With the move in 2004, our ministry expanded to include a commitment to offer our new home as a meeting place for other organizations with values consistent with our call. We are thankful to be hosting 11 other faith communities and many other activities, including 12-step groups, the InterPlay community of Washington, DC, offices of the Al-Anon / Alateen Information Service for Washington DC and Suburban Maryland, the International Federation for Gender Education, New Story Leadership, yoga classes, music workshops, community meetings, and personal celebrations. It is an active "ministry of place."

Worship

Seekers Church worships on Sunday morning. We begin worship at 9:30 with an informal time to share reflections on our faith journey, greet visitors, practice hymns, announce special events in the life of the community, and offer a special prayer for peace and justice. We enter the sanctuary at 10:00. Worship is usually finished between 11:15 and 11:30, and we gather for coffee and conversation in the large kitchen of the old house that is an integral part of our church home. All children participate in the early part of worship, then leave for separate classes. We celebrate Communion on the first Sunday of every month, and the children rejoin us for that part of the service. A separate pamphlet, "Welcome to Worship With Seekers Church," provides a more detailed introduction to our community worship.

Special Celebrations

Special celebrations enhance the life of the community. We celebrate on Christmas Eve with a shared meal at the church, followed by worship with special emphasis on scripture lessons and carols of the Incarnation. On Ash Wednesday, we gather in the evening to enter the season of Lent together, marking one another's foreheads with ashes. On the evening of Maundy Thursday, the night we remember Jesus' last supper with his disciples, our celebration includes a foot washing ritual to remember the importance of servant leadership in the community. Our Easter Sunday celebration begins with a shared breakfast before worship.

School for Christian Growth

Our School for Christian Growth (SCG) provides adult Christian Education on Tuesday evenings. The SCG is frequently a place where newcomers and visitors are introduced to a life of spiritual commitment. The Learners and Teachers mission group guides and sustains our school, offering two six-week terms of classes in the Fall and again in the Spring. In addition there are special, shorter learning opportunities between semesters. More details on the School are available later in this guide and on the web site.

Silent Retreats

Silent retreat is a central part of the tradition of Seekers Church. These retreats are regularly scheduled weekends at Dayspring Silent Retreat, located on Dayspring Farm in Germantown, MD. They are usually scheduled in April and September and led by someone from Seekers. Support for silent retreats is part of the mission of the Living Water mission group. We offer scholarship support to ensure that all who want to attend are able to do so.

Silent Retreats are a valuable opportunity to reconnect with God, with nature, and with each other, as we live for a weekend in an atmosphere of simplicity and tranquility. This time together in silence gives Seekers the opportunity to deepen the non-verbal sense of community while tending to their own inner journey.

Other Retreats

Rolling Ridge Retreat Center and the adjacent Still Point Mountain Retreat cabin provide places for informal gatherings in a quiet mountain setting. Seekers Church owns shares in Still Point and is able to schedule the use of the facility for several weeks and weekends each year. Rolling Ridge is located near the point where the Appalachian Trail crosses the Potomac River, a few miles from Harper's Ferry, West Virginia. Still Point can accommodate six to eight people in a rustic setting, very close to the Shenandoah River. For more information on the use of Still Point, speak with a member of the Servant Leadership Team listed in Appendix C. In 2017 a new retreat opportunity became available at Dayspring. Overlook Retreat House hosts individuals and very small groups, throughout the year. (overlook.retreathouse@gmail.com)

Web Site

Our web site (www.seekerschurch.org) offers all users of the World Wide Web access to information about our life together, to liturgies and sermons created by many Seekers, to information on external missions and internal ministries, and to a sampling of the artistic creativity of a growing number of Seekers.

Common Ministries

For the past several years Seekers Church has sponsored three ministries, offering opportunities for Seekers and others to join together in a common effort to create a more welcoming, peaceful and just world. These three ministries are:

- **Carroll Café**, the "Second Fridays Coffeehouse," presents monthly blues, roots, world or folk music concerts open to the wider community. A volunteer team of Seekers and others transforms our worship space into an informal concert hall filled with amazing music.
- For the **Bokamoso Youth Foundation**, Seekers Church hosts a **career workshop** to help visiting young people from South Africa hone their employment-seeking skills. Each year since 2002, Seekers Church has welcomed a musical and theatrical performance team from the Bokamoso Youth Centre, a program in Winterveldt, a township near Pretoria, South Africa. Bokamoso provides a nurturing community to support the youth whose families have been challenged by AIDS, poverty and unemployment, and the month-long fund-raising visit provides support for life skills training and post-secondary education for many others.
- The **Care Pack Project** asks for donations of essential items such as new socks and toiletries for homeless people in the area. The team assembles small backpacks with the items for us to distribute to those we encounter in our daily activities. Care packs are available on the coat hooks near the parking lot entrance. All Seekers are encouraged to keep one available to share whenever needed.

Informal Gatherings

Informal gatherings of Seekers include community conversations after worship, usually on the third Sunday of the month. For several years, we gathered for an informal potluck Thanksgiving dinner at our place on Carroll Street, open to all who want to attend.

We also gather for celebration of important occasions in the lives of individual Seekers, for occasional singalongs in the homes of various members of the community, and opportunities for other activities together, as well as other celebratory occasions organized by someone in the community for all of us.

Publications

In addition to this *Guide to Seekers Church* there are several booklets and brochures that help explain our community life, the mission groups of Seekers Church and our guidelines for preaching and music in worship. A more extensive collection of our publications is available on our web site (www.seekerschurch.org).

Stalking the Spirit in a Do-It-Yourself Church (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014) is the story of Seekers Church that documents our life together and is recommended reading for all prospective members. Written by Marjory Bankson, *Stalking the Spirit* is available at Seekers Church, from the publisher, or from Amazon.

Calling on God: Inclusive Christian Prayers for Three Years of Sundays (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths, 2014) is a lectionary-based worship resource written by Peter Bankson and Deborah Sokolove, both Stewards of Seekers Church. It is available at Seekers Church, from the publisher, or from Amazon.

Pat Conover has written a socio-cultural assessment of Seekers that is available through a link on our web site under Life Together/Writing About Seekers or from Pat upon request.

Belonging

For many years, we have been living with the question of “membership” in Seekers Church. Two traditions in Seekers Church have shaped the way we describe this process, a tradition of commitment and a tradition of inclusion.

A Committed Body

One of the brightest gifts from our Church of the Saviour tradition is the guidance to be a high-commitment church. In the words of Elizabeth O'Connor, Gordon Cosby dreamed of a church where “the members would be committed to Christ and committed to one another in unlimited liability.” As a community-based church, intentionally without clergy, Seekers Church needs the best from each of us to make our shared life vibrant and fulfilling. Commitment is a core element in the life of each Seekers mission group, where each member carries authority for some element of the life of the group and is accountable to some other member of the group who serves as that member’s spiritual companion or guide.

A Welcoming Church

Inclusivity is central to the call that Sonya Dyer and Fred Taylor sounded when Seekers Church first came into being in 1976. Over the years, we have been careful with our language, striving to use inclusive, gender-neutral versions of Scripture and hymn lyrics. We have welcomed all who come to worship, without regard for sexual orientation, marital status, race ethnicity, level of income or religious creed. We have been eager to evoke and give space to new gifts of preaching, liturgical leadership, teaching, and pastoring. Our commitment is to maintain a place where all who come can be welcomed, nourished and empowered to live and celebrate God’s call on their lives.

Persons name themselves as belonging to our church by affirming that they are Seekers, claiming for themselves the intention to participate in the on-going life and worship of the church. All Seekers are invited to offer their gifts—preaching, teaching our children, teaching in the School for Christian Growth, joining Seekers Church mission groups, and organizing and supporting special activities in the life of the community. All Seekers are encouraged to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit and accept the support of the community as they find their own personal and authentic knowledge of God and Christ.

Life at the Crossroads of Inclusion and Commitment

On first glance, it might seem that high commitment and welcoming diversity don't fit well together. Our experience is that holding both prompts us to listen to each other so that we can build on the best of our differences. Since we don't just run a preset church program, there is room for exploration, growth, and ministry out of shared strengths and interests. Since we exist by shared ministry, we commit to three principles:

- Making a significant investment of time, energy, and gifts in the community and through it into the wider world.
- Being mutually accountable to one another for how they choose to be present and participate in the life of the community.
- Re-examining these commitments annually.

Our regular activities of community worship, Christian adult education and mission group life all provide opportunities to grow and practice shared ministry.

All who worship with us are invited to join a mission group or request a spiritual companion or director from within the community. We require that anyone who wants to join a mission group first take at least two 6-week classes in the School for Christian Growth. These classes help introduce newcomers to our spiritual practices, and they encourage committed members to stay on the Way with Christ.

Commitment to Seekers Church

We make serious efforts to welcome, and include in our fellowship, people who come from very different spiritual backgrounds. Likewise, we expect those who worship with Seekers Church to decide whether this community can be a meaningful place for them to follow a Christian spiritual path. **We welcome all who come but encourage a conscious commitment to the community from those who stay.**

Seekers is an ecumenical, inclusive community, not a doctrinal church that emphasizes dogma and creeds. We respect scholarship concerning the Bible, history and theology and the varying Christian traditions our members previously experienced. We encourage honest doubt and challenging questions. We strive to take the best from our diverse teachers and reground our received expressions of faith as we work with the challenge of current concerns, callings, ministry, and the building of community

Those interested in becoming a Member of Seekers Church typically:

- Worship with us for a period of time, meeting people during the coffee hour and asking questions.
- Attend one or more classes in the School for Christian Growth, including an Orientation to Seekers Church, which is offered periodically.
- Request a shepherding or spiritual companionship relationship with one of the Stewards of Seekers Church.
- Attend a silent retreat.
- Contribute financially on a regular basis to Seekers Church.

If you are interested in making a commitment to Seekers Church, you are invited to speak with any Steward. (See the list in Appendix B.)

Statement of Commitment as a Member

When a participant in Seekers Church feels ready to put down roots here, he or she may publicly declare at worship or a community gathering that he/she is committing to a growing relationship with Christ through a commitment to Seekers Church, using this statement:

I am a Seeker. I come today to affirm my relationship with this Christian community in the tradition of the Church of the Saviour, linked with the people of God through the ages.

As a member of this church, I will deepen my relationships in this local expression of the Body of Christ, sharing my gifts from God with others who worship with Seekers Church, and in the wider world. I will:

- *Nurture my relationship with God and Seekers Church through spiritual disciplines or practices;*
- *Care for the whole of creation, including the natural environment;*
- *Foster justice and be in solidarity with the poor;*
- *Work for the end of all war, both public and private; and*
- *Respond joyfully with my life, as the grace of God gives me freedom.*

Annual Recommitment

A key element in the life of Seekers Church is the understanding that our commitment to Christ and to Seekers Church is conscious and intentional. To reinforce this understanding, we renew our commitment to the community each year. “Recommitment Sunday” is observed on the third Sunday in October in memory of the first commitment of the founding members of the Church of the Saviour in 1947.

Each Fall, during the month before Recommitment Sunday, those who have affirmed their membership in Seekers Church are invited to re-examine it in their daily meditation, through discussion in their mission or small group, and/or with their spiritual director or companion, and through a vigil in the worship space. Each Seeker is encouraged to pray over the call of Seekers Church and the commitment statements to clarify the level of commitment that can be made with integrity, based on current circumstances, and on the personal challenge to reach for a deeper life of faith. Usually a written guide with questions for reflection is provided.

On Recommitment Sunday those who choose to commit or recommit share the recitation of the Statement of Commitment. Recommitment Sunday reminds those who do not commit or recommit that Seekers is a high-commitment church. This encourages intentionality and challenges “attendance-only” traditions in other places.

GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNITY LIFE

Over the years since 1976, Seekers Church has developed patterns that guide our life as one small part of the Body of Christ. These help us remain faithful to our call, help reinforce our core values of commitment and inclusivity, and support the faith journey of Seekers of all ages, and the community as a whole.

One of our core values is the belief that each one of us is called by God to a particular area of service. Discerning and following God’s call is often the focus of classes in our School for Christian Growth, part of the life of our mission groups, and the topic of transformational conversations. In addition to the School for Christian Growth and spiritual companionship in mission groups, the Mission Support Group offers a discernment process based on the Quaker “clearness committee.” For more information contact a member of the Mission Support Group.

Nurturing Spiritual Growth for Adults

Seekers School for Christian Growth

The Seekers School for Christian Growth (SCG) meets on Tuesday nights. Participants gather for a simple vegetarian meal together at 7:00, followed by a short meditation and classes from 7:45 until 9:30 p.m. Classes commonly include a homework assignment and/or written reports. School classes inform, empower leadership, build trust and community, and develop accountability. Classes offer participants the opportunity to take on small tasks to help the school work, find their voice, practice active listening and maintaining confidentiality, learn Seekers practices and traditions, consider God’s call, and become better known in the community.

The School generally schedules two semesters each year, with two six-week terms each semester. There is an emphasis on experiential learning, with time for sharing personal experiences related to the subject of the class. Classes are small, to allow all participants to experience the feel of a Seekers Church mission group as part of the class experience.

We recognize that learning together is an important part of building community and expect participation in the SCG as part of each individual's preparation for belonging: two classes before joining a mission group; and six classes before becoming a Steward.

The School is an essential element in the life of Seekers Church, offering the courses required for becoming a Steward on a rotating cycle, so that regular attendance at the school will allow a prospective Steward to complete the course requirements within a two-year period.

The school is administered by the Learners and Teachers Mission Group, which plans and develops class schedules, recruits teachers, coordinates classes and the supper that precedes them, and supports the teachers and students.

Spiritual Companionship

Accountable spiritual companionship is an important element of our life together. Usually in a mission group one member is confirmed by the group to serve as a spiritual guide, receiving regular written spiritual reports from the other members. These reports can take many forms, but usually include an experience of God's grace or revelation and a confession or learning about one's self. The spiritual director or guide reflects prayerfully on each report and returns them at the next meeting of the group with comments or questions offered in support. Some groups choose to pair up to exchange reports as spiritual companions rather than have a spiritual director. While this provides opportunities for more members to deepen their experience in spiritual companionship, we have found that growth, for individuals and for the group as a whole, is usually nurtured more clearly when one member receives reports from all members of the group.

If someone is not in a mission group, they may request a spiritual guide, either by asking someone directly, or by discussing their need with a Steward or a member of the Servant Leadership Team. Since serving as a spiritual companion is a serious obligation, both parties need to agree on the nature and duration of their commitment. We suggest an initial three-month trial period.

Nurturing Spiritual Growth for Children and Youth

Children are an integral part of the community. They are included in specific ways, such as:

- Most Sundays, during worship there is a brief word for the children, often based on the scripture lections of the week.
- Children light the altar candle at the beginning of worship.
- Children are invited to participate in monthly communion.
- Periodically, we hold special intergenerational worship services.
- We celebrate special events in the lives of Seekers children with rituals that are developed with their participation and invite them to experience other adult rituals such as commitment as a Steward or blessing participants in special ministries.

Some of our children and youth attend a church camp during the summer, some with Seekers' financial assistance. On Christmas Eve we gather for dinner as a community, followed by a worship service of Lessons and Carols, where children, youth, and young people offer many of the lessons.

During our annual time of recommitment, we help our children learn more about God and Christ by working with the elements of our commitment statement. On our annual Recommitment Sunday, we invite our children to make a promise of their own using this statement:

I promise

- *To learn about God by coming to this church;*
- *To take care of the air, water and earth, and to love the plants, trees, animals, birds, and fish;*
- *To love and respect my body;*
- *To help people who don't have much money;*
- *To try to get along with my family, my friends, and others; and*
- *To say "yes" to God as I grow.*

Approved by the Stewards of Seekers Church, November 2008

Sunday School

Currently the Sunday school is coordinated by a volunteer children's team. The team discusses the needs and growing edges of each child and guides teachers with suggestions. Many Seekers serve as teachers, commonly for about a month at a time. A lot of learning in the Sunday School comes through constructive conversation, creative activities, relationship building, and a mix of content sharing. The writers and theologians whose work has undergirded our Sunday School

program include John Westerhof (*Bringing Up Children in the Christian Faith*, and *Will Our Children Have Faith?*), and Sophia Cavaletti (*The Religious Potential of the Child*).

Our Sunday morning program is organized into classes by age. These include a nursery program for the very young and another class for pre-teens. Each class has its own team of teachers. We encourage building relationships between children and adults as well as among the children. Teachers are encouraged to bring their own gifts to the classroom, so children can experience the adults' passion and excitement. Sunday School classes usually begin with prayer and sharing.

Teens have special programs throughout the year and otherwise join adults in worship.

Mission and Mission Groups

In the tradition of the Church of the Saviour, Seekers Church is committed to mission through the giving of time, talent and financial resources. Our commitment to mission is lived out in the ways we allocate our gifts of time and resources to the community and the wider world.

Many Seekers are called to vocations that have a commitment to empower those in need. Some are educators. Others work within the Federal government, bringing their personal commitment to justice into those settings. Others are advocates for justice and empowerment. Others work through non-profit organizations to bring change to communities and churches. We want our mission group structure to provide places of support and accountability for this commitment to ministry in daily life.

In late 2018 we launched a new website to support personal planning. "Down the Road Together (<http://www.downtheroad.life/>) provides

a forum to share information, ideas, resources, plans, and feelings about our own later years or those of our friends and families. Jacqie Wallen is coordinating this initiative. In 2011, Marjory Bankson published a book focused on continuing commitment as we age: *Creative Aging, Rethinking Retirement and Non-Retirement in a Changing World* is available at Seekers Church, or from Amazon.

Mission Groups

In Seekers Church, the mission group is the primary structure for support and spiritual accountability for living out God's claim or call on the life of each Seeker. We understand that according to the New Testament, a mission group is an expression of the Body of Christ, in which Christ is resident and present. Without the living presence of Christ in the group, participants will not feel a sense of eternal significance. For us, our mission groups are the focal point for living out our commitments to mission (the journey outward), community (the life of Seekers Church), and spiritual growth (the journey inward).

Each group has a clear written "call," describing the purpose of the group. The call usually emerges before a group is formed. Commonly, new mission groups are born when two Stewards discern a call for corporate mission.

Once a call has become clear, and is shared by two or more Stewards, the call is affirmed by the Stewards and shared with the Seekers community during worship. This is an invitation to others who feel drawn by the call to join the new group and begin meeting regularly to pray and study together, to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit in living out the call as part of the life of the church.

Mission groups have various expectations of their members that involve on-going accountability. Joining a mission group implies a specific commitment to the spiritual disciplines or practices of that group. There is normally an exploration period to help all participants in the group confirm the joining.

Participation in a mission group is a balance of giving and receiving. Mission group members are called to give themselves to the group and its mission. In doing that, they receive support and affirmation for their unfolding lives as Christians. This giving and receiving is more a matter of commitment than one of maturity or strength.

When an individual participant in a group no longer feels an internal identification with the call of the group, he or she is expected to discuss this with the group, receive the blessing of the group, and leave to seek God's new call in some other place.

In Seekers Church, as in other faith communities growing out of the Church of the Saviour, mission groups are born, live out a natural life, and die. A mission group ends when the group can no longer live out its call. After an appropriate closure, participants are free to respond to some different call.

These mission groups are currently supporting the life of Seekers Church:

- **Celebration Circle (CC)** supports congregational worship.
- **The Eyes to See, Ears to Hear Peace Prayer Mission Group (Is2C)** maintains a community focus on prayerful work for justice and peace. The group is responsible for the weekly prayer for peace and justice early in our worship and has sponsored special events for the community such as vigils.
- **Learners and Teachers (L&T)** supports our School for Christian Growth.
- **Living Water (LW)** tends the inner life of Seekers with silent retreats at Dayspring Retreat Center, classes and workshops.
- **The Mission Support Group (MSG)** accompanies members of the group who have accepted a call to serve in some particular dimension of their lives, vocation, family or volunteer activism. During our gathering time at the beginning of worship the group coordinates sharing by individual Seekers of their understanding of God's call. In addition, they administer the Growing Edge Fund, and provide support to help Seekers discern God's call. A second, informal, mission support group meets regularly at Seekers Church after worship on Sunday mornings.
- **Earth & Spirit Mission Group (ESMG)** is called to support deeper spiritual connection with God through experience with the natural world. The group is called to reflect on, act for, and experience nature through both individual engagement and corporate mission.
- **Outreach Mission Group (OMG)** invites new people yearning for what Seekers Church offers and welcomes into Seekers those whom God sends our way. OMG works to develop and implement ways to be welcoming and inclusive, while reducing unnecessary barriers to connection and inclusion.
- **Time and Space (T&S)** is the steward of our ministry of place, caring for our building and supporting guests who use our space.

For more detail on the mission groups of Seekers Church, see the pamphlet "Mission Groups of Seekers Church," available at the church or on line in the "Life Together/Core Documents" section of the Seekers Church web site.

Other Groups

Other groups of Seekers are focused on particular interests of the members of the group. While these are not organized as mission groups with regular meetings and common spiritual practices, they do carry important parts of our life together. For instance, Martha's Mob is an informal gathering to provide periodic maintenance for the building, changing light bulbs and air conditioning filters, and doing other repairs that we need to keep our much-used building in good condition.

Many of the men of Seekers Church gather biweekly on a Saturday morning for breakfast and a chance to share with each other.

Ministry of Place

As we were planning the renovation of our place on Carroll Street, we knew that we wanted the building to be available for many different kinds of use. We planned for a flexible worship space with chairs that could be stacked on carts and rolled out of the way. Other rooms were designed to encourage informal conversation. In the first decade of our life in this renovated space, we have been blessed to see it become a popular place for meetings, drama, music, dance, movies, yoga, learning, and more. In a typical year there are about 800 events hosted by outside groups in our facility. The Time and Space mission group supports and oversees the use of our building and the work of our Building Use Coordinator, who receives a stipend from Seekers to coordinate use of our facilities.

Budget and Spending

Since Seekers Church came into being in 1976, several policies have been developed by the Stewards to guide how the budget will be developed. Each year, recommendations for the budget are drafted by the Financial Oversight Group (FOG) based on information gathered from the community. The Seekers Church budget is approved by the Stewards in the late fall for the following calendar year.

Financial administration is provided by our Treasurer in consultation with the FOG. The treasurer receives a stipend from Seekers to compensate her for her time and effort.

The Stewards have established a guideline that we will commit about as much of the annual budget to support for mission as we spend on the internal needs of the community. Currently about half of the gifts we receive from our offerings are

distributed to international and domestic organizations or through the Seekers' Holy Spirit Fund to people in need. Seekers also supports some groups that use our space by covering the cost of their use.

Recipients of Seekers funds are groups or organizations in which one or more member of Seekers has invested time and energy or has direct, first-hand knowledge. Suggestions for mission giving are welcomed from all Seekers. After the budget figures for the domestic and international giving categories have been approved by Stewards, two groups made up of all Seekers who care to participate in the decision-making meetings determine how the funds will be distributed in each of the two categories.

Domestic Giving

Seekers Church supports many missions that grew out of the Church of the Saviour, as well as other missions and ministries in the Washington metropolitan area. We tend to support many of the same organizations each year, as members of Seekers continue to be deeply invested in those places over time. At present, our funding goes to support organizations working in the areas of housing, family and individual support, education, arts education, health care, racial reconciliation, spiritual development, and retreat. As one manifestation of prophetic witness to the wider world, we devote part of our external giving to domestic groups engaging in public policy advocacy.

International Giving

As a community, Seekers Church is fortunate to have several active participants who are involved with charitable organizations in other countries. These Seekers help identify new opportunities for ministry as they travel and are often able to deliver our contributions personally. Seekers Church supports community development in villages in the highlands of Guatemala; a creative student support programs in Quetzaltenango (Guatemala), Ciudad Sandino (Nicaragua) and Puerto Morales (Mexico); a nutrition and eye care program in Uganda; an advocacy program promoting social justice in Nicaragua; the Bokamoso Life and Othandweni Day Care Centres in Winterveldt, South Africa; New Story Leadership promoting Israeli-Palestinian understanding; and Sustainable Organic Integrated Livelihoods (SOIL) a sustainable sanitation and compost program in Haiti. In each case, a Seeker maintains active links to organizations receiving our support.

Growing Edge Fund

Each year, we offer some financial assistance for individuals within Seekers Church who want support from the community as they respond to God's call in some new way, some "growing edge" of their lives. Recipients work with a sponsor to develop some appropriate form of accountability to the larger community. The Mission Support Group administers the Growing Edge Fund.

Holy Spirit Fund

There are times when our commitment to be in solidarity with those in need calls us to support individuals and families within the congregation. The annual budget includes funds that can be used at the discretion of the Servant Leadership Team to meet those temporary needs.

LEADERSHIP

Since our life as a church is based on responding to God's call as individuals and as a community, leadership comes from many sources. All Seekers are encouraged to offer their gifts as they are led by the Holy Spirit. Key elements of our life together are coordinated and led by Seekers Church mission groups. This creative diversity is guided by the Stewards and supported by the Servant Leadership Team (SLT).

Formal decisions within Seekers Church are the responsibility of the Stewards. Considerable effort is usually made to involve all Seekers in formal and informal discussions that contribute to decisions by the Stewards on significant matters. Issues are addressed from the pulpit, special meetings are held to seek out the views of all participants in Seekers Church, and discussions over coffee after worship often turn to the decisions facing the community. All Seekers are invited to attend the monthly meeting of Stewards up to the time when Stewards share more personally from their lives.

Our general traditions of openness and inclusivity sometimes create the expectation that all who participate in the life of Seekers will be involved in all decisions, or at least the important decisions that shape the community. Two issues are at stake. What gives Stewards the right to make the decisions? How should Stewards consult other Seekers before making decisions?

Authority Within Seekers Church

The organization of Seekers Church, as adopted from the Church of the Saviour, flows from the Free Church tradition, where the leading of the Holy Spirit is crucial. For example, we give priority attention to discerning and following God's call on us as individuals and as a community, and to developing and offering our gifts in service to others. Authority in Seekers does not derive from denominational membership or designation as clergy.

Authority in Seekers Church does derive from the Biblical tradition. This is exemplified by preaching based on the common lectionary and daily attention to the inspiration and guidance of the Word as embodied in this community and in scripture.

The authority of call is manifested by our mission groups, each with a particular call to nourish the life of the community or reach out to meet the deep needs around us. Mission group members share a commitment to the call of the group, weekly disciplines, and commitment to Christ and to each other.

In Seekers Church, authority for the health of the community rests with a group of core members. This group has adopted the formal name of "Stewards." In the tradition of the Church of the Saviour, the commitment to membership as a Steward is an ordination to ministry. This "stewardship" is open to all who feel called to that responsibility and choose to engage in the preparation that is required.

The authority of the Holy Spirit, the Bible and God's call on our lives are God-given and subject to constant fresh understanding. Discerning and implementing Christian servanthood in the structures of our lives is central to our call as a faith community. The roles and responsibilities of our Stewards, and the path to making the commitment as a Steward of Seekers Church warrant further description.

Stewards of Seekers Church

Stewards are those Seekers who have felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to commit themselves to discovering what it means to live out Gordon Cosby's vision of being "committed to Christ and one another in unlimited liability." Stewards offer their service to the community in the form of support, guidance, and responsibility for Seekers Church as a legally incorporated organization.

One of the reasons Seekers Church can welcome diversity and encourage informality within the community without losing the core of our identity and our sense of direction is the strength and length of the process for formally becoming a Steward. In Seekers Church all Stewards are ministers of the church, and together serve as the board of directors of the church. They may seek licensing by the DC government to perform weddings.

High expectations of Stewards help to sustain continuity in the life of Seekers Church. We want to be responsive to the Holy Spirit, but we also want to test the validity of those who claim the Spirit's leading, whether the leading concerns an individual call or the direction for the community as a whole. The Stewards look for the marks of the Holy Spirit in decision-making for the community and expect each other to be prayerful and reflective about the decisions we make.

We hope that our emphasis on this deliberate, reflective process will protect us from the extremism that has sometimes marked communities in the Free Church tradition. By placing the formal decision-making in the hands of those who are fully committed to all elements of the life of the community, we hope to nurture both a dynamic reliance on the Holy Spirit and a conservative reliance on reflection and accountability among the Stewards.

The explicit disciplines expected of Stewards may seem difficult or peculiar to those whose reference point is the tradition of other churches or volunteer organizations. Yet it is the authenticity and accountability of these intentional commitments to being Stewards that provides an important part of the foundation for authority in Seekers Church.

Participating in the Life of Seekers as a Steward

In the tradition of the Church of the Saviour, the commitment to membership as a Steward is an ordination to ministry that carries a commitment to support the faith journey of the community. Stewards are responsible for establishing policies for how Seekers Church uses its time, talent and financial resources. The Stewards serve many of the functions expected of trustees, elders, wardens or deacons in other Christian churches. In addition to participating in the life of the community, Stewards meet monthly to address organizational issues and the spiritual health of the community. These extended evening meetings include worship, prayer, sharing, decision making, and sharing a meal together. Most questions are resolved through discussion, prayer and consensus, although there is an occasional vote. Any Steward can bring questions and raise matters of policy. The structure of each Stewards meeting is developed by the Servant Leadership Team working with the moderator of the meeting.

Since Seekers Church functions on the basis of call rather than committee, many tasks normally expected of the “governing body” are performed by others who have a sense of leadership and growth in that particular area. Preaching, teaching both adults and children, and organizing special community celebrations are often provided by Seekers who are not Stewards, but who feel called to offer their gifts in a particular way for the health of the community. We welcome this diversity of gifts. Stewards are accountable to the entire congregation, and not merely to other Stewards.

The Disciplines of the Stewards

Becoming a mature member of the Body of Christ grows from the practice of our love of Jesus Christ, of others, and of ourselves. Our Stewards embrace common disciplines or spiritual practices that express that love and are necessary for personal growth in Christ and for the building of the faith community. The common disciplines are:

- Attending Sunday worship, usually with Seekers Church;
- Observing daily quiet time - prayer, scripture reading, and reflection or journaling. Scripture reading is usually guided by the ecumenical lectionary, also used for our Sunday worship.
- Giving proportionately of income to Seekers Church, beginning at ten percent;
- Making a silent retreat once a year, if possible with Seekers;
- Participating in an ongoing mission group with two or more Stewards, for living out the person’s chosen ministry, for building the Church, and for accountability in spiritual growth;
- Being accountable for the spiritual journey in a regular written report to the spiritual guide of the group;
- Attending Stewards’ meetings regularly;
- Expressing commitment to discovery and use of gifts, to education and growth in the faith, and to the pastoring and support of the community as a whole in the ongoing life of the Seekers Church;
- Reviewing the Stewards’ commitment with one’s group or another Steward and spending an hour in meditation prior to Recommitment Sunday in October.

- Adopted by Seekers Church Core Members in May 1987

- Revised by Seekers Stewards in June 2001

Why Become a Steward?

Individual Seekers are called to become Stewards for different reasons. Some are primarily called to be servant leaders for the community and live out that call through membership as a Steward. For others, the call to serve as a Steward grows out of the search for a deeper sense of belonging to community and more accountability for the individual spiritual journey. Stewards often find that deeper level of belonging in relationships with other Stewards, though for most this deeper level of belonging is found in the mission group. For others, the larger size of the Stewards’ group and the more explicit commitment to the ongoing life of the community are important to their sense of belonging.

Becoming a Steward

To complete the process of becoming a Steward usually requires several years. People do not move into membership as a Steward quickly, and some choose to be active participants in the community and make significant contributions to the life of the community for many years without becoming Stewards.

A prospective Steward usually begins to feel a call toward Stewardship by taking required classes in the School for Christian Growth. Generally, individuals will participate in a mission group for at least six months prior to becoming a Steward.

Required Classes

Prospective Stewards are asked to take at least six classes in the School for Christian Growth. The classes provide a way of experiencing the gift of a personal relationship with God and of sharing their faith, as well as exploring the concepts of commitment and community as it is expressed in Seekers Church. The requirement is to complete two classes each in Hebrew Scripture and New Testament, and one class each in Christian Growth and Christian Teachings. While credits from other CoS schools may be accepted, we encourage prospective Stewards to take as many of the classes as possible with the Seekers School to support their growth as a member of Seekers Church.

Sponsorship

The sponsorship period is a process to help the prospective Steward review his/her faith journey and readiness to assume the disciplines and commitments of a Steward. Generally, the sponsorship process will take one to three months. The sponsor is a Steward who may be supported by other Stewards in working with the prospective Steward. This sponsorship is more intensive than spiritual shepherding or mentoring and involves serious examination of whether the candidate is prepared to explore what it means to accept unlimited responsibility for this Body of Christ. The prospective Steward, under the guidance of the sponsor, will review:

- The commitment statement of the Stewards and the common disciplines, to reflect upon and to clarify his/her own readiness to assume these commitments;
- Classes taken in the School for Christian Growth;
- Her/his faith journey, in the form of a written spiritual autobiography, which will be shared with the sponsor, the mission group, and Stewards;
- The histories of the Church of the Saviour and Seekers Church, reflecting on their meaning for the individual's life in Christ;
- The meaning of ordination into the priesthood of all believers, and how that will be lived out in the life of Seekers Church.

The sponsorship process ends with sharing the autobiography with the Stewards and spending one hour in prayer and meditation in the chapel. The candidate is invited to attend a Stewards' meeting, and to read his/her spiritual autobiography at the next meeting. When this is completed, the candidate is welcomed as a Steward of Seekers Church. At worship on a Sunday soon thereafter, the new Steward publicly reads the Stewards' commitment and is welcomed by the congregation.

The Stewards Commitment Statement

I come today to make my commitment as a Steward of Seekers Church, a Christian community in the tradition of the Church of the Saviour, linked with the people of God throughout the ages. We worship God as triune being. Along with the Disciples, we believe:

- † *That the Creator — father and mother to us all, ground of our being — loves, sustains and calls us;*
- † *That Jesus is the Christ, who calls us to a ministry of love and justice;*
- † *That the Holy Spirit, as the empowering presence and breath of God, confronts and inspires us to do God's work in the world.*

We believe that we are all ministers of the Church, which is both universal, grace-filled body of Christ and fragile earthen vessel.

I commit to:

- † *Be a faithful witness to God's presence among us;*
- † *Nurture my relationship with God and Seekers Church through specific spiritual practices or disciplines;*
- † *Care for the whole of creation, beginning with the natural environment;*
- † *Foster justice and be in solidarity with the poor;*
- † *Work for the ending of all war, public and private;*
- † *Share responsibility for the spiritual growth of persons of all ages in the Seekers Church community;*
- † *Take responsibility for the organizational health of Seekers Church;*
- † *Respond joyfully with my life, as the grace of God gives me freedom.*

When I move from this place, I will join another expression of Christ's church.

*- Adopted by Seekers Church Core Members in May 1987
- Revised by Seekers Stewards in September 2001*

This commitment is based on the original commitment to membership in the Church of the Saviour. (See Appendix A.)

Maintaining and Ending Membership as a Steward

Seekers may make the commitment to membership as Stewards at any time during the year. All continuing Stewards recommit once each year on the third Sunday in October. The recommitment process includes reflection on the call of Seekers Church, meditation, discussion in the mission group and with the spiritual guide, and at least an hour in the chapel for reflection on the life of Seekers Church during the week before recommitment. Those who feel led to recommit read the Stewards statement in unison during worship on Recommitment Sunday. Those who do not feel led to recommit are encouraged to continue their participation in the life of Seekers Church. This annual recommitment helps each Steward be explicit and current in the level of their commitment to Seekers Church.

On some occasions, Stewards have requested a leave of absence. These requests are brought to the Stewards at the monthly meeting and discussed before such leave begins. Arrangements for continued accountability are developed based on each situation. These often include a continuing relationship with at least one Steward, occasional attendance at a Stewards meeting during the period of absence, or some regular written or visual presence at the monthly meeting (brought by the linking Steward). A definite period for the leave of absence is established at the beginning, so that all Stewards will have a common expectation about the length and reasons for the absence. At the end of the scheduled time, the absent Steward returns to a Stewards meeting to report on the absence, and to take whatever next steps are appropriate.

Any leave of absence ends before the next scheduled recommitment date, so that all Stewards are free to choose recommitment or not. Individual decisions to lighten the level of commitment can be challenging, but they are accepted as part of the process of balancing the spiritual development of each individual with the spiritual development of the community as a whole.

Servant Leadership Team

Since our beginning as a separate congregation, Seekers Church has called forth from the Stewards certain individuals who serve the community in a special way as members of our Servant Leadership Team (SLT). They guide the monthly Stewards' meetings, hold the pastoral needs of people not in mission groups, administer the Holy Spirit Fund, and encourage leadership by others. These Seekers serve on a regular, part-time basis, and are paid a stipend by Seekers Church.

The roles and responsibilities of members of the SLT have shifted over the years. It has been repeatedly clarified that they are not de facto clergy, are not paid for preaching, teaching, or liturgical leadership. Pastoral care in Seekers is provided in multiple ways. SLT members are charged with being available as needed, and with coordinating, supporting, and encouraging leadership by mission groups, other groups, and particular individuals. They receive agenda suggestions and plan for Stewards meetings. Members of the SLT are accountable to Stewards and receive a review every three years from a team of Stewards and Members. A list of current members of the SLT is at Appendix B.

Appendix A: Church of the Saviour Commitment

The commitment statement of the Stewards of Seekers Church is based on the original commitment to membership in the Church of the Saviour:

I come today to join a local expression of the Church, which is the body of those on whom the call of God rests to witness to the grace and truth of God. I recognize that the function of the Church is to glorify God in adoration and sacrificial service, and to be God's missionary to the world, bearing witness to God's redeeming grace in Jesus Christ.

I believe as did Peter that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I unreservedly and with abandon commit my life and destiny to Christ, promising to give Him a practical priority in all the affairs of life. I will seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness.

I commit myself, regardless of the expenditure of time, energy, and money to becoming an informed, mature Christian. I believe that God is the total owner of my life and resources. I give God the throne in relation to the material aspect of my life. God is the owner. I am the owner. Because God is a lavish giver I too shall be lavish and cheerful in my regular gifts. Realizing that Jesus taught and exemplified a life of love, I will seek to be loving in all relations with individuals, groups, classes, races, and nations and will seek to be a reconciler, living in a manner which will end all war, personal and public. I will seek to bring every phase of my life under the Lordship of Christ.

When I move from this place I will join some other expression of the Christian Church.

Appendix B: Current Stewards and Servant Leadership Team

Stewards

In January 2019 there were 18 individuals serving as Stewards of Seekers Church. They are listed according to the earliest year of their commitment to Seekers Church.

1976: Joan Dodge

1978: Marjory Bankson, David Lloyd

1980: Peter Bankson

1991: Margreta Silverstone, Deborah Sokolove-Yakushiji

1994: Brenda Seat, Keith Seat

1997: Ken Burton

1998: Trish Nemore

2000: Cynthia Dahlin

2004: Sandra Miller

2013: Jacqie Wallen

2014: Vincent Shepherd, Judy Lantz

2015: Michele Frome

2017: Glen Yakushiji

2018 Elizabeth Gelfeld

The Servant Leadership Team

Since our beginning as a separate congregation, Seekers Church has called forth from its membership individuals who serve as coordinators and support staff for the community. These Seekers serve on a regular, part-time basis, and are paid a stipend by Seekers Church.

Brenda Seat (2002 – present)

Trish Nemore (2012 – present)

David Lloyd (2016 – present)

Joan Dodge (2016 – present)

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