

A View of Self-Understanding: Ancient Israel and Seekers Church

In early 1997 Seekers Church was fully engaged in the search for a new home. The Headquarters of Church of the Saviour would be sold in the foreseeable future and Seekers Church would need a new place to worship. This seminar paper by Kevin Ogle offers his insiders perspective on this "Exodus" in the life of Seekers Church.

The Self-Understanding of Seekers Church as Compared with Aspects of the Self- Understanding/Identity of

Ancient Israel

Expressed in the Pentateuch*

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It is a particularly useful time for participants in Seekers Church to review our faith community's own founding story, for Seekers is in the midst of a process into which we entered in hopes of finding space in which to continue many aspects of our lives as a gathered and called church. Not surprisingly, this process was in response to a Church of the Savior/Gordon Cosby initiated process not entirely unlike the 1975-76 "New Land" process, which created the conditions for Seekers birth in the first place.

The "big story" for the community of Ancient Israel – the one that the Torah presents as shaping Israelite corporate life and self-understanding – was the exodus; the stories contained in the book of Genesis serve as a prologue to set the stage (1). Analogously, the prologue for Seekers is really the story of the founding and development of the Church of the Savior (C of S) (2).

Seeker's "Genesis" in the C of S New Lands process begun two decades ago (3) is clearly reflected in our founding story, which (I think) tends to be seen by us as a continuation and re-appropriation of the promise and tradition of the original Church of Saviour. As recounted for me in a recent phone conversation with co-founding/co-calling pastor Sonya Dyer, Seeker's founding story goes something like the following.

Sometime in the spring of 1975, C of S founding pastor Gordon Cosby announced that to respond faithfully to his own sense of call to attend to the needs of the various missions and service ministries that had emerged out of C of S mission groups and because of the church's size [110 official members and 40 official interns], he felt he needed to be relieved of his current role pastoring the church and that the leadership from within the church needed to be developed and broadened. He suggested as a possible solution dividing into different combinations of community cohering around different worship centers. This announcement caused a fair amount of consternation and dismay among many in the church. It also led to the election of an eight/nine person group (The New Land Servant Group), which was charged with the task of discerning an appropriate response to Gordon's announcement. Fred Taylor and Sonya Dyer were a part of that group, which met for nine months, usually twice per month in the very early morning. As part of that process, the group invited dialogue from the

larger congregation, and then in a two day retreat at Dayspring (4), produced a recommendation written by Wes Michaelson which reflected the group's process of discernment, and which the C of S Church Council accepted.

The paper called for those willing to offer leadership around particular visions of ministry or community to "sound those calls" in the way that call-sounding for Mission Groups had already been established. But these calls were to be to new worshipping communities, which would as a baseline embrace the established core membership disciplines of C of S and which would be affirmed by the Church Council. It was envisioned that the new sister communities would be comprised initially of clusters of the various 22 C of S mission groups that existed at the time. Gordon embraced this proposal in a sermon early in 1976 that called for members of the church to respond. Fred Taylor did so by approaching Sonya, and after dialogue, they decided to offer themselves as a paid leadership team for a worshipping community where Fred would offer his preaching gifts and Sonya her gifts for liturgy, among other things. Unlike others who were offering potential leadership at the time, they did not have a vision of being called around a particular external call, but rather, as Sonya and Fred put it, "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." The name "Seekers" was chosen because of a passage from Robert Greenleaf's then forthcoming book, *Servant Leadership*, where Greenleaf wrote about the connections between prophecy and servant leadership; Sonya and Fred chose it because they wanted to call a community that would "be intentionally on the way, and committed to bring forth prophetic leadership from contemporary sources." (5)

As "founding shepherds" of Seekers, Fred and Sonya were clear that they were calling forth an independent community, and not simply relying on the vision or charisma of Gordon. They were also clearly calling a community that did not have the same requirement for commitment to the kind of unifying corporate mission that the other new communities had. To pass muster with the church council Fred and Sonya retained a requirement for membership that in addition to participation in a mission group would include commitment to an external mission. But they were clear that they were primarily seeking a gathering around a common worship life, not a particular external mission/call. Sonya is clear that the different-ness of the vision she and Fred initially offered colored Seeker's relationship with the other C of S communities and the continuing C of S structure from then forward.

This immediately manifested itself in several ways. One was the rejection by the ecumenical staff (Gordon, Elizabeth O'Connor, and Bill Branner) of the suggestion Fred and Sonya made to initiate regular leadership meetings with the leaders of the (originally five) other new C of S faith communities; Sonya and Fred had hoped that such meetings could serve as a place of support, encouragement and deepening of the development of leadership in the new communities. Another difference was that while the other communities invited Gordon to preach regularly, Seekers did not, continuing to live out its more independent story. A third is that Seekers was named and came to experienced itself as an "outsider community" among the other C of S communities.

Sonya sees the original call/vision of Seekers unfolding consistently over the years in the development and growth of

Seekers. From the beginning, Seekers did not have formal intern members, and cultivated a more inclusive style that resulted in a less isolated formal membership and more mutuality between those who were official members and others in the Seekers community. In addition, within the general structure of the C of S pieties/spiritual disciplines, more space was made for creative theological work, particularly – though certainly not exclusively – feminist theology and liturgy. Because worship was the starting point for Seekers as a community, ritual has been central, and the weekly common lectionary texts have been a focus of reflection, prayer, and interpretation connecting Seekers to the ecumenical church from the earliest years.

So goes one brief "authorized" version of our founding story. The several versions of the Exodus story shaped the self-understanding and identity of the Israelite community, and that story was given expression in Judaism's rituals, customs, and laws. So too, Seekers' founding story orients us, and our rituals and expressions of community life reflect its impact on Seekers' self-understanding and development – however aware or not of this one may be. As I talked with Sonya to identify important Seekers rituals that express this church's identity, I was surprised to learn that our ritual of community sharing at Circle Time prior to moving worship into the Chapel has evolved from what at first was a Sunday morning breakfast! Those breakfasts served to gather adults and children to reflect in word and through drama on the biblical texts for the week.

Another facet of Seekers' worship practice arises out of Seekers' original commitment to creativity and the involvement/evoking of artists from the church. That (of course) has to do with our ever-changing alter as a visual

focus for appreciation and reflection in worship each Sunday, not to mention the hangings which frame it and the wooden cross on the wall above the alter (6). Commitment to a truly open-pulpit is another expression of this church's identity as a community of mutuality, creativity, and openness to the gifts of all. (I doubt there are many churches who had 27 different preachers out of the 52 Sunday opportunities in the last calendar year, with a generally equal balance of women and men fulfilling that function.)

Our worship service seeks to be inclusive in many ways. Perhaps most important theologically is our current practice of moving into a circle to share communion, with both a woman and man presiding at the table as was the case originally in Seekers – though as only a monthly celebration of our inclusivity. This practice is evocative of Seekers' founding story perhaps in much the same way as the Exodus 12 instructions for observing the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread helps evoke the founding exodus narrative for those who looked to the Pentateuchal story to understand and appropriate their identity (7). Of course, like all Christian observances of the Eucharist, Seekers' observance recounts a Last Supper that was also a Passover feast (8). We celebrate in that time the inclusive Reign of God which Jesus proclaimed and the inclusive community his Spirit called forth in response, and are invited to consider our own calls to incarnate God's love.

Seeker's weekly worship service reflects a process of welcoming the gifts of all, with the Celebration Circle Mission Group providing primary coordination and liturgical leadership in shaping the structure of our worship life and keeping it in the context of the Christian liturgical year. Our weekly corporate prayer time, in which all are free to

verbalize particular prayers of confession, praise/thanksgiving, and petition/intercession – and which concurrently promotes silent prayer and reflection – may well be the true theological center of our worship (9). As such, it is interesting and even instructive to compare the way Seekers Church prays during this liturgical time to some of the ways in which Israel talks to God in the Pentateuch (10). Seeker's corporate prayer time begins with a formal liturgical confession, which typically confesses some way/ways in which we human beings "miss the mark." (11) Individual spoken prayers, which usually follow, often echo the theme of the liturgy – a theme of guilt often found in the Psalms, to be sure. But occasionally one hears a straightforward or even challenging individual confession of anger or frustration with God, of the sort found in Exodus 5: 22-23, where Moses complains to God: "[Pharaoh] has mistreated this people, and you have done nothing at all to deliver your people." (5: 23, NRSV). Or not unlike later in the story (Ex. 17), when Moses complains that those same people are now ready to stone him because of their physical thirst in the wilderness. Similarly, Seekers' time of thanksgiving and praise usually contains numerous expressions of appreciation for God's presence and gifts in the life of individuals and the community; occasionally, artistic expressions of praise are shared outside this formal time which approach and even at times exceed the exuberance and beauty of the songs of Moses and Miriam celebrating the deliverance through the Sea of Reeds (Ex. 15). Finally, Seekers prayers of intercession and petition during this time reveal an understanding of God as friend/partner that is not foreign to Israel. We assume (sometimes the liturgist explicitly states) that God hears our silent or inarticulate groaning and that God identifies with those who suffer (as in Ex. 2: 23-25). We prayerfully petition God to intercede on behalf of loved ones and vulnerable people. Less often, but still quite noticeably, one hears prayers on behalf of those who are somehow – or by many – viewed as God's enemies (e.g. during the U.S. – Iraqi war,

Suddam Hussein), as in Abraham's intercession on behalf of Sodom in Gen. 18 (However, I don't think Seekers tend to view God as "sparing" such persons/forces simply because we intercede out of more compassion for them than God has, as it seems is the case in the Gen. 18 account). Finally, it seems that in our verbal prayers in gathered worship, anyway, we avoid the appearance of straightforwardly bargaining with God – unlike, for instance, Jacob did at Bethel (Gen. 28:10ff) and Penuel (Gen. 32). Clearly, the way in which we pray to God reflects some diversity of theological understandings, just as the Pentateuch expresses different theological understandings and different glimpses of God in the stories it tells.

Seekers' commitment to our children and youth is reflected in their participation in Circle Time, the weekly children's message in worship (offered by different adults and children), age-appropriate Sunday School classes, youth-led worship services for the whole church (12), and a tradition of rituals celebrating the life events of Seekers children. A related issue – since those children who have "grown-up" and undertaken geographic moves to attend college have not recently been replaced by births or new younger families – is Seekers' aging. Support and inclusion of the gifts and limitations of our older members has thus become a topic of explicit concern in the community. (13)

Other important traditions and ritual forms which provide avenues for exploration of call and faith journey are core structures inherited from C of S. It appears to me that Seekers has faithfully expressed those structures, but of course in Seekers own "style." Two of those key structures would be the School of Christian Living classes (14) and the formation and continuation of Mission Groups around various internal and external calls as primary places of accountability and spiritual growth in community. The spring and fall Seekers silent retreats at Dayspring would fall into

this category of inherited but stylistically shaped traditions, as would the annual recommitment process in September. The recommitment process is now expanded to invite a less rigorous/defined recommitment to participation in the community from those who aren't "core-members," but does not neglect the importance of reflection and recommitment to the traditional C of S pieties that are a key covenant of those choosing to remain or become core members. (15)

In fact, it seems that those traditional C of S pieties and accountability structures are seen as so foundational and constitutive of Seekers life that those pieties and that accountability structure function for Seekers in much the same way that the Decalogue functions in the Pentateuch. According to Whybray, the Decalogue expresses "a series of basic principles of conduct ... which came to be recognized in Israel ... as summing up what was essential to Israel's life as commanded by God." (16) "Keeping the commandments" as a way to keep faith and continuity with the founding story, sustain the community, and receive God's promise was thus understood as central to who the Israelites were, and a key to the nation's survival after the exile. Hence the famous "Shema" text of Deut. 6, which serves as something of a credo for Judaism and calls the people to faithful observance of the Decalogue (recounted a second time in the Pentateuch in Deut. 5:6-21) that "it might go well" with them and that they might "multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of [their] ancestors has promised." (Deut. 6:3. NRSV). (17)

For Seekers, as in the original Church of the Savior, the core disciplines of "membership" are associated with Gordon Cosby, just as the Pentateuch associates the Decalogue with Moses. There is, then, a certain non-negotiable, community-

sanctioned, and transcendent quality accorded to them. Individuals may not be able to achieve the standards expressed in the disciplines, but that is not cause to question the standards (usually). Rather, it is the individual's willingness to commit to them that comes into question. Seeker's commitment to inclusivity has prompted considerable dialogue about this, but by and large the "blue-print" is affirmed as essential to the exodus from culturally captive Christianity that is attributed to C of S's model for church or Christian community. (18) Similarly, the religious and ethical principles expressed by the Decalogue are affirmed as essential for Judaism to preserve its identity and community life, and the later Biblical prophetic critiques of cultural and societal practices of injustice or oppression are rooted in the Decalogue, and not in opposition to it.

One key prophetic movement of Seekers' inclusive identity in recent years has found expression both in a formal change in Seeker's Call in 1990 and a Mission Group that was called into being shortly thereafter. The change in our "Call" (a creed-like statement of identity that is an attempt to define our life together) (19) added an important sentence beyond the original 1976 version, which expressed a commitment to "Christian servanthood through 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." The added sentence was: "We desire and welcome participation in Seekers of women and men of every race and sexual orientation." The discernment process that led to the new sentence in the call and the creation of the Spirit and Sexuality Mission Group have helped open doors to fuller participation and leadership in Seekers of gifted individuals who otherwise might not have felt welcome to participate and lead – though clearly there is much room for continued growth in our living our commitment to

inclusivity and diversity as well as in Seekers' understanding of the relationship between sexuality and spirituality.

Less formal, but still important, ritual expressions of our Seekers identity that come immediately to mind are our weekly obligation to scurry out of our shared worship space and to reconfigure it for the service Gordon Cosby leads at 11:30 AM; other ritual expressions include the traditional Seekers after worship coffee hour upstairs, the spring and fall community overnights at Wellspring, and more recently the monthly community sing-alongs led by Jessie and Glen and hosted in different Seekers' homes – all of these informal ritual times provide opportunities for connection, support, and community.

In a sermon this past fall, Deborah Sokolove playfully suggested – as Seekers confronted the need to find new worship space in light of the eventual sale of the Mass. Ave. building and the presumed division of the proceeds among the 9 former C of S communities – that it is a little like having to embark on our own exodus journey. She didn't want to push that analogy very far, however, because C of S and Mass. Ave. can't really be successfully compared to Egypt. But at lunch this month, in response to my question, she did suggest to me that maybe the Pentateuchal story with more relevance for the story of Seekers at this time is the call of Abraham and Sarah to found a new nation. Deborah also suggested that the Pentateuchal story for interpreting the C of S New Lands – at least from a Seekers perspective – would be the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11). I found that an interesting idea, too ...

But this year's Hebrew Bible Common Lectionary text for the Second Sunday in Lent (2/23/97) is part of the story of Abraham and Sarah's call. And currently Seekers seems focused

on trying to discern the shape and context of its future call and legacy. Perhaps it would be fruitful to explore the parallels. The story of the patriarchs is a set of narratives by which post-exilic Judaism understands its ancient history and identity. It begins with Abraham's call in Gen. 12, and ends – after recounting Isaac's, Jacob's and Joseph's stories in turn – with the family's resettlement in Egypt at Joseph's invitation, and then the natural deaths of Jacob and Joseph there; again, setting the stage for the big Exodus story. (20) Later, the Israelites look back on/construct the unlikely series of events recounted in these narratives as constitutive of who they are as a people, so that the words prescribed in Deuteronomy (26:5) for the liturgy for the annual presentation of the first fruits in the central sanctuary are these: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien..." (21)

But what is clear from the outset in this story of Abram and Sarai's call and their stumbling attempts to follow and believe in it is that the whole enterprise seems so highly unlikely and so highly at risk. First, Abram, at age 75, and Sarai, at 66, are called by God, out of the land of Haran where they have presumably settled into somewhat disappointed childless retirement, on the promise that God will make of them a great nation, through whom all the families of the earth will be blessed. And this promise is to be actualized through an heir who is not yet born. But Abraham and Sarah (still Abram and Sarai at this point) along with Abraham's nephew Lot take God at God's word, pack up all their possessions and people, and "set forth to go to the Land of Canaan." (Gen. 12:1-6). There, God appears to Abraham, and says, this is it! – "To your offspring I will give this land." (v. 7). But what does Abraham, do? He builds an altar to God there yet keeps on moving! (22) One way to read the story of the next 25 years of adventure and delay up until Chapter 17

might be that it results from Abram's inability to accept a simple gift.

Nonetheless, several interesting things happen as a result. They go to Egypt and Sarah is taken into Pharaoh's harem because of Abraham's fear for his own life and willingness to trade on her beauty in a time of famine. She is therefore presented as his sister. God has to invoke plagues to get them out of that. Then Lot has to be rescued from an alliance of eastern kings after he and Abraham split up. Next, at Sarah's suggestion, Abraham sleeps with her slave-girl Hagar, in a successful attempt to conceive a son, Ishmael; Abraham is now 86, Sarah 77.

But God keeps affirming the promise, in Chapter 17 giving Abraham at 99 and Sarah at 90 their traditional names, but requiring circumcision on the part of the males of their household as (we might note, painful) evidence of their good faith. In the next year Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed by God, but first Abraham's intercession in arguing with God about God's plans has the effect of saving Lot, though not Lot's wife (19:26), who suffered the fatal misfortune of looking back after they reach Zoar. Then they move again (Chapter 20) to Gerar, and Abraham uses the "Sarah is my sister" routine again with the result that the household is enriched with a lavish gift of sheep, cattle, and slaves from the flustered King Abimelech, who is warned by God in a dream not to sleep with Sarah. Finally, Isaac is born, so named, as Sarah says, because God has brought laughter for her, and everyone who hears will laugh with her. (21:6).

This is an interesting, somewhat disturbing, and clearly entertaining founding story – one that at this point in

Genesis is still unfolding. It helps claim a special relationship with God for Israel, whose namesake will be Isaac's second son. But what implications does it suggest for Seekers, if any? Well, we are an aging community. We are middle-class residents of the Greater Washington area, which means we can hardly be considered dispossessed. If Abraham and Sarah might have been comfortable but discontent and concerned about their future and whether or not they would leave any ongoing legacy, I think Seekers shares a similar situation.

But the story of Abraham and Sarah, as presented by the biblical text, affirms their willingness to act, even if it almost parodies the way in which they tend to act without full appreciation of God's ability to grant the promised gift of an heir as well as their inability to simply receive the Promised Land when they arrive.

It seems to me that Seekers might just be being called to act – and that it is likely we will have difficulty seeing any space as Promised, and difficulty claiming any such space even if we can see it as a potential base for this community's call. And that some sort of pain – though at least not circumcision – will be required for Seekers to leave the home in which this community has come of age. But the promise of our tradition (including the Pentateuch) is that God will likely be a partner with us as long as we are willing to act to claim the promise of God's Call for us – even as we (or perhaps even God) make mistakes along the way.

All that said, I would add that as I worked with this paper in recent weeks and Seekers has worked with the practical and process issues of a vision for itself that might be "place-based," it has been intriguing and energizing to see the ideas

for a vision of Seekers' ministries/callings being generated around the possibility of purchasing the property on Penn. Ave. SE Could that be promised space, through which Seekers might be a blessing to others?

NOTES

(*) This is written rather sermonically with an eye to distribution among Seekers as a "reflection piece." Hence, footnotes are used to explain/denote information generally known/available to Seekers Church participants.

(1) Deeley lectures, 1/9-10/97, compare Whybray's Introduction to the Pentateuch (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995) at 29.

(2) One way, perhaps, of interpreting that C of S story might be as something of an exodus from the bland, culturally captive expressions of Christian faith that characterized post-WW II mainline religion in the USA. (See the section of this paper which attempts a brief comparison of the C of the S tradition of small group spiritual accountability with the way the Ten Commandments helped shaped community life in Judaism, at page 11 below). C of the S "officially" began in the fall of 1946 when Gordon and Mary Cosby and a nucleus of a dozen or so people who had been meeting in homes in Alexandria began the search for a regular meeting place where they could establish a church with "a distinctly ecumenical spirit." The next year, with little money on hand, they purchased a site in Washington, DC. The group's life was informed in part by Gordon Cosby's experiences as a Chaplain in the European "theater" of WW II. Elizabeth O'Connor's books have chronicled

the story and significant dimensions of the life of the Church of the Savior community. Among those published by Harper & Row are Call to Commitment (1963), Journey Inward, Journey Outward (1968, out-of print[op]), Our Many Selves (1971, op), The New Community (1976, op) Letters to the Scattered Pilgrims (1979, op). Also available from Word Books are Eighth Day of Creation ((1971) and Cry Pain, Cry Hope (1987). The Servant Leadership school self-published Servant Leaders, Servant Structures (1991). All in-print books are available through the Potter's House book service (202/ 232-5483).

(3) Documented in Chapter 5 of Elizabeth O'Connor's The New Community (Harper & Row, 1976, op).

(4) The C of S retreat center near Germantown, Maryland.

(5) A Guide to Seekers Church: A Christian Community In the Tradition of the Church of the Saviour. Fifth Edition, October 1996, Washington, DC. pp. 5-6.

The Greenleaf passage is printed in this pamphlet, and reads as follows:

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 to a better way and to a personality better able to live fully and serenely in these times. The variable that marks some periods as barren and some as rich in prophetic vision is the interest, the level of seeking, the responsiveness of the hearers. The variable is not in 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 own growth and service. (Servant Leadership, Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1977, p. 8).

(6) Those able to be present in Seekers' Feb. 2 worship service had an opportunity to specifically celebrate and see lifted up this important feature of Seekers' life.

(7) Whybray, pp. 74-75.

(8) Deeley seminars, 1/20-21/97.

(9) Though this prayer time does not include our children and youth, who are in their Sunday School classes by then. Conversely, it could also be argued that, as in many Protestant churches, the sermon/interpretation of scripture/preaching is the theological center of Seekers worship.

(10) Using the texts on prayer in the life of Israel from the syllabus for this class initially scheduled for 1/20/97, and taking as my point of departure class discussion from that date.

(11) For example, in the season of Epiphany this year, the responsive confession was:

Leader: The Light comes into the world.

People: Our eyes, long used to darkness, Close tight against the bright light. We turn away and will not see.

L: The Light comes to reveal the truth.

P: But we are lost in logic, and miss the reflections of God's appearance. We turn away and will not see.

Unison: Forgive us, Light of Life, when we turn away, and will not see you in the world around us. [After "Individual Prayers of Confession" the Leader then provides an Assurance, in this case: "You are forgiven, for the Light has come, and the Glory of God surrounds us. Amen."]

(12) The Youth Clowns of Seekers presented the Word in the December 15 Sunday Service, and described what they saw as the ten essential marks of Seekers. Hence, some of the informal traditions/rituals of Seeker were named. Accordingly, suggested the youth, "you can tell you are a Seeker if—

10. You can't understand what's on the altar.

9. Going to the bathroom doubles your Stairmaster exercise [the Cof S Hdqtrs. building in which we worship has no restrooms on the main floor, and some steep stairs].

8. You can ignore the quieting bell at 11:30 A.M. [when the C of S "Gateway Service" led by Gordon Cosby begins downstairs while Seekers upstairs coffee hour is going strong].

7. You get a new Christmas message every year.

6. You are old enough to preach when you can see over the lectern.

5. You drink grape juice out of midget cups.
4. You like Manning's coffee. [referring to Sonya Dyer's husband, who typically brews the coffee before coffee hour each Sunday]
3. You don't know/can't remember/can't decide if God is a He or She.
2. It takes you longer to decide how you'll decide than to decide.
1. You can't explain your church to your friends."

As reported in the January issue of Soundings, Seekers monthly newsletter.

(13) Leading to last fall's class in the Seekers School of Christian Living on Aging and Diminishment and it's "Vision for Seekers As We Age." Again, reported in the January issue of Soundings.

(14) The core curriculum of the original C of S "School of Christian Living" was apparently adapted by (current Seeker participant) Jackie McMakin along with Rhoda Nary and published by Harper and Row (1984) as Doorways to Christian Growth. It has now been reissued in four volumes, all also available through Potter's House: Encountering God in the Old Testament: Meeting Jesus in the New Testament; Journeying in the Spirit; and Discovering Your Gifts, Vision, and Call.

(15) See A Guide to Seekers Church (note 6, above) at 10, 18-21. Those who attend regularly and identify themselves as part of the church make the following commitment statement: I

am a Seeker. The Seekers Church is my community of faith. I acknowledge that I am called by God to be part of this community. I have joy and pain to share, and joy and pain to bear. As part of the Seekers community, I am a growing Christian. I will be intentional and accountable about naming my relationship to this community, sharing my gifts from God with the community and the wider world, and living out my commitment of faith. (10, italics in original).

By contrast, the core members recommit to the following more comprehensive Statement of Commitment: I come today to make my commitment to the Seekers Church, a Christian Community in the tradition of Church of the Savior. Seekers Church is an ecumenical body of Christians who are linked with the people of God throughout the ages. We worship God as triune being. We believe:

+That the Creator – father and mother to us all, ground of being – loves, sustains, and calls us;

+That Jesus is the Christ, who for our sake lived, was crucified, died, rose from the dead, and now bids 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 of God's presence among us;

+ To nurture my relationship with God and Seekers through specific disciplines;

+To foster justice and be in solidarity with the poor;

- +To work for the ending of all war, personal and public;
- + To share responsibility for the spiritual growth of persons of all ages in my community;
- +To 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.

18, italics in original).

The requirements for core membership are listed below at note 18.

(16) Whybray at 118.

(17) Deeley seminar, 1/13, 21/97.

(18) Seekers' "The Disciplines of Membership" and their rationale are enumerated in A Guide to Seekers... at p. 20:

Becoming a mature member of the Body of Christ grows from the practice of our love of Jesus Christ, of others, and ourselves. Core members of Seekers Church embrace common disciplines which express that love and which are necessary for personal growth in Christ and for the building of the church. The common disciplines are:

- +Attending Sunday worship, usually with Seekers;
- +Observing daily quiet time – prayer, scripture reading, and reflection or journalling. Scripture reading is usually guided by the ecumenical lectionary, also used for Sunday worship.

- +Giving proportionately of income, to Seekers, beginning at ten percent;
- +Making retreat once per year, if possible with Seekers;
- +Participating in an ongoing mission or support group with two or more core members, for living out the persons chosen ministry, for building the Church, and for accountability in spiritual growth;
- +Being accountable for the spiritual journey in a written report to the group;
- +Attending member's meeting [usually one/month] regularly;
- +Expressing commitment to discovery and use of gifts, to education and growth in faith, and to the pastoring and support of the community as a whole in the ongoing life of the Seekers Community;
- +Reviewing the core membership commitment with one's group or another core member and spending an hour in meditation prior to Recommitment Sunday in October. – Revised by Seekers Core Members in May of 1987

(19) "The life of Seekers Church is defined by our call..." A Guide..., at 5

(20) Whybray, p. 49ff.

(21) Deeley seminar, 1/21/97.

(22) Deeley seminar, 1/9/97.