

“The Word 20 Years Later” by Several Seekers



June 30, 2024

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Peter Bankson: The Decision to Buy on Carroll Street

Today we're celebrating the 20th anniversary of the walk when we carried the processional cross and banner up the hill from

Dupont Circle to mark our arrival here. But the move from 2025 Massachusetts Avenue began long before that sunny Sunday afternoon.

Marjory describes the beginning of our pilgrimage in *Stalking the Spirit: in a Do-It-Yourself Church*:

“Gordon Cosby stunned everyone at the C of S council meeting in October 1992 by questioning whether there was enough common ground to hold the C of S faith communities together. ‘We need new wineskins for new wine,’ he said. ‘We have nine communities. There is growing divergence among them; oneness cannot be maintained.’”

Gordon recommended that Church of the Saviour be dissolved, and a new legal structure be developed to permit each faith community to operate with total autonomy, along with a separate corporation to hold any common property.

We proposed taking on stewardship of the building in the same way Dayspring Church had assumed stewardship for the land at Dayspring farm. There was a long, and complex, process for the Church of the Saviour to discern whether to keep the building or sell it and put the proceeds into the missions and ministries of the nine offspring churches.

On June 27, 2004, in our first Sunday worship in this sanctuary, Keith Seat reviewed the long path we had followed to get here. I’ll share some of his observations from 20 years ago. He said:

“It was in 1995 that Marjory, Diane Wilkens and I [Keith] strategized and negotiated to see how Seekers might be able to stay at 2025, when the Church of the Saviour decided to sell that building. We had meetings and discussions with both Gordon Cosby and Bill Branner, but couldn’t afford the CofS

headquarters, much less the renovations it needed.”

Later that year the CofS council decided to sell the building and move on, and we began a serious search for a new home. Keith continues:

“In 1996 and 1997, Pat, Doug Dodge, Molly McMurray, and I comprised the Homemakers Mission Group and worked intensively with Seekers to consider renting or sharing and all other possible alternatives for our church home. The ultimate conclusion was that we needed to find and purchase, or build, our own building.”

The Homemakers found several interesting places, including a dilapidated old house and attached storefront across the street from a METRO Station. Sound familiar?

Again, from Keith’s sermon 20 years ago:

“This Carroll Street property had been briefly on the market, was taken off for some time, and then came back on the market in the Fall of 1999. After some hesitation about whether it could actually work for us, growing interest blossomed into a full discernment process within the community. Despite uncertainties and serious initial questions within Seekers, the process unfolded much more easily this time, and the final decision to purchase this building was very nearly unanimous.

“We purchased the building on February 9, 2000; Mary Carol and I (Keith) went to the formal closing transferring title to Seekers. I thought the hard part was over. All that remained was to sort out the details of the renovation, hire a good contractor, and move in a few months later!”

Keith’s sermons commemorating our arrival and our 10th anniversary in 2014 have lots more interesting details. His sermon on June 20, 2004 can be found at <https://www.seekerschurch.org/keith-seat-qwhen-we-get-to-carr-oll-streetq-the-future-is-now/> and his sermon ten years later

can be found at <https://www.seekerschurch.org/when-we-get-to-carroll-street-the-first-ten-years-by-keith-s/> .

Our move, from the headquarters of the Church of the Saviour on Massachusetts Avenue to our own home here in Takoma DC took a long time, but it provided a lot of opportunities for the Holy Spirit to show us our Way. Jeanne Marcus, who was with us through this process, will offer a few reflections on how the Spirit moved among us in that time of transition.

Jeanne Marcus: The Dream and the Vision

In 1999, as we Seekers began to turn our attention to a very specific property in a very specific location, there was a sense in some members that we needed a time of deep discernment to consider how a move could change the character or essence of Seekers.

For instance: Seekers had been in Dupont Circle, near the center of D.C.; but the new space was just a block from D.C. boundaries with Maryland. Were we turning our backs on our brothers and sisters in Northern Virginia?

Or this: as renters, we could pass on a significant portion of Seekers tithes and contributions to ministries outside ourselves. It was unlikely that this could continue: how would that change us?

Or maybe most importantly: a core understanding was that our lives, as individuals and as a community, could and should be lived in response to discerning God's liberating and empowering call to us. In the church, if no one felt 'called' to make something happen, we would lay it down.

As long as we rented a building, our worship reflected a God whose presence was with us in a movable ark, not a building we owned and operated. How would that change?

With these real concerns, the community met for a daylong retreat very near to Rolling Ridge. I believe that our gathering in the beauty and presence of deep woods was essential for what we did that day. There, we had space for all to speak and to hear each other.

In the afternoon, we were sent out to walk the land and to bring back something that had spoken to us about the community journey we were on together. I have no recollection at all of what I brought back. But I do remember what Keith brought back: he showed us a piece of a tree limb whose core was rotting. Keith explained that it was a seed tree: in the process dissolution of an older tree, a rich soil and container was created for the germination and growth of a new generation of trees. I felt the energy in the room shift into a very different quality. And it was as if we had all come together there for this exact moment.

Marjory Bankson: Notes on Financing the Building.

- **1994 Church of the Saviour members vote to sell 2025 Mass Ave headquarters**
 - Of 125 dual members/21 are Seekers >>>>Seekers needs a new home

- **1996 Financial Oversight Group (FOG) forms/Bill Branner turns over financial affairs;**
 - Stewards vote to hold outreach giving at the current level, keep expenses down and use net of \$70,000 to start our Future Fund (FF). From then in, put net income into the FF.

- **Nov, 1998 Pat Conover** circulates a paper on giving from gratitude rather than duty;
 - Recommends giving from our wealth rather than tithing from income;

- Suggests we can afford a building with a combination of gifts & loans from the congregation
- **Feb. 2000 ... we purchase 276 Carroll St building for \$345,000 using ALL of the Future Fund, leaving NO money for renovation.**
- **May, 2000...Stewardship Group** (Pat, Trish, Rachel, Emily, Kate and Marjory) brainstorms possibilities for financing renovation ourselves. Results are:
 - Sermons on money as a spiritual issue
 - Classes in the School (Belonging, Decision-making, Stewardship & Space)
 - Spirit Guides group forms to deepen life in mission groups
- **October, 2000...Bulletin insert results in promise of \$906,000...enough to start**
 - One-time gifts: \$247k
 - Loans from 40 people: \$659k
 - 0-5% interest; repayment in 1-10 years
- **Sept, 2001 ... more loans needed ... added \$59k for a TOTAL OF \$1.2 MILLION**
 - Increments of \$1,000
 - 0-8% interest, paid annually
 - Repayment when needed or at discretion of Seekers
 - In the end, we had 24 loans; average 5% interest

We were able to hold our external giving at the same level for the next ten years while we paid off the loans, beginning with

those at the highest interest. The final loan, by Kate Cudlipp at 0% interest, was paid off to settle her estate at the time of her death in July, 2011.

Deborah Sokolove: Reflecting on Bread and Roses

The anguish with which the bad news about costs was greeted led to an avalanche of emails and many special meetings of the Building Development and Stewardship teams. In the interest of economy, it seemed that many members of the congregation were willing to strip out every bit of beauty, comfort, and elegance from the plan to renovate the unloved building that we had bought. Others argued that we should, as Brenda put it in one of those emails,

focus more on what we want to do with it and how the things we have planned so far fit into what we are feeling called by God to be about, rather than just thinking about what each piece is going to cost us monetarily. I think if we only focus on that, we may cost ourselves spiritually, by creating a space that is dark and dingy, or unfit to be used for a call that could emerge. I want to hold onto the bigger picture even as we do some necessary bean counting!

The Sunday morning before a congregational meeting in October 2000, at which detailed recommendations would be presented, I offered a sermon titled "Bread and Roses." In it, I asked

Is this the time for Seekers to "dream big"? Can we, should we, try for both bread and roses? What will happen if we fail? What will happen if we find we cannot pay back the loans so generously offered by members of the congregation with the resources to do so? Will we have to sell the building, default on the loans, disband as a church? Worse, perhaps, will we have to cut back on our outward giving, despite our intention not to do so? Or, if we cut back the plan to bare bones, if we eliminate all the lovely touches that can make the difference between an OK place, and one filled with light for the eyes,

delight for the senses, will we always be sorry that we missed a golden moment?

<https://www.seekerschurch.org/deborah-sokolove-bread-and-roses/>

In the end, we did make a lot of cuts, but we kept the great circle and skylight in this room; the big, glass skylight on the other side of the dividing wall; and the grace-filled, comfortable kitchen which Brenda designed and in which we have gathered more times than anyone can count.

As Keith noted back in 2004, the path to completion was not smooth. He said,

As we looked everywhere to try to find a suitable contractor, Manna began Providence Construction, its new for-profit arm to deal with projects such as ours, and we were finally on track again. Providence began working with us in August 2001, even before we had nailed down the details of our contact with them.

During the long renovation phase, Keith, Peter, Glen, I and sometimes Brenda, Jeanne, and others met with our construction manager early every Friday morning as one snag after another slowed progress. Eventually progress came to a halt because our somewhat inexperienced, first construction manager was not really up to the task, and many months went by when nothing happened at all. I do not recall if he quit or we (or Manna) fired him, but eventually Manna sent us Nolan Smith, who saved the project and brought it to completion..

Nolan Smith: Remembering the Construction Process

I wish I'd known more of this story before I started. Clearly you all did all the hard work. I just had to have a pulse and the ability to show up on a regular basis.

Getting started here was a bit of a blur. My memory is fuzzy but it took awhile to even get an idea of what was happening.

There was a permit posted in the window and there was a rumor that a set of plans existed somewhere that had some stamps on it in case an inspector strolled in. So what on earth drove this project.

Well, as we have heard, there was this committee. It has always been my understanding that if you don't want to get something done form a committee. I quickly learned that this was NOT that committee.

Often construction is driven by blue prints. Several years of training at Manna had taught me that plans were for inspirational purposes only and I have no memory of being "inspired" on this project by the plans. However, there was frequent and regular inspiration from your committee.

As an outsider looking in this group of folks was on the same page, carried a unified vision, had individual roles that they played within the whole, was very intentional, and was extremely effective at problem solving. It was Perhaps an example of the most functional mission group I will ever witness. Early on You all took me room by room to help me understand the vision for the space.

After getting somewhat up to speed, my memory is that I spent the next few months meeting weekly to share a continuing saga of bad news. You all seemed undaunted, I now know why. I still had a pulse and continued to show up on a regular basis.

I wish I had a specific memory, but many times we would have our weekly meeting and I needed some sort of decision. Usually I would come with a few options and often you all would select one of those. But on several occasions you didn't. You came up with a solution that hadn't occurred to me. Solutions that were much better, and clearly captured the essence of who you were. Solutions that demonstrated a full grasp of your engagement with the space and your visions for it.

Peter asked me to share the back story of the tower of power.

On any construction project as soon as you have a permit one of the first things to do is to put in for a class of service. This gets PEPCO awake and ready to send engineers out to determine location of equipment and how power will get into the building. My predecessor had already done this and paid for it so I called PEPCO for clarification. Turns out that original class of service had expired and we needed to start over.

So, a few weeks later PEPCO sent out an engineer and I explained how the original class of service routed the power to come overhead from across the street, through the wall, up here behind the altar. Well, that was no longer going to work. It now needed to come from across the street, down a new light pole, underground to the property line, and up into Glenn's magical closet. They assured me it would take a couple weeks to recalculate the cost and that the previous payment would be applied to the new total.

A few weeks go by and I get a bill from PEPCO for something like \$150,000. Our original class of service was around \$8000. I quickly whipped out the engineers business card and called. It took a few days for him to answer. He assured me that it did seem odd that moving the service from one corner of the building to the other would make it 18 times more expensive. However he did not calculate bills so he passed me on to a supervisor.

It took a few days to catch the supervisor and he also thought it was odd. A few days later he called back and announced that he found a \$20,000 error. I assured him that as grateful as I was for that discovery I was still looking for a larger number. He passed me on to another PEPCO representative. This went on for over a month. Four or five people later somebody else accidentally picked up the phone and he assured me that he would check the bill and get back to me. I had heard that before. Despite my cynicism this guy called a few days later and told me he had discovered a problem with our bill. Every

time PEPCO works in the street they need to submit a traffic diversion plan to the department of transportation. Our class of service had like 100 traffic diversion plans submitted with it. Our new bill was around \$1,000.

So now that that was cleared up I was all set to prepare our portion of the conduit. PEPCO was responsible for all of the conduit from the street to the property line. We were responsible for what was left between the property line to the electrical panel. On a commercial job that conduit needs to be run in concrete. Given that I had just burned several weeks negotiating the cost for all of this I was now in a hurry. So Luke Perry, my excellent assistant, and I slapped together some conduit and concrete forms as quickly as we could and started mixing sacrete. After striping the forms we fully intended to create a drywall box to hide this thing. But no, you all discovered a work of art in our hurry. It was an accidental sculpture later named the tower of power.

There were dozens of craftsmen who made this space what it is. They all deserve a lot of credit. I only had to be the guy with a pulse and the ability to come by on a regular basis to help conduct the orchestra of craftsmen who built this place. Thank you all for allowing me to help to assemble your vision. This space that you created is very special and it was an honor to have a front row seat to see it come together.

Glen Yakushiji: Carroll Street Update can be seen at <https://youtu.be/4bhB9Zv726E>

Deborah and Jeanne: Claiming it as our own

Deborah: Planning the Dedication Ritual

As the construction progressed and we finally could plan for a move-in date, Celebration Circle started talking about what a dedication liturgy could look like. Kate Amoss, who was a member of CC at that time, and I volunteered to work together to design that liturgy. We looked at church blessings from

many different denominations and time periods, and eventually constructed something that took into account both the ancient tradition and our own, Seekers, sensibility. Finally, the day came when Kate, I, and a few others waited inside the building while the majority of the congregation walked all the way from 2025 to 276, carrying the processional cross that David built and I embellished, and the banner that Margreta had made because I asked her to. That cross and that banner now stand in the sanctuary every Sunday, holding the entire congregation in an embrace.

Jeanne: The Walkers' Narrative

On that day, 20 Seekers left 2025 Massachusetts Ave., the much-beloved space that had been our one-and-only church home. It was an exceedingly hot and humid day, with a glaring sun. We walkers were dressed accordingly: we looked the part of a band of believers on pilgrimage. We headed uphill the entire distance, a fitting reflection of the process that had transformed a forlorn space into our new home. At the forefront of our procession were Peter, Jeffrey Silverstone, and then-13-year-old Andy Holmes. They and others took turns carrying the processional cross and the banner that led the way. Up we went into Adams-Morgan and past the Potter's House, where one of our C of S siblings was holding Sunday worship. They spontaneously invited us inside, and offered a brief prayer for our walk and our future. On and on we walked, sweaty but determined. Reaching Cedar Street, we walked up the drive to the back porch, and knocked on the door.

As we knocked, we began a dialogue based on Psalm 24:7-10, which older translations give as "Lift Up Your Heads, O Mighty Gates:.."

Those outside said:

Stretch toward the skies, you doors,
Open high and wide.

Let the glorious Lover of Life come in.

and those inside asked:
Who is this splendid Lover?

The people outside replied:
The Holy One, Creator of Heaven and Earth,
The Spirit of life,
the Lover of all.

As we opened the doors, we said:
Enter, all you blessed ones of God,

(Deborah) After that, we walked around the entire building, blessing each room and the furnishings in it, especially the small crosses that Kate Amoss and I invited members of the community to make and send to us during the previous month. During coffee hour, you will have an opportunity to look for all those crosses.”

(Jeanne) Sonya Dyer was one who called Seekers Church into being almost 50 years ago. She remained as the passionate, compassionate spiritual leader and wise woman on the Servant Leadership Team, until family ties took her to Charlotte N.C. toward the beginning of Seekers journey toward a new home. Though Sonya wrote this poem back then, her words are as relevant and eloquent now as when they were first spoken:

The Future is Possible, by Sonya Dyer

As we face new junctures
In our lives,
What enduring truths
Will you and I
Be seeking to embody
In our new situations?

We will continue to challenge patterns

In the culture, in the community, and in ourselves
With the yardstick of faith.

We want to be everyday prophets
Engaging the challenges we see
Without knowing where we will come out,
Living with what is unresolved and unclear,
Being patient with the time it takes
For the new to become clear.

We will stay alert to what is present in our new situations
and what we bring to them,
and trust that new insights, energies,
and possibilities will emerge.

We will continue to create pockets of hope,
Name those we see,
And when possible
Expand their power.

We believe that it is possible
To be people of compassion and justice
In every corner of the globe.

Amen.