

Guide to Seekers Church

Eighth Edition

May 2013

Authority Within Seekers Church

There are at least five sources for authority in Seekers Church:

- The Holy Spirit;
- The Bible;
- God's call on us, as individuals and groups;
- The role of the Stewards of Seekers Church; and
- Precedent.

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 Church also derives 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.

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, as in all faith communities that grew out of the Church of the Saviour, authority for the life of the community rests with a group of core members. In Seekers 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 that carries a commitment to support the faith journey of the community.

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." The commitment and disciplines of our Stewards are essentially unchanged from the description of "members" developed in the Church of the Saviour since it was founded in 1947. Stewards offer their service to the community in the form of support, guidance, and responsibility for Seekers Church as a legally incorporated organization.

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 governmental authorities to perform religious ceremonies such as weddings.

Anyone who attends Seekers Church may become a Steward, through a process that usually takes several years of preparation, as described herein. 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.

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 of 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 information we offer. 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.

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 requests a current Steward to sponsor him or her. 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 personal unlimited responsibility for the Body of Christ. The candidate prepares a written spiritual autobiography and reviews it with the sponsor, then reads it to his/her mission group and elicits comments. 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 the following Sunday, the new Steward publicly reads the Stewards' commitment and is welcomed by the congregation.

Required Classes

Prospective Stewards are asked to take at least eight classes in the School of Christian Living. This provides a way of experiencing the gift of a personal 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 includes two classes in each of the following: Hebrew Scripture, New Testament, Christian Growth and Christian Teaching. While credits from other sister community schools in the tradition of the Church of the Saviour 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.

Ministry and Group Affiliation

Prospective Stewards identify their point of ministry for the building of the church, and enter into a commitment to one of the ongoing mission groups of the Seekers Church. The prospective Steward should have taken at least two courses prior to entering a group and are encouraged to take most of the courses prior to making this commitment. Entering into a mission/support group includes the commitment to personal daily disciplines and to accountability to that group for one's spiritual journey. Generally, individuals will participate in the group for six months prior to becoming a Steward.

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, with extensions if needed. The sponsor is a Steward, who is chosen in

consultation with the prospective Steward's mission group. The prospective Steward, under the guidance of the sponsor, will review:

- 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 commitment statement of the Stewards and the common disciplines, to reflect upon and to clarify his/her own readiness to assume these commitments;
- The history of the Church of the Saviour and Seekers Church, and reflect on their meaning for the individual's life in Christ; and
- The meaning of ordination into the priesthood of all believers, and how that will be lived out in the life of Seekers Church.

The sponsor will be supported by other Stewards in working with the prospective Steward. The sponsorship process ends with sharing the autobiography with the Stewards, and spending one hour in prayer and meditation in the chapel prior to the commitment ritual. The new Steward is welcomed into membership as a Steward in a ritual during a Sunday worship service following the Stewards meeting.

The Stewards Commitment Statement

This is the statement a person makes when becoming a Steward of Seekers Church:

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.)

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 and decision making. Most questions are resolved through discussion, prayer and consensus, although there is an occasional vote. Any Steward can bring questions and matters of policy. The structure of each Stewards meeting is developed by the SLT working in cooperation 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.

Why Become a Steward?

Individual Seekers are called to becoming 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. 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.

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 which express that love and which 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

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 director, 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 warmly 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 from some or all of the disciplines of membership as a Steward. 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. Since individuals themselves choose to be Stewards and work with a process to claim that choice, it is appropriate that individual Stewards do the same for a leave of absence—choose for themselves as part of a process that involves the other Stewards.

Any leave of absence ends before the next scheduled recommitment date, so that all Stewards are free to choose between recommitment and leaving Stewardship. Stewards may choose not to renew their commitment, choosing to return to a less formal relationship with Seekers Church, or to leave the community. While we mourn such a decision, it is accepted as part of the process of balancing the spiritual development of each individual with the spiritual development of the community as a whole.

Recently we designated one of our Stewards as “emeritus.” This Steward, who is an elder and no longer attends Stewards meetings regularly, keeps all the other commitments of Stewards.