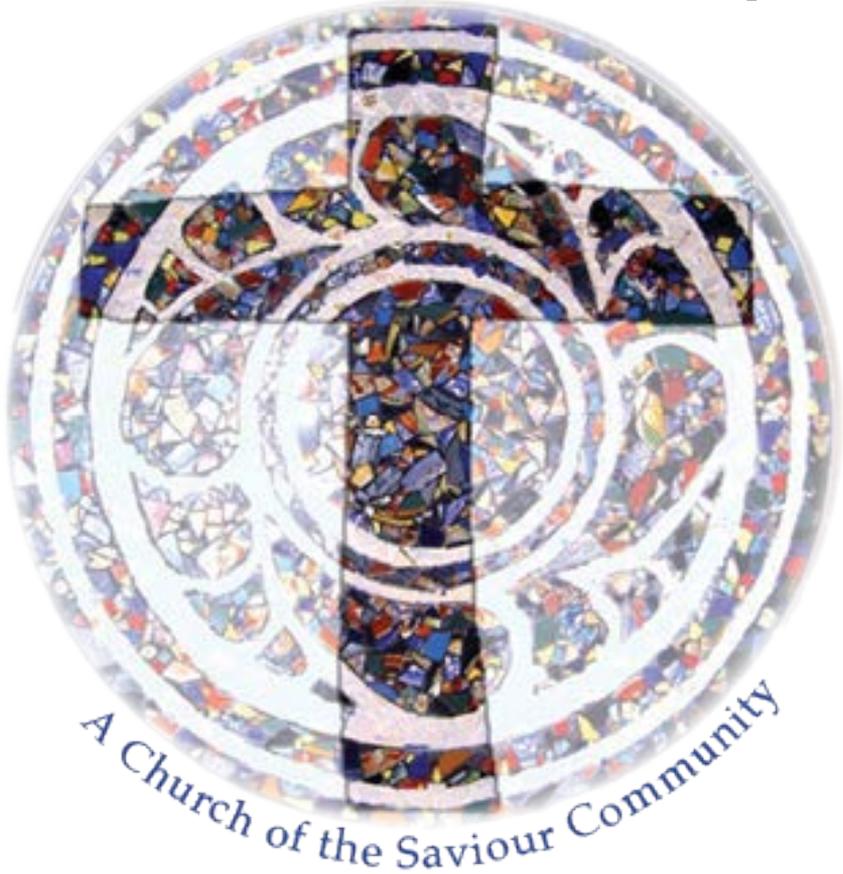


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What is a Seekers Mission Group?



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Introduction

The Mission Groups of Seekers Church are at the heart of the life of our faith community, where they provide a place for life-enriching and life-altering experiences. Our mission groups sustain and organize our ministries in the world, support the personal spiritual growth of their members, and sustain the life of this Church. A more complete description of our individual mission groups is available at the Church, or on the Seekers web site (www.seekerschurch.org). The “Mission Groups in Seekers Church” is found in “Core Documents” in the “Life Together” section of the main menu.

This booklet will introduce you to the life of our mission groups. We understand our church as a community of individuals who intentionally seek out God’s call for their life and who welcome accountability and support for living out that call.

A mission group is a place where you can engage in the work of Christ in our time. It is a place where you can join with a few others who share your particular call from God to do some particular ministry and find support and encouragement for your spiritual growth.

Those of us who have been members of a mission group for a long time have found that, while it does take some getting used to, mission group life is a blessing – a time to look forward to; a time that gives each member special energy. It helps us maintain our focus on ministry and keeps us connected with the inspiring energy of the Holy Spirit.

Deep conversations and intimate worship are the basis for countless stories of mission group experiences where members have worked with hard issues and found solace, perspective and support even when there are no easy answers. This has led some members to make sweeping changes in their work and their lives.

We hope this introductory brochure will help those of you who are unfamiliar with Seekers Church begin to understand why these groups matter so much to us.

What Is a Mission Group?

In Seekers Church, we have come to understand that the best way for us to deepen our faith in God is through a combination of prayerful reflection and intentional action, working together with a few others who share a common commitment to a particular ministry. We maintain this environment for growth through small mission groups. We see mission groups as having some of the qualities of the small groups that lived and worked with Jesus during his earthly ministry and in the early church.

Our current understanding of mission groups in Seekers Church is grounded in the fundamental work of Gordon Cosby, a founder of the Church of the Savior. The central traditions of Church of the Savior mission groups are continued in Seekers. For the participants, mission groups are a fundamental place of belonging and service. Regular face-to-face meetings help build trust and a sense of shared commitment. The process of discerning God's call and evoking gifts encourages and helps empower all members to claim a specific ministry. The intimacy and vulnerability made possible by high levels of trust, and high levels of commitment and accountability for one's inner journey, promote personal transformation and empowerment.

A Seekers mission group is a distinctive kind of small church group. Many churches use committees to make decisions and accomplish the work of the church. Many churches have support groups in which individuals come together to help one another through their life journeys. And many churches have classes or study groups that work with the Bible and other readings in order to deepen the spiritual lives of those who attend. Although mission groups do this work in Seekers Church, they are much more than a committee or a support or study group. For Seekers, mission groups are the places of deepest belonging in the body of Christ, places where members of a group can deepen their commitment to Christ and live out God's call.

Mission groups provide support for each member of the group as they pursue a closer relationship with God and seek to refine and respond to God's individual call on their lives. The mission group is a place where members can talk about their relationship with God and their place in Christ's body – the church. *Why does God*

seem so distant right now, or so close? What might these signs and insights mean for me? Mission group meetings also provide time for meditation and for being thankful to God.

Some mission groups in Seekers Church carry core parts of the life of the faith community – worship, lifelong learning and retreat. Others focus on providing a place of accountability and support for members who have an individual commitment to service and witness in some particular place in the world.

The actions of the mission group are the work of the church and are recognized and granted authority for this work by the Stewards of Seekers Church.

Stewards are members of Seekers Church who make an additional commitment to support the life and health of the congregation. They meet monthly to coordinate overall activities of the community. Since there are normally at least two Stewards in each mission group, the monthly gathering of Stewards provides an ongoing opportunity to share the vision of our calling as a congregation with each mission group so that it may better shape its life into a supportive part of the whole.



The Role of Mission Groups in Our Life Together

Mission Groups support our personal inner journeys to find and refine what God would have us do with our lives, and our outer journeys of service and witness as it relates to God's call for us. At any given time most Seekers belong to a mission group. Mission groups encourage deep integration into shared community and this binds together all three elements of the Seekers commitment – to inner journey, outer journey and community.

Mission groups practice an action-reflection approach to study and work, to the integration of personal interests and group needs. Mission groups are formed around the call to a shared ministry: it is the call that brings members together in a mission group. The life of a mission group is marked by a sense of informality, honest conversation, by beginning each session with worship, by the sharing of responsibility; and particularly by a practiced reliance on listening for the leading of the Holy Spirit. Members of the group work together to discern and affirm the gifts they bring to the life of the group and the resulting responsibilities and authority within the group. Accountability within each group includes a spiritual direction or companionship relationship to support each member.

This all works together to make life in a mission group far more than “planning the work, then working the plan.” This life together makes room for both prophetic attention to the work of the group and pastoral attention to the needs of participants as whole persons and not just as “committee members.”

Most people in Seekers Church lead very full lives. It takes commitment to join a mission group, but people stay for the joy, the love, and the meaning they experience as part of the mission group.

A few people are members of more than one mission group but most can not sustain two such commitments. The important thing for Seekers is not to do all our work through mission groups, but that all individuals have the opportunity to experience the love of God in the transformative, sustained, face-to-face, engagement that a mission group offers.

The Genesis of a Mission Group

In Seekers Church the process of giving birth to a new mission group begins when a Steward hears a new call. This person carries the emerging sense of call, deepening the discernment through prayerful reflection, journaling and talking with others in the community. A valid call will focus on some specific need, some area of brokenness in the world or the church, some particular place where God's Realm is waiting for a co-creator to contribute to transformation.

At least one other Steward must join in discerning and carrying the call before taking it to all Stewards for recognition and affirmation. As the Stewards review the call and work with the initiating group it is discerned with greater clarity. When there is a positive sense of the call, the Stewards affirm it.

Once the Stewards have affirmed the new mission group, the founding Stewards invite other Seekers to join the mission group if they are ready to make a commitment to the call of the group and the spiritual practices it has adopted for its own health and growth. This affirmation is a sign to all who are part of Seekers Church that this mission group has the authority to act in the name of the church. Mission groups are accountable to the Stewards for the call they have accepted and the resulting activity.

Several Seekers mission groups have grown out of ministry teams or working groups, as members of the group decided that the work of the group was call for them. Most recently, the Healers Group, which had been meeting for spiritual accountability and support for eight years, was affirmed by Stewards as the Broken & Beloved mission group.



Challenge and Preparation

You may be wondering if you would want to join a mission group, help to create a mission group, or suggest that an existing group become a mission group. The feelings of community, the support for personal growth, the opportunity for meaning-filled service all make mission groups attractive, but the commitment to weekly meetings, to disciplines for spiritual growth, and to taking on a ministry are expensive in terms of time and energy. And it takes a while to learn the culture and practices that are vital to group life. For some, the commitment to intimate work and worship with a small group of other folks can seem a little strange.

Mission groups take time for the "why" questions that help the participants and the whole group make the connection to meaningful work together. That releases powerful commitment that feels like joy rather than burden. It also promotes serendipitous and "organic" work styles based in shared understandings, whether or not they are clearly articulated.

Seekers Church offers guidance for these challenges by asking prospective mission group members to participate in the School of Christian Living for two 6-week classes. The classes have several purposes, including helping people get ready for life in a mission group. In addition to the School of Christian Living, Seekers Church does many things to help us engage the life questions that lead to exploration and commitment to a mission group. Sermons, retreats, and especially searching conversations help a lot. Most Seekers worship with the community for at least a year before joining a mission group.

If you would like to nurture a group in your faith community that has the characteristics of a mission group and would like some ideas to help you get started, you might check out our pamphlet "Crafting a New Mission Group," which is available on our web site in the Life Together/Mission Groups section.

The Mission Groups of Seekers Church

There are currently eight mission groups in Seekers Church. Each carries a different part of our ministry in the world or in our life together as an intentional Christian community. As mentioned earlier, a more detailed description of current mission groups is available in the Life Together/Mission Groups section of Seekers Church web site at <http://www.seekerschurch.org>.

Broken & Beloved supports members' entrepreneurial work as healers in the world in various capacities based on our interests and training, which include counseling, mediation, expressive movement, music, peacemaking, bodywork, communication, hospice and facilitation. The group helps members maintain alignment between work and call. B&B provides a safe space for members to be vulnerable and appreciate their belovedness, while also supporting members in carrying God's love to each person with whom they work, viewing each as a child of God.

Celebration Circle is called to energize and structure the worship life of the Seekers Church. Members of this mission group write Seekers' worship liturgies, plan and coordinate worship services and coordinate preaching by a different person each Sunday. The group is an important place of support and accountability for the ministry in daily life of its members.

Eyes to See Ears to Hear Peace Prayer Mission Group is called to be a place of prayer and action for the myriad circumstances in the world that are in need of justice, peace and healing. We know that our hearts grow heavy and numb from the news of violence and injustice all around us. We seek to create space to pray, even when we don't see any "way out," any action step, even, perhaps, any hope. We seek to create a place to hold the suffering and agony. But we also seek to promote engagement in addition to prayer in those places where we see possibility for connection.

Koinonia is called to create and sustain opportunities within our life together that will build *Koinonia*, or partnership, and identify and remove barriers that would prevent deepening our fellowship together. Although the call to *Koinonia* with one another is one

that all Seekers hold, the role of the Koinonia Mission Group is to make it more visible, and by holding it up, make that call more central and intentional in our life together.

Learners and Teachers is called to invite and enable people to take part in learning and sharing opportunities that help inform and support a life of faith. Learners and Teachers lives out this call by sponsoring the Seekers Church School of Christian Living as well as sharing its approach to Christian education with other congregations.

Living Water supports the inner life of all Seekers by developing the capacity for group spiritual guidance and other forms of spiritual companionship; sponsoring our silent retreats and other activities that focus on the “inward journey,” presenting disciplines to nourish the inner life; and supporting other dimensions of our inner journey.

The **Mission Support Group** is called to support members on individual mission, and others who are in the process of discerning mission. The group provides a place of support and accountability for these individual calls. Mission Support Group also tends our Growing Edge Fund that supports Seekers as new calls emerge, and invites different Seekers to share God’s call on them during our gathering time at the beginning of worship.

The **Time & Space** mission group is called to fill the home of Seekers Church on Carroll Street, NW. with new life and use our space to support the emergence of new missions and ministries. This includes:

- Encouraging use of our space by Seekers for our missions and ministries;
- Facilitating use of our space by others, sharing our life together with them and encouraging relationships between them and members of Seekers Church; and
- Taking care of our space in practical ways that help us maintain our focus on mission and ministry rather than maintenance.

The Mission Group Secret

Over the years Seekers Church has developed a set of guidelines and processes for mission groups. These are found in the current edition of *Guidelines for Seekers Mission Groups*. The guidelines are just that, for life in Seekers is the antithesis of legalism. The main thing to remember is that the secret of our mission groups is not in the guidelines and processes, but in the depth of our meeting and caring for each other. The group's call invites the transformative presence of the Holy Spirit in individual transformation to pour out into creative, committed work together.

One sign of this reality is that Seekers mission groups seldom work out of any rigid processes for accomplishing various purposes, even though there are millions of handbooks available for all kinds of church activities. We are an "understand it ourselves" and "do it ourselves" people. We are not above borrowing from others and we have several members who are connected to various expressions of the wider church. Such borrowing is enhanced by our decision not to commit to any one denomination or tradition, and a willingness to learn from whatever is life-giving. Our flexibility is also based in rich and variable theological engagements, in ongoing Bible study, and an understanding that "lived truth" is often more valuable than "objective truth." Because we believe in shared leadership most of our members feel free to take appropriate initiatives and to share in discernment concerning the leadership of others.

Another sign is that we are not afraid of failure, or of having a good initiative come to an end. In one sense, we can't fail. Everything contributes to our growing understandings and helps us discern and direct ourselves for the greater good. Endings release energy for new beginnings and course corrections.

Our secret is that to really understand why mission groups matter so much to us, you have to experience them. At least this introduction gives you a peek.

Other Groups in Seekers Church

Mission groups are not the only way things get done in Seekers Church. There are other kinds of opportunities for individuals to offer their gifts through small, more informal groups. Sometimes individuals or informal small groups take on the coordination of a specific task such as providing coffee and tea after worship and supporting a single-parent family reunited after the mother was released from prison. Stewards sometimes appoint a group to perform some specific task or to develop a recommendation for consideration by the community. For example, each year Stewards invite all who worship with us to join a “Domestic Giving Group” and an “International Giving Group” to determine how the Church will distribute the funds we give to support other missions and ministries.

Several “ministry teams” have emerged to coordinate specific activities. These teams are different from mission groups because they meet less frequently than mission groups, draw participants who are also members of mission groups, do not normally include spiritual accountability within the group and are more focused on the task. For example, Martha’s Mob gathers three or four times a year to maintain our building. Another group of volunteers supports Carroll Café, the Second Fridays Coffee House, which offers live folk music at Carroll Street once a month. Another group of volunteers supports the Bokamoso Foundation by facilitating a multi-day career workshop for the group of young adults visiting from the Bokamoso Life Centre in Winterveldt, South Africa each year.

Our Care Pack Team provides small backpacks filled with personal hygiene necessities for Seekers to distribute to homeless people. Another informal group oversees our financial stewardship.

Members of the Servant Leadership Team also take on numerous and diverse tasks that include administration, healing, encouragement and coordination to support the life of the congregation.

For More Information

If you are visiting with Seekers Church and are interested in learning more about mission groups in Seekers Church, please speak to a Steward or a member of the Servant Leadership Team.

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