



# HANDBOOK FOR **CHURCHES AND MISSION GROUPS**

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PRINCIPLES AND STRUCTURES OF A CHURCH AND MISSION GROUP  
DEVELOPED DURING FIFTY YEARS AT THE CHURCH OF THE SAVIOUR

BY DOROTHY DEVERS AND N. GORDON COSBY



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The first edition of Handbook for Mission Groups was written by Gordon Cosby. The second edition was edited and updated by Dorothy Devers, a long-time member of The Church of the Saviour. The third edition of the Handbook (2018) has been updated to reflect the current faith communities, separate churches, and members of The Church of the Saviour. Only the introduction has been changed.

References in the text are by author and title only.  
Complete publishing information is listed in the Bibliography.

Some of the Biblical citations have been modified to reflect  
The Church of the Saviour's commitment to non-sexist language.

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## INTRODUCTION

This revision of the *Handbook for Mission Groups* has been made at a time of radical change in the structure of The Church of the Saviour.

A deep commitment to Jesus Christ always results in significant growth and requires change in structure—change which, though necessary, can be painful.

Such a change occurred twenty years ago when six faith communities, each with its own leadership and budget, were formed out of the original single community. Over the years this number increased to nine communities with about seventy mission groups. In 1995, after two years of prayerful consideration, another change was made and these nine communities became separate churches.

This Handbook spells out the principles and structures of a church and of a mission group—principles that have developed during fifty years of experience at The Church of the Saviour.

Many of our visitors have read Elizabeth O'Connor's books describing the various dimensions of our life as it has been lived out. Their principal questions have had to do with group structure. Structure, though uninspiring to many, is the key to maintaining a quality of life that can quicken the heart of the beholder. Deceptively easy to grasp, the principles and structures are costly beyond description to embody; but once they are embodied, the possibilities for the explosion of spiritual power in the world are unlimited.

## THE MEANING OF CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

*... to be with God's friends is a good way to keep  
close to Him and you will always draw great benefit  
from being with them.*

—St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, p. 45

An authentic Christian church is a community rooted in Christ. As the family of God, bound to God and to one another through Christ, the church is fundamentally transformative—transforming the lives of its members, who, in turn, seek to transform the world in which they live. Thus, although the church exists as an end in itself, it is ready to lose its life for the redemption of the world.

The Body of Christ, the *laos*, always live in community, in close spiritual association. Although I belong to a “congregation,” I still may not be part of a church. A part which is not united with the whole is useless. It is in community that my gifts are evoked, and it is here that I help to evoke the gifts of others. The church is the seedbed and garden in which fruits of the spirit grow.

Consideration of the importance of the natural family and the nurture and instruction of the children are responsibilities of the spiritual family, the church. Ways and means of fulfilling these responsibilities are not only vital, immediate concerns but are also essential for helping to bring about the coming of the kingdom on earth.

The head of the church is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Christ himself calls each person into membership; joining is not by human invitation. Each person needs to be sure that the call is

unmistakably from Christ, and must understand thoroughly the implications of belonging to his Body; otherwise, the pressures in such a closely knit fellowship can be intolerable.

Total commitment to Christ and disciplined lives are not for the purpose of earning one's way into heaven. Rather they are for the glory of God to release the power of the Holy Spirit through corporate witness. This cannot take place amid an undisciplined people.

(See also, *The Sounding of a Call to Found a Church*, p. 9; and *The Mission of a Church*, p. 8.)

## **DISCIPLINE**

Discipline, the cost of power and effectiveness in individual and corporate witness, is always a part of the life of the members of the Body of Christ. The word "discipline" as used here does not have a corrective or punitive connotation. Rather, it connotes discipleship.

After Jesus had spent a night in prayer, listening to his Abba (which was his primary work), he came down from the hills and called twelve disciples whom he named apostles (Luke 6:12-13). He said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19). Members of the church are followers of Christ, disciples who love God and their neighbors, following a Way that attracts others, so they, too, may become "fishers" of men, women, and children. (See also *Necessity of Specific Disciplines*, p. 15-16.)

There must be freedom in this area, however, and the purpose of an ordered way must be well understood. Disciplines practiced legalistically and perfunctorily not only are useless but have negative effects.

*For full membership in the church, membership in a mission group is required. For preparation for membership in a mission group and subsequently in the church, see pp. 17-19.*

## **THE MEANING OF MISSION AND OF ECUMENISM**

The Christian community is on a twofold journey—one inward, the other outward. The inward journey is to find Christ within oneself and within others, and through him to come into the presence of God. The outward journey is to find Christ and to be with him as he is at work in the world. This is mission—to be with Christ, bringing into being the kingdom of God in the world. Thus, the church is on mission. As it has been said, without burning there is no fire; without mission there is no church.

Each member and prospective member should know something of, and be in touch with, the missions of the church and should understand how they all together constitute the one united total mission of the community. The group mission never exists solitarily; it is an integral part of the whole that is the church. The one exception is that group whose mission is to *become* a church.

The church, in turn, is one segment of the total Body of Christ, and recognizing this, is responsible for relating in specific ways to the varied expressions of the church throughout the world. The unique path to be followed will be determined by the ways best adapted to, and used by the gifts of the members of the local church.

Each member should read at least one book on the Ecumenical Movement. [Recommended reading: Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*; *Spirituality in Ecumenical Perspective*; and Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, see Bibliography, p. 24.] The root meaning of ecumenical



from the Greek *oikoumenikos*) is “the whole household of God.” In becoming a member of a local church, one should have a sense of joining the worldwide church. Oppression of the church in any part of the world is cause for deep concern in the total Body of Christ.

The Christian church is growing in appreciation of the significance and validity of macro-ecumenism, or what Matthew Fox calls “deep ecumenism,” as a means of ushering in, and undergirding universal harmony and peace. “Deep ecumenism is the movement that will unleash the wisdom of all world religions... This unleashing of wisdom holds the last hope for the survival of the planet we call home... Universalism is a characteristic common to all the traditions of the Cosmic Christ in the Scriptures...” (*The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, Matthew Fox, p. 228.)

“Christianity needs to contribute its riches to an awakening of Cosmic Wisdom and it will do so by way of a tradition of the ‘Cosmic Christ’” (*ibid*, p. 243). As Peter, friend and disciple of Jesus quoting Joel, said “... in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh...” (Acts 2:17).

## THE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF A CHURCH AND ITS MISSION GROUPS

For a mission group and a church to give full allegiance to Jesus Christ, four dimensions of life must be recognized as essential.

### CHANGE

To belong to the church of Jesus Christ is to become part of a community whose very purpose is to nurture its members in such a way as to bring about transformation of life. A person who seeks membership must be willing to undertake a difficult inner journey involving times of personal dissatisfaction and depression. Like the Psalmist descending to the depths within grappling for insight: “Why are you cast down O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God” (Ps. 42:11). Such seeking is to find a new awareness of that which lies hidden in the unconscious.

A continuing dialogue with God brings increasing recognition of those things within one which may be brought to God for healing. Even more than a heightened sensitivity to imperfections will come recognition of the desperate need for the change which makes possible the healing of sin.

Thomas Merton in *Contemplative Prayer* described the experience of dread, nothingness, and night in the heart which arises out of “awareness and infidelity to the truth of life.” The problem with many of us is that as yet we have not even reached the point in our spiritual development where we know what Merton is talking about. In the community of faith the supernatural grace of Jesus Christ is mediated to us in such a way that we become aware of ourselves as sinners, and recognize our need of healing. The self is surrendered; a fundamental change takes place. The Christian church is a laboratory of change.

### WITNESS

In its second dimension, the church is a people who witness with clarity to the Power which can produce change. This Power can forgive sin, renew our cities and our nation by changing their priorities, thus transforming our society. Modern-day followers of Jesus, dependent upon this invincible Power as he was, can bring newness into the world that so desperately needs renewal.

Some question the wisdom of naming the Name, of publicly acknowledging Jesus as Lord. Those who declare it inadvisable to do so fear to alienate persons to whom they would speak of the gospel. Oddly enough, the world is much freer to express its hunger and desire for God than is the church of today which has come to be very reluctant to speak in spiritual terms.

The inauthenticity so often evident in the church causes naming the Name to be tremendously alienating to those outside the church. But if there *is* authenticity in the life of a church, the world will not be alienated by the bearing of witness; in fact, the only way we can have any genuine dialogue with the world is clearly and emphatically to name the Name and to be outwardly what we are inwardly. If people want to know me, they have to know me as a person in Christ, because that is who I am. The same holds true of a genuine Christian community.

Mission groups serve the larger geographical community in which the church is situated. They bear witness to the Power that is the only power, the Name that is the only name in which lives can be changed, forgiven, and become new.

To be authentic Christians we must witness. "If the trumpet give forth an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for the battle?" (I Cor. 14:8). When the witness is dim and the sound blurred, no wonder it is so difficult to make the transition into the community of faith, into all it costs to surrender life to Jesus Christ! It is better to speak the Name even though the authenticity is not as clear as we would like it to be, than it is to be hesitant about naming the Name.

## **NURTURE**

Third, the church of Jesus Christ is a nurturing community that stands ready to provide direction and encouragement for those who need shepherding though they may not yet be ready to make the commitment that membership requires.

The church and the mission group should be able to give guidance to those persons who evidence an innate hunger for, and interest in Christian community, leading them to make response to God's call on their lives; and also to those who, having already responded to Christ in faith, are eager to grow into spiritual maturity, discover the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and devote those gifts in service to the Kingdom. People literally travel around the world seeking this sort of shepherding and are often unable to find it.

## **ACTION**

The fourth dimension of a church and of a mission group is that of action. Not just any action, but Christian action. A group touched by some segment of the world's pain will, in the name of Christ and with the help of the Holy Spirit, endeavor to bring about the healing of that pain. With constant intercessory prayer and with earnest, selfless endeavor, that vision can emerge without which the people perish.

*These four dimensions of a church and a mission group are essential.* Many persons want some sort of self-engagement, but not God-engagement. They would like to join a group with one or two dimensions but not all four. They will be under pressure if they are in a group that is clearly committed to all dimensions. Others are impatient to get on with the action. "Let's get the show on the road. Let's do the job. Let's get on with the task."

If a group is faithful to its Lord, it will seek to embody all four dimensions—change, witness, nurture, and action.

## HOW A MISSION GROUP COMES INTO BEING

A mission group is a small group (two or three to twelve) who have responded to a call sounded by one or more persons acutely aware of a specific need. The primary action of the group is focused on meeting that need.

To believe that a group of committed people gathered faithfully for Bible study, prayer, and the seeking of God's will for their lives will be given a corporate mission is a false assumption. To attempt a common task *after* a group has formed fails to take into account the deeper inner responses of the various ones in the group. Because of the great diversity found in any group, the call that comes to be recognized by one person is not necessarily the call of another. No one call emerges to which all in the group can respond.

Experience has shown that a mission group should *begin* with one person or a small nucleus of persons who have heard a call for a specific mission. A new group begins with a clearly understood outward journey as well as a commitment to the inward journey. It is crucial that these dimensions be embodied from the very beginning, otherwise the group begins with many general hopes, aspirations, and longings, but is never able to agree on the common task or the specifics of the disciplines. The minimal disciplines are largely set by the originally called person, and they may grow out of the experience of a larger community of faith. With these givens, clear options are provided for those interested in group life.

### THE SOUNDING OF A CALL TO FOUND A MISSION GROUP WITHIN AN ALREADY-ESTABLISHED CHURCH

The person to whom the word of God has come may sound the call in any one of a variety of ways. Often in personal conversations he or she discovers another to share the call. The fire of God kindled within his or her spirit inflames another. The two are given to each other.

The call may be shared with one or two other persons, with a Sunday morning worshipping congregation or with any segment of the community. A number of people may respond. If no one responds, the person waits, nurturing his or her own life in Christ and praying for those who can hear, meanwhile pursuing the call individually, waiting for the moment others can share it. If others respond, they begin their life together, evoking one another's gifts, and praying for clarity in hearing God's will as to ways in which their mission is to be carried out.

### THE EVOLUTION OF THE CALL

Moses' call is a clear example of the way a call may come. He was looking with interest at a burning bush that was not being consumed by flames. As he watched, he heard God call to him from the middle of the bush. "Moses, Moses!" Moses answered, "Here am I." And Yahweh said, "I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt... I am well aware of their sufferings... And now the cries of Israelites have come to me, and I have witnessed the way in which the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I send you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt."

Moses said to God, "Who am I to go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

"I shall be with you," was the answer.

Then Moses said to God, "... I am to go, then, to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' But if they ask me what your name is, what am I to tell them?"



And God said to Moses, "I AM who I AM. This is what you must say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

Although the form in which a call is first heard may be very simple, conventional wisdom may deem it impossible. A call may come saying:

- Free the children housed in understaffed, crowded institutions.
- Rid the city of illiteracy.
- Pray for persons in positions of political power and, if possible, make personal contact with them.
- Feed the hungry, house the homeless, heal the sick.
- Make efforts to overcome racial injustice.
- Provide means of rehabilitating those suffering with addictions.

As one is obedient, new light is given. The implications and ramifications of the call are seen. A simple call faithfully followed leads into many interlocking systems. Unlimited horizons open up. Three called people with no clearly defined strategy may end up with fifteen groups each carrying a necessary part of an incredibly complex task affecting the quality of life in an entire area or perhaps the world. How like a mustard seed!

An important principle: The real responsibility, including determination of strategy, securing of staff, and raising of funds must be placed squarely upon the mission group embodying the call. This can be done only by discovering and call forth the gifts of each group member. (For The Evoking of Gifts, see p. 12-13.)

## **THE SOUNDING OF A CALL TO FOUND A CHURCH**

The ways of God are not our ways and, therefore, the varied calls are unpredictable, infinite in number, specific in nature, and purposeful for the coming of the Kingdom.

Accustomed as we have become to the already long-established churches and denominations, and amazed as we are at the rapidly developing and increasing numbers of mega-churches—the thought of starting a church with very few called persons may seem ludicrous, preposterous, unbelievable. But with God nothing is impossible.

A few (even two) called persons can begin as a mission group with the mission of bringing into being a church after God's own heart. Having had the call, having been given the vision, and having discerned the specifics of the mission, the small group will set forth in writing the specifics of the commitment and the disciplines required for its fulfillment. (See example of Member's Commitment, Vision, and Disciplines, p. 22-23.)

This small group may decide to attend a weekly worship service in an already-established church; or, believing in the priesthood of all believers, they may conduct their own weekly worship services. With patience, faith, and expectancy they will be enabled to recognize in an ordained minister or in members of the laity the gift of leadership required to lead them in worship. They recognize and evoke the gifts of one another, share their spiritual autobiographies, and learn the procedure to be followed in order to be legally certified as a church.

A School of Christian Living will be brought into being, offering at first one or two of the five or six classes required for membership (see pp. 16-17). The remaining core classes and other classes in related subjects will gradually be added to the curriculum.

As the number of intern members and members increases, calls to service will be heard and missions will be formed to meet some specific evidences of misery and pain in the world.

## THE FOUNDATION OF A CHURCH

*The Essence of a Church:* total allegiance to Jesus Christ, the Word of God from the beginning, who came to live and die for us, and who rose from the dead by the power of God to become the Cosmic Christ universally present within, between, and among us.

The life of Jesus as set forth in the Gospels embodies and exemplifies his teachings and the truths that come to us through his parables and his commandments, the greatest of which he said was: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind—and you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:37-39).

In order to love and obey God, we endeavor to embody *the three theological virtues—faith, hope and charity (love)*. These three virtues, taught by Jesus, are the means by which the soul is united with God through its human faculties: understanding, memory, and will.

*Faith* is closely allied with understanding. "What must we do to be doing the work of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in whom he has sent" (John 6:28-29). And, "Everyone who is prepared to do the will of God shall know..." (John 7:17). Anselm maintained that true faith seeks understanding. He wrote: "I seek not to understand in order that I believe; but I believe in order that I may understand, for I believe for this reason that unless I believe I cannot understand" (Anselm, *Prosologion*).

Hildegarde speaks of the "dazzlingly fair wings of reason" on which we can "soar upward in true faith and hope in God" (Hildegard of Bingen, *Mystical Writings*, p.33).

*Hope* is closely allied with memory. One hymn spells this out: "O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come..." Hope is based on the memory of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. He showed his confidence in the potential of memory when he said, "Do this in remembrance of me" (I Cor. 11:25).

*Hope is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul,  
And sings the tune without the words  
And never stops at all.  
—Emily Dickinson, Selected Poems and Letters, p.79*

"Hope envisages its future and then acts as if that future is now irresistible, thus helping to create the reality for which it longs... Even a small number of people, firmly committed to the new inevitability on which they have fixed their imaginations, can decisively affect the shape the future takes" (*Prayer and the Powers*, Walter Wink, p.4).

*Love* is closely allied with will. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he is who loves me" (John 14:21). In other words, if you love me you *will* do my commandments. As Kierkegaard wrote, "Purity of heart is to will one thing... And he who in truth wills only one thing can will only the Good." (*Purity of Heart*, p.53).

"...the soul is not united with God in this life... through enjoyment, nor through imagination, nor through any sense whatsoever; but only through faith, according to the understanding; and through hope, according to the memory; and through love, according to the will." (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, John of the Cross, Book II, vi, 1.)

In order to love and serve our neighbors, we endeavor to embody *the four cardinal virtues*—*prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice*—the virtues that enable the followers of Jesus to go into all the world to perform his mission.

**Prudence** — that quality that insures being “wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matt. 10:16). “The fear (awe, reverence) of God is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 1:7).

**Fortitude** — the strength growing out of courage. Courage brought about by the assurance, “Do not fear” (Matt. 10:31; 14:27; 17:7; Luke 5:10, 12:32).

**Temperance** — moderation in all things. Nonviolence. “Love your enemies” (Matt. 5:44). “Turn the other cheek” (Matt. 5:39).

**Justice** — for the poor and oppressed. “What ye have done for the least of these ye have done unto me” (Matt. 25-40). “...he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor... to set at liberty those who are oppressed...” (Luke 4:18). “As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18).

## **EXAMPLE OF COMMITMENT, VISION, MISSION, AND DISCIPLINES OF A NEW CHURCH, THE CHURCH OF THE SERVANT JESUS, FOUNDED MAY 4, 1995**

### **COMMITMENT**

In gratitude for God’s unconditional love for me and all creation I surrender my life to God with all the love of my heart.

All that I am and all that I have I place in God’s hands without reserve and complete trust.

I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God, whose life, crucifixion, and resurrection offer the world a new covenant of redemption. He is the head of the church, and it is his Spirit which gives life and power to the body.

As a member of this community I will witness to the redemptive power of the resurrection which offers forgiveness of sins and eternal life with God.

I will endeavor to grow more deeply into the mystery of Jesus Christ and to become open to his limitless power, for his purpose of transforming myself and the world.

I will seek to model the servant nature of Jesus, following his teaching and example in faithfulness to the word of God given in Scripture. I will pursue an individual and corporate life of prayer, simplicity, evangelism, healing and service.

This commitment and the disciplines which honor it will be the primary focus of my life.

### **VISION**

We are called to be an ecumenical Christian church.

We will be a small church and, instead of increasing our size, we will encourage others to form new churches. Our definition of growth is related to spiritual depth, love, and integrity of the community.

We will be an inclusive family that is without racial, cultural, economic or social barriers.



We will be related to the world as a community of forgiveness, reconciliation, and hope.

### MISSION

We are called to proclaim Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and to nurture radical discipleship.

We are called to encourage small groups seeking to form new churches.

We are called to confront injustice and stand with victims of oppression in truth and love.

### DISCIPLINES

- One-hour minimum of prayer daily with emphasis on listening
- Intercession for community and world needs
- Keeping a spiritual journal (See Appendix, p.21-22)
- Planned Bible study
- Two silent weekend retreats annually, with our community
- Stewardship of money, tithe to church, and give generously beyond that as God leads
- Responsible consumerism, honoring God's creation: the earth, its resources, and goods
- Living each day simply, cultivating an ever-deepening awareness of, and availability to God's loving presence and guidance in every moment
- Exercising spiritual gifts and calling forth the gifts of others
- Healing relationships with those who are suffering
- Regular, on-time attendance at weekly mission group meetings and worship services
- Accountability to mission group for faithfulness to these disciplines

*(For the original Commitment and Disciplines of The Church of the Saviour, see Appendix, p.22-23.)*

## THE EVOKING OF GIFTS

*When we talk about being true to ourselves, being the persons we are intended to be—we are talking about gifts. A primary purpose of the church is to help us discover our gifts.*  
– Elizabeth O' Connor, *Eight Day of Creation*, pp.14,17

Each member called by God to belong to the church comes in by an experience of entering into the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This experience may take place very suddenly or over a long period of time effecting a change unbelievably radical. Paul says that if a person is in Christ, old things have passed away; all things become new (II Cor. 5:17). This mode of life becomes one of praise, gratitude, expectancy, freedom, enthusiasm, wonder, newness, and a feeling of "What gift will be bestowed upon me today?" rather than, "What will be required of me today?"

We become free enough, safe enough, for unique traits (endearing traits that possibly only a discerning parent ever saw, and that were lost somewhere along the way) to emerge again. That which is essentially ourselves which got tied up, traumatized, imprisoned, begins to come forth.

Christ makes each of us something unlike any other creation ever fashioned by God—something wonderful, exciting, unique; something specifically needed in the total Body of Christ. This uniqueness, this very self that is so hard to describe, this charismatic person, is the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the primary gift that we bring to the Body, and without it the Body is immeasurably impoverished.

To each person is given a gift or gifts by the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of the Body so that it can give itself for the healing of some specific area of pain in the world. The evoking or calling forth of these gifts is extremely important to each person individually, to each mission group, to the mission the group is seeking to perform, and to the whole church.

The unity and maturity of the Body are closely correlated with the multiplicity and variety of the gifts evidenced within it. A congregation cannot be mature if it only has a few outstanding leaders who exercise charisma; the diversity of gifts within the community must have been discovered and must be in operation. The so-called lesser gifts are as significant as those more easily discernable. Often there are persons who feel they do not have a gift or anything that is really needed. This is a false assumption.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 12, Paul speaks of the great variety of spiritual gifts, emphasizing the fact that “to *each* is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good,” and that “the Spirit apportions to *each one* individually.” In other words, the gift conferred by the Holy Spirit upon a person in Christ is not a vague, general propensity, but a specific power or capacity peculiar to that individual, to be exercised for the good of the group. The failure to take this teaching of Paul seriously is the cause of much of the apathy and ineffectiveness in the Christian church of our time.

### **CALLING FORTH THE GIFTS OF OTHERS**

Without question we are intended to call forth the gifts of others—to help them recognize their uniqueness and discover their gifts. This we are able to do when we ourselves are functioning in freedom, having the time of our lives doing what we want to do. Douglas Steere has written that we are almost never given potted plants or a finished blueprint, but only a seed or the tiniest sketch that our own powers and those of our coworkers are meant to draw out and to develop.

In order to be helpful in this effort to enable others to discern their gifts, we must be very careful not to make any effort to control them. Sometimes it is very difficult to maintain a hands-off attitude. The Holy Spirit will do the work if we just release the person and stop clutching and fashioning.

### **GIFTS ESSENTIAL FOR THE LIFE AND PURPOSE OF THE GROUP**

The group is called upon to discern the members in the group who have the gifts necessary to fulfill certain responsibilities for the building up of the group and the carrying out of its objectives. These essential roles are assumed by persons designated as follows:

#### **THE PRIOR**

The one who embodies the vision of the group and orchestrates the implementation of the gifts of its members. No mere moderator, the Prior is the shepherd of the shepherds—the overseer of the little flock—the one who prays that every person within the group will discover his or her unique capacities and will be enabled to use those gifts to the best advantage for the fulfillment of the mission of the group. Should there be a time when one of the other roles in the group needs representation or supplementation, the Prior will step into the breach temporarily.

#### **THE SPIRITUAL GUIDE**

The Spiritual director is “...but a trusted friend who, in an atmosphere of sympathetic understanding, helps and strengthens us in our groping efforts to correspond with the grace

of the Holy Spirit, who alone is the true Director in the fullest sense of the word" (*Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, Thomas Merton, *Preface*). The Spiritual Guide is one who guides the group into the optimum structure of discipline, study, and personal devotion which will further the spiritual growth of the individual members of the group and of the group as a unit: the one who sees to it that the members are faithful to this structure and who has the authority to hold them accountable. Accountability is greatly assisted by the keeping of a journal and weekly written reports. (See *Suggestions Concerning the Keeping of a Journal*, p.21-22.)

#### THE PASTOR-PROPHET

The one who, on a day-to-day basis, nurtures the people within the flock; stays in touch with them, makes them feel that there is someone who cares; is in touch at times of crisis or of celebration; is there with something of the gentleness and meekness of Christ to encourage them. This is also the one who, as Prophet, helps persons to engage in self-criticism and to see those areas where they are unsundered; who confronts where confrontation is needed.

One individual fills the roles of Pastor and Prophet—a necessary combination. People tend to seek out the person who embodies the pastoral function—who encourages them and treats them with gentleness and loving concern. Likewise, they tend to avoid anyone who embodies the prophetic function—who deals with them sternly, when need be, admitting no evasion or compromise. The Prophet speaks in love but insists on facing the truth. Thus, if both these functions are embodied in one individual, there can be no playing off the one against the other.

The Prophet has, however, the great responsibility of avoiding his or her own inner ambivalence in these matters.

#### THE SHEPHERD

The one (or there may be more than one in a group) who, on behalf of the group, has the responsibility of giving guidance and instruction to those outside the group who have expressed interest in the group. Some such persons may be complete novices where faith is concerned, but it is amazing how quickly they can mature under the guidance of a good shepherd who is really an undershepherd of Jesus Christ. With devoted counseling, a soul can develop a lasting enthusiasm and sense of direction in connection with the mission of the group, and so move toward an experience with Christ that will lead to total commitment.

#### THE ACTIVISTS

Those who, impelled by the Spirit, help the group to take on more and more of the pain and hurt of the world. There should be two or three Activists in each group to keep reminding the members that the group needs constantly to extend itself and that it is by definition a people of vision and presence.

#### OTHER GIFTS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO GROUP LIFE AND MISSIONS

In addition to the five responsibilities mentioned above as essential and for which certain gifts are necessary, there are others that may minister to the life and purposes of the group. Among these others may be:

#### THE ECUMENIST

Who keeps the group in touch with many other combinations of Christian life, both within the home church and within other churches; who contributes to the maintenance of unity and mutual understanding among the groups of the local church and, at the same time, brings them into the ecumenical stream of a worldwide fellowship.



## THE EVANGELIST AND THE APOSTLE

Who are agents of the group in new and perhaps alien territory, to present the kerygma in such a way that others might not be alienated but moved to respond.

## THE INWARD JOURNEY

For a mission group to continue to hear the call of God, to deepen its belongings in Christ, and to give its life in mission, it will of necessity be engaged in an inward journey. The following are the minimal essentials of this journey:

### GROWTH IN THE LIFE OF MEDITATION AND CONTEMPLATION ROOTED IN THE SCRIPTURE.

This movement will deepen one's capacity for adoration, praise, gratitude and ability to discern God's will. *Search for Silence* by Elizabeth O'Connor will afford enlightenment and provide useful exercises for growth in this area of life.

### GROWTH IN SELF-UNDERSTANDING.

Each of us comes to adulthood severely wounded. The journey into self provides new awareness of the wounds and blockages which keep us from the adoration of God and the giving of ourselves unreservedly to one another. There is always the need for a continuing exploration of the dark and light dimensions of our lives. The search for our inner treasure must never cease. Exceedingly helpful resources are the books *Our Many Selves* and *Search for Silence* by Elizabeth O'Connor.

### GROWTH IN COMMUNITY.

For careful consideration: What facilitates community? What blocks community? How belong to others in unlimited liability? How move from being an individual associated with others toward being a corporate person? How build institutions of caring?

## THE OUTWARD JOURNEY

The mission group by its nature is engaged in an outward journey which, to be effective, is possible only as an expression of the inward journey. The true church is always at that juncture where the will of God and the will of the world meet. Because of our inward journey, we can be in the Spirit at that point, serving as the presence of the Kingdom. This will be a ministry of presence, service, and verbal witness in a world sorely in need of transformation.

## NECESSITY OF SPECIFIC DISCIPLINES

The journeys described above will remain concepts only unless specific minimal disciplines are clearly spelled out and embraced by each member of the church and each intern member of a mission group. The minimal disciplines are not aspirations. They are not to be considered as future goals. They are serious commitments with which one struggles daily.

Although minimal disciplines will be spelled out for anyone entering the group, it is imperative that members and intern members each determine the maximum disciplines suited to their own condition and pace. Because the members of any group are at various points of development in their lives, the common minimal disciplines are inadequate for effective growth. Failure of each member to work at the appropriate maximum discipline accounts in part for so many groups' agonizing year after year over a recognized feeling of inadequacy.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

A group needs to adopt a procedure whereby each member is held accountable for the commitment he or she has made and the disciplines each has embraced. Many groups have found a weekly written report helpful. These reports may be given to one member, the Spiritual Guide, designated to receive and respond to them, and may include answers to such questions as:

- What have been the blessings to me during this past week?
- How have I done in keeping my group disciplines on a daily basis?  
(e.g., *I missed two days of daily prayer.*)
- How have I done on my individual disciplines this week? (Those disciplines which I have adopted for my own particular growth above and beyond the group disciplines.)
- What word have I heard God speaking to me through: Community? Scriptures? Other readings and events?
- Is there a broken relationship or commitment for which I need to ask forgiveness?  
Where do I need to forgive?

Another means of accountability is that of a periodic, in-depth, verbal report shared with the group.

Unless some procedure of accountability is followed, a substantial number in the group will become lax in their disciplines. As a result, the other members will be discouraged as will those considering entry into the group.

## PREPARATION FOR LIFE IN A MISSION GROUP

To enter a mission group without prior preparation can be harmful. The mission group, embodying as it does the varied dimensions of church, is total in its scope. It is both inward and outward. It requires that we be accountable to Christ and to one another for the totality of our lives. It assumes that we share unlimited liability for one another. If one is not inwardly ready for such a life, the pressures can be destructive. If one is ready, such a group is life-giving.

A structure must be provided to train for an understanding of the premises upon which life in Christian community is lived.

## A SCHOOL OF CHRISTIAN LIVING

The experience of The Church of the Saviour proved that a School of Christian Living is a vital necessity—*the sine qua non*—for the training of persons to be church. (The church is not the building; the church is the members.) Moreover, the School is not merely a program; it is the means of spiritual formation which determines the strength of the church. The classes offered are:

- Old Testament
- New Testament
- Christian Growth—which includes careful consideration of, and encouragement in the life of prayer, discipline and stewardship
- Christian Doctrine
- Christian Ethics

The nature of a corporate life in Christ becomes apparent as a result of the sharing of class assignments. For instance, if a class is working on the subject of sin, the assignment may be

to identify areas of hostility, violence, or anxiety in one's life and share them with the class. If the class is examining death and its meaning, members may be asked to meditate on their own death. If the topic is prayer, specific assignments in prayer will be made. As a result of the assignments and the sharing, new awareness breaks and change occurs.

After two or more classes in the school, one may become an intern member of a mission group provided she or he intends to complete the remaining classes. This dual belonging is too demanding for many. Often it is wise to complete the classes and then move into a mission group as an intern member.

Some persons are unwilling to undergo this kind of training and may be asked to wait until they see the need for it. They may prefer a group more limited in scope than a mission group such as a prayer group, a Bible study group, an encounter group, or an action group. The existence in a church of other groups meeting many types of needs may relieve the pressure upon those persons not ready to move into a mission group.

## **CATEGORIES OF MEMBERSHIP**

A mission group may include an infinite variety of types, temperaments, and ages. In fact, the more heterogeneous the group, the richer the common life. Every member of the group, however, regardless of age or background, must have seriousness of commitment. The nucleus will consist of those fully committed to Christ and to the dimensions of group life. These members have put down their weight, made the group their primary community, and under Christ are willing to be responsible for its life and mission. They continue to re-sound the call of Christ around which the group coheres. They hold one another accountable for the disciplines of the group. They evoke the gifts of one another. They are faithful to the group's mission and the hope and vision for its infinite expansion.

In this group there may be a limited number of intern members (see page 18-19) exploring the secret at the heart of group life and desiring to make the Members' Commitment.

The ratio of members to intern members will depend upon a number of factors, such as the spiritual maturity and clarity of commitment of the members, and the depth of the problems of the intern members as they explore a deepened commitment to Christ and the faith community. For some intern members the movement into membership is easy. For others it is stormy and difficult. An intern member may be received into a mission group only when pastoral care by members of the group is available.

Intern membership is of limited duration. It is hoped that within a year or eighteen months the intern member will either be drawn more deeply into an understanding of the call to commitment and be ready to make commitment, or will be aware that the timing is not of God and will withdraw from the group to pursue life in another structure.

The great danger is that the intern member will find life in the group supportive and meaningful and will want to remain within it, although unable to make the commitment which alone gives power to the group. Often the desire on the part of the intern member is supported by the members who, genuinely loving of their friend, dislike seeing the issue of commitment clearly drawn, and want the support of that person for the demanding tasks of the group. Even one or two such intern members create problems and make it more difficult for clear options to be presented to others. The intern member embraces much the same disciplines as the members, though there may be a few differences suited to his or her exploring state.



## THE INTERN MEMBER

The length of time spent as an intern member is to be of limited duration. (See Categories of Membership, above.)

The purpose of the category of intern membership is to enable a searching person to explore more deeply what it means to be a part of a servant people and to discover whether he or she can say “yes” to the covenant of full membership in the community.

An intern member is asked to complete the basic preparatory steps including courses in a School of Christian Living unless substitute experiences are approved by group members. Experience has shown that those who have tried to carry the intern member’s responsibility simultaneously with taking preparatory classes have found it extremely difficult. For this reason it is required that an applicant for intern membership complete at least two classes in the school before joining a mission group.

Because intern members are endeavoring to live their way into a deeper and fuller belonging to the church, they live by the disciplines of the members. They are, however, in an exploratory phase, not yet having made a full commitment. They, therefore, are not yet prepared to have a voice in any ultimate decisions to be made by the group.

Intern members are those who feel that they can best realize their potentials through joining with others in a covenant that includes corporate disciplines for deepening the life of devotion and the life of involvement in the world’s need.

Anyone making application should be fully acquainted with the disciplines and committed to them before assuming intern status. This can be best accomplished by conference with the Spiritual Guide and the Prior of a group. If, after the conferences, an applicant wishes to proceed, the Prior and Spiritual Guide will seek the confirmation of the group.

Intern members are always free to leave the group. If an intern reaches the conclusion that membership in this community is not the right move to make, then he or she has the responsibility of withdrawing from the group. However, this action is taken only after time spent in conversation with the mission group members.

### INTERN MEMBER’S COMMITMENT

I commit myself to the covenant of my mission group. By this I declare my willingness to be held accountable for the disciplines that the members have made explicit. I recognize that in making this pledge I am committing myself to involvement with people who are not like me—whose opinions and ways may be in opposition to my own. I thus declare my willingness to be stretched in uncomfortable ways, and to live in the tension and pain of unresolved relationships until differences shall be transcended and hurt transmuted.

I acknowledge that the cornerstone of this community is Jesus Christ, Servant and Liberator—the one who said, “Love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:12-13). In committing myself to the covenant of omission I confessed my willingness to take upon myself the lifestyle of servant. I will endeavor to grow in my availability to each person in the group and I will join in the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed.

I will seek not only to receive, but to give, not only to be loved, but to love. I will give myself

to discovering what it means to be a free person in community and what it means to be a community of free persons.

I recognize that though I am bound by the covenant of my mission group, I am ever free to break with it—never by default, but by open decision arrived at through meditation and in conversation with members of my group.

I celebrate this day because I believe that in binding myself in this covenant, I will be given new possibilities for a life of growth, freedom, and devotion.

## THE SPONSOR'S GUIDE

Each person who expresses a desire to become a member of the church is assigned a sponsor. The sponsor's task is to help the applicant examine his or her call; to consider with care each statement of the membership commitment; and to examine the motivation for joining the church. (Am I hoping to gain status? To gain a feeling of belonging? To be able to obtain more steady nurture? To have a sense of achievement? Such motives are sometimes unconscious but if not discerned they will hinder in members ability to live creatively within the body.)

For the applicant to have acquaintance with a large number of members is important; otherwise, undertaking to be a part of this particular unit of Christ's body may be questionable. If there has been no opportunity for conversations or visits with individual members, the sponsor may take the initiative to arrange for the applicant's meeting as many members as possible.

Candidates should know about the other mission groups in the church, what they are doing, who the members are, and what their purposes are. Information may be obtained through talking with other members or by reading the newsletters of their groups, and by joining in prayer with them. There should be a solidarity with other members even though paths do not necessarily cross in mission; this solidarity is necessary when one participates in decisions affecting the whole congregation.

### THE STEPS TAKEN BEFORE MAKING A PUBLIC COMMITMENT

1. **Classes in a School of Christian Living.** All members of the church will have completed courses in Old Testament, New Testament, Christian Growth, Christian Doctrine, and Christian Ethics. Only two of these courses are prerequisite for joining a mission group as an intern.
2. **Sponsorship.** The sponsor stays in close communication with the applicant's mission group. The sponsor will cover, in whatever way is appropriate, four major areas during meetings with the applicants:
  - The importance of total commitment to Christ.
  - The meaning of Church and of Community.
  - The meaning of Mission and Ecumenism.
  - The obligations of membership.
3. **Required Reading.** The candidate should read *Call to Commitment* and *Journey Inward, Journey Outward* by Elizabeth O'Connor.
4. **Spiritual Autobiography.** Each candidate writes a spiritual autobiography which covers background in the life of the spirit, previous church orientation, the high points of life as they have affected spiritual growth, and where he or she is in a relationship with Christ.
5. **Chapel Vigil.** During the week before making the final commitment, the prospective member spends an hour in the chapel in a vigil of prayer.

6. **Formal Commitment.** In the following week's worship the candidate, surrounded by the members of his or her mission group, stands before the congregation and makes the commitment.

## **LENGTH OF TIME TO BE SPENT IN A MISSION GROUP**

There is no set length of time for membership in a mission group. Membership in an original group maybe for a short time or of long duration, even for a lifetime.

Openness to, and a deepening understanding of God's call, as well as keener awareness of personal gifts may lead a member into a new and different dimension of mission. Perhaps this new area is being served by an already existing group. Then confirmation of the new call by the original group as well as by the new group will be sought. If no group exists in the new area of interest, the person may sound the call and be the one through whom a new mission group comes into being.

### **DIFFICULTIES THAT MAY BE ENCOUNTERED**

The firm, undeviating dedication to the principles and structure required to release spiritual power into the world grows out of a rare quality of discipleship.

The inward journey preparing for recognition of gifts and for hearing the call is long and arduous. Not only may the call be difficult to discover but, once discovered, obedience to the call may take strenuous efforts. "The gate is narrow and the way is hard... And those who find it are few" (Matt. 7:14).

Central to mission groups is a primary commitment to a corporate life and a corporate mission. This involves an intense focus and the commitment of time and energy to a handful of people. Few can embrace such a commitment. Gifted people can see obvious results more quickly and experience more ego satisfaction from pursuing individual projects and in mission within the community. One must be willing to give a lifetime to three or four people if necessary, with no guarantee of expectations ever being fulfilled.

Finally, any clear call that unites us on mission in deeper community may separate us at least for a time from friends and family members. Having confirmed my call, can I remain steadfast in following it?

### **CORPORATE IDENTITY CRISES**

A clear understanding of the covenant of the group is essential for each incoming intern member. Many forces are at work to undermine this understanding.

In spite of every attempt for clarity, some will come into the group who have not internalized its real nature. Some will become aware that their inner call is different from that of the group. Others will feel duped and will want to change the character of the group. Bringing to the surface the feelings of these members will reveal the many selves of the members.

Having had the real integrity and perseverance to live through a stormy identity crisis, the group may be immeasurably strengthened by the suffering it has undergone. On the other hand, there may be no called members left.



## HOW A MISSION GROUP ENDS

When those in a mission group recognize that there are no longer truly dedicated members, they may review the history of the group, give thanks for the months and years of its life, and celebrate its death. Often there is an awareness of sin to be forgiven, grief to be healed, and courage needed for the next steps to be taken.

## EPILOGUE

The letter of the law kills; the Spirit gives life. It is possible to understand at a certain level and to take seriously all that has been said, and still find that nothing life-giving is occurring. The application of the principles can be wooden, legalistic, rigidly applied.

A Christian structure exists to free people from that which binds and restricts them to provide healing for their wounds. The spirit infusing the preparation for mission and informing the life in the mission group is all important. It is a spirit of beauty, joy, love, celebration, festivity. This is the opposite of grimness. Free persons can be flexible. It is well to remember that, when a norm is clearly maintained, exceptions within limits can be made without disrupting the norm.

“The harvest of Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law dealing with such things as these” (Gal. 5:22-23). May God grant such a harvest!

## APPENDIX

### SUGGESTIONS FOR THE KEEPING OF A JOURNAL

- Obtain a good loose-leaf notebook to use for your journal. One standard size is 8 1/2"x5 1/2".
- Date every entry with day, month, and year.
- Write whatever you want to write—whatever is on your mind, e.g.:
  - significant happenings, decisions, insights
  - a description of your mood of the moment
  - an appraisal of your day (or of the day before)
  - hopes, fears, concerns, joys
  - assessment of a relationship with your own inner (true) self, with another person, with God, with material things, with events, with circumstances
  - a “peak experience,” or a failure or success in trying to fulfill that what you believe is God’s will for you to be or to do. [*This is your journal*, for your eyes only unless you sometimes consider it helpful (for the sake of another or for your own sake) to share a part of it with someone whose discretion and discernment you trust.]
- Record your insights from times of meditation and prayer, revelation or enlightenment.
- Record every dream you have when you can remember it, or any part of it:
  - In the lazy, half-waking time when you begin to be aware of having dreamed, train yourself to remain perfectly still and try to remember the dream in its entirety. Even the slightest move can sometimes make the memory of the dream vanish. Having remembered the dream, if it is an involved one jot down single words or phrases to remind you of its contents before you start to write it out. This procedure is especially helpful if you have dreamed two or three separate dreams, or more. Record the whole dream or dreams immediately if this is possible. Keep your journal close at hand.
  - Include all the details, as insignificant as they seem.
  - Think about the dream, trying to determine what your inner self may be trying to convey to you—or what your inner self has been trying to work through while you slept—while your active attention to other things was at rest.
  - Drawing a sketch of the setting or the scene of your dream may prove helpful. You don’t have to be

artistic, just draw as best you can—using stick figures—anything that helps to clarify the scene or the action of the dream.

- It is better to record your dreams as part of your chronological journal rather than in a separate section of your notebook because of their probable relevance to your current activities. You may find that your dreams reflect your spiritual progress or retrogression.
- It is often helpful to write out a prayer, almost like a letter to your heavenly Father-Mother, pouring out your feelings just as they are, tumbling over one another seeking expression, or slowly wrung from out of the depths of you. It is good to do this at varying times when you may be keenly aware of:
  - frustrating distractions
  - immense gratitude for grace received
  - discouragement bordering on despair
  - need for confession
  - overwhelming desire to fulfill God's will in your life—willing fervently to will his will
- As your journal grows, you may find it helpful to have an index with references according to date so that you can find entries easily. Such an index might include: names of persons (included in your journal notes, dreams, or prayers), insights, experiences, topics to which you might want to be able to return readily.
- You might profit by having a separate section of your journal (or even a separate notebook) devoted to a kind of bibliography containing reference to helpful passages related to your topical index; or you might have the excerpts themselves included in your notebook.

### SOME PRIMARY USES OF THE JOURNAL

1. Writing in your journal is one way to articulate and thus to clarify in your own mind your moods, feelings, motives, hopes, fear, loves, hates, ambitions, sufferings, joy—all facets of your life. *Such clarification makes it possible to determine your ultimate goal and the directions in which you move toward or away from that goal.*
2. What matters most is your direction—not how far along you are. There is no point in comparing yourself with others, but *there is validity in comparing yourself as you are today with yourself as you were a month ago, a year ago, five years ago.* You can answer such questions asked:
  - Are you wrestling with the same old problems?
  - Is your direction the same?
  - What about your patience? Is it increasing or decreasing?
  - Are you understanding any more clearly what it must mean to pray without ceasing?
3. *Your journal is a storehouse of your own written prayers.* When you are “down” it is good to read one of your prayers recorded when you were “up” to help you remember that the spiritual journey is a succession of valleys, plateaus, peaks—not a sojourn in any one spot.

### THE ORIGINAL MEMBERSHIP COMMITMENT OF THE CHURCH OF THE SAVIOUR<sup>1</sup>

I come today to join a local expression of the Church, which is the body of those on whom the call of God rests to witness to the grace and truth of God.

I recognize that the function of the church is to glorify God in adoration and sacrificial service, and to be God's missionary to the world, bearing witness to God's redeeming grace in Jesus Christ.

I believe as did Peter that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

1. Written by Peter G. Cosby III, brother of N. Gordon Cosby.

I unreservedly and with abandon commit my life and destiny to Christ, promising to give Him a practical priority in all the affairs of life. I will seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

I commit myself, regardless of the expenditures of time, energy and money to becoming an informed, mature Christian.

I believe that God is the total owner of my life and resources. I give God the throne in relation to the material aspect of my life. God is the owner, I am the owner. Because God is a lavish giver I, too, shall be lavish and cheerful in my regular gifts.

Realizing that Jesus taught and exemplified a life of love, I will seek to be loving in all relations with individuals, groups, classes, races, and nations and will seek to be a reconciler, living in a manner which will end all war, personal and public.<sup>2</sup>

## **THE ORIGINAL MINIMUM DISCIPLINES OF THE CHURCH OF THE SAVIOUR**

### **We covenant with Christ and one another to:**

- Meet God daily in a set time of prayer.
- Let God confront us daily through the Scriptures.
- Worship weekly—normally with our church.
- Grow in love for the brotherhood and all people, remembering the command, “Love one another as I have loved you.”
- Be a vital contributing member of one of the groups.
- Give proportionally, beginning at a tithe of our incomes.
- Confess and ask the help of our fellowship should we fail in these expressions of our devotion.



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2. This paragraph was added in 1966, written by George Cresswell, whose parents, Dorothy and Frank Cresswell, are charter members of The Church of The Saviour.



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