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CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Discipling & Equipping

An Anabaptist / Mennonite Perspective





Front cover illustration:

ROOTS

<http://www.sharonquilts.com/html/imagefiles/roots.html>

Sample Instructions

- 1. Listen carefully to the text as it is read by _____(a volunteer)_____.
- 2. As the passage is read, be aware of what captures your attention. What word or phrase stands out? What idea or question dominates your thoughts? Where does your mind stop or linger?
- 3. After the passage is read, spend a few moments in silence, quietly reflecting on what you heard.
- 4. You are invited to share with one other person at your table or cluster. (6-8 persons)
 - a. Select a person you do not know if possible, a friendly looking stranger.
 - b. Introduce yourself and take turns listening to one another sharing the prominent thing that “caught your attention”. (3-4 minutes)
 - c. Then each share with your table what you heard your partner say. (8 minutes)
 - d. Listen carefully to what you are hearing, noting any common themes.
 - e. If in the context of a room full of table / cluster groups, have each group share one or two themes with the entire group.
- 5. Allow the scripture to resurface again and again to influence you throughout your work, and read the text aloud for reflection at the conclusion of the meeting.

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DWELLING IN THE WORD

“Dwelling in the Word” is a spiritual discipline designed to allow the biblical text to shape and form us. Dwelling in the Word is a unique way of allowing God to speak to us both individually and corporately. This dwelling values listening deeply to God and to one another.

So whenever we meet as Pastoral Leaders, Ministry Team, commissions, committees, or in congregational meetings, the habit of dwelling in the Word in a particular text as we gather can profoundly impact our work. Sometimes it will move us forward. Sometimes it will make us think differently about what is happening and how we respond. We believe God does guide us through the Word and helps us in our discernment as a faith community.

General Description

1. Choose a text – perhaps a text already meaningful to your group, perhaps a text related to your vision and ministry, perhaps a text from the lectionary of the Christian Year for the week.
2. Listen carefully to the text as it is read aloud.
3. Sit together with the text, in silence or in conversation, sharing with one another where your imagination was caught or where a memory was triggered. Let the text draw you together as a group.
4. Bring the text up when you’re trying to make a decision. See what it says to you then.
5. Close the meeting, again read the text aloud, reflect briefly in silence, and pray.
6. Bring up the text again at the next meeting, in the same manner.
7. Live in the text for several months. It will bring more and more to you as you habitually revisit the same text, “Dwelling with the Word”.

THE READING OF SCRIPTURE



Informational	Formational
1. seeks to cover ground quickly	concerned with small portions, “holding to a word, phrase, sentence
2. ... linear moves from beginning to end	in-depth; let passage open up its multiple layers of meaning
3. seek to master the text	allow text to master you, come with openness to listen, receive, respond
4. text is “out there, an object for us to control/handle according to our purpose	text becomes the subject of the reading relationship; we are the object shaped by the text. Wait its address
5. analytical, critical, judgmental	requires humility, detached, willing, loving approach—yieldedness
6. Characterized by a problem-solving mentality	open to mystery; allow the mystery to address us
7. doing oriented	being oriented
8. functional	relational

Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation
by M. Robert Mulholland, Jr.
Upper Room, 1980

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL FORMATION

An Anabaptist / Mennonite Perspective for Congregational Discipling & Equipping



Introduction

The journey to know God is to both experience God and gain understanding of God. The tendency toward more information needs to be balanced by more formation – genuine growth in meaningful experiences in a vital relationship with God.

Spiritual formation practices, experiences, and knowledge will vary significantly from individual to individual, and from those who grow up in the church and those who do not. It is important to recognize that genuine spiritual formation is not neat, tidy and linear. It is often “messy.” It takes time, and it continues over a lifetime. Therefore, spiritual discernment is necessary in guiding new believers and maturing Christians to be vibrant and growing.

This booklet is intended to help pastors, church leaders and members better discern the nature of Christian spiritual formation, the process of “Christ being formed” in us (Gal 4:19). It is shared with the hope it will be useful in “nurturing people toward maturity in Christ and in equipping them for ministries” (LMC VISION: 2010).

The sequence of this booklet moves from spiritual formation understandings, to discerning experiences, to teaching resources. **Part 1** establishes some important understandings and definitions relating to Christian spiritual formation. **Part 2** is a framework from birth to death to examine the process of spiritual formation for “children of the church”. **Part 3** seeks to shed light on the faith journey of those with little or no Christian church background. The bibliographies in **Parts 4 and 5** list available resources for teaching and mentoring ministries. Particularly review the resources noted “highly recommended.” **Part 6** will aid Leadership Teams in doing an assessment of the spiritual formation practices of their congregation in a focused retreat setting.

We pray that this modest booklet may be a tool the Holy Spirit will use in the important work of disciple-making, whether of persons from within the church or outside it. As churches become more aware of spiritual formation dynamics, they will become more effective. In the end, spiritual formation is God’s work. As we listen, learn, share, invite, welcome and love, we make Jesus visible. And it is the Father who draws men and women to Jesus by the Holy Spirit. We are co-laborers with God.

THE PRAYER OF EXAMEN

Examen comes from the Latin referring to the tongue or weight indicator on a balance of scale, hence conveying the idea of an accurate assessment of the true situation.

Preparation

- Quiet yourself within. Take a few centering and cleansing breaths.
- Acknowledge God's presence with you. Offer yourself and this time to God. Bid the Holy Spirit to enliven this discipline.

Review an Event or Period of Time

- Choose an event or period of time for examination. Reviewing the past 24 hours is a great place to begin.
- Beginning with the present moment, let each hour of the past day gently pass by your experience.

Linger as you remember the experiences.

- With generous pauses between questions, notice:
 - What have you taken for granted during this experience.
 - What feeling and thoughts are emerging as you look back over the past 24 hours?
 - Look back again over this period of time and reflect on the ways in which God was present to you.
 - Where do you see God at work? In joy, fears, suffering, work, play? In acts of service, study? In an event, person, sound, nature, music, action?
 - When or where in the past 24 hours did you feel you were cooperating most fully with God's action in your life?
 - When/where in the past 24 hours did you feel you were resisting God's presence and action?
 - Are there actions or thoughts that require God's pardon? The pardon of others?
 - In what ways do you believe God may be calling you to new awareness, a change of heart or a different action?
- Notice a sense of gratitude for one or two particular ways that God was present to you during this period. Express these feelings through journaling, moving, words, creating in some artist medium, singing, etc.

Close with Contemplative Resting and Thankfulness

- Take a moment to rest in the embrace of the Spirit.
- Thank God for whatever you have received.

Similarly with prayer one would choose a practice of prayer for a rule over a period of time from among various possibilities such as simple prayer, praise, intercession, the prayer of relinquishment, the prayer of the heart (centering prayer), the prayer of examen, etc.

Training for Mentoring in Spiritual Formation

- 1. It is essential in training mentors that their own practices and experience as well as their mentoring of others be rooted in an understanding of scripture & theology. It is important that mentors understand the true nature of spiritual practices in the mentoring process.
- 2. It is essential that mentors be equipped with an awareness and understanding of a variety of practices to be able to more adequately and effectively serve their mentorees.
- 3. It is necessary that mentors have opportunity to experience (a) a rule of life, (b) a variety of spiritual exercises and (c) the significance of “fit” or relevance of particular disciplines for their mentorees.
- 4. It is inevitable that equipping mentors begin at a modest level for their work but also understand the longer term work to be done in continuing to equip mentors for their mission in spiritual formation

Suggestions for Training Mentors Related to Spiritual Formation

Consider the following:

- 1. That a biblical/theological basis for spiritual formation be done in a lecture at the beginning of a seven sessions training period.
- 2. That mentors be exposed to various spiritual practices or exercises during a 20 to 30 minute devotional period at the beginning of each of the training sessions
- 3. That mentors be asked at the end of that time to adopt a “rule” to practice for a six-month period.
- 4. That mentors be asked to participate in an annual, day long “spiritual disciplines” retreat as ongoing training for mentoring in spiritual formation during which time they review and discuss their own “rule” or practice.

UNDERSTANDINGS OF
SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND DISCIPLING

Preface

Spiritual formation and discipling only happens by the grace of God as individuals open their lives to the Spirit of God. Yet the church is clearly commissioned by Jesus to make disciples of all people, baptize and teach them. In this divine-human relationship, spiritual formation and discipling takes place by God’s initiative and power and our active response and cooperation. “Formation occurs as God through Christ is **in** us (John 17:23) and we are **in** God (John 17:21)”. (Appendix 1, Smucker)

Definitions of Spiritual Formation and Spirituality

- Spiritual formation is about connecting our knowledge of God with our experience of God. It is a process of transformation, of being conformed to the image of Christ by being rooted and grounded in Him (Eph. 3:16-21). It’s a process that takes place in the inner person, whereby our character is reshaped by the Spirit resulting in a new kind of outward activity.
- Transformation is always grace, but it is also not passive on our part. Consider the difference between a rowboat, a raft, and a sailboat. In a rowboat, we are in charge to determine what direction we go and how fast. We may think we can make ourselves spiritual by having enough quiet times and following the Sermon on the Mount. On our own without the Spirit’s empowerment, it can result in legalism or pride.

On a raft, we become passive and just drift. We may decide to throw out doing anything to further spiritual growth and just depend on God’s grace. But this attitude ignores the commands in Scripture.

On a sailboat, however, the Holy Spirit and the disciple both play a part. In spiritual formation, like in sailing, we can’t control the wind or make the wind blow, but we need to set the sail and continually discern where the wind is at work. Good discernment is both individual and communal with accountability within the congregation. (John Ortberg, “Holy Tension” Leadership)



- Spirituality is “theology in walking shoes”. What we believe about our relationship with God needs to be lived out in relationship experiences with God. It’s like a relationship with a person. We might know things about the person, but what makes a relationship is the actual experience of being with the person, sharing our deeper selves, caring for one another, enjoying laughter and silent companionship, and doing things together. Our relationship with God is like that too. (Kairos School of Spiritual Formation, “Christian Education Curriculum”)

Understandings of Spiritual Formation and Discipling (cont.)

- Spirituality is a journey of becoming all that Christ has called us to be through ever deepening cycles of self-awareness and surrender to Christ. In other words, holistic spirituality is a pilgrimage of deepening responsiveness to God’s control of our life and being. All of God’s work has as its sole purpose that we might become what God created us to be in relationship with Jesus and others and to join the Holy Spirit in bringing all people to Christ.

Spiritual disciplines:

- “The spiritual disciplines are invitations to presence (helping us) become open to the presence of God.” (*Wendy Miller, Invitation to Presence, Nashville, TN: The Upper Room, 1995*)
- “Spiritual disciplines are nothing more and nothing less than ways to create a room where Christ can invite us to feast with him at the table of abundance.” (*Henri J.M. Nouwen’s foreword, Soul Feast, Marjorie J. Thompson’s. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1995*)
- “The inner righteousness we seek is not something that is poured on our heads. God has ordained the disciplines of the spiritual life as the means by which we place ourselves where he can bless us.” (*Richard J. Foster, Celebration of Discipline (New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 1978)*)

Description of Discipling:

- Walking alongside another relationally to discern where a person is at spiritually and what the Spirit of God is doing within his/her life. To disciple another involves taking initiative in the relationship and learning how to facilitate the person’s spiritual growth
- A process, not an event, of a disciple/student being taught and nurtured toward maturity in Christ which is a life-long journey
- To experience the congregation, a community of God’s people, as a “womb for disciple making” through worship, prayer, praise, fellowship, teaching, and caring.

Anabaptist Spiritual Formation (cont.)

The Function of Spiritual Disciplines in Spiritual Formation

1. Spiritual disciplines are practices we pursue for engagement and interaction with God. Such disciplines are essential to spiritual formation. In the practice of these disciplines we keep opening ourselves to God and giving ourselves to relationship with the triune God.
2. On the spiritual journey it is crucial to recognize that these practices are not a means by which we make ourselves more spiritual. But our fidelity and persistence in spiritual practices may well give evidence of being devoted in our relationship with God.
3. When choosing spiritual disciplines we need to prayerfully consider that which is relevant in our present journey and fits our personality. We need to ask God to lead us in the pursuit of these practices.
4. In the pursuit of spiritual practices we need to adopt a “rule” of life for a period of time. A “rule” refers to a set of practices to which we devote ourselves for a time to allow the discipline to become integrated into our being and by that rule to allow our life to be formed spiritually.

This stands in contrast to seeking novelty through a smorgasbord of exercises or the approach of a consumer who seeks to experience all in order to enhance his or her own ego. Fidelity to God is to shun the “fast-food” attitude but rather with humility, patience and continuity present oneself to God through a rule of life over a period of time for the formation of the soul.

5. Such a rule might include “spiritual disciplines and engagement patterns” by which several basic “resources” or “means of engagement” with God are selected by the mentor. For example these might include scripture, prayer, reflection and application or mission. Such engagement patterns would provide the framework within which the individual would select exercises for engagement with God. This could provide a focused exploration of the disciplines that are fitting and relevant.

For example, if one were to choose a regular encounter with scripture as a means of engagement, then the person would need to further select from among a number of possible ways to encounter scripture for his or her rule of life. This could be one of the following: reading through the bible, memorizing scripture, some form of Lectio Divina (meditation on scripture), living the scripture through imaging or imagination, study of scripture, Dwelling in the Word, etc. For a rule of life one would choose one of these for a period of time while also exploring others as a parallel activity.

Anabaptist Spiritual Formation (cont.)

3. We are formed spiritually only in relationship with God. Spiritual formation is not something we can create, attain or possess in ourselves. Like in a deep friendship or a marriage relationship, spiritual formation exists and thrives only in relationship with the other. Christian spiritual formation occurs and exists only within the divine-human relationship, which is always a work in progress. It holds the potential for the agony and ecstasy of any covenantal relationship that is driven toward communion, friendship, intimacy and union.

Any one in a vital relationship has hopes and dreams. There is the desire to be accepted, to know and be known, the hunger to be valued and loved, and the need to find satisfying, meaningful ways to be and to do together. In the divine-human relationship, God’s dream and intention is that we are being transformed into the image of God from one degree of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18). Our formation and transformation is God’s deepest desire, highest priority and greatest joy in his relationship with us.

4. Covenant, communion, and solidarity with God’s mission are essential elements of our lifelong journey into the heart of God. The formation-transformation language of scripture substantiates that on this journey God initiates and we are to respond, to cooperate with the divine initiatives. As God works in us and we cooperate with “Christ being formed in” us (Galatians 4:19), we are being “conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29), and are “being transformed into the same image (as God) from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

We are to be in communion with God and with one another. Our call to covenant is to be faithful to the Great Commandment, to love God with our whole being, to love neighbor as self, and to be true to God’s mission in the world. Communion, covenant and solidarity with God’s mission are inextricably intertwined; they cannot be separated.

Such references include the following: “Christ being formed in you” (*Galatians 4:19*), “being conformed to the death of Christ” (*Philippians 3:10*) being “conformed to the image of his Son” (*Romans 8:29*), being transformed “by the renewal of the mind” (*Romans 12:2*) and “being transformed into the same image (as God) from one degree of glory to another” (*2 Corinthians 3:18*).

Understandings of Spiritual Formation and Discipling (cont.)

Characteristics of Mature Disciples:

- On a journey of growth in an intimate relationship with God
- Passionately committed to Jesus Christ
- Having an understanding of the Biblical story and confessions of faith
- Evident fruit of the Spirit and Christ-like attitudes and character through the indwelling Holy Spirit
- Sharing their faith and discipling others
- Sharing of resources with others
- Being socially responsible; being a peacemaker in the world
- Having a conscious awareness and openness to the work of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts
- Living as an integral part of the body of Christ.

Guiding Scriptures:

- Jesus’ followers are commissioned to “make disciples of all nations”. (Matt. 28:19)
- The Holy Spirit is given to teach and remind us of Jesus’ teachings. (John 14:26)
- Our goal is to grow toward the maturity of godliness. (Matt. 5:48)
- It is “by the Spirit” that we “put to death” our sinful nature. (Rom. 8:13)
- We seek to be equipped “for building up the body of Christ”. (Eph. 4:12)
- We follow Jesus’ example of being gentle and humble teachers. (Matt. 11:28-30)
- Being trained by God may at times seem “painful” but it transforms us so we can share in God’s holiness. (Heb. 12:10-11)
- Being fruitful through the power of the Spirit. (John 15; Matt. 5; Phil. 1:6, 2:13)

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL FORMATION FROM BIRTH TO DEATH

Framework

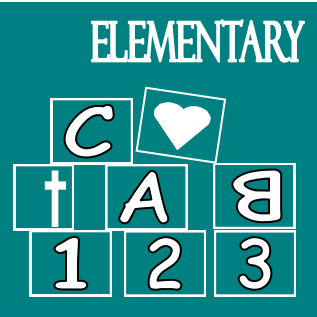
Footstep # 1: Spiritual Formation of Infants, Toddlers, and Pre-school



The loving nurture received from parents or significant care givers contributes to an infant’s healthy development and capacity to experience God. Validate and encourage the child’s innate wonder and awe of creation and of the Creator God in everyday life and worship, both family and church community. Encourage them to listen to God and validate what they hear. Help them learn to pray simple prayers of sharing their thoughts and feelings and concerns with God.

Research shows that children are prone to mystical experience if they are not subjected to narrow religious indoctrination that squelches their sense of wonder and awe. The temptation is for parents to explain everything to children about God and Jesus in ways that overpower their natural sense of wonder and awe.

Footstep # 2: Spiritual Formation of Elementary Age Children



Spiritual formation of children is not mainly preparing them for a future decision for Christ and their Christian life as an adult. Children have spiritual, mental and emotional needs that need to be met in the present. They have many questions about God, life and death. They have an innate longing to be loved and understood. They also have a conscience and are bothered when they have done wrong and therefore need to experience God’s and others’ forgiveness and forgiving others. Children need to experience God’s love and blessing.

The challenge is to tell biblical stories and truths in ways that continue to invite the child to a growing relationship of freely coming to God and Jesus with all of life. Biblical stories can be used to help children understand God’s character. *The underlying foundation that weaves through-out the whole biblical story is that of God’s love and desire for relationship with those He has created and the blessed righteous life intended for us.* When this foundation message does not come through loud and clear, the teachings become focused *only* on ethical or moral behavior. When we try to teach children the life of discipleship divorced from emphasis on this being connected to Jesus living within them, we ask something of them that becomes more like the law rather than grace and their image of God is skewed.

ANABAPTIST SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Marcus G. Smucker

Introduction

From a biblical perspective, Christian spiritual formation engages our head, our heart and our hands. It is a process that is rooted in thought and experience, in theory and practice. To know God is to understand and to experience God; understanding and experience inform each other.

This summary provides a biblical reflection about some of the roots of Christian spiritual formation in scripture and develops its implications for practice and experience. At the end I make specific suggestions for teaching spiritual formation.

In presenting this paper, I am working toward a biblical/theological frame of reference for presenting material and teaching spiritual formation.

Being Formed in Christ

1. The concept of Christian formation is rooted deep in the substrata of biblical thought. In the divine-human relationship formation occurs by God’s initiative and power and our active response and cooperation.
2. In Christian formation Jesus Christ is the touchstone. Formation occurs as God through Christ is *in* us (John 17:23) and we are *in* God (John 17:21). This language of communion and union is the essence of being Christian. This is the means of our conversion and transformation - Christ in us and we in Christ. This is the foundation of Christian spiritual formation.

“Being in” means that we are invited to participate in the life of the triune God, i.e., God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, who lives in love and communion which brings a deep and abiding union. So at the very core God is a relational being who lives in deep communion and invites us into this communion and union of the trinity. God seeks to make a covenant with us so that we come to live in fidelity with this love, communion and union, and with the heartbeat and work of the triune God.

Jesus prayed saying, “I in them and you in me, that they may be completely one.” Formation also occurs as we are in Christ. Again in John 17:21 Jesus prayed saying, “as you father are in me and I in you, may they also be in us.

Many who seek spiritual formation today are like the prodigal who want to take to themselves the capital that is meant to be used in community with the Father and use it in service of their own ego oriented self.

Examples of Spiritual formation (cont.)

SPIRITUAL FORMATION THROUGH HOSPITALITY

- How are we involved in each other's lives and welcoming the stranger into our gatherings?
- How do we go about sharing the rhythm of regular life with one another?
- How and when are persons invited to share their stories with each other (*small groups, fellowship meals, fun events*)?

Hospitality helps us be gracious with our lives and belongings. Hospitality also determines how we structure and equip the worship space. How hospitable are we with the “things” we have in our church (*making the church available for homeless people, providing space for support groups to meet*)?

SPIRITUAL FORMATION THROUGH SERVICE AND WITNESS

- Where and how are we equipped to be sent into the world to love our neighbors and serve “the least of these?”
- How are we being formed to be a people who are connected to, dependent on, and serving the global Church in holistic ministry in building the Kingdom of God:
 - outreaches
 - prison ministry
 - neighborhood events
 - supporting missionaries
 - home Bible studies with unbelievers
 - Alpha course, fall fest at a park,
 - vacation Bible School
 - Family and Friends evening with a meal and meaningful activities for children

Christian Formation from Birth to Death (cont.)

Footstep # 3: Spiritual Formation of Youth



The process of integrating faith into all of life begins consciously during adolescence. The church needs to help young people develop a relationship with Christ (experientially, not just cerebral knowledge). Youth need to understand and embrace their identity in Christ and understand the life values that grow out of that identity. A growing faith identity includes being able to live in trusting relationship with God and the people of God as well as putting faith into action in daily life, loving others as Christ loved.

Youth need to have an understanding of sin and God's grace and be encouraged to make a conscious decision of faith commitment to Christ in an invitational manner. At the same time, youth need space to develop faith and relationship in their own time.

Footstep # 4: Spiritual Formation of Young Adults

The young adult years are a time of searching for independence, searching for identity, questioning a faith that has been taught, and searching for a faith of one's own. The church needs to give them space while challenging them at the same time to discover Jesus for themselves. Young adults need mentors who can give them a safe place to do their searching and questioning.



Footstep # 5: Spiritual Formation of Mid-Life Adults



Mid-life covers a broad range of life experiences; parenting young children, releasing young adults, job/ vocation change, caring for aging parents, service / retirement opportunity, etc). Often mid life adults find themselves in situations where the faith they have felt comfortable with all these years seems insufficient for the complexity of the new situation. *In mid-life persons typically begin a more focused and often intense inward journey.* They may go through a dark time spiritually where God does not seem to speak or act like they've known God to respond previously in life. The challenge for them is to learn to trust God in the absence of experiencing God through the senses.

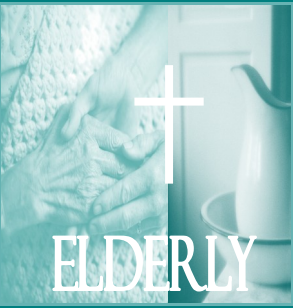
Christian Formation from Birth to Death (cont.)

Spiritual Formation of Mid-Life Adults (cont.)

Spiritual growth for the mid life adult comes through the process of ever deepening cycles of self-awareness, surrender and union with Christ. These persons come to have faith, hope and love, not through their own strength, but through the deeper power of the Holy Spirit within them.

Mid-life adults begin to sense their mortality with more urgency and wrestle with questions about life and death and temptations. They have learned that nothing is perfect and discover that areas in their faith journey need further exploration and deepening relationship with God.

Footstep # 6: Spiritual Formation of Elderly



Older adults may experience a loss of meaning in the shift to retirement and a sense of isolation and loneliness. The *developmental* task of the older adult is to achieve integrity, to pull life together into a whole. Growing old is primarily a spiritual pilgrimage. They become engaged in a life review with the challenge of finding healing for bitter memories, lost opportunities, and experiences of loss from injustice.

Elderly persons who no longer are able to do service for God in ways they’ve always known struggle to re-embrace their identity in Christ in being unconditionally loved and accepted as God’s beloved whether they “do” anything for God or not. It is almost a return to the spiritual formation task of young children in recognizing and appreciating both the small pleasures and the frequently overlooked opportunities for service that are embedded in their everyday lives. They can be encouraged to develop further the disciplines of prayer, meditation and solitude in deepening their relationship with Christ. *They need to grow in their sense of God’s presence and being comfortable with simple conversation with God.*

Older adults need to develop a satisfying philosophy of life against the backdrop of a shortening life span and diminished physical strength. They need to develop a theology of suffering that helps them remain joyful in spite of unpleasant circumstances. Death comes to be seen as a meaningful event, a graduation on to a greater season of life, and therefore they accept mortality while being good stewards of health.

Their faith calls them to renewed courage to live out life that is able to deal with unpleasant realities without illusion. They come to make peace with life’s incongruities and learn to continue to trust in God. They can continue to learn and grow and come to a gracious acceptance of one’s life, even one’s limitations, through the strength of God’s grace and love. They need to be encouraged as well to pass on words of hope and wisdom to the younger generation.

EXAMPLES OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

... where persons can participate and experience
the transformative workings of God through Community

SPIRITUAL FORMATION THROUGH CREATIVE WORSHIP

- How are our services and prayer gatherings designed to be interactive experiences with God through music, prayer, giving, art, ritual, confession, blessing, sermon, communion, etc.
- How are we teaching and leading persons in prayer and giving opportunities for prayer retreats or intercessory prayer?
- How do persons receive anointing of oil or prayers for healing?
- How do we incorporate ritual to invite God into life passages as spiritual markers in persons’ lives (births, back to school, accepting Jesus, baptism, marriage, retirement, death)?
- Other examples for prayer:
 - Intercessory prayer room ministry with guides for intercession for congregation
 - Conference and missions
 - Take children’s Sunday school classes to the prayer room to learn what happens there and to pray
 - Prayer times focused on local community
 - Focused prayer times to intercede for two-four things relating to the congregation, community or world
 - Linking persons together to be prayer partners
 - Training persons to have prayer ministry for needs at the end of a service

SPIRITUAL FORMATION THROUGH DIALOGUE AND BELIEF

We are called to be vulnerable and authentic in engagement with scripture and with each other in order to allow Christian faith to come to life in our world.

- How do we allow the Bible to unfold and lead us?
- Where do persons participate in a dialogue about the difficult questions and demands of faith?
- Where do persons work through struggle within the community of faith?
- Is this what takes place in Sunday school classes, mid-week events, age-related group meetings, small groups?
- How does mentoring take place in our community?
- Are persons finding spiritual friends that facilitate their sharing about spirituality in their everyday life?

PRAYERFUL REREADING OF TOOLS:

Have each person reread the spiritual formation frameworks in an open attitude of prayer, requesting God to speak to them about any areas that as leaders they need to pay attention to. Then have persons share what struck them in the reading.

AFTERNOON SESSIONS:

It is difficult to structure how the afternoon should be spent, as leadership groups need to feel the freedom to go deeper into whatever spoke to them in the morning. Our tendency often is toward curriculum, teaching, and knowledge. How can we balance that with an emphasis on our relationship and experience of God?

God may not direct you to change your discipling activities or take on a whole new “method” of discipling. You may find you are being directed to change your approach and way of thinking in those discipling activities.

Some questions that may help encourage reflection and evaluation:

- 1. How does discipling happen in our congregation? When is someone “qualified” to disciple another?
- 2. Where do persons get training in the congregation in order to disciple others? Training on helping others to wonder, open themselves to God’s presence, doing soul care.
- 3. How is scripture used in our congregation? Is it used more as information or do persons learn how to allow scripture to form them?
- 4. How does our congregation encourage the telling of stories across the generations and between the footsteps in the framework of birth to death?

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL FORMATION FOR ADULTS

***Note:** This framework or roadmap is not meant to describe a linear movement only. Spirituality is messy and non-linear. It is a process and a journey. Walking in relationship with another, partnering with God’s Spirit to discern, and active mentoring is a journey of commitment and patience.*



Marker #1: Spiritual Formation in Evangelizing

Focus: *Listen to the other’s story and learn how they experience God.*

- Extend “hospitality with the stranger” from the heart to build relationship with persons through shared life experiences.
- Listen to the persons’ story and invite sharing with questions such as:
 - What’s your earliest picture or experience of God?
 - How would you describe your picture of God now?
 - What has been your spiritual journey?
 - What has been your experience with religion or church?
 - Who is God for you? Who is Jesus for you?
 - Do you have practices or people that support and honor your relationship to God?
 - How have persons been influential in your religious experience?
 - Have you had moments of great wonder, awe, or joy that have been life-shaping?
 - Tell me about any time in your life where you felt close to God.
 - Were you ever aware of God’s love for you?
 - What are you looking for in relationship with God?
- Discover the spiritual worldview (beliefs, values, behaviors) of this person so you can relate the person’s story to God’s story. If the person asks you if you are a Christian, respond with a question of what do you mean by Christian? The reply may give you a basic understanding of the worldview and context of this person’s God image.



Marker #2: Spiritual Formation with Seekers

Focus: *Build relationship, share your experience of God and invite to faith in Jesus.*

- Build relationship with the person and become known by him/her
- Involves nurturing an awareness of God’s presence and calling forth a response to God’s grace
- Take natural opportunities of telling your experience of God’s grace
- Encourage persons to “belong” before having to “believe” or “behave.”
- Invite persons to encounter God in faith community worship and fellowship
- Keep open to their doubts and questions. Invite their questions by naming some of your own fears or doubts from your own journey. Ask the person what questions or thoughts they have

Christian Formation for Adults (cont.)



Marker #3: Spiritual Formation with New Believers

Focus: Affirm and guide the new believers into a growing relationship with the Lord.

- Conversion is both an event and an ongoing process of transformation through relationship with Jesus Christ
- Centered around the person’s growing relationship with Christ and with the Body
- The experiential learning process of being discipled brings us into the mystery and knowledge of God. Walk together in the following experiences:
 - Experience the communal life and worship within the body of Christ for confession and nurture of the soul
 - Prayer – speaking and hearing God’s voice
 - Use of scripture for confession and nurturing the soul – meditation, praying Scripture
 - Cultivate an attitude of thanksgiving, speaking and singing praise.
 - Disciplines that facilitate growth in relationship with Christ in grace and truth
 - Understanding identity in Christ and openness to Christ’s transformation
 - Spiritual discernment in decision-making
 - Healing of false picture of God and self image from past experiences
 - Understanding and joining God’s work within the world
 - Understanding and experience of the Body of Christ
 - Empowerment of the Holy Spirit to live a Godly life
 - Experiencing God’s grace on a daily basis
 - Committed to developing healthy growing family and interpersonal relationships
 - Committed Christian life in home, church, and community
 - Learning Christian stewardship of resources (money, environment, relationships)
 - Sharing faith with others

Church Leadership Retreat (cont.)

GATHERING:

Invite one person in the group to lead in centering worship on God. Explain that the day will include time spent together and in solitude for prayer. Distribute the schedule. Bring the day before God in prayer and invite the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit to direct the day.

SILENT PRAYER:

Invite each person to prayerfully reflect on how his/her own spiritual formation was facilitated? What were benchmark encounters with God? Who were the persons who were used by God to help them in their spiritual relationship with God? What role did they have?

Then the second question for silent reflective prayer is on how our congregation facilitates spiritual formation.

SHARING AS PAIRS:

Have persons share their personal reflections with each other. This helps persons to know more about each other on a soul level as well as dream new ideas for the congregation. After each person has shared from his/her personal journey, the two persons can share where they see spiritual formation already happening in the congregation (*see the examples listed at end of the retreat framework*).

COMPILATION:

Have each pair share their list of spiritual formation activities within the congregation. Designate someone to write these on a board or paper for the group to keep in front of them as they work in the afternoon.

CHURCH LEADERSHIP RETREAT

CONGREGATIONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION ASSESSMENT

Sherill Hostetter

PURPOSE:

The most important part of a church leadership team’s work is to facilitate the spiritual formation and growth of all persons within the congregation. In this one day retreat, leaders will step back and prayerfully reflect on how spiritual formation is already taking place and where intentional changes may need to happen. Some congregations may desire to invite an outside resource person to facilitate the leadership team in this retreat.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Every leader should review the tools in this booklet for spiritual formation assessment.

*It would be helpful if every leader chose one of the books on the bibliography for spiritual formation to read before the retreat.
All leaders need to have read this booklet ahead of time.*

SCHEDULE:

- 8:30 am Arriving and settling
- 9:00 Gathering for worship
- 9:00 Silent reflective prayer on how I have been spiritually formed
How our congregation facilitates spiritual formation
- 9:30 Sharing in dyads
- 10:00 Compilation of reflections as a total group
- 10:30 Break
- 11:00 Prayerful rereading of the two “frameworks” in this booklet (pgs. 10-15)
- 11:30 Sharing of what stood out for persons from the readings
- 12:00 Lunch
- 1:00 What paradigm shifts do we need in our congregation in the ways we do spiritual formation?
- 2:00 How would God desire to use us as leaders in guiding the congregation in spiritual growth?
- 2:30 Break
- 3:00 What needs to happen from here?
- 3:30 Small groups to pray for each other in the call of spiritual leadership

Christian Formation for Adults (cont.)



COMMIT & GROW

Marker # 4: Christian Spiritual Formation in Preparation for Baptism *(These are in addition to those listed above.)*

Focus: Training for growth and commitment to Christ and the church.

- Encounter the biblical story and how his/her story fits into God’s story.
- Begin sharing God’s love and your faith with others
- Explore the meaning of a lifelong covenant with Christ and the church
- Understand the Confessions of Faith from an Anabaptist/Mennonite perspective
- Encounter the biblical story and how his/her story fits into God’s story.
- Embrace the mystery of faith in baptism, communion, and other rituals.
- Commit to involvement and accountability within a local congregation
- Participate in the sharing of firstfruits tithes and gifts
- Pursue a lifetime commitment to being a peacemaker
- Embrace life in Christ as being holistic, permeating all of life.



EQUIP & CHALLENGE

Marker # 5: Spiritual Formation for Maturing Baptized Christians

Focus: A lifetime of maturing relationship with God and loving ministry to others.

- Committing to an ongoing relationship with God as life-long learners that focus on applying what is learned
- Finding and experiencing accountability with a spiritual friend
- Embracing the Spirit’s transformative work that enables new understandings of self and others to emerge
- Weaving life-giving spiritual practices into the fabric of daily life
- Discovering his/her spiritual gifts and being given opportunities to use them
- Finding ways to be involved with non-Christians that gives the opportunity to share one’s faith and disciple others

SPIRITUAL FORMATION RESOURCES

All Resources Available in the Lancaster Conference Center Library

Highly Recommended

Dean, Kenda Creasy and Ron Foster. **The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry**. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1998.

The focus of this book deals directly with the primary need for God in the lives of youth and those who minister to them! It points first and foremost to a passionate embrace of Jesus Christ. Well-chosen words reassure with wisdom salted with humor and Christian conviction.

Miller, Wendy. **Jesus Our Spiritual Director: A Pilgrimage Through the Gospels**. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2004.

Rice, Howard. **The Pastor as Spiritual Guide**. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1998.
Spiritual guidance can serve as the organizing principle for ministry and provide a unique and valuable pastoral focus. This book is a unique and superb treatment of the spiritual task of the pastor in all aspects of ministry.

Thompson, Marjorie. **Family: The Forming Center: A Vision of the Role of Family in Spiritual Formation**. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1989.
A vision of the role of family in spiritual formation is of critical importance. This book explores ways to strengthen the spiritual bonding within families, offers many options for developing spiritual disciplines, and gives practical advice on family group discernment in setting priorities for action.

Thompson, Marjorie J. **Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life**. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. 1995.
The author brings a celebrative perspective to the spiritual disciplines, seeing them as the means by which our souls feast on spiritual food and thereby satisfy our hunger for God. The book is intended to be formative for its readers rather than merely informative.

Thurman, Howard. **The Inward Journey**. Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1961.
Thurmond was pastor of the first interracial, interdenominational church in the United States. This book, authored by a pastor, poet, mystic, philosopher, and theologian is a unique collection of short devotional writings on the quest for meaning, understanding, fulfillment, love, peace, and God. It concludes with eleven impressive reflections on themes from Psalm 139

Discipling / Catechism Resources (cont.)

Additional Resources (cont.)

Janzen, Susan E., ed. **Making Disciples: A Guide for Youth Catechism Leaders**. Newton, KS: Faith & Life Press, 1992.

Kehler, Larry, ed. **Focus on Faith**. Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, n.d.

Keller, Frank R. **Preparation for Covenant Life**. Newton, KS: Faith & Life Press, 1979.

Krabill, Russell. **Beginning the Christian Life: A Manual to Prepare the Young Believer for Church Membership**. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988.

Mennonite Church USA. **Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective**. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995.

Mennonite General Conference. **Mennonite Confession of Faith**. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1963.

Peifer, Jane Hooper and John Stahl-Wert. **Welcoming New Christians: A Guide for the Christian Initiation of Adults**. Newton, KS: Faith & Life Press, 1995.

Schertz, Mary H. and Dan Epp-Tiessen, eds. "Catechesis", **Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology**. Fall 2003, Vol. 4, No. 2.

Stutzman, Ervin R. **Being God's People: Embracing Christian Faith from a Mennonite Perspective**. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998.

Witmer, Dave. **I Have Decided to Follow Jesus: A Personal Bible Study for Growth in Christ**. Dave Witmer, 1997.

DISCIPLING / CATECHISM RESOURCES

Highly Recommended

Hershberger, Michele. **God's Story, Our Story: Exploring Christian Faith & Life**. Scottdale, PA: Faith & Life Resources, 2003.

This curriculum is organized around the Biblical story, beginning at Genesis, ending in Revelation, and is centered on Jesus, whom we follow as Savior and Lord. Readers are constantly invited to see their own faith journey in light of God's story. In working with the Bible's narrative, this book covers the points of faith that are important to Mennonites, especially as stated in the *1995 Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*.

Yamasaki, April. **Making Disciples: Preparing People for Baptism, Christian Living and Church Membership**. Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing Network, 2003.

This resource gives congregational leaders a wealth of ideas and tools for calling and integrating believers into the church. While its primary focus is on discipleship of older youth, the manual has plenty of ideas for adult discipleship as well.

Additional Resources

Mennonite Catechisms (1970-1995)

- Beginning the Christian Life
- Being God's People
- Faith for the Journey
- Focus on Faith
- Making Disciples
- Preparation for Covenant Life
- Turning Toward Jesus
- Welcoming New Christians

Becker Ann Weber. **Faith for the Journey: Youth Explore the Confession of Faith**. Newton, KS: Faith & Life Press, 1997.

Holsopple, Jerry L., Producer/Writer. **Turning Toward Jesus: A Video and Study Resource for New (and Growing) Believers**. Harrisonburg, VA: Mennonite Media Productions, 1995.

Spiritual Formation Resources (cont.)

Curriculum Resources

Journeys with God is "an innovative, Bible-based, child-centered curriculum" used in the Mennonite Elementary Schools. The theological underpinnings are Anabaptist and the foundational frame work was developed by J. Nelson Kraybill.

Spiritual Formation: Christian Ed Curriculum introduces the basics of Christian spirituality, helps to notice and articulate experiences with God, and encourages a meaningful personal spiritual life. It is designed for a 12-week class of approximately 45-60 minutes class periods. It was developed by the Kairos School of Spiritual Formation.

Faith Development Series focuses on the Anabaptist understandings of faith development during the various stages of the life cycle. Published by Faith & Life Press, the titles in this booklet series are:

Lehn, Cornelia. **Children and Faith: The Education and Conversion of Children**. Newton, KS: Faith & Life Press, 1993.

Bergen, Abe. **Youth and Faith: Testing the Boundaries**. Newton, KS: Faith & Life Press, 1995.

Cornies, Ingrid. **Young Adults and Faith: Expanding the Horizons**. Newton, KS: Faith & Life Press, 1995.

Hawkley, Ken. **Middle Adults and Faith: Building Bridges**. Newton, KS: Faith & Life Press, 1995.

Wiebe, Katie Funk. **Older Adults and Faith: Making New Maps**. Newton, KS: Faith & Life Press, 1995.

Spiritual Formation Resources (cont.)

Additional Resources

Ackerman, John. Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2001.

Anderson, Keith R. and Randy D. Reese. Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide to Seeking and Giving Direction. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999.

Bass, Dorothy C. and Don C. Richter, eds. Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2002.

Bastian, Karl and Sara, My Awesome Adventure: Finding New Life with Jesus Christ. Fort Collins, CO: Through the Bible Publishers, 2001.

Curtis, Brent and John Eldredge. The Sacred Romance: Drawing Closer to the Heart of God. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997.

Demarest, Dr. Bruce. Soul Guide: Following Jesus As Spiritual Director. NavPress Colorado Springs, CO 2003.

Foster, Richard J. Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998.

Foster Richard J. Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home. New York: Harper Collins Publishers 1992.

Jersak, Brad. Can You Hear Me? Tuning in to the God Who Speaks. Abbotsford, BC Canada: Fresh Wind Press, 2003.

Jones, Timothy. Finding a Spiritual Friend: How Friends and Mentors Can Make Your Faith Grow. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1998.

Spiritual Formation Resources (cont.)

Additional Resources (cont.)

Jones, Tony. Soul Shaper: Exploring Spirituality and Contemplative Practices in Youth Ministry. Youth Specialties Books, El Cajon, CA, 2003.

Miller, Wendy. Invitation to Presence: A Guide to Spiritual Disciplines. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1995

Miller, Wendy. Learning to Listen: A Guide for Spiritual Friends. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1993.

Scazzero. Peter L. The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.

Smith, Christian with Melinda Lundquist Denton. Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers. Oxford University Press, Oxford, England, 2005.

Stutzman, Rose Mary, ed. Soul Care: How to Plan and Guide Inspirational Retreats. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003.

Yaconelli, Michael. Messy Spirituality: God's Annoying Love for Imperfect People. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.

Spanish Resources

Martin, John R. Adventuras en el Discipulado. Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala: SEMILLA and CLARA, 1995.

Suderman, Robert J. Discipulado Cristiano al Servicio del Reino. Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala: SEMILLA and CLARA, 1994.

Schipani, Daniel S. Discipulado y Liberacion. Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala: SEMILLA and CLARA, 1993.