



July-August 2009

FELLOWSHIP

BEING THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD



COOPERATIVE BAPTIST
FELLOWSHIP
of South Carolina

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Spiritual formation is about growing in spiritual maturity and discipleship. We do not achieve this kind of spiritual growth through our own sheer determination and will power. Spiritual formation is actually the work of divine grace in our lives with which we are called to cooperate.

Spiritual formation is not a new catch phrase for Christian education. While Christian education is an important component of spiritual formation, the words are not synonymous.

Christian education implies the exchange of Christian ideas while spiritual formation focuses on the transformation of a soul. In other words, Christian education is information-centered whereas spiritual formation is transformation-centered.

Christian education is teacher-pupil oriented; spiritual formation is Holy Spirit-disciple oriented. Christian education may be considered linear; spiritual formation is considered dynamic.

In the past Christian education focused on "saving souls" and "filling minds." We participated in Sunday school, Discipleship Training, WMU, or Brotherhood; attended preaching services, prayer meetings, revivals, and Vacation Bible school; and read our Bible, prayed, tithed, and witnessed.

Baptists believed that participation in these activities ensured one would become a mature Christian disciple.

CBF churches are discovering it's time for a paradigm shift. In our postmodern world, educators and theologians have seen a shift in emphasis from knowledge to

experience and from theories to relationships concerning matters of Christian discipleship.

In an attempt to make this paradigm shift, moderate Baptists understand that helping persons engage in relationships with others and have meaningful life experiences creates an atmosphere for spiritual formation.

From this perspective the "learner" is seen as an individual on a spiritual journey. The "teacher" serves as a spiritual guide or mentor, and the practices associated with spiritual formation may include silence, listening, studying, journaling, mediating, observing the Sabbath, and serving in the name of Christ.

More from Amy on the back page

by AMY JENNINGS

Amy Jennings is a spiritual director, teacher, and minister. She earned a master of divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and has recently moved to Greenwood from Tennessee where she served in churches, schools, and agencies for almost 20 years. Amy also worked as a production editor for the United Methodist Publishing House in Nashville, and has been a contributing writer to several publications, including the Upper Room Dictionary for Spiritual Formation. For the past four years she has served as a member of the Spiritual Formation Network Discerning Community for CBF.

Contact Amy
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A labyrinth is an ancient symbol that relates to wholeness. It combines the imagery of the circle and the spiral into a meandering but purposeful path. The labyrinth represents a journey to our own center and back again out into the world. It is a symbol that creates a sacred space. A labyrinth is not a maze. A maze has twists, turns, and blind alleys. It requires logical, sequential, analytical activity to find the correct path into the maze and out. A labyrinth has only one path. The way in is the way out.

LABYRINTH IN PRAYER GARDEN IS FBC GREENVILLE'S LATEST SPIRITUAL FORMATION TOOL

A new labyrinth in the prayer garden is the major focus for spiritual formation currently at First Baptist Church Greenville. "We are working to help educate our people about and invite their use of the labyrinth," said minister of education Michelle McClendon.

The labyrinth is just the most recent addition to the church's program of spiritual formation. The church's spiritual formation committee:

- Provides various contemplative

retreats, workshops and worship experiences at various times during the year.

- Prepares a Lenten devotional booklet primarily written by church members for use during Lent.

- Sponsors a Centering Prayer group.
- Hosts a "Dream" Group that employs the method of dreamwork developed by the Haden Institute.

- Partners with and promotes events of NEXUS Center and of Contemplative Outreach of Greater Greenville.

"We aim for an integrative approach," Michelle said. "We also seek to consider the various ways in which individuals approach spirituality—intellectual, emotional, mystical, and hands on."

In the coming months, FBCG will offer introductory spiritual formation opportunities for people who know little about the history of spirituality and spiritual practices to help broaden their understanding and awareness.

www.firstbaptistgreenville.com/ChristianEnrichment/spiritualFormation.html
Michelle McClendon | m.mcclendon@firstbaptistgreenville.com

SPIRITUAL FORMATION ESTABLISHING ROOTS AT FBC GREENWOOD

First Baptist Church in Greenwood is excited about its spiritual formation ministry. "Since last September, we've begun to weave some elements of spiritual formation into the life of our church," said Blake Kendrick, associate pastor for students and adult spiritual formation.

Some of those areas are:

1) Contemplative Prayer: Every other month, the church holds a 35-minute service of contemplative prayer and communion in the chapel before morning Bible study. The service features reflections upon lectionary passages and liturgical themes. "Congregants are invited into a time of silence," Blake said. "The service is intentionally organized to give God time and space to speak."

2) Emphasis on spiritual gifts: In August, FBC Greenwood will begin an emphasis on using spiritual gifts to fulfill God's mission for the church. Each person will complete

a spiritual gifts inventory to measure his/her spiritual gifts. "The premise behind this approach is that spiritual formation involves an inward and outward journey of the soul," he said. "As our congregants journey inwardly through worship, study, contemplative prayer, and other spiritual disciplines, they

discover their true calling and purpose. This calling will lead each person on an outward journey through missional service. Just as our mission statement says, we are inwardly seeking God's heart as we are outwardly being God's hands."

3) Student Ministry, particularly with middle and high school students: Each Wednesday night, the youth group gathers for *Pathways*,

where participants chart their spiritual journeys in a journal, and learn about *lectio divina*, contemplative prayer, and holy friendships.

"At the core of our practice of spiritual formation rests the metaphor of the soul's inward to outward journey. I think this is key to understanding our calling to a personal and corporate relationship with God and neighbor. Each facet of the journey strengthens the other; they weave together beautifully to form a stronger cord of faith."

— Blake Kendrick, bkendrick@embarqmail.com

One way that we are encouraging our members to develop their relationship with God is to get them involved in a small group Bible study. While Sunday School is a good place for fellowship and for a brief Bible lesson, in-depth Bible study rarely happens in classes. We have co-ed, men only, and women only groups. I would recommend the *Companions in Christ* series, studies published by Kerygma, Renovare resources, and short term studies published by The Upper Room to be used by small groups interested in spiritual formation.

— Christy McMillin-Goodwin, associate pastor, Oakland Baptist Church, Rock Hill

Gifts given through CBF of South Carolina

Fiscal Year July 1, 2008 through June 30, 2009

These are gifts given through CBFSC. Some churches may make direct gifts to CBF National, and to other designated causes.

Church	City	General Budget of CBFSC	State Missions CBFSC	General Budget of CBF National	Global Missions CBF National	Other	Total Giving through CBFSC
Augusta Heights Baptist Church	Greenville	\$1,402.50	\$705.00	\$162.50	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2,270.00
Augusta Road Baptist Church	Greenville	\$3,081.19	\$30.00	\$5,722.20	\$849.00	\$0.00	\$9,682.39
Belmont Baptist Church	Columbia	\$937.19	\$150.00	\$1,556.53	\$185.00	\$0.00	\$2,828.72
Boulevard Baptist Church	Anderson	\$32,334.82	\$205.00	\$59,921.36	\$8,205.50	\$128.99	\$100,795.67
Brunson Baptist Church	Brunson	\$1,448.53	\$1,045.00	\$2,504.42	\$20.00	\$1,104.00	\$6,121.95
Cedar Spring Baptist Church	Spartanburg	\$388.98	\$0.00	\$722.39	\$575.00	\$0.00	\$1,686.37
Chesterfield Baptist Church	Chesterfield	\$0.00	\$327.25	\$0.00	\$193.00	\$0.00	\$520.25
Clearview Baptist Church	Anderson	\$847.26	\$0.00	\$792.97	\$715.31	\$0.00	\$2,355.54
Corinth Baptist Church	Vance	\$2,464.12	\$50.00	\$4,576.19	\$125.00	\$0.00	\$7,215.31
Cornerstone Baptist Church	Hartsville	\$1,713.50	\$68.26	\$502.88	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2,284.64
Earle Street Baptist Church	Greenville	\$1,869.59	\$0.00	\$3,472.08	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$5,341.67
East Park Baptist Church	Greenville	\$41.43	\$0.00	\$76.88	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$118.31
Emmanuel Baptist Fellowship	Lexington	\$1,753.22	\$1,587.00	\$3,255.91	\$450.00	\$0.00	\$7,046.13
Fernwood Baptist Church	Spartanburg	\$10,317.91	\$619.17	\$10,316.85	\$3,054.17	\$270.00	\$24,578.10
First Baptist Church	Aiken	\$56,524.43	\$1,557.03	\$0.00	\$57,617.55	\$17,010.88	\$132,709.89
First Baptist Church	Allendale	\$914.37	\$0.00	\$1,698.15	\$50.00	\$0.00	\$2,662.52
First Baptist Church	Anderson	\$12,967.50	\$1,505.50	\$20,170.05	\$3,371.75	\$0.00	\$38,014.80
First Baptist Church	Belton	\$3,359.61	\$1,218.00	\$6,239.30	\$5,455.05	\$14,398.35	\$30,670.31
First Baptist Church	Blackville	\$6,380.51	\$0.00	\$1,409.62	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$7,790.13
First Baptist Church	Clemson	\$2,909.20	\$0.00	\$5,402.80	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$8,312.00
First Baptist Church	Clinton	\$3,487.68	\$100.00	\$3,265.35	\$4,112.48	\$0.00	\$10,965.51
First Baptist Church	Conway	\$5,104.54	\$0.00	\$9,479.89	\$50.00	\$0.00	\$14,634.43
First Baptist Church	Denmark	\$78.55	\$1,297.57	\$145.85	\$743.61	\$0.00	\$2,265.58
First Baptist Church	Easley	\$3,988.25	\$0.00	\$7,406.75	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$11,395.00
First Baptist Church	Edgefield	\$2,931.75	\$0.00	\$5,444.60	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$8,376.35
First Baptist Church	Gaffney	\$2,821.05	\$0.00	\$1,719.11	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$4,540.16
First Baptist Church	Greenville	\$11,000.00	\$3,767.74	\$0.00	\$64,051.38	\$1,116.00	\$79,935.12
First Baptist Church	Greenwood	\$9,625.00	\$2,251.50	\$17,875.00	\$8,541.12	\$300.00	\$38,592.62
First Baptist Church	Holly Hill	\$3,711.92	\$246.50	\$4,783.83	\$247.65	\$0.00	\$8,989.90
First Baptist Church	Inman	\$9,731.15	\$0.00	\$18,072.13	\$100.00	\$0.00	\$27,903.28
First Baptist Church	Lake City	\$30,035.00	\$0.00	\$65.00	\$0.00	\$20,000.00	\$50,100.00
First Baptist Church	Lake View	\$700.00	\$0.00	\$1,300.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2,000.00
First Baptist Church	Lancaster	\$74.00	\$0.00	\$91.00	\$50.00	\$0.00	\$215.00
First Baptist Church	Laurens	\$1,280.12	\$0.00	\$2,377.37	\$325.00	\$0.00	\$3,982.49
First Baptist Church	Loris	\$150.50	\$0.00	\$149.50	\$240.00	\$0.00	\$540.00
First Baptist Church	Mauldin	\$3,117.23	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$3,117.23
First Baptist Church	Newberry	\$7,976.16	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$7,976.16
First Baptist Church	North Charleston	\$213.99	\$0.00	\$397.37	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$611.36
First Baptist Church	Orangeburg	\$13,985.71	\$0.00	\$19,473.21	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$33,458.92

Church	City	General Budget of CBFSC	State Missions CBFSC	General Budget of CBF National	Global Missions CBF National	Other	Total Giving through CBFSC
First Baptist Church	Pamplico	\$1,067.55	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,067.55
First Baptist Church	Pendleton	\$9,995.00	\$0.00	\$10,465.00	\$5,935.75	\$0.00	\$26,395.75
First Baptist Church	Piedmont	\$1,989.79	\$1,933.50	\$3,695.35	\$1,257.00	\$150.00	\$9,025.64
First Baptist Church	Simpsonville	\$2,257.66	\$0.00	\$1,744.72	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$4,002.38
First Baptist Church	Walterboro	\$6,787.92	\$0.00	\$12,606.11	\$6,572.50	\$0.00	\$25,966.53
First Baptist Church	Woodruff	\$1,195.09	\$0.00	\$1,342.99	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2,538.08
First Baptist Church	York	\$5,561.79	\$610.00	\$10,329.03	\$3,246.50	\$0.00	\$19,747.32
Florence Baptist Fellowship	Florence	\$586.00	\$0.00	\$145.00	\$50.00	\$0.00	\$781.00
Greenlawn Baptist Church	Columbia	\$1,919.61	\$1,220.00	\$3,564.99	\$1,027.00	\$0.00	\$7,731.60
Heath Springs Baptist Church	Heath Springs	\$134.96	\$0.00	\$250.64	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$385.60
Kathwood Baptist Church	Columbia	\$11,381.77	\$6,969.00	\$16,802.45	\$5,124.29	\$5.00	\$40,282.51
Lakeview Baptist Church	Camden	\$4,092.21	\$1,058.00	\$5,091.56	\$2,010.50	\$0.00	\$12,252.27
Lawtonville Baptist Church	Estill	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$5,000.00	\$0.00	\$5,000.00
Mountain Bridge Community Church	Greer	\$52.50	\$0.00	\$97.50	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$150.00
New Heights Baptist Church	Gaffney	\$2,984.64	\$0.00	\$5,542.90	\$4,979.38	\$0.00	\$13,506.92
New Hope Christian Fellowship	West Columbia	\$340.00	\$1,122.42	\$260.00	\$775.00	\$0.00	\$2,497.42
Nixonville Chapel	Conway	\$420.00	\$0.00	\$780.00	\$805.00	\$0.00	\$2,005.00
Oakland Baptist Church	Rock Hill	\$36,477.00	\$5,567.40	\$24,318.00	\$8,351.10	\$0.00	\$74,713.50
Overbrook Baptist Church	Greenville	\$855.22	\$0.00	\$1,588.28	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2,443.50
Palmetto Missionary Baptist Church	Conway	\$450.00	\$400.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$850.00
Pelham Road Baptist Church	Greenville	\$555.10	\$0.00	\$1,030.90	\$3,481.00	\$0.00	\$5,067.00
Pendleton Street Baptist Church	Greenville	\$681.75	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$681.75
Providence Baptist Church	Daniel Island	\$4,200.00	\$0.00	\$7,800.00	\$0.00	\$1,285.00	\$13,285.00
Rivertown Community Church	Conway	\$975.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$3,350.00	\$0.00	\$4,325.00
Sans Souci Baptist Church	Greenville	\$1,596.75	\$0.00	\$2,965.38	\$510.00	\$0.00	\$5,072.13
Shaws Fork Baptist Church	Aiken	\$0.00	\$855.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$855.00
St. Andrews Baptist Church	Columbia	\$11,550.71	\$70.00	\$21,451.31	\$5,787.00	\$0.00	\$38,859.02
Swift Creek Baptist Church	Hartsville	\$1,441.15	\$300.00	\$2,676.35	\$320.00	\$0.00	\$4,737.50
The Baptist Church of Beaufort	Beaufort	\$19,084.27	\$2,722.01	\$8,804.84	\$6,249.28	\$444.59	\$37,304.99
The Community Church of the Midlands	Columbia	\$25.00	\$25.00	\$25.00	\$25.00	\$0.00	\$100.00
Tidal Creek Fellowship	Beaufort	\$210.00	\$0.00	\$390.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$600.00
Timberlake Baptist Church	Myrtle Beach	\$2,983.12	\$0.00	\$5,540.08	\$325.00	\$0.00	\$8,848.20
Trinity Baptist Church	Seneca	\$12,481.08	\$1,568.00	\$22,968.92	\$4,163.31	\$250.00	\$41,431.31
Total Church Gifts		\$396,001.10	\$41,150.85	\$392,826.34	\$228,672.18	\$56,462.81	\$1,115,113.28
Total Individual Gifts		\$38,701.89	\$7,010.00	\$11,864.95	\$1,315.00	\$1,323.14	\$60,214.98
Total Gifts		\$434,702.99	\$48,160.85	\$404,691.29	\$229,987.18	\$57,785.95	\$1,175,328.26

If you notice a discrepancy, please contact the SC/CBF office.

Thank you for your support of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of South Carolina operates on a fiscal year that runs from July 1-June 30.

THE FELLOWSHIP'S EMPHASIS ON SPIRITUAL FORMATION

by Rick Bennett

CBF's Director of Congregational Formation

rbennett@thefellowship.info | 770.220.1605

Spiritual formation is “the process of becoming like Jesus, by the gracious working of God’s Holy Spirit [in community], for the transformation of the world.”

Spiritual formation is nothing new; Baptists have been doing spiritual formation from the beginning, just not a very holistic version of it. Additionally, everyone has a spiritual formation. By virtue of being created in the image of God, we are spiritual beings and our spirit (heart) experiences formation constantly.

The questions are:

- Toward what are we being formed? In whose image?
- How does intentional Christian spiritual formation take place?
- How are we being intentional about that formation?
- Who is the Holy Spirit and what role does the Spirit play in our spiritual formation?
- What is the relationship between faith and works here?
- What historic Christian practices can create a space where Christian spiritual formation can occur?
- What biblical images and metaphors illustrate spiritual formation?
- What is the end of Christian spiritual formation?
- How can I partner with the Spirit to help my church be formed in the image of Christ?

The reason that CBF chooses to emphasize the concept and language of spiritual formation is that it encourages renewal and expansion in perspective; it gives attention to several dynamics that we (as Baptists) did not pay attention to in our

more programmatic days.

Some examples would include: an emphasis on procedure at the expense of process, an emphasis on individuality at the expense of community, an emphasis on the Bible at the expense of the Holy Spirit and even Jesus, and an emphasis on doing at the expense of being/becoming.

Our emerging paradigm is to focus as much on becoming the presence of Christ as being the presence of Christ; you can’t have one without the other. In order to be the presence of Christ in the world (CBF’s vision statement), you must be in the process of becoming the presence of Christ, taking on the “mind of Christ.”

These thoughts are all consistent with Romans 8:28-29 where, I believe, Paul is clear about God’s intention for humanity. God desire (God’s will) for humanity is fundamentally about expressing the full humanity embodied in Jesus. Further, God uses EVERYTHING that happens to us toward this end; God redeems the “stuff” of our lives toward our formation in the image of Jesus. (To be clear, I did not say that God causes things to happen to us so that God can in turn redeem the circumstances.)

**Steps
to
take**
to become
more engaged
in your own
personal
spiritual
formation

- 1** Begin by reading the Fellowship’s expanded definition for spiritual formation. Go to the [Spiritual Formation Network page](http://www.spiritform.net) (www.spiritform.net) and [click on FAQs under resources](#).
- 2** To learn more, I’d recommend a resource called *Light for the Path*, available through the [CBF Store](#) (go to thefellowship.info and look under quick links). In this resource there are lots of links and leads to resources on spirituality as well as a couple of good, brief articles on spiritual formation in the Baptist context.
- 3** Next, I’d recommend joining a spiritual formation small group, a community where you can learn more about God, yourself, and others. No resource accomplishes this as well as the *Companions in Christ* series. *Companions* is a timeless piece and will introduce you to concepts in spiritual formation that every Christian needs to explore in her/his own journey toward Christlikeness.
- 4** A couple of CBF’s latest resources would hit the spot with our crowd: *Words that Shape and Form* and the new children’s resource, *Becoming Like Christ: Helping Children Follow Jesus*, both available through the [CBF Store](#).



Spiritual formation is what we’ve always talked about as discipleship or walking in the way of Jesus. We’re encouraging folks to become like Jesus, to open themselves up to the Spirit of God.

– Rick Bennett, CBF’s director of congregational formation

GOING DEEPER INTO SPIRITUAL FORMATION:

CENTERS THAT HELP INDIVIDUALS/GROUPS ON THEIR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

THE SNAIL'S PACE

by RANDY WRIGHT, director, former pastor of Fernwood Baptist Church in Spartanburg
<http://thesnailspace.org/>

The Snail's Pace is a small Christian retreat center in Saluda, NC, that provides privacy, respite, and spiritual renewal. While spiritual formation is a continuing rhythm of prayer, study, journaling, contemplation, or other practices, a retreat offers a more intentional and intense opportunity to experience God's presence and sense God's activity in one's life. Groups or individuals may spend a day or a week in a setting that encourages quiet, privacy, and sanctuary. Holy listening is another component to spiritual formation and is offered at The Snail's Pace.

THE ANCHORAGE

by CATHIE POWELL, director, member of First Baptist Church, Greenville
<http://theanchorage.org/>

Everything is forming us spiritually — some for good, some not. A Christian education professor at Erskine asked us to write down everything we noticed that was Christian education — mission trips, singing in the choir, worship, serving in the soup kitchen, teaching a Bible study, all educate us about what it means to be a Christian. The point was that everything that happens at church is Christian education. In the same way I think SPIRITUAL FORMATION is happening all the time — not just at church, but wherever we look for God. We are formed by

our deep longings. We who are on a spiritual journey thirst for intimacy with God. Especially in these difficult times, we long for time to listen for God's leading, to be still and know God is with us. The Anchorage offers quiet days, weekend retreats, prayerful book studies, guided solitary retreats and spiritual direction for clergy and laity, women and men, individuals and groups of all ages to help them on their journey.

PINNACLE LEADERSHIP ASSOCIATES

by MARK TIDSWORTH, director
www.pinnaclelead.com

Pinnacle Leadership Associates assists clients to discern and live out their callings through purposeful living and working. In the areas of spiritual formation, for example, Pinnacle offers a retreat on forgiveness called *Welcome to Graceland*; a workshop of Sabbath-keeping called *Practicing Sabbath in a Hectic World*; and a spiritual formation retreat for clergy called *Soul Gainers: Being in Ministry Without Losing Your Soul*. Pinnacle also offers what we call *Life Coaching*, a form of spiritual formation that encompasses the whole of one's life.

THE HADEN INSTITUTE

<http://www.hadeninstitute.com/>

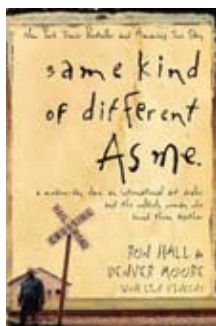
Located in Flat Rock, NC, this center offers spiritual direction and dream leader training for both professional ministers and lay people.

SAME KIND OF DIFFERENT AS ME:

A modern-day slave, an international art dealer, and the unlikely woman who bound them together

By Ron Hall and Denver Moore

Thomas Nelson, copyright 2006, 245 pages



One of the most poignant passages in the book has to do with one of our prejudices about the homeless, about street people: "Sometimes it's drinkin or druggin that lands a man on the streets. And if he ain't drinkin or druggin already, most folks like me start in once we get there. It ain't to have fun. It's to have less misery."







God's good news is that in *Same Kind of Different as Me*, there are two conversions, two transformations, two salvations: Ron's and Denver's. This is a story worth reading, well told and compelling. Life can and does get complicated and difficult. It is never static. The second half of the book could be a separate volume, a story of a loving marriage and grief. Both sections of the book are valuable. Buy yourself some tissues and start reading.



Read Marion's full review at
<http://cbfscbookbytes.wordpress.com>
 or link to it from the [home page](#)
 of our web site.

A FEW SPIRITUAL FORMATION RESOURCES

(recommended by those quoted in this newsletter)

-  For weekly biblical reading
A Guide to Prayer published by the Upper Room
-  Youth Ministry
 - a) *Growing Souls: Experiments in Contemplative Youth Ministry* and b) *Contemplative Youth Ministry* both by Mark Yaconelli
-  Books
 - Soul Feast* by Marjorie Thompson
 - A multiple-work series by Thomas Nelson known as *The Ancient Practices Series* with works by Brian McClaren, Robert Benson, Scot McKnight, and others.
-  The revised common lectionary
-  Group Studies
 - Any of the *Companions in Christ* studies, including shorter studies called *The Way of Discernment*, *The Way of Forgiveness*, and *The Way of Prayer*."
-  Web sites
 - www.thefellowship.info/documents/May_07_resource_page_PDF.pdf
 - www.spiritform.net (CBF's Spiritual Formation Network)
 - www.christianeducationnetwork.org
 - www.renovare.org
 - www.upperroom.org

RETHINKING church life

"It is a weird time in church life." Why do you suppose the following sentences describe literally thousands of Anglo (predominantly white) churches in SC, NC and Georgia?

"Our church averaged 250 in Sunday School just a few years ago, and now we average 125. On bad Sundays, we dip below 100. Our sanctuary looks empty, and we have entire sections of our educational wing we no longer use."

The problem is not limited to Baptists, or liberals, or any other single group. Bill Leonard said something important about this real-

ity: "This is about demographics and sociology."

If this does not describe your congregation, thank God for the good

leadership within your church. Certainly, there are specific problems in every church that need to be addressed, but shrinking numbers is a cultural pattern that is much bigger than whoever you think is at fault in your congregation.

Here is a short list of reasons for numerical decline throughout North America:

1. Increased mobility of our church members. They go to the beach or the lake one weekend a month, visit the grandkids one Sunday each month, and go to a football game every weekend in the fall;
2. Polarization of our church members by Talk Radio hosts who promote fear and hostility with anyone who disagrees with them. Secular politics is taking a serious toll on Christian congregations. Bullies are thriving in some Christian congregations;
3. A very limited world view by the lay and clergy leadership of many or most mainline churches. "The way we have always done it is the way we intend to keep on doing it until we die and our church and denomination dies with us. We will run from change."
4. Hypocrisy of many churches and church members. The misbehavior of televangelists is just the tip of the iceberg. New converts come into their new congregation excited about their new faith, yet sometimes run head-on into ugly and mean-spirited church politics. No wonder many pews are empty!
5. Multiple church and parachurch affiliations. I know people whose spiritual life works something like this: They attend a Bible study and prayer time once a week at work, worship at a random church once each month, and give their largest contribution every year to a favorite charity through an on-line donation; they think of themselves as "spiritual" and "Christian," but they are not really connected to any local congregation in a significant way;
6. It is hard for most local churches to compete with Hollywood, or even with the local Megachurch. Evan-

COORDINATOR'S COLUMN

By Marion Aldridge



gelism has always required that the church be creative about "fishing" for converts. Congregations which insist that boring worship is a good thing are in trouble. How to make worship interesting and meaningful will vary from congregation to congregation, but you can count of this: If worship is not interesting and meaningful, young adults, who often have the attention span of a video game, will not attend;

7. Race is always lurking as a reality in the South. My unscientific guess and analysis is that the middle class has always been the backbone of organized religion. Wealthy folks tend to attend church less often, and the demographics of the South have been changing. Many Anglo congregations are declining in attendance as their members get wealthier (see #1). Many African-American congregations appear to be growing and thriving as their members have become middle class (though others suffer from the same demographic problems of their white neighbors, including...)
8. Inflexibility of many older church members who want younger adults, even non-Christian younger adults, to conform to church tradition before they are accepted within the church;
9. The marginalization of the church in our culture. Church just isn't as important in our culture as it once was. Once upon a time, churches were at the center of our communities. Christian thinking, particularly Baptists practices, dominated the way we lived in the Deep South. Pee Wee baseball was not played on Wednesday night because that was "church night."

I remember when most of the families who lived near us were at least moderately active members of some Christian church. More recently, my nearest neighbors have been a Jewish family, a Chinese Buddhist couple, a gay couple and two sets of Presbyterians. My neighbors are not packing the pews at any nearby Baptist church! Those days are gone. Period.

Am I despairing? Of course not. A lot of churches are in trouble, but the Church of Jesus Christ will do just fine, thank you.





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THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

by AMY JENNINGS

We were created or formed for a relationship with God (Genesis 2:7). Unfortunately, sin distorts us and our relationship with God. We must be reformed (Galatians 4:19). Thus, spiritual formation is the dynamic process of becoming conformed to Christ (Romans 8:26-27) by being transformed through the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:1-2).

The [Spiritual Formation Network of CBF](#) understands spiritual formation as “the process of being shaped in the image of Christ by the gracious working of God’s Spirit for the transformation of the world.”

Spiritual formation involves being attentive to the movement of God in our lives. It involves growing in trust toward God and allowing God to be in control. And thirdly, spiritual formation involves recognizing that our lives are surrounded by grace and developing an attitude of thankfulness toward God and others. Spiritual formation seeks to achieve a balance among such spiritual practices

as private prayer/meditation, corporate worship, biblical study, and social action. These spiritual practices serve as conduits through which God’s grace transforms the heart.

Spiritual formation focuses on forming an intimate relationship with God by practicing the presence of God. We are made for God and nothing else will ever satisfy us. Thus, a shift occurs when we seek to turn our attention and awareness toward God. Paul referred to this as praying without ceasing (II Thessalonians 5:17).

As our relationship with God deepens, we begin to choose God’s ways and desires as our own. We do not have to do anything to prove that we deserve to be loved.

Spiritual formation focuses on sharing our stories with each other and affirming our gifts. The community of faith should be a safe place where we share how God is working in our lives and where our spiritual gifts are nurtured and affirmed.

It is essential that CBF churches—in a world of materialism, consumerism, and self-absorption—attempt to be countercultural by offering opportunities for spiritual formation. God’s desire for Christians is to be formed, reformed, conformed, and transformed into the image of Christ. Making disciples is our commission for the 21st century. As Christians, we must actively engage in spiritual formation if we are to grow in our faith and become vibrant and consistent disciples for Christ. — Amy Jennings

