

the Gospel and Our Culture

a network for encouraging the encounter in north america

WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?

Inagrace Dietterich
Chicago, Illinois

Many contemporary resources dealing with spirituality make no explicit reference to the Holy Spirit. Indeed spirituality is often used in a vague manner with no clear meaning, or with a wide and ambiguous significance. The designation came into vogue, according to Gordon Wakefield, "to describe those attitudes, beliefs, practices which animate people's lives and help them reach out towards super-sensible realities." The term itself is a relatively recent one with the original English usage meaning the clerical or ecclesiastical office as distinct from the secular office, indicating whether one answered to "spiritual" or "temporal" authorities. Eventually it came to describe things of the "spirit" as contrasted with things of the "material" world, with the link to devotion or piety coming still later. By 1775 Dr. Samuel Johnson defined spirituality as "acts independent of the body, pure acts of the soul; mental refinement."

A Generic Spirituality. While many believed that secularization would mean the death of religion, the recent popularity of Thomas Moore's *Care of the Soul* (#1 on the best-seller list for 46 weeks) indicates that there is a widespread hunger and search for "the sacred," for that which transcends and gives meaning to the difficult and confusing realities of everyday life. In 1966, Philip Rieff predicted that the modern era would not mean the loss, but an increase in spirituality: "In the emergent culture, a wider range of people will have 'spiritual' concerns and engage in 'spiritual' pursuits. There will be more singing... but no prophet will denounce the rich attire or stop the dancing. There will be more theater, not less, and no Puritan will denounce the stage and draw its curtains." He also observed that this spirituality would probably not involve commitment to a community, adherence to a particular religious tradition, or engagement in disciplined practices, but rather the permission for persons to pick and choose their own spirituality through broad experimentation with a variety of approaches.



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Most popular models of generic spirituality, shaped by the assumptions and perspectives of secular modernity, focus upon the behavior, desires, or attitudes of the individual person for the purpose of meeting self-defined "spiritual" needs within the private sphere of life.

Individualistic. Since *Habits of the Heart*, a widely-read critique of American individualism, the explicit affirmation of this stance has gone somewhat out of fashion. Yet the underlying presupposition of much spirituality, says Christopher Lasch, is still that of "the abstract, disembodied, free-floating, freely-choosing, contracting, decision-making, rational, autonomous individual" engaged in a quest for personal meaning. The techniques offered are intended to enable individuals to discover and experience the truth and richness of their "inner self." The focus is upon the mystery of the self, the sacred to be apprehended in the depths of one's soul. When participation within a religious tradition is advocated, it is in order to facilitate individual self-realization.

Therapeutic. When linked with individualism, spirituality becomes the meeting of personal religious needs. As Tony Walter points out, believing that the gratification of needs is what motivates all human behavior, the therapeutic mode sees the self as a bundle of needs. By meeting simpler needs, more complex and rewarding needs will emerge (thus Maslow's "hierarchy of needs"). The goal is the progressive actualization of human potential. Supplanting social norms and religious ethics, inner needs become a new morality. And since the self, free from the influence of others, is the final judge, whatever a person believes to be an essential need(s) becomes the ultimate good. Because meeting needs is not a choice but a necessity, self-interest becomes self-fulfillment.

Privatistic. Generic spirituality distinguishes between the private interior realm of the individual self and the public realm of social, economic,

and political interactions. As an autonomous individual with nothing outside of the self to provide a wider framework to interpret, integrate, or transform personal experiences, the solitary self becomes the center and

channeling, angels, 12-step groups, Bible study, or the eucharistic liturgy).

Life in the Spirit. A spirituality shaped by the biblical "notion" of the Holy Spirit is based on different

*Generic
spirituality becomes the meeting
of personal religious needs.*

origin of identity, value, and meaning. Freed from the public influence of religious communities or traditions, the private individual invents a new obligation—to one's self. And in order to actualize or fulfill the self, individuals become consumers, "customers" seeking to "buy" those religious goods or experiences which will satisfy their private spiritual needs (i.e. crystals,

assumptions and displays an alternative perspective. Christian spirituality is participation in God's new creation, in the new life brought about by Christ's defeat of the powers and principalities of a fallen world through the cross and resurrection. This new life is discovered, nurtured, and expressed within eschatological communities of faith formed by the

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outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. And the purpose of the Spirit's active presence is empowerment for mission—for witness to God's mighty acts (cf. I Peter 2:9).

Communal. While affirming the dignity and worth of each human being, the image is not that of the autonomous, self-dependent individual, but of the person in the context of intentional and committed communal relationships. Christian personhood implies imagination, adventure, and engagement, for human beings are not "egocentric" but "exocentric", as Wolfhart Pannenberg points out. That is, we discover truth, meaning, and purpose not by turning inward but by facing outward—by openness, attentiveness, and receptivity to that which is beyond ourselves. By our own devices we can not transcend or overcome the isolation, competitiveness, and divisiveness of human self-centeredness. It is the Holy Spirit who, by enabling participation in Christ's triumph over the powers of sin and death, actualizes God's transforming love and grace within believing, worshiping, and celebrating communities.

Eschatological. Life in the Spirit involves not accommodation to human needs, but redefinition: "The kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). Christian spirituality is "eschatological." That is, it is participation in the new life brought about by the events of Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost. God's loving and righteous reign of judgment, forgiveness, and reconciliation—the kingdom of God—has been inaugurated in human history. As evidenced by the gifts and fruit of the Holy Spirit, while not yet fully realized, God's promises are being fulfilled within authentic and dynamic communities of faith. "The Holy Spirit is the first-fruits of future salvation (Rom. 8:23), the foretaste of the new life, a foretaste which lives in hope and believing trust, anticipating

Canada and the GOCN

Alan Roxburgh
GOCN Canadian Coordinator
West Vancouver, British Columbia

For several years those attending GOCN annual conferences and consultations have expressed a hope that the Network could begin sharing its work on a more regional basis. Many church leaders have found it difficult to find the time and finances to travel long distances for these consultations. There has also been a growing interest in sharing the GOCN's work at more local levels so that it reaches a broader spectrum of church leaders. For some time now we have been discussing ways of developing these regions as a Network.

This past March at the "Confident Witness, Changing World" conference in Chicago, these interests were again raised by many attending the event. In particular, a large contingent of Canadians attending the conference

met together to talk about the role of GOCN in the Canadian context. From those initial conversations there grew the conviction that the themes being addressed by GOCN were not only significant in terms of content but very much needed in the Canadian church setting. The conviction emerged that sponsoring a series of regional GOCN events in Canada over the next several months would be a significant step in establishing a GOCN presence for the Canadian church scene. With this in mind, Craig Van Gelder and Alan Roxburgh, two members of the GOCN steering committee have developed a two day GOCN seminar. We will be holding two such seminars over the next several months, one in Vancouver in November and the other in Toronto in January. These seminars will enable us to test a model for sharing the GOCN agenda. From these seminars we then plan to extend their availability as resources to the church across North America.

the future, even now, in our present existence, in spite of its subjection to death" (Pannenberg). The church, as an end-time community living the life of the future within the present age, is not shaped by the needs and desires of autonomous searching individuals, but by the transforming promises and possibilities of God.

Missional. As a foretaste of the inbreaking reign of God, life in the Spirit indicates a people alive to God, who bear God's name, and who in their life together represent God's character and purpose. The Holy Spirit incorporates believers into God's cosmic mission: the reconciliation of humanity and the healing of creation. Having been invaded or "infected" by the Spirit, this new way of life is not a private or "in-house" enterprise, for the love, freedom, and joy of Christian

spirituality is overflowing, contagious, and intrinsically seeks to embrace the whole of created reality. Thus mission is not a church program or task which the Spirit helps us to fulfill, as Lesslie Newbigin reminds us. It is the Spirit who is the active missionary, for mission is not a burden, but the fulfillment of a promise: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8).

Conclusion. A spirituality of the Holy Spirit moves beyond the inner self of private individuals, to speak of the all-encompassing power and love of the creating, redeeming, and sanctifying God at work in the midst of personal life and history. Within this perspective, spirituality is the arena

Continued on page 8

BECOMING MISSIONAL CHURCHES

Editor's Note. This report contains excerpts from the guiding document of a Mission Church Process being pursued by nine New Jersey congregations of the Synod of the Mid-Atlantics, Reformed Church in America. Working jointly with the Center for Parish Development in Chicago, they have committed themselves over the next few years to follow paths of reflection and action that will shape them as faithful and effective missional communities. The process is guided by the IMPACT Management Team with representatives from each of the churches. David Risseeuw, pastor of one of the nine churches chairs the team. Brent Backofen serves the project as Synod Staff Consultant, and Dale Ziemer is the consultant from the Center for Parish Development who serves as Project Director. All three have been involved in the GOCN and believe that in this process these nine churches are modeling a way to pursue the aspirations many other congregations have to respond to God faithfully in our contemporary context.

Toward more faithful and effective participation in God's mission

The Mission Church Process will enable congregations to become more faithful and effective participants in God's creative, redemptive, and transformative mission. This exciting process offers the opportunity for church leaders and members to deepen their faith, become more aware of what God is calling them to be and do, become more purposeful as a congregation, and become better equipped for ministry and mission in today's and tomorrow's world.

The Mission Church Process is for those congregations that are intentional about responding to God's call in this new era. It is for congregations that are ready and willing for the kinds of changes in their life and ministry that will equip them to become more faithful and effective embodiments of the Christian message today and tomorrow—more missional churches.

Objectives of the Mission Church Process

The Plan will help congregations become more faithful expressions of the Christian mission by enabling them to achieve the following objectives:

1. **Calling:** To discover what it means to be God's called people with a God-given mission in this new era in the life of the church.
2. **Vision:** To become guided by God's vision of the kingdom (or reign) of God within their congregational life.
3. **Contrast Society:** To demonstrate to the larger society a quality of common life and shared ministry which expresses life within the redemptive reign of God.
4. **Spiritual Renewal:** To become more open and receptive to the renewing power of the Holy Spirit within the life of the congregation.
5. **Engagement:** To engage the resources of the Gospel with the challenges and opportunities of modern life.
6. **Leadership:** To equip both clergy and lay leaders with the new insights, skills, and orientations required for today's and tomorrow's faithful missional congregation.

The gospel invites us to pause in the midst of the hectic tasks of running our congregation (Luke 10:38-42). It asks us to step back from immediate institutional dilemmas, to resist the cultural demands of bigger and better, and to take the time to sit at the Lord's feet. The proposed Mission Church Process will enable our congregations to do exactly this. It will engage us in a system-wide, participatory, and intensive process of "listening" to the Lord. It will mean choosing "the better part."

The Mission Church Process is not one more managerial tool or technique. It is a theological process that will help us discern God's call afresh. It is not one more attempt to repair the congregation or to introduce some new gimmick to bring only temporary relief. It is a process of transforming a local church from a loose association of relative strangers who participate in the church on their own terms, to a called and committed company of God's people who demonstrate in the quality of their life together what it means to live inside the reign of God.

The Congregational Stream

During the initial year, officers and other key leaders, as well as the total membership of congregations, will be invited to engage in several Bible study courses in the local church.

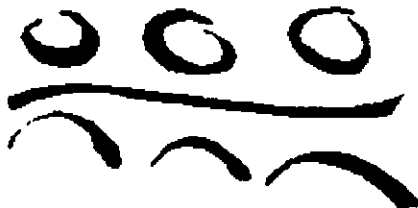
The focus of the Bible study is upon ecclesiology, a contextual understanding of the calling and mission of the church. The purpose of the Bible study courses is to help church decision-makers and members develop the biblical and theological understandings that will help them guide their churches into becoming missionary churches in a missionary environment. The pastor and/or other key leader will be trained to provide the instructional leadership for this course of study.

“The Church and the Coming Reign of God” (6 sessions)
Participants will explore scripture pointing to the reign or kingdom of God, the central theme in Jesus’ message. Attention is given to what it means for their congregation to discern and participate in the vision of God as a sign, a foretaste, and an instrument of life in the realm of God.

The People Called by God (11 sessions)
Participants will explore life together in Christian community as they examine biblical images of the church as “the people of God,” “the body of Christ,” and “the communion of the Holy Spirit.” Application will be made to the specific life of their own congregation.

The Practice of Christian Community (10 sessions)
Based on the beatitudes participants will examine the way of life that is to exist within the community of God’s people. Their own congregation will be analyzed in light of the understanding that it is to be a living example of the new community of God’s people whose mission is to manifest life inside the realm of God.

The Biblical Mission of the Church (9 sessions)
This study, based on the four gospels, explores how four different evangelists expressed the church’s calling and purpose for four very different audiences, at different periods of time, in very different places, during the earliest decades of the church.



The Clergy/Key Leader Stream

The role and mission of pastors and other staff members participating in the Mission Church Process will be to fulfill the “key leader” role in their local churches throughout the process, that is, to be the primary sponsor and guide within the local church for a process of major and profound change.

Key Result Areas and Goals

Goals will be achieved in the following areas:

1. *Leading change:* To develop and utilize the skills required to lead a congregation through a process of major and profound change.
2. *Theological grounding:* To develop and become articulate about the fundamental theological presuppositions undergirding planned transformation in the church.
3. *Theoretical grounding:* To develop and become articulate about the basic theoretical presuppositions that underlie major and profound change in the church, including change theory and general systems theory.
4. *Team development:* To build and work with key leadership teams and other working units throughout the project.
5. *Strategic development:* To learn to work strategically and to assure that the changes that are introduced throughout the project become embedded in the life of the congregation.
6. *Transition management:* To learn to lead the congregation through a planned process of transition from the former “establishment church” to a “missionary church.”

Pastors as key leaders will become familiar with a growing bibliography emerging in the social sciences, especially the management sciences, having to do with change, change leadership, change management. They will be exposed to a variety of theories of change and how to help congregations build themselves as “learning communities,” as “arks” capable of continuous learning. They will develop technical competencies in team development, strategic planning, strategic managing, and transition management.

In addition, and even more important for the church, they will also be working in the field of theology, exploring overlooked biblical and theological concepts dealing with change as it relates to the activity of God who is constantly engaged in change: creating (giving life), redeeming, (saving life), and empowering (fulfilling life). Participating pastors and other key leaders will explore not only theology (the study of God), but ecclesiology (the calling and the mission of the church), a critical area of exploration as the church must re-define its role and mission in a secular society.

WHEN DEATH IS LIFE

Campus Ministry As A Laboratory For The Local Church

*Coleen Smith Slosberg
Kalamazoo, Michigan*

On the evening of January 4, 1996, United Campus Ministry as we had known it for seven years died. For seven years, there had been a cooperative effort between UCM and the Kalamazoo Wesley Foundation but on that evening the pastor who represented the Wesley Foundation went to his board to ask an immediate and total separation of the ministries. He also asked that UCM vacate offices which we had occupied for seven years. His board voted to concur with his request. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, UCM was without program, without meeting space, without secure office in the midst of a community once again in crisis.

I say "once again" because as I look back, I see that this was the final act of a drama which had begun three and a half years earlier when my previous colleague had been removed from ministry. At that time, the United Methodist board had turned to UCM to hold the cooperative ministry together. The board which now asked me to vacate my office had once hired me on as their interim. That act delayed the disintegration of the cooperative ministry but did not prevent it. And so this final act.

I share this because there is a way in which we might see campus ministry as a laboratory for the local church. The way in which we explore being the church in the midst of a secular campus may help others explore being the church in the midst of a secular society.

United Campus Ministry sits in the middle of a campus of 22,000 students plus faculty, support staff, maintenance, housekeeping, postal, health

and public safety departments. A small city on top of a hill. Yet it was not until we were cast out of the building which had housed our ministry that I lifted my eyes to realize how little time and energy we had actually spent on the campus. Comfortably ensconced in a building with worship services each Sunday and programming during the week, there was little time and energy left to relate to those who never came through the doors of the church, who were "out there". UCM's energy and resources were consumed serving a relatively small congregation of 75-100 students who ventured into the church building.

Now don't get me wrong. I do not regret those years. We learned a lot about ministry in general, about newsletters and data bases and fund raising. But the fact remains that, though we were a physical presence in the midst of campus, we were a silent presence to those who never passed through the doors of that building. The building which gave us a base of operations shut us off from the campus. We existed behind its walls.

But then came January 4 and the end of an era in our ministry. Suddenly our future was without building, without office, without program. There were a handful of scattered students and a board and campus pastor in shock. Imagine how you would feel. Imagine yourself part of or pastor to a 100 person congregation. Imagine that through some act not your own, you suddenly discovered that the church you were used to was without form and half the size it had been. Imagine. What would you do? How would you begin to put your church back together again? We did not have to imagine. It happened. And as the shock began to lift we began to discover what images would give shape to our future: they were images of salt and yeast.

Those first weeks we were a circle of students meeting at my house over Sunday dinner. There were ten to fifteen of us each Sunday sitting over dinner and talking about what the church might be, how UCM might be in the midst of a campus. And we

decided to root our new ministry, not in programming but in service and reflection. We had a vision of the redeemed world. We decided to work toward that vision. Getting students involved in community service had always been important to me but I had never had much time to arrange and organize and recruit students for it. Now suddenly I was set free from the demands of an ongoing program to imagine with the students how we would be the church on campus. We covenanted together to be a group of action and reflection. We arranged for service at the local shelter and soup kitchen. We then came together each Sunday night to talk about what that service had been like and how we felt God's absence or presence in that time. No more was church a matter of attending Sunday services. Now church was working toward the vision and reflecting on that vision. Each week we ended our time together with evening prayer.

We were a small circle but the vision began to grow. What would happen if we invited other students to do service with us? So I went to a social work professor who offered his students extra credit for working and reflecting with us. They came for dinner and discussion and sometimes stayed for worship, mostly didn't but it didn't matter. Our circle grew even if our worship circle did not. After all, we said, Jesus had 12 and we were holding our own there. We talked about being the salt and the yeast but Jesus never said we were to be the whole loaf of bread. The campus was the dough.

The vision grew. We put up signs around campus for Habitat for Humanity which had been inactive for several years. We discovered that we could organize a steady stream of students to work each Saturday. They were always invited to the Sunday gathering but did not come. Our circle grew even though our worship circle did not.

An English professor came to me wanting to bring workshops for the healing of racism to campus. She couldn't find anyone to sponsor them

and so UCM became the sponsoring organization. With that small beginning, others joined: the College of Health and Human Services, the dean of students, the Institute for the Study of Racism, the university NAACP. Our circle grew.

Then we began to think that we wanted a mission specifically our own instead of moving from one agency to another for our weekly service. We talked with the head of student volunteer services who put us in touch with the Kalamazoo Boy's and Girl's Club. We applied for and got a grant to begin the Saturday's Kids program. This fall we will have college students working with kids from one the Kalamazoo's most at-risk neighborhoods. We have the small beginnings of a service project working toward the vision.

And this fall when we went to student activities fair, we had 225 students sign up to do service with us. The most we had ever signed up to "do religion" with the combined ministry had been 25-40. Our circle is growing. With the counseling center,

we have initiated a half hour meditation time each Tuesday morning. With the Social Work department, we are planning a series of lunch lectures on spirituality. With Comparative Religions, we have helped develop a calendar of days of religious observance which is hanging in every office on campus this fall. With the Family Studies program we are running Family of Origin classes.

Our circle is growing. This small group of students, this committed board of directors, this United Campus Ministry has come to life in a new way. Our covenant holds: each of us is involved in service somewhere. We are every where throughout the dough of the campus. And each Sunday night a small group of us come to study and worship and ponder together. In the loss of our church, we have found new life as a church.

"How can we get people to come to worship?" we used to ask, but we were working so hard to hold a program together that I spent little time outside the building. More recently we said that if we are doing our job of being

faithful, of worshipping and serving and studying, then people will come. But I need to be honest: not a lot of people have come. Yet from our laboratory on campus, I want to suggest that having a lot of people in worship on Sunday morning may not be the test of being the church, We may never again have a worshipping community of more than twenty. On a campus of 22,000 students only a small percentage will be involved in UMC. But we have claimed a new vision of ourselves as the church: we are the salt, we are the yeast, the campus is the dough. We are working toward a vision. We are involving others in that work. And while I do not want to understate the pain of the change, we thank God that we lost our home *in the church* so that we might discover another way of *being the church* in the midst of campus.

I conclude with this question: Jesus said "You are the salt of the earth." In what ways might we have to lose our lives as the institution of the church in order to be the salt of the earth? □

COLORING OUTSIDE THE LINES

Strategies and Direction for Breaking Out of a Business-As-Usual Church

This two-day leaders conference is being offered at two Canadian sites and is sponsored by the Gospel and Our Culture Network.

It will focus on the two themes:

Modern Life and Gospel and Leading the Missionary Congregation.

The Seminar will be led by Alan Roxburgh and Craig Van Gelder.

*Western Conference Registration
November 25 & 26, 1996
West Vancouver Baptist Church
450 Mathers Ave.
West Vancouver, BC V7S 1H3
Phone: 604-922-0911*

*Central Conference Registration
January 13 & 14, 1996
Spring Garden Baptist Church
112 Spring Garden Ave.
North York, ONT M2N 3G3
Phone: 416-223-4593*

COST (Canadian Currency)

\$85.00 per person

\$75.00 per person for a group of 2 or 3

\$65.00 per person for a group of 4 or more

\$60.00 for students

Brochures and full details are available from either conference site.

SPIRITUALITY continued from page 3 where the interrelationship of divine and human life becomes explicit. This is why it is so important to relate Christian spirituality and the Holy Spirit: so that the character, activity, and purpose of spirituality are shaped by our belief in God, *and* so that our spirituality gives testimony to the character, activity, and purpose of God. It is the mission of God which provides the criteria for Christian spirituality, *and* it is the mission of Christian communities to proclaim God's merciful acts and transforming intentions. Without appropriate theological criteria—a coherent and compelling expression of God's living presence—spirituality becomes as idolatrous and demonic as any other human invention, *and* without the faithful worship and witness of missional communities, the concept of God becomes empty and irrelevant.

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NETWORKINGS

■ Several conferences being held this fall provide signs that issues that are of concern to us in the Gospel and Our Culture Network are becoming evident in a number of circles. The newly formed Church Innovations Institute is holding a conference on November 2 at Luther Seminary in St. Paul on "People Together: Talking, Deciding, and Acting as Christian Community." Another conference entitled "Building the Church: Becoming a Missional Community" is being sponsored by the Theodora W. Grow Center for the Renewal of the Churches associated with Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in Lombard, Illinois. Featured speakers at the November 7-8 event include Duncan McIntosh, Loren Mead, Ray Bakke, and Claude Mariottini.

■ A newly published book by GOCN member Chris William Erdman attempts to bring vision back into Christian family life. The book is entitled *Beyond*

Chaos: Living the Christian Family in a World Like Ours and is published by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (no close relation!). Chris writes out of his own experience as pastor of mission, evangelism, and discipleship at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Sharon, Pennsylvania, and challenges the reader "to look at the family as an expression of the gospel, the church and the kingdom of God."

■ Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary is seeking a faculty member to fill the William A. Benfield Professorship of Evangelism and Global Mission. In addition to a Ph.D. or comparable degree in missiology or another appropriate field, candidates for the position should possess the ability to relate the history and theology of evangelism and global mission to contemporary issues confronting the church's witness in the United States and other parts of the world. For information, contact President John Mulder, 1044 Alta Vista Road, Louisville, KY 40205.



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