

Spiritual Formation Task Force Report December 5, 2022

*As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.
Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.
– Colossians 3: 12-14*

Introduction:

In the Mission Study for Piedmont Community Church, published in early 2022, it states:

The cornerstone to any healthy church is the Holy Spirit and its members' growth in the faith. Spiritual formation can take different forms - from a very personal journey to a group pathway. The church needs to listen to the needs of all of its members and provide a safe, nurturing environment for each person in the community to explore their spirituality.

In recognition of this, a Spiritual Formation Task Force was formed, and began meeting in June, 2022. The members are: Don Ashburn, Steve Schibsted, Virginia Watkins, Suzie Skugstad, Ron Heckmann, Eric Behrens, Kristin Johnson, and Nancy Walters. Building on PCC's long history of promoting the growth and expression of Christian faith, this Task Force sought to explore how our congregation can offer more avenues for people in their spiritual journey. The following ideas are meant as a framework of the strategy— why — and also some tactical plans — the how — for giving members and prospective members options that fit their interest and stage of life. A first-year plan and budget at the end adds specifics.

Definition of Spiritual Formation:

Though it has a long history in the Christian Church, the phrase “spiritual formation” is relatively new to some. So, one task is to define it. According to Robert Mulholland, spiritual formation is “the process of being formed in the image of Christ for the sake of others.”¹ A similar term is “spiritual growth,” although growing spiritually happens to people in all sorts of religious and secular contexts without necessarily having an explicitly Christian character, or acknowledging the active presence of God in the process. Even so, in this report, the words “formation” and “growth” are sometimes used interchangeably.

Over the past 30 years or so, Christian spiritual formation has become a greater focus in many churches. It derives from of a hunger so many people have to deepen their relationship with God. It is not something that happens all at once, although each experience in a person's life has an impact, as the Spirit actively guides them to grow in faith, hope, love and compassion – to “clothe themselves” in Christ, as Paul puts it in Colossians. One of the best-known writers on

¹ Mulholland, M. Robert. 1993. *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*. IVP Books, Westmont, Illinois.

spiritual formation, Richard Foster, points to the dynamic of cooperation that happens when a person can recognize and respond to the Spirit of God, who is already actively present in their life. The process varies for each individual, since no two people experience, nor grow in relationship to God in the same way, nor at the same pace. In this sense, as Foster writes:

Spiritual Formation is a process, but it is also a journey through which we open our hearts to a deeper connection with God. We are not bystanders in our spiritual lives, we are active participants with God, who is ever inviting us into relationship with him.²

Elements of Spiritual Formation:

In Protestant churches, spiritual formation is often seen as falling within the general parameters of a congregation's "Christian Education" ministry; whether it be for adults, youth or children. Yet, formation happens in all sorts of ways beyond the formal framework of education – which, for adults, usually refers to classes on the Bible, theology, history, or contemporary issues. Those are all important venues for formation, but they tend to focus on developing knowledge *about* God with the head, rather than connecting *to* God with the heart. Christian Educator Peter Benson describes 8 dimensions of spiritual formation, or "maturity," for a Christian.

- **Trusting** in God and in our connection to God through Christ.
- **Experiencing** a sense of well-being/peace – what the New Testament calls "abundant life."
- **Integrating** faith and life, in which church "isn't just a Sunday morning thing."
- **Seeking** spiritual growth through study, reflection, prayer and discussion. This can happen in classes, small groups, retreats, individual study, etc.
- **Sharing** in community where people open up and support one another.
- **Living** out values, such as; commitment to equality, affirmation of diversity, sense of responsibility for the welfare of others.
- **Advocating** for social change to bring about greater justice in the world.
- **Serving** humanity and the world through acts of love and justice.³

Catalysts for Growth:

Spiritual formation is a lifelong process. With regard to adults, the Task Force identified a number of catalysts, or potentially transformative activities, where it takes place currently at PCC. This does not include how spiritual formation happens beyond our congregational life. Such catalysts include:

- Worship
- Local service projects
- Overseas mission trips; e.g. Mexico or Africa
- Adult education classes or retreats

² <https://renovare.org/about/ideas/spiritual-formation>

³ Benson, Peter L. 1991. "Restructuring Christian Education: The Challenge to Congregations. Alban Institute, September/October, Volume XVII, No. 5.

- Bible study – individual and group
- Prayer – individual and group
- Choir and Bell Choir
- Small Groups, such as Life Groups
- Just Breathe
- Fellowship gatherings; both formally or informally organized by the church
- Family Camp
- Service within the church; on Boards, committees, ushering, teaching Sunday School, mentoring youth, preparing and delivering meals, and many other ways
- Affinity Groups (Needles and Hooks, Walking, Potlucks, Theatre)
- Financial giving, whether pledging or for other projects.

These, and other, catalysts for formation can be sorted into 7 general categories: Worship, Education, Small Groups, Fellowship, Retreats, Service/Mission Projects, Financial Giving. While it is good to identify and celebrate the breadth of such catalysts within our church, it is also important to be aware of the interconnections between what can, at first, seem to be unrelated areas of ministry. That is, while some programs or situations are more obviously focused on “spirituality,” growth can and does happen in lots of ways. The Spirit is always actively inviting each individual to grow in relationship to God and to other people, in their own way and at their own pace.

Principles in Developing Plans/Programs:

The Task Force looked at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges we face with regard to spiritual formation at PCC. In light of the opportunities identified, we propose the following principles to guide our spiritual formation ministry:

- In each of the areas identified as “catalysts for spiritual formation,” we seek to be aware of how growth or transformation can occur in each setting. That mindset should guide our decisions and expectations surrounding what projects or programs to pursue.
- Spiritual Formation doesn’t simply concern the inner life of an individual, though it can start there. It should bear fruit in how people see and interact with the world beyond themselves. We seek to highlight this Inward-Outward Together dynamic of formation in each programmatic area of the church.
- In order to facilitate formation, we seek to introduce people to various spiritual practices, in classes and retreats; such as contemplation, fasting, prayer, study, etc.
- “No one size fits all” in the area of formation. What may be a catalyst for one person may not be for another. We seek to encourage each person in our community of faith to regularly find out for themselves what area of ministry helps them to grow spiritually.
- Building on its long history of being inclusive, PCC should seek to invite people – already connected to the church or not – to experience what living a life of faith can be like in a context that accepts and celebrates diversity of thought, experience and culture within a Christian context.

- The experience of isolation brought about by COVID has opened people to want “something more” in life – including an experience of a caring community. So, we seek to emphasize the centrality of communal caring and connection to our congregational life in what we communicate within and beyond the church.
- We seek to include people of all ages in our invitation to spiritual growth, having this goal inform how we decide on programming.
- There is a need for various types of support groups; especially parenting, divorce and grief. We seek to use internal and external resources to facilitate such groups.
- We seek to be more “up front” about asking lay people to start, or lead groups, not relying on clergy alone to take initiative.
- We seek to include women’s voices consistently in teaching, leadership and preaching – a neglect that has too often been present in churches.
- We seek to utilize the many resources available to us within 10-20 miles of PCC to lead classes, groups or retreats.
- We will establish a “buddy system” for assimilating new members.
- We intend to upgrade our website to provide resources and information regarding spiritual growth; both offered by PCC and for individuals to pursue on their own.
- We will explore different avenues to facilitate worship experiences.

Program Ideas:

After identifying the catalysts and opportunities for spiritual formation, the Task Force came up with several ideas for topics for classes, retreats, or speaker series offered by PCC. The list of topics is not exhaustive, and will evolve over time. It includes: Stages of Faith, Spirituality and Personality Types, Building Faith in Families, Gifts and Call, Healthy Partnering in Couples, Seeking Reconciliation in a Culture of Conflict, Dealing with Suffering, Discovering Spiritual Disciplines. Classes will continue to be offered in areas such as Bible study, Basics of the Christian Faith (i.e., “Christianity 101”), seasonal studies in Advent and Lent. We will also solicit ideas from the congregation on an ongoing basis for other topics of interest. Working with the Fellowship Committee of the Board of Deacons, and with the assistance of a newly hired staff member (prospective start date - early 2023), we will schedule onsite and offsite fellowship events at least quarterly – with the potential for more. We can also develop new worship experiences geared to people who can’t attend Sunday morning services, or who are interested in alternative styles of worship.

The intention is to offer a variety of classes each year, and to repeat several classes from year to year to accommodate those who were not able to attend previously. Classes that will repeat are “Core” classes, and may include: Gifts and Call, Stages of Faith, Spiritual Practices, Basics of Christian Faith, New Member Classes (“Come and See”). Other classes will be called “Elective.” These would include topical studies about current issues, book studies, Bible study, and “practical” theology; i.e., putting faith into practice in such areas as family, work, marriage.

Year 1 Plan and Budget:

The Task Force has developed a calendar of Spiritual Formation offerings to take place at, or through, PCC from October 2022 to June 2023. Weekly, offerings include such things as;

Weekday Online Bible Study, Just Breathe, Saturday Men’s Bible Study. We hope to reestablish a Women’s Bible Study too.

- Life Groups will continue to meet weekly for 4-6 sessions 5 times per year and will be at the core of our Spiritual Formation efforts.
- There will be two retreats, one in the winter and one in the spring in the area of Spirituality. Our first retreat will be held onsite at PCC March 3 and 4, focusing on the Enneagram personality typology.
- Multi-week Sunday morning or weekday evening classes will happen in fall, winter and spring. Already held, or scheduled classes are “Gifts and Call” (October-November), “Incarnation” (December) and “Stages of Faith” (January-February), “Introduction to Spiritual Practices” (February-March), “Lenten Series” (March-April). Other classes will be offered, with topics to be determined.
- To open people to various ways to grow spiritually, we will establish and invite people to use an onsite library of written resources, as well as using our website.

All of these activities in promoting spiritual formation will have implications for PCC’s annual budget. As so many are new and untried, here is a forecast of expenses for the year 2023-24:

• Life Group (dinners + curriculum)	\$2000
• New Member Gatherings	1000
• Honoraria for Teachers or Guest Preachers	6000
• Retreat Expenses	<u>4000</u>
Total:	\$12,000

Summary:

There are clearly many opportunities for spiritual formation for PCC to explore in the immediate time frame and long-term. There are already things we do well, and other fruitful avenues to pursue. Of course, given that spiritual growth happens in so many different ways in our congregational life, we need to organize our efforts to promote it. Therefore, realizing that no group can take responsibility for every aspect of the life of the church, after submitting our report to the Board of Trustees, the members of the Task Force will continue to meet quarterly as a Spiritual Formation Team to implement our plan, to evaluate it, and to pursue other programs and ideas. The Team will be under the supervision of Dr. Ashburn, with input from Dr. Schibsted.

Our Task Force is excited to be bringing these ideas forward, and submit it for consideration and adoption. By meeting quarterly and reporting back to the Board, we anticipate continued development, adjustment and ideally expansion of these tools in support of PCC’s growth.

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