

Drew University

Be Still and Know that I am God: Parish as Spiritual Life Center

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University***

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ABSTRACT

BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD: PARISH AS SPIRITUAL LIFE CENTER

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The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Our Saviour

Pompton Plains, New Jersey

In 2014, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Our Saviour stated as a priority the spiritual growth of its members. This paper reviews briefly the definitions of spirituality, its history and biblical foundations. It establishes through research that specialists do agree that the parish is the primary context for spiritual growth and that worship is the primary context in which this takes place. Further research looks into how this growth occurs within the life of the parish. It finishes with a look at what activities/experiences within the life of The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Our Saviour enhance spiritual growth as defined and stated by eight specific members of the congregation. Of importance to them, are worship experiences outside of Sunday morning worship and fellowship opportunities.

Dedication

For my Parents, The Rev. Kenneth Nehmer and The Rev. Lois Nehmer Schiff,
who took me to the font and raised me in the faith

For my children, Isaac and Joshua, my daughter-in-law Andrea, and grandson Ryder
who hold forever a place in my heart

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INTRODUCTION

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. Genesis 1: 1-2 (NIV)

THE PAPER AND PROJECT

In the beginning—since the beginning—the Spirit hovered over creation and never relinquished its presence upon it. God breathed God’s spirit, God’s breath into the first of humankind (Gn 2:7). When Moses was in need of assistance, God took a share of the spirit that was upon Moses and shared it with the seventy elders, and they prophesied in that moment (Nm 11:24-25). In the sixteenth chapter of 1 Samuel we read that the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David (1 Sm 16:13). The author of Psalm 51 pleads that God would not take God’s spirit from them (Ps 51:11). Isaiah speaks of the descendent of Jesse upon whom the spirit of the Lord rests (Is 11:2). The spirit rests upon the servant found in four songs within Isaiah. (Is 42:11). Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit when greeted by pregnant Mary at her door (Lk 1:41).

The spirit came upon Jesus at the time of his baptism (Mt 3:16; Mk 1:10; Lk 3:22). In a post-resurrection appearance to his disciples Jesus commands of his disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Mt 28:19-20). Jesus says that the Holy Spirit is given without measure (Jn 3:34) and that the Spirit gives life (Jn 6:63). In the gospel of John, he speaks of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit that is to come (Jn 14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:13). At a post-resurrection appearance to

his disciples as recorded in the gospel of John, Jesus breathes upon them and tells them to receive the Holy Spirit.

The story of the Holy Spirit continues as the Spirit came upon those gathered at a Pentecost celebration (Acts 2: 1-4). The book of Acts shares stories of the work of the Spirit in the early church.

Paul tells the Romans in his letter to them that when we are weak, when we struggle to pray as we ought, the Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words to express (Rom 8:26). We abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:13). We receive the Spirit that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God (1 Cor 2:12). God's spirit dwells in us (1 Cor 3:16).

God's spirit dwells in us, and it is that which we desire to form within us—a stronger sense and understanding of God's most Holy Spirit. This paper explores the concept of spirituality, spiritual formation/growth, the history of spirituality, and how life within the parish community is the center for this formation and development. The project then brings this into a narrower focus for a specific parish community.

The defining of spirituality revolves around its history and the history of any given moment in the unfolding of Christianity. Economics, social structures, cultures, and politics of a given time influence people's faith and spiritual formation/growth. While I do separate them into two sections, underlying the narrative is their relation to one another.

The defining of spirituality is dependent upon any one given author/specialist in the field. There are, however, some shared understandings among some authors/specialists. What many do agree upon is that it defies a concrete definition and that

political, economic, and sociological factors of any given historical timeframe influenced the understanding of spirituality. Several see it as a “lived experience.”

Explored briefly is the history of spirituality. Specific areas of influence mentioned include the Early Church and Cappadocian Fathers, monasticism, and Celtic spirituality. History in the area of Protestant spirituality is not as prolific as is the history of spirituality within the Roman Catholic tradition. As noted, the exploration of spirituality within Protestantism was not of special focus until the 1980s.

Investigation in the area of biblical foundations uncovered an absence of resources addressing this area of spirituality. As noted in that section a professor found the need to write a textbook for the course that she taught on spiritual foundations of spirituality. The Bible is its own best resource in this area of study.

Those with an interest in parish life and spirituality note that the parish is the place in which spiritual formation/growth does take place. Here too, however is a scarcity of research on ways that spiritual formation/growth takes place within the parish. Resources abound for individual devotion and prayer life but not on how this takes shape within the parish as a community. Areas explored include worship, education, service and the importance of the pastor’s own spiritual life.

The results of the project show that worship, education (Bible study), service and fellowship influence spiritual growth in the participants. Their desire is to see greater participation on the part of other members.

I continue this paper with my own personal journey, as to how I came to be interested in spirituality, the education received, and reaching the belief that the parish is an important place in which spiritual formation should be taking place.

PERSONAL JOURNEY

On August 17, 1958, the Spirit ever-present was there at the baptismal font of Mt. Carmel Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It was on that date that Ken and Lois Nehmer brought me to the font. Water poured upon my head as the pastor proclaimed, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Thus began an incredible journey of faith that led me to the exploration of spiritual direction and spirituality.

This journey would include attending worship and Sunday school at Mt. Carmel Lutheran in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Our Savior Lutheran in West Bend, Wisconsin; Faith Lutheran in Orlando, Florida; Peace Lutheran in Palm Bay, Florida; and two parishes in Ohio, as my father attended seminary. Upon his graduation and ordination, a move to North Dakota brought membership to Walcott Lutheran Church in Walcott, North Dakota.

The memory of the smell of wine on my mother’s breath as she returned from communion at Mt. Carmel Lutheran remains with me to this day. A Sunday school teacher with heterochromia allowed a younger me to feel less self-conscious about my own two different colored eyes. Playing one of the Magi at Peace Lutheran taught me that gender does not matter when proclaiming Christ’s early days. Each congregation provided experiences and opportunities to grow in faith. Worship, bible study, fellowship and service had been a part of my life since birth, yet I lacked the understanding, the connection, and the words to express my relationship with God. I do not recall ever being asked, “Where did you see God this week?” Perhaps it was as James Wilhoit, head of the Scripture Press office of training and Christian ministry at Wheaton College observes, “I came to see that some churches are marked by the presence of a ‘culture of formation’

and while others may have many programs and much activity, they lacked the presence of such a transformative culture.”¹ Was this true of the congregations in which I was raised? They had worship, education, service and fellowship activities but looking back they lacked the opportunity and encouragement to express my own experience of the living Christ.²

It was not until later that a sense of the Holy Spirit, a sense of God’s presence in my life, took hold. I learned it was God’s voice, not my own ego, when I would be present as a woman presiding over the Eucharist, and in my soul I would hear, “You should be doing this.” Bread broken and blessed, wine poured as “this is the blood of the new covenant,” proclaimed, and I would hear, “You should be doing this.” When I first heard these words, I like a young Samuel did not recognize it as God’s voice (1 Samuel 3: 1-14). Partaking in the sacrament of Holy Communion became a living experience of the presence of God and a word of encouragement to take up a new journey, a new vocation.

Years later, after first hearing this call from God, I would indeed enter seminary. During that time I was introduced to Spiritual Direction and the role of the Holy Spirit at work in my life. It was not through a course that this learning took place; it was not a requirement of the seminary that we engage in spiritual direction. The Christian education course did not discuss education in terms of spiritual formation.

It was through my internship supervisor that I first heard of spiritual direction and later in my senior year when Sabbath House of Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, offered an open

¹ James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 13.

² John Ackerman in his book *Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations* (Herndon, Va: The Alban Institute, 2001), 96. Confesses to this.

house on campus, that I truly learned about and was able to engage in spiritual direction. Engaging in Spiritual Direction opened my heart to a completely new experience of God in my life and in my mind, body, and soul. It was then that I started to see what it was, what it meant to love God with all my heart, mind, soul and strength. It was then that I could start to see all of life-- studying, family, friends, play, and worship as a living experience of the presence of God.

In April of 2010, I completed a certificate program in Spiritual Direction through the Quellen Spiritual Center. The Quellen Spiritual Center is a sponsored work of the Sisters of Christian Charity with a community housed in Mendham, New Jersey. Too many weeks during those three years, my reflection papers would contain my struggle as to where God was calling me to use this certificate. Would this course of study change the way I preached, taught, counseled or even spoke? What from this learning would be called forth into parish ministry? For as much as I felt called to be a Spiritual Director, I knew that this learning benefited parish ministry as well.³

As I walked through a labyrinth on the shores of Lake George, New York, in May of 2012, it was then that Parish as Spiritual Life Center revealed itself to me. I took into my inward journey the question: "Where are you calling me forth?" It was in the center of that labyrinth, as I was still, as I was dwelling in the divine light, as God was indeed God, I suddenly realized that one important role of a parish was to help its members become more aware of the divine within their own lives.

³ I do have a small practice of Spiritual Direction. At present, I only see one directee on a regular basis. Thus, this training in spiritual direction has indeed been of greater use in parish ministry, helping to assist parishioners in opening their hearts to the living God at work in their lives.

In 2015, I began a part-time assignment to journey with The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Our Saviour (TELCOS) as their Vice-Pastor. My tasks were to attend council meetings, teach confirmation, engage in hospital and home visitations, and secure coverage for funerals and weddings. Several months into our time together, the Chair of the Call Committee asked the Bishop of the New Jersey Synod of The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), to allow them to interview me as she felt my gifts would be well suited for TELCOS. In reading their Ministry Site Profile (MSP), I knew this would be the parish, where the possibility of exploring spiritual formation within a parish might come to fruition.

THE CONGREGATION

In 2014, the membership of The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Our Saviour completed a MSP as it began its search for a pastoral candidate. Under the Pastoral Preferences section, they prioritized areas of emphasis for pastoral ministry. Section “B” listed areas of congregational life and ministry where congregants indicated in what order they would like to see certain areas receive attention, ranking their top seven in order of priority. These areas were:

- Adult education opportunities
- Building/new or renovation
- Confirmation ministry
- Congregational climate(fellowship, communication, etc.)
- Ecumenical work with other congregations
- Instruction and assimilation of new members
- Leadership development

- Ministry with children
- Ministry with youth
- Mission outreach to the community/evangelism
- Spiritual growth of members
- Social ministry and advocacy for justice
- Stewardship development
- Worship and music.

In order to gather findings for the needs of the congregation, eighty members completed surveys. Of these eighty, twenty-seven respondents placed spiritual growth of members as their number one area of attention needed. Fourteen ranked it as a second area of priority needing attention with five respondents placing it as a third area needing attention. Seven respondents placed it in the fourth position, three respondents ranked it in the fifth position; nine respondents placed it sixth with two respondents placing it seventh. Eight respondents did not place it as a priority at all; six people chose not to rank any of the areas. Thus, 84% of respondents ranked spiritual growth of members as needing some attentions with 33% stating that spiritual growth of members was the top priority of need.

Around fifteen months after assessing the survey results, I received the call in December of 2015 to serve TELCOS. I began my tenure with them in January of 2016. Soon after my arrival, I invited members of the congregation to attend Listening Circles. As their pastor, I assured them my purpose was to listen. My intent was to understand and to get to know them as individuals and TELCOS as a congregation. They were asked to share why they joined this congregation, what they most enjoy about being a part of this

congregation, how they are currently active within the life of the congregation, and, they were asked to share a favorite church memory.

After those who were open to sharing did so, the sessions then moved to a biblical reflection on Colossians 3:16-17.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (NRSV)

The discussion questions based on this passage were: 1) What do the words “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him,” mean in terms of our work together at TELCOS? 2) In what ways have you been spiritually nurtured by this community? 3) Where should we be, what should we be doing?

Over the course of two months, six sessions took place with twenty-four members of TELCOS participating. They ranged in age from 16 to 80.

Responses to the question, “Where should we be going?” varied in nature. The responses included: 1) would like Bible study, 2) new music, 3) kids to play 4) Vacation Bible School, 5) welcome ministry, 6) become re-involved in the community 5) youth involved in the Pequannock Food Pantry 6) healing service as part of regular worship 7) nourish faith 8) relationship building, 9) filling people spiritually.

No one shared how he or she is spiritually nurtured. Is this that which they are seeking? Do they need the language or the courage to speak of God at work in their lives? Do they desire opportunities to feel nurtured by God?

BEGINNING OUR JOURNEY TOGETHER

Our journey together began with introducing an evening bible study once a week. A group of six regular attendees formed. We started with reading all of Genesis in its entirety chapter by chapter. They soon found that they preferred to look at one book a week or across several weeks but did not enjoy an entire reading of a specific book.

In December of 2018, a second group began to meet as a morning session. This group settled into being four regular attendees with one person from the evening session moving to the morning. This study looked at the assigned texts for the Sundays in Advent. While only formed for the short term, with a study of the Advent texts in mind, participants asked to continue to meet beyond Advent and to continue to be able to study the upcoming texts for Sundays.

Council meetings' devotions moved from an opening prayer to include a reading of scripture. A variation of Dwelling in the Word explores the specific text through silences and a repeated reading of the text, followed by an open discussion of what touched their hearts. A specific text was used for several months.

Alternative worship opportunities started with Worship Without Walls. Worship Without Walls takes place from April to November outside either in TELCOS' backyard or an area park with hiking paths. Participants gather for an opening liturgy, the reading of scripture, a dialog based on the texts and Holy Communion. Time to hike takes place between each section of worship when we gather at a park. Participants share their daily lives as they walk together.

When a family that regularly attended Worship Without Walls no longer could do so, a second worship opportunity was introduced—Praise and Pizza. Praise and Pizza begins with a gathering liturgy and song, moves on to scripture readings, a service project

and guided dialog based on the scriptures as attendees enjoy a meal of pizza. The evening concludes with Holy Communion. Youth in elementary school and a young adult with autism take roles in leading this worship service.

I introduced two opportunities for prayer based on the beginning research for this project. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Life Together*, writes, “The family community gathers for praise and thanks, reading of the Scriptures, and prayers. The deep stillness of morning is broken first by prayer and song of the fellowship.”⁴ On the first Sunday in Lent of 2018, I challenged members of TELCOS to join in prayer on a daily basis as they rise and greet the new day. A morning prayer for members’ use appears in the monthly newsletter, is provided on cardstock and just recently is published in the weekly e-blast that goes out on Monday mornings. A time for Centering Prayer at the beginning of worship began in spring of 2019.

As I moved forward with this idea of parish as spiritual life center, for my project’s focus, I interviewed five members of TELCOS for the paper: *Parish Members Defining Spiritual Growth*. Interviewees struggled to define spiritual growth as a concept. Their attempts to define it used activities such as worship, prayer, bible study, sermons. As I stated in that paper, “it isn’t that people can define what spiritual growth is, but they can state what activities/experiences lead to spiritual growth from their perspective and for their own personal growth.”⁵

With this communal foundation in place, the project and this paper will seek to explore more fully, what it is that members of TELCOS seek when they say they desire

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishing, 1954) p. 42.

⁵ *Parish Members Defining Spiritual Growth*. Doctor of Ministry Course 990. Drew Theological School, Fall 2018.

spiritual growth and how it is that they define spiritual growth. Are they hearing a call from God? (“Be still and know that I am God.”—Ps 46:10) Are they sensing a longing? (“As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.”—Ps 42:1) Is it that they wish to live the entirety of their lives—work, play, family, friend and service focused on God? (For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’...—Acts 17:28) As we move forward what will life at TELCOS look like? Will it mean changing worship, or adding additional bible study opportunities? Will it mean shaping council meetings or team meetings differently? Will it mean shaping a life together as a community in service, worship, and fellowship, or shaping individuals in their personal growth? Is it both? As John Ackerman, Presbyterian pastor, spiritual director and consultant to clergy groups states, “The shape of our life together in communities helps form our individual spiritual lives. And our individual awareness of God’s presence helps shape our common life.”⁶ Will it mean writing, preaching and teaching differently so that members of the congregation can make a connection between faith and their daily lives of family, work, school, play, friends and recreation?

THE CONGREGATION’S DEMOGRAPHICS AND HISTORY

As will be noted in the brief review of the history and journey of spirituality, as well as in the chapter “Parish as Spiritual Life Center,” the economics, social structures, cultures and politics of a given time influence people’s faith and spiritual formation/development. Thus, we need always to be aware of what is happening in and around our parishes within our families’ lives, within the community in which the parish

⁶ John Ackerman, *Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations*. (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2001), 2.

is centered, as well as the communities from whom we draw our memberships, and the nation as well as the world, as we are indeed a global society. Of equal importance is the history and demographics of the congregation. Also of value to our work with parishes is the recognition of the importance of the political climate to the life of the faith community.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Our Saviour resides in Pompton Plains, New Jersey. The congregation members reside across twenty-six local zip codes and four out of state. The membership ranges in age from three months old to ninety-six. Its charter dates its beginning on January 22, 1961. It has had six called pastors with the longest tenure being twenty-two years, and its shortest less than twelve months.

The parish center resides on 1.92 acres in a residentially zoned area of Pompton Plains. According to the latest United States census data, Pequannock Township, with a history dating back to 1695, has a population of 15,410 of which 94.8% are white only⁷, 7.9% are of Hispanic or Latino and 1.5% of Asian alone. Its median household income is \$86,824 with 4.7% persons living in poverty. Ten households from the membership rolls reside in a township of 7,000+ of which 91.1% are white only, 4.8% Asian and 6.3% of Hispanic or Latino. Its median income is \$96,647 with 5.4% persons living in poverty⁸. Demographic studies of additional communities from which the membership gathers reveal similar census data. The membership of TELCOS reflects these demographics.

⁷ In the Ministry Site Profile(MSP) that the congregation developed in 2014, the wording here was Caucasian. The United States Census website at this time uses "white only." I do not know if the use of the word Caucasian is that of those who wrote the MSP or that of the United States Census website at that time. I have not at this time determined if this is significant.

⁸www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/butlerboroughnewjersey,pequannocktownship,morriscountynewjersey,US/PST045217

In its early years of worship, TELCOS worshipped in the two VFW Halls in town, the second one just down the block from what would become the present day location. On January 22, 1961, the signing of the Charter took place. May 7, 1961 marked the celebration of Organization Day. Sixty-three people signed their names into the official church records on that day. Fifty-nine years later, two of those individuals remain as members and are in their nineties.

On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary, a booklet celebrating that milestone included memories of members. The council president at that time wrote,

As you look through this book I hope that you will see the work of Christ in it. I say this because without Christ we would not have come as far as we have. If you can see Christ in what He has done for us in the past it will be easy for you to have hope for the future because you will have this hope in today's world with all its troubles and uncertainties and we need to remember that it is here at Our Saviour during worship and fellowship that our faith is strengthened.

He saw that it was indeed the role of the life within the congregation through worship and fellowship that faith is strengthened.

Yet another member shared,

Two and one half years ago on coming to Our Saviour Lutheran Church, it was like coming home, where the Word is, was, and shall be.

I have become filled with grace, humility and I am really working on patience. What a blessing patience can be. I have enjoyed our worship here to the fullest, whether it was at a time in my life when I needed it most, or my heart was fully opened to the Grace of God, our living Lord.

I have found contentment and peace here with all of you. May God continue to richly bless Our Saviour Lutheran as it serves His Kingdom here on earth". EDITH MARR

I do not know Edith Marr, nor has her name ever been shared with me as the history of the congregation is told. Thus, I cannot fully speak to her words here other than

to say that within them, for me, is a sense of God's presence for her through worship and the sense of being home brought her as a member of TELCOS. As the definition of spirituality is explored later in this paper, Edith's words here, I feel, reflect a spirituality for her.

TELCOS has not been without some controversies, which has shaped its culture and ethos. One problem is spoken of more openly than another. This involved the same pastor at the center. Clashes resulted between members of the congregation with several members leaving each time. Other controversies were disagreements among members that resulted in one of the two parties leaving the parish. While I am sure there may be more hidden clashes, those known to me have helped me to understand more clearly the congregation, as a whole, as well as individual faith journeys. Controversies shaped not only the ethos of the congregation but the faith of those involved. Often shared with me when these controversies have been discussed, is one's ability to forgive and forget. Members involved in these events who remain as members sit on opposite sides of the nave from one another avoiding contact with one another.

Currently, the congregation is in the final stages of negotiating a settlement of a lawsuit with the township. Although originally not in the plan to receive a sewer line, at the urging of a restaurant one block down from our building, the township ran a sewer line to that establishment. Once installed, all structures on that line were required to connect to it within three years. Upon completion of hooking TELCOS to the sewer line (at a cost of \$9244), it was then assessed an initial sewer fee of \$139,000 (over half of an annual spending plan). The First Reformed Church of Pompton Plains (FRC) was also assessed a fee well above their means to pay. TELCOS and FRC jointly hired an

attorney and worked together in negotiating a settlement. The weight of this burden and resulting lawsuit has taken away some energy from ministry both monetarily as well as emotionally.

TELCOS is a founding member of the non-profit Community Partners for Hope (CPFH). CPFH gathers houses of worship, non-profits including the local hospital, the local Rotary, two Women's Clubs, and Lions Club, civic organizations and local government agencies together to address local needs. It has hosted seminars on opioid and heroin addiction, as this town has experienced deaths from overdoses. These seminars have included local officials as well as nationally known Chris Herren, a former professional basketball player and recovering addict. Additional seminar topics include: human trafficking (yes, this is/was in our community), teen suicide and vaping.

Once a year CPFH sponsors a food-packing event. Over thirty members of TELCOS have participated each year for the past eight years. The organization has packed over one million meals. The event gathers over seven hundred volunteers from the community.

TELCOS gives to local, national and global causes. Members sew together quilts for Lutheran World Relief, knit or crochet prayer shawls and mats for the homeless. The youth pack lunches and care packages, spending time in Newark, NJ distributing the packages with the organization Project Kind.

This history, these demographics, this community and its local and global involvement shapes the community of TELCOS and certainly shapes the lens of this research and project. This foundation will assist in answering the questions already

asked: As we move forward what will spiritual life at TELCOS look like? What within our life together will change? What spiritual growth will individuals experience?

II. SPIRITUAL, HISTORICAL AND BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

DEFINING SPIRITUALITY

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is Our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.
Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (NRSV)

Could this be the first definition of spirituality—a word that eludes a definitive definition? Does one’s spirituality begin with a confession of the heart?⁹ Alternatively, is it that spirituality is indeed about the totality of who we are? Diane Chandler feels that “spiritual formation must apply to the whole person.”¹⁰

Theologians, spiritual writers, biblical scholars, and historians do not agree on a specific definition of spirituality. Bradley Holt, professor emeritus, former professor of religion at Augsburg College, describes spirituality as “this ambiguous, six-syllable term.”¹¹ Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M., professor emerita in the Jesuit School of Theology at the Graduate Union in Berkeley, California, states that there is a “fluidity of the term's usage and ... general confusion about its meaning, ...”¹² She goes on to state, the term "spirituality," like the term "psychology," is unavoidably ambiguous, referring to (1) a

⁹ (see the footnote for Deuteronomy 6:4 in *The Renovare Spiritual Formation Bible*, pg 259)

¹⁰ Ruth Haley Barton, Diane J. Chandler, Siang-Yan Tan, Judy TenElshof, and James C. Wilhoit, “Spiritual Formation in the Church,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care*. 7, no.2 (2014): 296. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/269698731_Spiritual_Formation_in_the_Church.

¹¹ Bradley P. Holt, *Thirsty for God: A Brief History of Christian Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), p. 6.

¹² Sandra Schneiders, “Spirituality in the Academy” *Theological Studies* 50 (1989):676. <https://doi/10.1177/004056398905000403>.

fundamental dimension of the human being, (2) the lived experience which actualizes that dimension, and (3) the academic discipline which studies that experience.¹³

Philip Sheldrake, a religious historian and theologian, also uses the phrase “lived experience” as he speaks of the problem of defining spirituality—“In short, part of the contemporary problem with defining ‘spirituality’ is associated with the fact that it is not a single, transcultural phenomenon but is rooted within the lived experience of God’s presence in history...”¹⁴

The editors of *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century* did not provide a specific definition with which the contributors were to base their writings. They did state in the introduction a working description. It too includes in its definition the phrase “lived experience.”

Christian spirituality is the lived experience of Christian belief in both its general and more specialized forms.... It is possible to distinguish spirituality from doctrine in that it concentrates not on faith itself, but on the reaction that faith arouses in religious consciousness and practice. It can likewise be distinguished from Christian ethics in that it treats not all human actions in their relation to God, but those acts in which the relation to God is immediate and explicit.¹⁵

A deeper, but not exhaustive search to defining “spirituality” includes James C. Wilhoit, who writes as an evangelical, as he lists widely shared patterns in stories of spiritual growth.

Christian spirituality involves a deep knowing of Jesus and, through him, the Father and the Spirit. Christian spirituality is grounded in knowing, not knowledge. Knowing God requires that God wants to be known. While God reaches out to us, he is also boundless mystery.

¹³ Schneiders, “Spirituality in the Academy,” 678.

¹⁴ Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method* (New York: Cross Road, 1992), 33.

¹⁵ Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff in collaboration with Jean Leclercq, *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*. (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987), xv-xvi.

Christian spirituality involves the grounding of the human spirit in the divine Spirit.¹⁶

John Ackerman uses a full page in *Listening to God* to explore the meaning of spirituality. He writes, “Spirituality is generically understood as the search for meaning, finding something greater than oneself to belong to.”¹⁷ Yet, he also uses phrases such as, “an experience of God,” “reverence toward God,” and “listening to God.”¹⁸ He states that “Christian spirituality is concerned that people are formed into Christ.”¹⁹

Dwight Judy, Professor Emeritus of Spiritual Formation at Garrett-Evangelical Theological, a member of the editorial review board for *Presence*, (a publication of Spiritual Directors International) and an ordained elder with the United Methodist Church speaks of Christian spiritual formation as “the process through which we become new creatures in Christ.”²⁰ Alternatively, Bradley Hanson, from a Lutheran perspective, defines spirituality as “a useful way of talking about the way we human spirits transcend our immediate circumstances and ask about a larger reality and meaning. A spirituality is the way that a person or group answers the question and lives out that answer in various practices.”²¹ Hanson goes on to say, “spirituality refers to actual experience of faith that has a particular configuration of commitment, trust and belief.”²²

¹⁶ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 18.

¹⁷ Ackerman, *Listening to God*, 19.

¹⁸ Ackerman, *Listening to God*, 19.

¹⁹ Ackerman, *Listening to God*, 19.

²⁰ Dwight H. Judy, *A Quiet Pentecost: Inviting the Spirit into Congregational Life*. (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2013), 7.

²¹ Bradley Hanson, *A Graceful Life: Lutheran Spirituality for Today*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 10.

²² Hanson, *A Graceful Life*, 12.

Hanson, too, uses the word “lived” as he explores the meaning of spirituality stating it as, “a *lived faith plus a path*.”²³ By path he means “a holistic way in which a particular faith is nurtured and expressed.”²⁴

Bonnie Thurston, former professor of Theology at Wheeling Jesuit College, in her book on the spiritual life of the early church, uses three pages to bring us to her understanding of a functional definition of spirituality as it applied to the early church as recorded for us in the books of Acts and Ephesians.

Spirituality was what the early Christians did to put into practice what they believed. It was what they did to respond to a world filled with the presence of God and the risen Christ. Therefore, it included private prayer and public worship, devotion and fasting, almsgiving, art, and social action. In short, spirituality encompassed practically the whole realm of human activity, because all of life was understood under the lordship of Christ.²⁵

Parker Palmer, in *The Active Life*, does not define spirituality, but speaks to the spiritual quest. “For me, the heart of the spiritual quest is to know ‘the rapture of being alive,’²⁶ ... to allow that knowledge to transform us into celebrants, advocates, defenders of life wherever we find it.”²⁷ He goes on to state, “We need a spirituality which affirms and guides our efforts to act in ways that resonate with our innermost being and reality, ways that embody the vitalities God gave us at birth, ways that serve the great works of justice, peace and love.”²⁸

²³ Hanson, *A Graceful Life*, 11.

²⁴ Hanson, *A Graceful Life*, 12.

²⁵ Bonnie Thurston, *Spiritual Life in the Early Church: The Witness of Acts and Ephesians*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), p. 3.

²⁶ Parker Palmer takes the phrase “the rapture of being alive” from a quote of Joseph Campbell in *The Power of Myth*.

²⁷ Parker Palmer, *The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity, and Caring* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), 8.

²⁸ Palmer, *The Active Life*, 9.

Scott Hendrix professor emeritus of Reformation History and Doctrine at Princeton Theological Seminary, says, “The existence of a Protestant spirituality depends wholly, therefore, on how the terms *Protestant* and *spirituality* are defined. ... *spirituality* means the way in which members of a religious community nurture and practice their faith.”²⁹ He goes on to discuss the difficulty of finding the precise meaning of spirituality in the late Middle Ages and the era of the Reformation, and thus a definition for spirituality in the early years of Protestantism.

Allan Sager, former professor of contextual education at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, as he unpacks a definition for spirituality (using fourteen bullet points to do so), includes a quote from Martin Luther,

...everything our body does outwardly and physically is in reality and in name done spiritually if God’s Word is added to it and it is done in faith. Nothing can be so material, fleshly, or outward but that it becomes spiritual when done in the Word and in faith. ‘The spiritual’ is nothing more than what is done in us and by us through the Spirit and faith, whether the object with which we are dealing is physical or spiritual.³⁰

Kent Ira Groff, founder of Oasis Ministries for Spiritual Development in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, relates spirituality to the active life. Of spirituality he says, “Christianity is ‘one beggar showing another beggar where to find bread,’ to recast an ancient proverb.”³¹ Matthew Fox, a Dominican Priest, in his article “Spirituality for

²⁹ Scott H. Hendrix, editor. *Early Protestant Spirituality*. (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 1.

³⁰ Allan H. Sager, *Gospel-Centered Spirituality: An Introduction to Our Spiritual Journey* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990) 25. He notes this as quoted by James M. Kittelson in *Luther the Reformer* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), p. 208. He further states that Kittelson references vol 37, p. 92 of *Luther Works*, 55 vols., Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, general editors (St. Louis: Concordia: Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-1986).

³¹ Kent Ira Groff, *Active Spirituality: A Guide for Seekers and Ministers*. (New York: The Alban Institute, 1993), x.

Protestants,” defines spirituality as “way of living together and in depth.”³² He goes on to say that “spirituality is what people need to sustain themselves.”³³

In their work on Christian spirituality, Cunningham and Egan list twenty-two sources’ definition of spirituality including some already presented here. Thus, it does indeed seem as though theologians, spiritual writers, biblical scholars, and historians do not agree on a specific definition of spirituality. Urban T. Holmes, former Dean of the School of Theology of the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee and Professor of Pastoral Theology at Nashotah House in Nashotah, Wisconsin, speaks to the lack of clarity defining spirituality and the confusion it creates. “Devoid of clear meaning, spirituality has become a catchword for whatever one favors or opposes. I have discovered that passing mention of spirituality can bring immediate acceptance by some or can evoke intellectual skepticism in others. The cynicism of its detractors is only reinforced.”³⁴ I would like to hope that we might find some common ground and yet I offer my own definition.

For me, spirituality is “lived” experience within a living experience—living the presence of God **at** our chosen vocation, **with** our families and friends, **where** we play, **in** the tasks of our daily schedules, and **as** we live in the world among others. It is sensing the presence of God in heart, soul, and mind and embodying this God. It is indeed the loving of your neighbor as yourself. Spirituality is grasping the fullness of God from the amoeba playing in a drop of water to the fact that dinosaurs once walked upon the earth.

32 Matthew Fox, “Spirituality for Protestants” *The Christian Century* August 2-9, 1978, 731. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rgr&AN=524170327&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

³³ Fox, “Spirituality for Protestants,” 731.

³⁴ Urban T. Holmes, *Spirituality in Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982), 10-11.

It is single grains of sand forming a beach, to a star which may burn out at this very moment but whose light appears here on earth for a thousand years more. This is of God, this is the spiritual of which I resonate, sensing the mystery of God in mind, body and soul.

A return to Deuteronomy 6:4-5 seems necessary. It was this text which Jesus expounded upon when speaking with the lawyer in Matthew 22: “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Mt 22: 37b-39) This was Jesus’ response to the question “What is the greatest commandment?” I wonder if this might be Jesus’ response to “What is spirituality?” When we do in fact love God with all of our heart, soul and mind, how can we not then love our neighbors? Is this not a “living” experience of God’s love for us and our love for God and one another as we live our lives? Thus for me, spirituality is both an inner and outer way of being.

Of note, before I leave this section is the fact that two Roman Catholic sources chose to define Protestant spirituality. I continue to struggle to find more Protestant, and specifically Lutheran sources with definitions from those perspectives.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SPIRITUALITY

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Genesis 1: 1-2

At what point did spirituality—that sense of God’s presence—take form? Was it when creation itself felt the wind/breath/spirit of God sweep over the face of the waters? (Gn 1:2) Was it when Abram answered God’s call with the courage to go where God

would lead him? (Gn 12: 1-4) Perhaps it is at the time of Jacob's wrestling with a stranger and not releasing that stranger until he would receive a blessing? (Gn 32: 24-29) Or was it at the time that God gave what is known as the Shema-Deuteronomy 6:4-5, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is Our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." A review of the writings on the history of spirituality reveals an understanding that the history of Christian spirituality does indeed acknowledge its roots as grounded in late and contemporary Judaism faith practices.

John Zizioulas, a Greek Orthodox prelate writes,

The Christian church was born out of the history and the expectations of late Judaism as the fulfillment of the destiny of the people of God announced by the Prophets, and Christian spirituality, therefore, emerged under the influence of the beliefs of contemporary Judaism. The eschatological outlook that marked the Hebrew mind, characterized by the expectation of the coming of the Messiah, was inherited by Christianity and became the dominant factor in the shaping of its spirituality.³⁵

In her writing on the spiritual life of the early church, Bonnie Thurston also sees the relationship of Jewish traditions in the spiritual formation of the early Christians. "If we are to understand the spiritual life of the early Christian community, we must know something of the diversity of belief and practice against which it defined itself."³⁶ Thus, the connection between the formation of Christian spirituality and the history of the Hebrew faith cannot be ignored. While Christian spirituality may indeed originate with the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the influence of what came before is essential to its history and formation.

³⁵ John D. Zizioulas, "The Early Christian Community" *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*. edited by Bernhard McGinn, John Meyerhoff, and Jean Leclercq. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1985), 23.

³⁶ Thurston, *Spiritual Life in the Early Church*, 4.

Protestant spirituality, then, includes our Jewish heritage and 1500 years more, which includes the work of the early church, the writings of the early Church and Cappadocian Fathers, and the role of monasticism and Celtic spirituality.

Lars Thunberg, writing on Eastern Christianity notes,

It belongs to the genius of the early church that it was able to concentrate its attention on theological themes that were decisive for human spirituality. Three such themes are predominant, and at each point a particular Christian perspective is worked out: (1) the understanding of God, in which the divine reality is conceived of as trinitarian; (2) the understanding of salvation, in which Christ, the Savior is conceived of as a *theandric* (i.e., a divine/human) *mystery*; and (3) the understanding of human beings, conceived of as *persons carrying the image of God in themselves*.³⁷

We see this as we explore the history of spirituality.

Several of the early Church and Cappadocian Fathers were born into families of wealth and afforded education accordingly. Much can be learned from these early Fathers. Athanasius of Alexandria gave us an incarnational spirituality into which a vision of the church formed.³⁸ Basil of Caesarea “inaugurated the tradition of bishops’ assuming the role of rich patrons in helping the poor, the sick, and the refugees.”³⁹ Kannengiesser, renowned Patristic scholar, writes of Gregory of Nazianzus, “His genuine contribution to the history of Christian spirituality in the ancient church is the invention of an appropriate metaphysics to support the triune notion of God.”⁴⁰ Gregory of Nyssa “elaborated the richest doctrine of Christian mysticism in the ancient Greek-speaking

³⁷ Lars Thunberg, “The Human Person as Image of God: I. *Eastern Christianity*,” *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*. Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, and Jean Leclercq editors. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1987), 292.

³⁸ Charles Kannengiesser, “The Spiritual Message of the Great Fathers,” *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*. Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, and Jean Leclercq editors. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1987), 64.

³⁹ Kannengiesser, “The Spiritual Message of the Great Fathers,” 68.

⁴⁰ Kannengiesser, “The Spiritual Message of the Great Fathers,” 70.

churches.”⁴¹ Jerome, known for his many translations, the most important, that of the Vulgate in which most of the Bible was translated into Latin must be mentioned. As must Augustine of Hippo, giving us “Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee, O Lord,” as written in his works, *The Confessions*.⁴²

Many historians note monasticism’s influence within the history of Christianity and spirituality. Monasticism started early in the life of Christianity and continues to this day. Jean Gribomont notes the research of E.A. Judges when writing, “In about 324 and then again in 334 and in the subsequent period there appeared in Christian papyri in Egypt the term *momochos* (monk) with its derivatives and synonyms: *apotaktikos* (he who denies himself) anchorite (recluse, hermit), or simply brother.”⁴³ The early monastics’ disciplines included: celibacy, asceticism, fasting, periods of prayer and poverty.⁴⁴ Early monasticism “offered strength through its prayers, good example in practicing Christian virtues, and its theological and literary culture.”⁴⁵

Celtic spirituality noted rigorous asceticism, meditation on the Bible, education of children, the practice of private penances,⁴⁶ and their desire to evangelize the pagans.⁴⁷ Celtic spirituality lifted up women. Bradley P. Holt, in his work on the history of spirituality, claims Brigid as the most famous of the women saints in Ireland.⁴⁸ Irish

⁴¹ Kannengiesser, “The Spiritual Message of the Great Fathers,” 71.

⁴² *Confessions* 1.1

⁴³ Jean Gribomont, “Monastisim and Asceticism: I. *Eastern Christianity*,” *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*. Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, and Jean Leclercq editors. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1987)90.

⁴⁴ Gribomont, “Monastisim and Asceticism: I. *Eastern Christianity*,” 90.

⁴⁵ Gribomont, “Monastisim and Asceticism: I. *Eastern Christianity*,” 107.

⁴⁶ Pierre Riche, “Spirituality in Celtic and Germanic Society,” *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*. Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, and Jean Leclercq editors. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1987), 166-167.

⁴⁷ Riche, “Spirituality in Celtic and Germanic Society,” 170.

⁴⁸ Holt, *Thirsty for God*, 66.

Christians' concept of *anamchara*, or "soul friend," is found in the modern day practice of spiritual direction.⁴⁹

As Christianity spread to far more corners of the globe, the influence of those cultures and nations formed theological and spiritual perspectives. Gradually, there was the separation of "East" and "West." The East became characterized by icons, the Jesus Prayer and hesychasm (contemplative prayer); the West "focused on sin as the enemy of humankind and on the cross of Jesus as its solution."⁵⁰ Holt calls forth Anselm of Canterbury as among the great spiritual teachers of that time.⁵¹ He notes Anselm's personal example of holiness, his advocacy and devotion to the Virgin Mary, and his contributions to systematic theology.⁵² Holt further notes that Anselm took his theme phrase from Augustine "I believe so that I may understand, and what is more I believe that unless I do believe, I shall not understand."⁵³

Volumes written on the history of Christian spirituality abound and include works specific to Protestantism's own journey within Christianity. Scott H. Hendrix brings together the writing of early Protestants. He notes that at the early formation of Protestantism, the term spirituality indicated "a way of being rather than a way of acting, or, to put that distinction in medieval terms, spirituality implies a closer relationship to the contemplative life than to the active life."⁵⁴ He notes that the Reformation may very well have been "a reformation of spirituality, since the unresolved issues that led to a

⁴⁹ Holt, *Thirsty for God*, 67.

⁵⁰ Holt, *Thirsty for God*, 84.

⁵¹ Holt, *Thirsty for God*, 84.

⁵² Holt, *Thirsty for God*, 84-85.

⁵³ Holt, *Thirsty for God*, 85.

⁵⁴ Hendrix, *Early Protestant Spirituality*, 3.

permanent separation of Protestant confessions from obedience to the pope were mainly matters of worship and piety...”⁵⁵

As noted previously, economics, social structures, cultures, and politics of a given time influence people’s faith and spiritual formation/development. Hendrix makes note of the influence that the politics of that time had upon the Reformation. He notes that women voices were present but mostly undisclosed to a wider audience because they could not occupy public roles or issue their opinions in print.⁵⁶ Hendrix includes the female voices of Katharina Schutz Zell and Elisabeth Cruciger in his edition of *Early Christian Spirituality*. Katherina Schutz Zell “regarded her marriage to Zell as a partnership in the gospel, wasted no time in adding her public voice to that of her husband.”⁵⁷ Elisabeth Cruciger, a nun who “fled the suppression of Protestant sympathies at the cloister,”⁵⁸ is recognized for her hymns, most notably “The Only Son from Heaven.”

In addition to the voice of Martin Luther, Hendrix includes the voices of Ulrich Zwingli, known for his work in Switzerland (of which six works are included); Martin Bucher, leading reformer of Strasbourg, and known for his mediation (of which four works are included); and Philip Melanchthon, co-leader of the Lutheran movement⁵⁹ (of which three works are included). He divides their works into nine parts: Personal Voices; Interpreting Scripture; Preaching; Admonishing and Consoling; Living the Faith; Singing; Praying; Reconstructing Sacraments; and, Worshiping.

⁵⁵ Hendrix, *Early Protestant Spirituality*, 5.

⁵⁶ Hendrix, *Early Protestant Spirituality*, 9-10.

⁵⁷ Hendrix, *Early Protestant Spirituality*, 105.

⁵⁸ Hendrix, *Early Protestant Spirituality*, 186.

⁵⁹ Hendrix, *Early Protestant Spirituality*, 62.

Of Martin Luther, Holt writes, “It is in his *Large Catechism* that Luther sets out one of his most basic spiritual teachings—that the Christian life is a daily baptism, a daily dying and rising with Christ in repentance and forgiveness.”⁶⁰ Holt writes further that Luther’s “concept of vocation encompassed all of life; it was God’s call to be a disciple of Jesus, to fulfill our roles as family members, to love our neighbors, and, yes, to serve our neighbors by means of our ordinary occupations.”⁶¹

Holt writes of the movement of spirituality following the Reformation,

After the period of the reformation, many of the Protestant movements went through three periods of development. The first was a confessional period, when the attention of the leaders was focused on defining and defending the denomination intellectually. The second was a Pietist period, calling for more attention to the needs of ordinary people, especially in the affective dimension of the spiritual life. And finally, the rationalist period, or the Enlightenment . . . brought the critique of an autonomous reason to bear on both the Bible and the practices of the churches.⁶²

Where the formation of spirituality takes place shifts in history. John Ackerman, writing in 2001 notes “In the 1950s, spirituality was centered in the churches.”⁶³ He notes further, “A ‘seeking spirituality,’ which arose in the 1960s, is characterized by knowing God on the journey rather than in houses of worship alone.”⁶⁴ Indeed, one need only walk through a section of a bookstore or search on-line to find a myriad of devotional books or daily readings and meditations for individual use.

A complete review of the history of spirituality within Protestantism would include the works that influenced the formation of the Methodist, Presbyterian and Anglican faith traditions, as well as the rise of Pentecostalism. As this project and paper

⁶⁰ Holt, *Thirsty for God*, 101.

⁶¹ Holt, *Thirsty for God*, 102.

⁶² Holt, *Thirsty for God*, 118.

⁶³ Ackerman, *Listening to God*, 13.

⁶⁴ Ackerman, *Listening to God*, 13.

focuses on a congregation within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, my research narrowed to that faith tradition. It is here that resources were much scarcer. That may be due to Protestantism and Lutheranism not embracing spirituality until recent decades. According to Dwight Judy, “*Spiritual formation* began to emerge in Protestant Christianity as a special focus in the 1980s.”⁶⁵ He notes in 2013, “In practice, most Protestant seminaries have been serious about spiritual formation studies for only a little over a decade.”⁶⁶ Judy points out it is only since 1996 that the Association of Theological Schools, an accrediting body for seminaries, lists personal and spiritual formation as a criterion for seminary education.⁶⁷

Holt, in his chapter “The West since 1900,” mentions only one Lutheran, that being Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was a German theologian, who studied both in Germany and the United States, served a parish in London, taught at a seminary in Germany, and protested Hitler and Nazis Germany thus leading to his arrest and imprisonment. Holt claims that “Some have come to know Bonhoeffer exclusively through *Letters and Papers from Prison*.”⁶⁸

Outside of his review of the rise of Pentecostalism, and aside from his mention of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Holt brings twelve other Protestants to his readers’ attention. Among those he includes: Eugene Peterson known for his translation of the Bible, *The Message*; Jim Wallis, founder of *Sojourners* magazine; and Richard J. Foster known for founding Renovare. Renovare is “a Christian nonprofit that models, resources, and advocates fullness of life with God experienced, by grace, through the spiritual practices

⁶⁵ Judy, *A Quiet Pentecost*, 10.

⁶⁶ Judy, *A Quiet Pentecost*, 7.

⁶⁷ Judy, *A Quiet Pentecost*, 7.

⁶⁸ Holt, *Thirsty for God*, 161.

of Jesus and of the historical Church.”⁶⁹ Holt further brings into the discussion Martin Luther King, Jr. and Howard Thurman.

The dearth of historical resources on Protestant spirituality, and most especially spirituality within Lutheranism, is disappointing and frustrating as I research moving forward with the congregation. I can only hope that as we move forward as a faith tradition we will embrace the third person of the Trinity in greater depth, realizing the gifts the Holy Spirit gives us as Martin Luther states them in his explanation to the third article of the Apostles’ Creed:

I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers. On the Last Day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.⁷⁰

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

Stories abound in the Bible of God’s story within humanity’s history and humanity’s story within God’s story. Barbara Bowe, former professor of the New Testament at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, claims that they “sear the soul.”⁷¹ Of the biblical writings, she says this:

They invite us, for example, to stand with the Israelite ancestor Jacob as he wrestles against the nocturnal spirit at the Jabbok River, begging for a

⁶⁹ From Renovarés website: renovare.org/about/overview

⁷⁰ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, editors. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 355-356.

⁷¹ Barbara E. Bowe, *Biblical Foundations of Spirituality: Touching a Finger to the Flame*. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 2.

blessing (Gen 32: 22-32). They ask us to experience Moses' sister Miriam's exuberant delight in leading the great liturgy of freedom—in the Reed Sea (Ex 15:20-21). They compel us to weep at the death of the Israelite judge Jephthah's unnamed daughter (Judg 11: 30-40) and to shake our fist at God with Job at our side. They challenge us to see that the coal that seared Isaiah's tongue (Isa 6: 1-8) and the fire that burned in Jeremiah's heart (Jer 20:9) were not merely words but powerful prophetic images of our own journey with God. They beckon us to know Jesus, the Messiah, the Human One. They draw us to consider the faith of Paul and of the deacon Phoebe, the foibles of Peter, and the life of James the brother of the Lord. They summon us to lament at the divisive effects of intracommunity battles among Christians in ancient Corinth. They ask us to ponder, finally, the fiery words of the mysterious seer, John of Patmos, and to learn in all these encounters the identity of the invisible God as the Holy Other who speaks to our hearts.⁷²

I add to this that the biblical writings call us into an intimate relationship with God as we ponder the creation story of being made in the image of God (Gen 1:27), or of first being formed from the dust of the ground and God breathing life into us as spoken of in the second recorded creation story (Gen 2:7). As we realize with Jeremiah (Jer 1:5) and Isaiah (Isa 49:1) that God knew us before we were formed in our mother's wombs and knit us together within those wombs (Ps 139:13), we acknowledge the depth of God's knowledge of us. Through Isaiah we learn that we are precious to God, honored and loved (Is 43: 4) and that we will not be forgotten for God has inscribed us on the palms of God's hands (Is 49: 15-16). Listening to Jesus' prayer, we overhear that we are indeed one with God (Jn 17: 21). The Spirit itself knows our weaknesses interceding for us with sighs too deep for words (Rom 8:26).

James Wilhoit uses the dominant metaphor of the growth seen in plants and animals that are well cared for as he lists biblical images of spiritual formation in the area of Christian life and nurture.⁷³ He refers to the image of humanity as clay and God as the

⁷² Bowe, *Biblical Foundations of Spirituality*, 2-3.

⁷³ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 24.

potter (Isa 64:8). Vine and branches (Jn 15:5) and famine/drought (Am 8:11) are among the images Wilhoit brings forth. Hunger and thirst (Mt 5:6), human growth (1 Pt 2: 2-3) and heart/soul (Prv 4:23) reference our inner spiritual life.⁷⁴

In the area of Christian life as journey and struggle, Wilhoit speaks of God bringing us home (Zep 3:20) and healing our brokenness (Ps 147: 3). He uses additional images that "...capture the call for personal responsibility, action and discipleship that mark the Christian life."⁷⁵

A third category into which Wilhoit divides biblical images of spiritual formation is "Christian life and the resurrection." The images used here, he states, are those of "rescue, love, redemption, and justification."⁷⁶ Here his chosen scripture images include that of redemption in that we were bought with a price (1 Cor 7:23); Christ as our paschal lamb (1 Cor 5:7); the message of the cross (1 Cor 1:18); and, that Christ bore our sins in his body on the cross (1 Pt 2:24).

Yet again, in the journey of research, a dearth of resources exist. An advanced search through the Drew University Library and a Google search under the heading "Biblical Foundations of Spirituality" produced references to Bowe's book and reviews thereof, but not another source directly addressing the biblical foundations of spirituality.

Barbara Bowe speaks to this lack of resources,

"Each year I have searched for a suitable textbook (in addition to the Bible itself...) for the course I teach, and each year I find there is none. There is not, together in one volume, a textbook that surveys the whole Bible in order to open its treasure chest of stories, images, questions, and portraits

⁷⁴ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 24.

⁷⁵ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 25.

⁷⁶ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 25.

of faith—one whose explicit purpose is to help readers *touch their fingers to the flame* and so to be forever transformed by this divine encounter.”⁷⁷

Several editions of the Bible do contain resources that can be of assistance. The *Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible* describes itself as “...a multifaceted resource for approaching the Bible through the lens of Christian spiritual formation.”⁷⁸ Its features include essays on the “People of God ... designed to help us see the flow of this ‘with-God’ history—from individual to family to tribe to people to nation to all humanity.”⁷⁹ It includes an essay about the unifying theme in Scripture “...the ‘with-God’ life, allows us to better recognize how God is with us and how we are with God, now, today.”⁸⁰ Within its pages an invitation extends to see the “with-God life presented in the Bible,”⁸¹ hence it is a resource for discovering the biblical foundations of spiritual formation.

The ELCA Lutheran Study Bible’s introduction states, “Lutherans share with other Christians this foundational understanding: The Bible is the Word of God, and through it God’s Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.”⁸² Its study notes and faith-reflection questions assists its readers to understand the Bible as the World of the Bible notes “describe how a particular book may have been written and what literary form it takes”; the Bible Concepts notes “focus on ideas and theological insights,” and the Luther Perspectives notes “are introduced by a key question that connects a Bible verse or passage with Lutheran theological

⁷⁷ Bowe, *Biblical Foundations of Spirituality*, 3. The course she references here is “Biblical Foundations of Spirituality,” as part of Catholic Theological Union’s certificate program in biblical spirituality.

⁷⁸ The *Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible* (San Francisco: Harper, 2005), xv.

⁷⁹ *Renovaré*, xv.

⁸⁰ *Renovaré*, xv.

⁸¹ *Renovaré*, 2291.

⁸² *Lutheran Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), 15.

perspectives, teachings, or practices.”⁸³ The “Faith Reflection questions encourage individuals and groups to think about and discuss the meaning of some Bible texts or study notes.”⁸⁴ This edition of the Bible opens up discussion to the work of the Spirit in the church then and now.

Sandra Schneider addresses biblical spirituality. She proposes in her article for *Interpretation* three interrelated, substantive meanings of the term “biblical spirituality”: “...lived faith experience, the literary embodiment of lived faith expressed in the Bible, and engagement with the Bible through Christian history.”⁸⁵ She says that the “...central question of this article is how the Bible functions, or how it is engaged, to promote the lived experience of God in Christ down through the ages in diverse individuals and communities. How does Scripture give rise to and shape the faith of believers?”⁸⁶

Richard Rohr, Franciscan priest and founding director of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico, writes of scripture as spirituality. He says, “...the Bible is all for the sake of astonishment! It’s for divine transformation (*theosis*), not intellectual or ‘small-self’ coziness.”⁸⁷ He states clearly, “One great idea of the biblical revelation is that God is manifest in the ordinary, in the actual, in the daily, and now, in the concrete incarnations of life.”⁸⁸

Does one then need a textbook? Is the Bible textbook and foundation enough in defining, exploring, and growing spiritually? Can we look to the life of Jesus and the

⁸³ *Lutheran Study Bible*, 16.

⁸⁴ *Lutheran Study Bible*, 16.

⁸⁵ Sandra Schneiders, “Biblical Spirituality,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 70. No. 4(2016): 418. <https://doi/10.1177/002096431665108>.

⁸⁶ Schneider, “Biblical Spirituality,” 418.

⁸⁷ Richard Rohr, *Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality* (Cincinnati: Franciscan Media, 2008), 7.

⁸⁸ Rohr, *Things Hidden*, 16.

community he created as our foundation for spirituality and spiritual growth and the way in which it assists people to grow? Ackerman says that Jesus had a different way of teaching his disciples.

I believe that being with him meant living in community, learning from the experience of their life together as well as Jesus' questions and stories. Their life together was the curriculum. Jesus' perception of God was the curriculum. He taught disciples, not academics. He taught in parables, not with lectures. He encouraged his hearers to see God's work at hand in history and their own lives, the kingdom of God in their midst. He taught with the Spirit's authority.⁸⁹

Is it not from Jesus' own way that we assist parishioners to see God's work at hand in history and in their own lives?

⁸⁹ Ackerman, *Listening to God*, 94.

III. PARISH AS SPIRITUAL LIFE CENTER

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity.--Psalm 133:1

WHY THE PARISH

The poet of Psalm 133 knew that it was indeed good when the scattered people of God dwelled together—for it is God’s will for God’s people to be together. The creation stories would have us believe that God did not desire solitary living. According to the creation accounts God’s design included humanity, not a single human. In the account within Genesis’ first chapter, God created humankind in God’s image, “...male and female he created them,” (Gn 1:27) two beings not one. In Genesis’ second chapter, God declares, “It is not good that man should be alone...” (Gn 2:18). Yet, even with the creation of every animal of the field and every bird of the air (Gn 2:19) such creatures were not suitable companions for the living being first formed from the ground. Thus, from the first being a second being was created, someone with whom the first being could be alongside of, a relationship created, a family formed.

The Psalmist proclaims that it is good when kindred live together. With these images in mind, we see the various ways in which we do gather. We gather as family to share a meal. We cluster to listen to a concert, to watch a play or movie or to cheer on our favorite sports team. We live together in neighborhoods large and small. We congregate to worship in buildings we call churches or parish centers. We come together as God’s scattered people. We come from different upbringings, cultures, socio-economic backgrounds to form a community of faith where together we hear, learn and grow from God’s word for our lives. We come because God desires us to be with God in community.

God's desire to gather in the people is addressed in Zechariah. "I will signal for them and gather them in, for I have redeemed them, and they shall be as numerous as they were before." (Zec 10:8). The gospel of Matthew states that God "will gather his elect from the four winds." (Mt 24:31b). From twenty-six zip codes, TELCOS gathers as a community of God.

God gathers God's people in, into communities of faith—parishes, congregations. We gather in buildings, creating sacred spaces in which we worship, study, serve and foster relationships. Bonhoeffer, in *Life Together*, "It is by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly in the world to share God's Word and sacrament."⁹⁰

A majority of this section comes from the article, "Spiritual Formation in the Church," for the *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*. Five leaders in the field of spiritual formation responded to questions regarding spiritual formation in the church. Judy TenElshof, Professor of Christian Ministry and Leadership at Talbot School of Theology, stated that, "The church is God's family and exists to lovingly hold, support, and grow each member in their relationship to God for fulfillment of their God-given mission."⁹¹ Siang-Yang Tan, Professor of Psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary, believes that "the role of the local church in spiritual formation in Christ should be the primary or major role or goal of every local church."⁹² For Ruth Haley Barton, President and Founder, as well as Adjunct Professor of Spiritual Formation affiliated with the Transforming Center and Northern Seminary, "The role of the church in spiritual

⁹⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 18.

⁹¹ Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit, "Spiritual Formation in the Church," 292.

⁹² Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit, "Spiritual Formation in the Church," 293.

formation is to provide wise and loving safety and structure, teaching and guidance for Christians at all stages of their growth and development as children in God's family."⁹³

While for Diane Chandler, Associate Professor of Spiritual Formation and Christian Leadership at Regent University School of Divinity, she states, "If spiritual formation is the process of being conformed into the image of Jesus through relationship with him, then the local church is foundational in this process from not only a biblical and theological perspective but also a developmental, relational and missional one."⁹⁴

James Wilhoit finishes off the section: "What is the Role of the Church When it Comes to Spiritual Formation in Christ?" with, "Spiritual formation takes place in community and the community in which it should take place is that of the church."⁹⁵ Wilhoit is aware, "that many people seek out both schools and spirituality programs to receive a formation they did not receive in the church, but the success of these specialized ministries does not undermine the fact that the context for formation, established by Jesus, is the church."⁹⁶

These five specialists all agree that the church is the space in which spiritual formation is to take place.

The article continues by asking each to respond to the question: "To What Degree Should the Local Church be Focused on the Spiritual Formation of its Members and Why Should it Be so Focused?" Wilhoit begins this section re-quoting what he originally said in *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, "Spiritual formation is the task of the

⁹³Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit, "Spiritual Formation in the Church," 294.

⁹⁴ Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit, "Spiritual Formation in the Church," 294.

⁹⁵ Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit, "Spiritual Formation in the Church," 295.

⁹⁶ Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit, "Spiritual Formation in the Church," 295.

church. Period.”⁹⁷ Each leader in their response in turn stresses the necessity of spiritual formation being the focus of the church. Chandler states in her own response, “The spiritual formation of church members should be the very impetus of the church’s vision and mission to glorify the Lord Jesus and to be the heart, hands, and feet of Christ in the world.”⁹⁸ It only seems right then, that our parishes become the sacred space for our spiritual formation and growth.

In my experience as a lay member of several congregations, and as a leader myself of two congregations, we struggle with nurturing our congregants’ relationship with God. As Celia Hahn writes, “The divide between the spiritual search and the daily life of a congregation has been around for centuries.”⁹⁹ This concern was important enough to be included as a question posed to the five leaders already mentioned here. Chandler believes that the local church “has lost her spiritual moorings.”¹⁰⁰ TenElshof’s answer to this question speaks to what I tend to believe,

In both the training of leaders and the spiritual development of church members the evangelical church has leaned heavily on teaching and understanding the text of God’s word and far less on what is being experienced of God’s word in the heart and emotions creating a gap between what is known intellectually and believed and what is experienced in the heart and lived.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit, “Spiritual Formation in the Church,” 295.

⁹⁸ Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit, “Spiritual Formation in the Church,” 296.

⁹⁹ Celia Allison Hahn, “Can Congregations be Spiritual?” *The Clergy Journal*. May/June 2009, 6. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=39462301&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

¹⁰⁰ Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit, “Spiritual Formation in the Church,” 298.

¹⁰¹ Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit, “Spiritual Formation in the Church,” 299.

Barton states that, "...churches in general are struggling for clarity about what spiritual transformation is and how it happens in the life of a person."¹⁰²

Another question posed to Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit was: What Do You Think are the Biggest Obstacles to Spiritual Formation in the Local Church?¹⁰³ Both Tan and Chandler speak to the preoccupation with other ministry dynamics. Tan's list was the longer of the two and included: buildings, budgets, meetings, programs, preaching, worship, fellowship, outreach and evangelism, world mission, social concern and justice, pastoral care and counseling and visitation ministries, healing ministries, and support and recovery groups, etc.¹⁰⁴ TenElshof feels that the obstacles to spiritual formation "give rise out of the culture of our day."¹⁰⁵ She writes, "This includes a naturalistic assumption that the church should accept whatever is currently happening as normative and not face the reality of how what is currently happening interfaces with relationship with God and others."¹⁰⁶

How then do we move forward developing parishes into spiritual life centers? First, we begin with understanding "The shape of our life together in communities helps form our individual spiritual lives. And our individual awareness of God's presence helps shape our common life."¹⁰⁷ When we hold this in tension, we plan experiences and opportunities accordingly. Wilhoit however, states that, "Spiritual formation does not

¹⁰² Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit, "Spiritual Formation in the Church," 300.

¹⁰³ Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit, "Spiritual Formation in the Church," 301.

¹⁰⁴ Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit, "Spiritual Formation in the Church," 301.

¹⁰⁵ Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit, "Spiritual Formation in the Church," 303.

¹⁰⁶ Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit, "Spiritual Formation in the Church," 303.

¹⁰⁷ Ackerman, *Listening to God*, 2.

take place primarily in small groups and Sunday school classes; instead, it mostly takes place in the well-lived and everyday events of life. Our small groups, retreats and studies should help us respond wisely to the events of life that form us.”¹⁰⁸ He speaks of a “curriculum for Christlikeness.”¹⁰⁹ He has identified four spiritual commitments. They are *receiving*, *remembering*, *responding* and *relating*.¹¹⁰ For Wilhoit,

The *receiving* dimension highlights our need to focus on Jesus and be open to his grace for spiritual formation. ... *Remembering* describes the process of learning to remember, deep in our heart, who we are and, more important, whose we are. The next dimension, *responding*, reminds us that the enterprise of formational changes of character and action do not exist for our own private ends but to enable us to serve others and the world through love. Finally, *relating* affirms that spiritual formation takes place best in and through community.¹¹¹

As stated previously, the economics, social structures, culture, and politics of a given time influence people’s faith and spiritual formation/development. As the work of developing parishes into spiritual life centers is done we are called to be ever aware of “...the deeper cultural currents at work, currents that undermine the assumptions and practices around which many churches have built their lives.”¹¹² Zscheile asks, “...what does it mean to be church in a culture that is increasingly hostile or indifferent to Christianity?”¹¹³ Angela Reed notes, “Effective ministry to church and society must begin with some awareness of the contemporary cultural content.”¹¹⁴ She questions, “Pastors may be skilled at reading commentaries, but are they also skilled at reading contemporary challenges faced by the long distance driver, the stay-at-home mother and

¹⁰⁸ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 38.

¹⁰⁹ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 38.

¹¹⁰ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 50.

¹¹¹ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 50-51.

¹¹² Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age*. (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2014), xii.

¹¹³ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 13.

¹¹⁴ Angela Reed, *Quest for Spiritual Community: Reclaiming Spiritual Guidance for Contemporary Congregations* (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 18.

the college student in a multi-faith environment?”¹¹⁵ Thus, we need always be aware of what is happening in and around our parishes, within our families’ lives, within the community in which the parish is centered, the communities from whom we draw our memberships, the nation, and the world, as we are indeed a global society.

Ackerman suggests some starter questions for discernment of the corporate spirituality of the congregation:

- (1) What do the climate, the weather, the lakes, or mountains say about the spirit of the area
- (2) What is the nature of this part of the country, state, or city
- (3) What is the history of the parish, the style of your being together?
- (4) What is your recent parish history?
- (5) How are you different from other parishes?
- (6) What is the current spirit of your congregation?
- (7) How do you see yourselves?
- (8) Is there an image, picture, or person that might symbolize the group?
- (9) Can you draw a picture or a symbol of an animal that symbolizes the group?
- (10) For your congregation is there an “angel”—a personification of your corporate spirituality?
- (11) Is there a dark side?
- (12) Who gives your feedback from outside the community?
- (13) Where is God nudging you? Where is God present in your midst?¹¹⁶

These can indeed be a starting point as a parish moves into a commitment to spiritual growth and formation as a community of God.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN THE PARISH

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. —Acts 2: 42

Already established is the fact that spiritual formation/growth is a role of the church and that we begin by listening to God, and the community that gathers in a

¹¹⁵ Reed, *Quest for Spiritual Community*, 18.

¹¹⁶ John Ackerman, *Spiritual Awakening: A Guide to Spiritual Life in Congregations* (New York: The Alban Institute, 1994), 78-79.

specific place. What then might be practices that assist in helping parishioners' spiritual growth? Resources are not abundant in this area. As Ackerman notes,

Many books have been written about individual spiritual life. One can buy lots of books about church or small-group leadership. There are several about renewal of a parish—centering on spiritual awakening on the part of individual members or quality management. But I haven't seen many encouraging the development of love in management and in members, of spiritual awakening in a normal parish.¹¹⁷

In the article that was the foundation for the previous section, the five specialists were asked: What are Some of the Best Practices When it Comes to Implementing Spiritual Formation in the Local Church? TenElshof leads off the responses with:

I am not sure that bringing “practices” will ever have the effect for which we are praying. Instead there is a deeper journey with God and each other that we are called to through submission to the Holy Spirit's leading that will prepare our hearts for a deeper more intimate and integrated relationship with God and others. How these are to take place will take form within the ethos of each church depending on size, denomination what already is taking place, etc.¹¹⁸

She states further that unity in the leadership on several issues is important. She offers among others, “Cultivating a mutual understanding of spiritual formation ... Cultivating an understanding of the responsibilities of the church for spiritual formation by asking the question, what relational capacities toward God and others need to be awakened in them as leaders and then in their community?”¹¹⁹

Barton poses this question in her response, “Is spiritual formation an elective or is it central to the mission of the church?”¹²⁰ Chandler's response includes the notion

¹¹⁷ Ackerman, *Spiritual Awakening*, 75.

¹¹⁸ Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit, “Spiritual Formation in the Church,” 304.

¹¹⁹ Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit, “Spiritual Formation in the Church,” 305.

¹²⁰ Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit, “Spiritual Formation in the Church,” 305.

that we need to focus on both the personal and corporate. She states, “spiritual formation must not be relegated to church-related initiatives alone, it is incumbent upon the church to encourage, model, and teach personal and corporate rhythms and practices and clearly exemplify why they are important.”¹²¹ Chandler further suggests “the church must establish a worshipping community by doing just that—engaging in worship—in whichever tradition it ascribes.”¹²²

WORSHIP

We gather. “The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer.”¹²³ We gather to worship, to study scripture, to serve, and to participate in fellowship. Spiritual formation/growth happens as we gather not only in small groups and worship but in mutual conversation with one another.

Herb Miller claims, “Job one of the Church is not pastoral care, or helping the needy, or changing societal/governmental structures, or missions. The first business of the church is to help people connect with God and grow spiritually. Worship is the number one way this happens.”¹²⁴ Marjorie Thompson says, “worship is the most fundamental of all Christian practices.”¹²⁵ Allan Sager’s claim is that, “Worship that sets us before God can transform us. To stand before the Holy One of eternity is to change.”¹²⁶

¹²¹ Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit, “Spiritual Formation in the Church,” 306.

¹²² Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof and Wilhoit, “Spiritual Formation in the Church,” 306.

¹²³ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 19.

¹²⁴ Herb Miller, *Connecting with God: 14 Ways Churches can Help People Grow Spiritually* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 34.

¹²⁵ Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*. 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 61.

¹²⁶ Allan H. Sager, *Gospel-Centered Spirituality: An Introduction to Our Spiritual Journey* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 89.

Dwight Judy states, “Spiritual formation practitioners are exploring new ways of approaching worship as the primary venue for spiritual formation of the congregation.”¹²⁷

Various components of worship speak to people in different ways. Groff shares, “A woman tells how the most meaningful part of worship is the benediction: two arms upraised in silence, as if embracing everyone with love, just before the spoken blessing. For another it is a simple signing of the cross.”¹²⁸ He speaks of the Passing of the Peace in his chapter “The Soul of Care.” (It did not occur to me to use the designations Passing the Peace or the Benediction as I created the surveys. I looked at larger components rather than small gestures or rituals within a greater part of the liturgy).

How then do our worship services contribute to spiritual growth? Miller lists fourteen questions to guide the process:

1) Does our worship focus on God? 2) Is our worship service people oriented? 3) Is our worship service real-life oriented? 4) Do we plan parts of the service as carefully as the pastor plans the parts of the sermon? 5) Do we view worship as a drama in which the worshipers are actors, rather than a drama in which the worshipers are observers? 6) Do we maintain a balance in the experiential tools we expect people to use in worship participation? 7) Does our worship service communicate with contemporary young adults in the twenty-five to forty-five age range? 8) Do we recognize the value of multiple worship services? 9) Is the format contemporary? 10) Is the worship pace consistent with the expectations of most young adults? 11) Is the worship atmosphere warm and friendly? 12) Does the service contain sufficient change and variety each week? 13) Does the room in which worship occurs contribute positively to the objective of communicating with God? 14) Do we recognize that planning and leading worship is an incredibly difficult art?¹²⁹

As he asks these questions, he explores each one with a view to the congregation’s demographics. For some he offers concrete suggestions. Within

¹²⁷ Judy, *A Quiet Pentecost*, 33.

¹²⁸ Kent Ira Groff, *The Soul of Tomorrow’s Church: Weaving Spiritual Practices in Ministry Together* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2000), 108.

¹²⁹ Miller, *Connecting with God*, 38-45.

others, he offers an invitation to consider things more deeply. Of special note, “Worship that does not begin and continue with God as its central focus becomes something other than Christian worship.”¹³⁰

As Judy speaks of spiritual formation practioners exploring new ways of approaching worship, he states “they are finding ways to integrate ancient practices with a variety of contemporary forms. We are invited to worship God in praise, in music, in sounds of cymbals, and with the awe expressed in silence.”¹³¹ He reflects further, “Worship invites us into reflection on our own life through scripture, exhortation of the Word, prayers, hymns, and support of the community.”¹³²

Judy too, presents questions for consideration in forming worship to enhance spiritual growth. The questions focus on the role of prayer and the preached Word. Of prayer, he questions, “Is there adequate opportunity for us to listen for God and respond?”¹³³ Of the preached Word he asks, “But does the message touch our hearts?”¹³⁴ He notes, “As we apply spiritual formation practices to worship, we discover the power of sensory-rich worship, silence, and symbolic images to invite us into the presence of God.”¹³⁵ He follows this with two questions, “Are we allowing ourselves to be opened up, so that the God of transcendence can break through? Are we so busy keeping up with a great onslaught of words and images that there is no space for the holy moment?”¹³⁶

¹³⁰ Miller, *Connecting with God*, 38.

¹³¹ Judy, *A Quiet Pentecost*, 33.

¹³² Judy, *A Quiet Pentecost*, 34.

¹³³ Judy, *A Quiet Pentecost*, 34.

¹³⁴ Judy, *A Quiet Pentecost*, 35.

¹³⁵ Judy, *A Quiet Pentecost*, 35.

¹³⁶ Judy, *A Quiet Pentecost*, 35.

Groff, in his discussion on worship claims, "...life-giving rituals help us notice God in our surroundings."¹³⁷ He too, offers questions for consideration in planning worship with spiritual growth in mind. "Who attends? Who do you want to attend? How do their needs affect the form and content, the place and space, times and accessibility? How do you discern the frequency of Communion in the context of your community and in the context of biblical and church traditions?"¹³⁸

We take these questions and others that arise into consideration as we form our worship opportunities. Wilhoit sees "prayer and praise and opportunities for confession, repentance, receiving the sacraments, hearing and giving testimonies of God's activity, and learning/challenge,"¹³⁹ as important as we create worship experiences.

EDUCATION/SCRIPTURE

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, "For whatever is written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope" (Rom 15:4). The study of scripture is important to spiritual growth and development. As discussed, in the section on Biblical Foundations, we learn from Christ's own life, and the community of disciples that surrounded him. Chandler believes "the church needs to foster a love for God's Word and a commitment to follow its precepts without becoming legalistic."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Groff, *Active Spirituality*, 50.

¹³⁸ Groff, *Active Spirituality*, 54.

¹³⁹ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 86.

¹⁴⁰ Barton, Chandler, Tan, TenElshof, and Wilhoit, "Spiritual Formation in the Church," 306.

In the use of scripture we “continuously make connections between the human story and the divine story,”¹⁴¹ which Henri Nouwen suggests, is the great vocation of the minister.¹⁴² Connecting the human story, a person’s own story, to the divine story creates room for spiritual growth.

Ackerman recommends asking these questions when discerning the study of the Bible: “Is the Bible taught as an intellectual exercise? Or is education viewed as a whole-person concern? Are people helped to pay attention to God? Are they encouraged to build relationships with others in faith community? Are they invited to show others how their relationship with God makes a difference in their life?”¹⁴³ As we ask these questions, we may want to bear in mind Groff’s words, “The soul of education is to move from *information* to a holistic process of *reformation*, integrating heart and mind. It is the whole person being formed and re-formed, like a potter shaping clay, incorporating the integrity, passion, and wholeness of Christ.”¹⁴⁴

Worship contains the reading of scripture. Scripture studied in small groups is important for exploring all that it has to offer. A brief paragraph of introduction in a bulletin, or how a sermon might expound upon a given text is not enough. If as Judy claims, “the place to begin spiritual formation ministries is with a small group of curious, committed people.”¹⁴⁵ Bible study groups is one such small group. Not all members of a congregation may join in a small group study, but as Judy points out, “Even a small

¹⁴¹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Living Reminder: Service and Prayer in Memory of Jesus Christ* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977) 24.

¹⁴² Nouwen, *The Living Reminder*, 24.

¹⁴³ Ackerman, *Listening to God*, 99.

¹⁴⁴ Groff, *Active Spirituality*, 86.

¹⁴⁵ Judy, *A Quiet Pentecost*, 17.

group of people who practice spiritual disciplines provide leavening to their whole community of faith.”¹⁴⁶

Formative reading of scripture the “kind of reading that nourishes the life of the spirit,”¹⁴⁷ does not only occur within small groups. An encouragement for individual reading and devotion should occur as well.

Herb Miller would argue that preaching ranks above Bible study as a spiritual-growth influence.¹⁴⁸ I cannot argue that more people will hear a sermon of mine on any given Sunday than those who attend a Bible study. Small group opportunities however, allow for a greater length of time and a deeper delving into what scripture says for our lives. It opens up a safer space for discussion and disclosure allowing the sharing of personal faith stories to assist another in growing ever deeper from what may be a shared experience.

Scripture read and proclaimed in preaching at a worship service, scripture studied in small groups and scripture read in individual devotions all lead to spiritual growth. Each should be encouraged in the life of the parish.

SERVICE/SOCIAL MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES

Groff’s words at the beginning of his chapter, “Samaritan Stewardship: Direct and Indirect,” about the Samaritan touched my heart and opened it to understanding the Samaritan story/parable Jesus shares with his disciples in a new way.

The *redeemed* Samaritan freely chose to serve directly, pouring oil and wine as his own inner wounds connected him to the wounds of another. But as a *redeemed* “Martha,” he also feely chose *not to do all the serving himself*. He paid the innkeeper to do the balance of the caring on his behalf. Paying attention to the ratio of direct and indirect service has far-

¹⁴⁶ Judy, *A Quiet Pentecost*, 17.

¹⁴⁷ Sager, *Gospel-Centered Spirituality*, 101.

¹⁴⁸ Miller, *Connecting with God*, 86.

reaching consequences *at all levels of the spiritual life, physical, financial, emotional and intellectual.*¹⁴⁹

Physical presence as well as indirect presence are both means through which the Holy Spirit uses us to care for one another and moves our hearts, minds and souls within our spiritual journey. Allowing others into service, through our monetary donations and by asking them to participate, gives them opportunity, as well to serve and see how God is at work in their service.

Groff further states, “Direct service with the least of these can mediate the mystical presence of the risen Christ.”¹⁵⁰ He makes the argument that “unless we restore the neglected portion of ‘being with,’ our service (Greek *diakonia*) may enslave ourselves and the very ones we are trying to serve.”¹⁵¹ Wilhoit believes, “cultivating a tendency toward responsible action and engagement is part of the culture of effective spiritual formation.”¹⁵²

Luther’s understanding of the priesthood of all believers plays a role in Wilhoit’s understanding of the foundations of responding to God in love and service to God and others. Luther believed that clergy and laity share in the service of God and to fellow believers using the gifts that they have been given. Wilhoit states, “A balanced concept of the priesthood of all believers will affirm the personal spiritual responsibility of all Christians, their right duty to minister in Christ’s name, and the truth that one does not abide in Christ apart from abiding in the body of Christ, the church.”¹⁵³ A parish’s outreach programs whether as accompanying presence, standing/working alongside

¹⁴⁹ Groff, *Active Spirituality*, 140.

¹⁵⁰ Groff, *Active Spirituality*, 147.

¹⁵¹ Groff, *Active Spirituality*, 143.

¹⁵² Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 149.

¹⁵³ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 152.

others or giving monetarily allows parishioners to find God at work in the minds, hearts, body and souls. It offers them an opportunity to use their God-given gifts to serve God and others and helps them to see the unique part they have in the Body of Christ (1Cor. 12).

FELLOWSHIP

Time spent in mutual conversation is important to developing connections and friendships. “Time surely does not guarantee positive relationships, but without time they cannot develop and mature into deep spiritually forming relationships.”¹⁵⁴ Mutual conversation can take place as we serve side by side, as we begin to gather before worship outside the worship space, as small group ministries open their time together, or in large group fellowship activities. Wilhoit says “A minimum quantity of time is necessary to be really engaged in the task of community formation, but it is also important that we experience community in a rich variety of ways.”¹⁵⁵

For Thomas Edward Frank, “Through mutual care, hospitality, and education the people build one another up in love, ... There is no greater challenge for congregations than becoming a community.”¹⁵⁶

Miller uses the survey evidence from George Gallup, Jr., and Timothy Jones work in *The Saints Among Us*, as foundation for his work in *Connecting with God*. In his chapter, “The People Connection,” he speaks to the role of fellowship in spiritual growth.

¹⁵⁴ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 187-189.

¹⁵⁵ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 190.

¹⁵⁶ Thomas Edward Frank, *The Soul of the Congregation: An Invitation to Congregational Reflection* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 53.

“The laity ranked fellowship number three on the list of factors that have helped them grow spiritually; clergy ranked fellowship seven.”¹⁵⁷ Fellowship’s role in spiritual growth cannot be ignored.

THE PASTOR

“The beginning point for being an effective spiritual leader is to be a spiritual person,”¹⁵⁸ so says Brian White, pastor of United Methodist Temple in Terre Haute, Indiana at the time of his statement. Pastors themselves must be engaged in on-going spiritual growth to be effective leaders. I am at my best when I am attentive to my spiritual life. “The piety of the parish pastor informs his or her ministry with the congregation, discovers those occasions of illumination within the life of the congregation, and is lived in tension with the demands of the congregation.”¹⁵⁹

Ackerman cites the work of Eugene Peterson’s *Working the Angles*, “three inner acts of paying attention keep pastors doing what they are supposed to: paying attention to God in prayer, paying attention to the Word of God in scripture, and paying attention to what God is doing in individuals and the congregation as a whole.”¹⁶⁰

Ackerman feels that if a “pastor is to serve as a spiritual guide, he or she must continually find help in paying attention to God.”¹⁶¹ He suggests that a skilled spiritual director can be of help. I have been in spiritual direction since my senior year in seminary. It does indeed keep me focused on God at work in my life. Ackerman also suggests that a pastor needs to be part of a Bible study group that moves “past the

¹⁵⁷ Miller, *Connecting with God*, 71-72.

¹⁵⁸ Judy, *A Quiet Pentecost*, 54.

¹⁵⁹ Holmes, *Spirituality in Ministry*, 171.

¹⁶⁰ Ackerman, *Listening to God*, 108.

¹⁶¹ Ackerman, *Listening to God*, 108.

academic to contemplative Bible study.”¹⁶² While I do attend a weekly colleague group as often as I can, I must say that it stays more academically focused than contemplative. As I lead Bible study at the parish my first question upon the reading of the text is, “How did this touch your heart, your mind, your soul?” Thus, often the parish Bible study is more likely to be the contemplative one. A third suggestion is that a pastor talk with other pastors about what is happening in the congregation. For many years, I participated in such a group where we discussed joys and challenges. Changes in calls, the terminal illness of a colleague’s spouse, and retirements dissolved the group. It was of value and I do indeed miss it.

Worship, the study of scripture, engaging in service, and fellowship all have a role in the spiritual growth of individuals. Each brings to the individual a way to experience God, God’s presence and God’s kingdom. Each in its own way allows for spiritual growth in mind, body, and soul. A parish should offer to its members, opportunities to engage in each experience within the life of the parish, but also encourage personal prayer, and devotions.

A parish dedicated to the priority of spiritual growth for its members will have a pastor dedicated to their own spiritual growth. The pastor will seek out and participate in taking their own Sabbath time, engage in spiritual direction, the study of scripture outside of the parish and if and where possible a colleague supervision/support group.

A parish as spiritual life center understands how each component adds to the vitality of the congregation, and will seek to encourage participation across the various components of the congregation’s life together.

¹⁶² Ackerman, *Listening to God*, 108.

IV. THE PROJECT

“Be still and know that I am God!” Psalm 46:10a

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

The gospel of Luke tells us that the apostles asked Jesus to increase their faith (Luke 17:5). Is this yearning to know God more deeply still within us today?

I believe that this yearning to know God more deeply does indeed continue to this day. The purpose of this project will be how to best address the congregation of TELCOS’s stated desire for spiritual growth as stated in the congregational surveys conducted in 2014 while preparing to call a new pastor. Will it mean changing worship, or adding additional bible study opportunities? Will it mean shaping council meetings or team meetings differently? Will it mean shaping a life together as a community in worship, service, learning and fellowship or shaping individuals in their personal growth?

The scope of this project offered opportunities/experiences where members of TELCOS engaged in worship, prayer, the study of scripture, engagement in service, and fellowship. The full membership of TELCOS received a letter explaining the scope of the project. The letter included an explanation of the data from the 2014 surveys, and an invitation to experience a new practice (Appendix 1).

Eight specific members were invited to participate in at least one of the offered Bible Studies, a Spiritual Life Seminar, engage in the shared morning prayer, and a service opportunity. An invitation was extended to commit to completing pre- and post-surveys (see Appendices 2 and 3) asking them: 1) to define spiritual growth as they understood it; 2) what the experience of worship is in relation to their definition; 3) what within worship is particularly meaningful and is important to spiritual growth as they

defined it; 4) what activities enhance spiritual growth for the individual; and 4) how the experience shapes their understanding of spiritual growth. The post-survey also asked them which activity or worship experience most contributes to spiritual growth and what would they like to see become a part of the parish's life together.

Of the eight original invitations, all eight agreed to be participants. They ranged in age from thirty-four to seventy-three years. Four participants were men and four were women. They represented five of the twenty-six zip codes. Education level ranged from high school diploma to master level degrees. All eight participants attend worship regularly.

All eight completed a pre-interview including the signing of an Informed Consent. All eight participated in at least one new opportunity/experience. Not one participant participated in every offered opportunity/experience.

Although the full congregation was invited to experience something new, only four did so, one of these being a spouse of one of the participants. I believe the lack of substantial participation by members of the congregation outside of the invited eight does say something to this issue of desiring spiritual development. The full congregation was not aware that eight specific persons had been chosen to complete pre- and post-surveys. This will be addressed in the conclusion.

PRE-SURVEY RESULTS

The participants were asked to check off those experiences/opportunities in which they currently participate. There was an opportunity for them to define spiritual growth, share how participating in these experiences help shape their relationship with God, and how they define their relationship with God.

Pre-survey results follows.

How do you define spiritual growth?

#1 “The realization being closer to the community of believers and recognizing that my well-being is improved by faith in Christ.”

#2 “Learning. Sharing. Feeling the Holy Spirit”

#3 “So in order to answer this I went to find out what spiritual growth meant. There were several passages to look at 2 Peter 1:5-8. So what I’ve concluded is that my definition of spiritual growth is what I give and what others get out of all that God has given us.”

#4 “Becoming closer to God.”

#5 “To learn more about God and share the Good News with others.”

#6 “A deepening of the personal relationship with God especially in increased consistency of prayer practice, trust in Him, and living faith.”

#7 “It’s trying to be like God! We are given examples of how God lived his life through our Christian education. To grow spiritually, we have to instill his practices in our everyday life. It comes through action and involvement. The more we act like God, the closer we become like God, the more our individual spirit will grow!!”

#8 “Exploring new ways to connect with God in both group and individual settings. In groups, spiritual growth can be gaining and deeper understanding of how others view their faith and seeing if I can relate to that or how my beliefs differ and why. Individually it is finding ways to deepen my connection to God through prayer, understanding the Bible, and finding ways to share my faith with others.”

What experiences/opportunities do you currently participate in?**Worship**

Sunday mornings - 8

Worship Without Walls - 2

Praise and Pizza - 4

Advent Evening Prayer - 2

Mid-week Lent Services - 7

Education

Book of Faith Bible Study - 2

Living Lutheran discussion group - 1

Prayer

The shared monthly morning prayer - 5

Daily devotions - 1

Prayer at Meal time - 4

Prayer at other times during the day - 8

Service

Quilt making - 2

Bedrolls for the Homeless – 2

Prayer Shawl Ministry - 0

Worship Assistant - 7

Good Samaritan Squad - 4

A team ministry - 5

Volunteering for a nonprofit organization - 1

Other – 1

(please list) Girl Scouts

Giving

Regular giving to the spending plan - 8

Do you tithe? - 2

ELCA World Hunger or Good Gifts - 1

Lutheran Disaster Relief - 2

Other (please list): donations to coffee hours, Sunday school supplies, special events or other needs of the church, congregation's scholarship fund.

Outside giving: New Jersey Food Bank, St. Jude's, North Star Relief, Habitat for Humanity, a local women's shelter and the public library.

Fellowship

Attend Fellowship Hour after worship - 8

Attend Mid-week Lent Soup and Bread suppers - 5

How does participating in or experience within any of the above help shape your relationship with God?

#1 "Yes, I feel that helping in small ways makes me feel closer to God."

#2 "It makes me feel the presence of God."

#3 "It helps in the fact that I know I am able to share whatever I have no matter how little or how much."

#4 “It helps me focus more on God.”

#5 “I feel I am doing what God would want me to do for Him.”

#6 “The worship helps strengthen and refresh (depending on kids allow for focus lol).

The others are more my sharing God’s love and my time. Lenten soup has always been one of my favorites but has been challenging.”

#7 “It just makes me feel good, giving back gets into your soul, ... very difficult to explain.”

#8 “Feeling connected to a church family absolutely helps bring me closer to God. When

I am serving I feel I am living out my Baptism and Confirmation promises to serve others and hope that my service makes others feel God’s presence in their lives. For me, serving others makes me joyful.”

How do you define your relationship with God?

#1 “I often fall short what I should be doing but God is always there for me. He is my comforter and helper. I have had my share of difficulties but He always pulls me through—I am so thankful for the strength he gives me.”

#2 “As a constant.”

#3 “tumultuous, questioning, inspiring, exhausting, exhilarating, It’s not a definition but When God is with you all these feelings can be experienced.”

#4 “It can always be better. Sometimes I am closer then other in my life. In short, there is room to grow.”

#5 (was left blank)

#6 “When I was confirmed I thought, ‘okay, that’s it.’ Then someone, an older woman in

the congregation said to me something along the lines of, ‘Congratulations on the start of this journey with God. It won’t always be easy but I hope you always turn to Him for strength and peace.’

This is a journey. It is certainly not always easy. I falter, I fall short, worry about things I can’t but keep turning to God and He keeps giving me His peace.”

#7 “It is best described in 2 words, ‘very private.’ But no worries, it’s strong.”

#8 “I would think like most of us, there are times when I feel God is very present in my life and other times I feel He is not as tangible. Those less tangible times, if I am honest with myself, are generally when I am reflecting on my sinfulness and the parts of my life I am not ready or willing to change, or are confused by situations that I am not sure why God would have put me into.

When I make God a priority, by listening to Christian music, by praying more often (opening and ending my day with prayer), I definitely feel much closer to God.

Sometimes I think I’m too informal in my relationship to God, mostly because if He already knows my innermost thoughts and fears, then there is no point in being anything less than direct when I speak to Him. But at times that almost feels disrespectful and I feel guilty about that.

I try to make sure everyone I meet knows I have a relationship with God, and the important role He has in my life. I want that to be something that defines me.”

THE EXPERIENCES

An invitation was extended to participants to attend the alternative worship experiences (Praise and Pizza, Worship Without Walls), a bible study experience

including the one specific to using the technique of Dwelling in the Word, the Spiritual Life Seminar- "Finding God in All Things," the shared monthly morning prayer, a service opportunity, and fellowship. Before participation in an experience, all pre-surveys were completed.

The Spiritual Life Seminar had four of the selected participants in attendance and four members of the congregation. Three participants who had not previously attended a bible study session did so, as did one of the spouses. No members outside of the selected participants and the spouse thereof answered the invitation to join in bible study. Four of the selected participants attended Worship Without Walls for the first time as did the same spouse of a participant and an additional member along with her young child. Two participants attended Praise and Pizza having previously done so at some point. One attended for the first time but not during the month of October. I do not know who accepted the invitation to join in the shared monthly morning prayer, that already saw strong participation with five of the eight select participants stating they did pray in the morning. This was true of service opportunities; here too, was strong involvement before the invitation to do so. However, one of the select individuals did accept the invitation in November to deliver a Temple Talk during the stewardship emphasis, something they had not previously done. All participants cited attending fellowship following worship on the pre-survey, thus no new involvement was seen at this event.

The invitation to participate extended for the month of October. As previously stated, one of the select participants attended Praise and Pizza for the first time but did so in December as they were unavailable in October. Their post-survey was completed and turned in following this.

POST SURVEY RESULTS

The distribution of post-surveys took place in November. I received the final one in early January. In reviewing these documents I discovered that I had distributed a previous draft of the pre-survey and not the intended one. I believe that each survey offers the necessary information to move the congregation forward and that the post-survey offers the important results as it asks participants about meaningful experiences and what they find important for spiritual growth.

1) **How do you define spiritual growth?**

#1 Developing an attitude of appreciation for the Holy Spirit's presence in my life. The realization that the more I open my heart to him, the better my life is.

#2 Quiet contemplation. Learning.

#3 Spiritual growth is the understanding of a loving and caring God who can at times be angry. He can put us where we belong even if we feel we don't belong.

#4 Spiritual growth is becoming closer to God. Aka knowing him more.

#5 To get a better understanding of my faith and God

#6 Gaining deeper personal relationship with God and conscious connection with your own soul

#7 Growing with God every day, using his way to try and be a good person every day.

#8 Enhancing your understanding of your own personal relationship with God and your faith, through individual and group activities.

Question Two: What is your experience of worship in relation to your definition?

#1 The more I participate in worship related activities the more centered and grateful I

feel.

#2 A longer time frame does not make it feel that growth is happening.

#3 My experience is in helping out the church in whatever way I can with my time and talents.

#4 Worship should bring us closer to God. It should help us to center ourselves so we can focus on him.

#5 By listening to words of the lessons, songs of the day and pastor explaining all of this in her sermon helps me to understand my faith.

#6 Really depends on the day in terms of focus and kids and life at this stage of my life.

#7 I try to feel God's presence every day in thought.

#8 Hearing the word of God each week strengthens this relationship and provides as opportunity to hear how the Word is interpreted by others in our faith. Singing hymns of praise enhance this experience.

Question Three: What within the service of worship is particularly meaningful or important to you? Below are specific parts of the service for worship, which do you find important for spiritual growth as you define it?

Participants responded as follows:

Prelude – 3

Choir Anthem – 3

Postlude – 3

Hymns – 6

Scripture – 6

Sermon – 7

Confession – 5

Kyrie – 3

Hymn of Praise – 3

Eucharistic Prayer – 5

Prayers of the People – 6

Holy Communion – 7

Moments of Silence – 5

Offering – 0

One participant wrote in “Children’s Sermon prayer the words have meaning and
the congregation repeats it.”

Question Four: Within the life of the congregation, specific activities and experiences are provided. Below are listed a number of these, which of these activities enhance spiritual growth for you?

The participants responded as follows

Book of Faith Bible Study – 5

Living Lutheran discussion group – 3

The shared monthly prayer – 6

Quilt making – 1

Bedrolls for the Homeless – 1

Prayer Shawl Ministry – 0

Worship Assistant – 6

Good Samaritan Squad – 3

A team ministry – 4

Volunteering for a non-profit – 2

Other – 2

Regular giving to the spending plan – 6

Giving to ELCA World Hunger or Good Gifts – 1

Giving to Lutheran Disaster Response – 1

Other giving – 3

Here a participant responded: “giving time. It’s more valuable to me than money.”

Another respondent listed other sources of their giving.

Attend Fellowship Hour after Worship – 8

Attend Mid-week Lenten Soup and Bread Suppers – 6

Here a participant added: “not sure enhances spiritual growth but enhances worship as a congregation. Makes church feel like family.”

Worship Without Walls – 6

Praise and Pizza – 5

Advent Evening Prayer – 4

Midweek Lent Services – 7

Question Five: How does participating in or experience within any of the above help shape your understanding of spiritual growth?

#1 The more I learn the more I appreciate the church and the work of the Holy Spirit.

#2 Services outside of a Sunday feel more special.

#3 It lends way to family and community.

#4 Being part of a church community gives you the opportunity to share your faith with others and theirs with you.

#5 To get a better understanding of my faith and God.

#6 More and varied experience helps to bring faith into every day.

#7 It just makes me feel good.

#8 Gives me an opportunity to hear other parishioners' understanding of the word. Gave me new perspective.

Question Six: Which of the activities or worship experiences listed above that you marked most contribute to spiritual growth?

#1 All of the above

#2 Advent Evening Prayer

#3 Fellowship after church. Even though I don't attend I would say Worship Without Walls, Praise and Pizza and Mid-week Lenten suppers.

#4 Lenten Soup Suppers

#5 All of the above

#6 It really depends different experiences touch me differently but always confession and communion center me.

#7 Holy Communion

#8 Attending worship regularly, including additional services during Advent and Lent

Question Seven: What activities/experiences would you like to see become a part of this parish's life together?

#1 I believe that there are many opportunities. I just need to participate more in them.

#2 I think we should take advantage of contemporary music. Even if we play it in church before the Prelude. Sometimes people sit in church quietly before the service starts.

#3 I would like to see a Healing Service and maybe a Hymn sing.

#4 I understand that our music is very liturgical. But I miss the songs of my childhood that filled my heart with joy. Songs like "Holy, Holy, Holy," "Great is thy Faithfulness," and "Amazing Grace." We do sing these songs now and then and Praise and Pizza helps.

#5 An adult Sunday school to prepare for Sunday services.

#6 Not sure, we offer so much. I would like to participate in more.

#7 When nice weather is upon us, I'd like to recommend an outdoor service on the grounds. I have experienced this at another church (Zion, LBI) and it is/was very moving. Similar to Worship Without Walls, but on our grounds.

#8 I would like to see more people attend Lenten Services. More people serving during worship as readers, ushers, etc.

ANALYSIS

There was no definitive change in the participants' definitions of spiritual growth from the time of the pre-survey to the completion of the post-survey. They continued to define it as an attitude appreciating the presence of the Holy Spirit, quiet contemplation, learning, developing an understanding of a loving and caring God, becoming closer to God, being in a deeper relationship with God, and enhancing understanding of God.

The post-survey put an emphasis on worship as it is the core of a congregation's life together. Members of the congregation who participate in worship are also the ones found in some aspect of congregational life be it volunteering, bible study, giving of time and talent as well as monetarily. At this time, I know of no parishioner who is involved in some aspect of congregational life who isn't also attending worship.

All eight survey participants attend worship regularly. Each participant recorded finding various aspects of worship as meaningful and important toward spiritual growth. Two participants responded that each aspect is an important component, while others were more selective.

The sermon and Holy Communion received seven designations each as being meaningful or of importance to spiritual growth. It is not surprising that Holy Communion would rank high as Sager quotes Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The rediscovery of the Eucharist may prove to be the most important event in Christian spirituality of our time."¹⁶³ Holy Communion is a vital part of Sunday worship, *Worship Without Walls*, and *Praise and Pizza*. It is central to who we are as a congregation, which shows forth in these results.

¹⁶³ Sager, *Gospel-Centered Spirituality*, 92-93.

Hymns, Scripture and Prayers each received six designations of importance and meaning, while Confession, Eucharistic Prayer, and Moments of Silence each received five responses.

Several of the musical components of worship (Prelude, Choir Anthem, Postlude) only received three designations as being meaningful or of importance to spiritual growth. The singing of hymns received six designations. Three participants' responses to the last question: "What activities/experiences would you like to see become a part of this parish's life together?" addresses the issue of music. One participant wants the songs of their childhood sung more often, another would like a hymn sing, and the third would like to see contemporary music sung. Of note is the observance that the participant requesting more songs of their childhood is twenty years younger than the individual wanting to see contemporary music offered.

As to the additional worship experiences offered, Worship Without Walls and Mid-week Lent services each received significant amount of responses to indicate that they are indeed a vital aspect of the congregation's life as to enhancing spiritual growth. The Advent Evening Prayer only received four responses. It is the worship experience with the smallest attendance, yet, it was marked of most importance to one of the participants. That same participant stated, "Services outside of a Sunday feel more special" in response to question five: "How does participating in or experience within any of the above help shape your understanding of spiritual growth?"

Within the area of service is the volunteer opportunity of serving as a Worship Assistant (as an Usher, Greeter, Assisting Minister, Communion Assistant, Choir Member and/or Altar Guild). Six participants designated this as an activity that enhances

spiritual growth. Thus participating in service during worship is of importance as well to spiritual growth. A participant stated that they would like to see more people serving during worship as readers, ushers, etc.

Within the life of the congregation outside of worship, fellowship received the most designations as an activity enhancing spiritual growth for the participants. In fact, all eight participants gave it a designation as an activity which enhances spiritual growth. Six participants designated Mid-week Lenten Soup and Bread suppers as another vital fellowship opportunity for spiritual growth.

MOVING FORWARD

Ackerman shares an anecdote from a time he was attending a talk by Gerald May at the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation in Washington, D.C. An attendee rose to ask Dr. May a question preferencing it with the spiritual practices in which they already engaged. They asked, “What’s next?” Ackerman reports that Dr. May “...paused, smiled slightly, and said to the questioner, ‘I don’t know. Why don’t you ask Jesus?’” As the congregation and I move forward in mission, ministry, and spiritual growth together, central to our life together will be to ask God: 1) Where do you wish us to go? 2) What do you wish us to do? 3) How do you wish us to get there? I see these questions being formed into a prayer petition that can be offered up at council meetings, team meetings, and worship itself.

The formation of a Spiritual Life Team is essential in moving forward. The results of the surveys show that TELCOS continues to see the need for spiritual growth and is open to it. Several of those who participated did state that they would like to be more involved themselves in specific activities and would like to see others participating as well.

A Spiritual Life Team with members consistent in worship, committed to spiritual growth, and representative of the demographics of the parish can start the process of forming the parish into a spiritual life center. Members of this team will meet with prayer, enthusiasm, and dreams. The Spiritual Life Team observes the work of the Holy Spirit in, among, and through the members of the parish as well as within the life of the parish itself. The forming of the parish's own definition of spiritual formation will be the work of this team.

The role of the Spiritual Life Team will be to create and promote activities and experiences that allow participants to deepen their relationship with God. These experiences recognize that we do so with our whole selves—mind, body, soul, and strength. The Spiritual Life Team will encourage the participation of congregation and community members in these activities. (See Appendix 4 for a more in-depth policy for the Spiritual Life Team).

Working with the parish's definition, other teams/committees within the parish can plan worship, Bible study, and fellowship opportunities reflective of the definition. The Spiritual Life Team may look to offer suggestions for additional growth opportunities.

As the Worship and Music Team moves forward in worship planning the use of some of Miller's questions will be helpful as we take the results of these surveys into consideration. I look to those that are of importance to our context at this time:

- 1) Does our worship focus on God?
- 2) Is our worship service people oriented?
- 3) Is our worship service real-life oriented?

- 4) Do we recognize the value of multiple worship services?
- 5) Is the worship atmosphere warm and friendly?
- 6) Do we recognize that planning and leading worship is an incredibly difficult art?¹⁶⁴

Underlying these questions and planning is the question posed by Judy, “Is there space for the holy moment?”¹⁶⁵

As TELCOS moves forward, wishing to keep worship as its central core of spiritual formation, planning will need to be intentional about music selection. Where within worship is a specific music genre more faithful to the text or the day’s designation? There will be no magic worship service, but mindfulness in planning and leading worship. People are at different places in their lives: what touches someone one moment, may not be what touches them at another moment. In planning, we can only do our best.

Of note in the survey results and the research, the sermon has a high level of priority. I will need to be mindful of this. I have learned that members of the congregation prefer my presence among them rather than behind the pulpit. They appreciate personal anecdotes, as they are pertinent to the text. (This includes anecdotes speaking to events or experiences within the parish, as well as my personal struggles or experiences).¹⁶⁶ Questions such as:

- 1) Is God’s story present in this sermon?

¹⁶⁴ Miller, *Connecting with God*, 38-45.

¹⁶⁵ Judy, *A Quiet Pentecost*, 35.

¹⁶⁶ I have not been shy about sharing the few mystical experiences within my journey. My being open to do so has opened others to share as well. At a recent Bible study, a participant actually used the word “mystical.” Her sharing opened up an incredible outpouring of sharing by additional members in attendance.

- 2) Is our human story present in this sermon?
- 3) Is the intersection of these stories present in this sermon?
- 4) Is it faithful to God and to the context of the congregation?
- 5) Is the language easily understood by young and old alike?

While Advent Evening Prayer sees poor attendance, but is of high importance to one of the participants, and another participant expressed the desire to see more in attendance at Mid-Week Lenten Worship, increasing attendance at these services will need to be explored. Will it mean asking these participants to do the inviting?

Various prayer practices experienced within the life of the congregation appeared as priority on the post-survey. Though not appearing on the survey results, I have heard an appreciation for the contextualizing of the Prayers of the People used in worship. The core of these prayers is provided in the resource *Sundays and Seasons*, an annual resource published by the ELCA. My practice is to add to the petitions what is pertinent to the community or world on that Sunday. The petition on creation may include an environmental or ecological disaster, the petition on peace may include a specific area in conflict, and the prayer for the nations may include reference to a political action.¹⁶⁷ Each week we mention the members on the prayer list by name, and those serving in the armed forces, as civil servants, and volunteer first responders.

The post-survey offered an opportunity to speak to the prayers within worship; the pre-surveys asked the participants to speak as well to prayer within their personal lives. As already shared, five participate in the shared monthly morning prayer, one does daily devotions, and four pray at meal times; all eight of the participants report praying at other

¹⁶⁷ The Sunday before the beginning of the Senate moving into the Impeachment Trial, we prayed for their wisdom.

times during the day. I return to a quote from John Ackerman, “The shape of our life together in communities helps form our individual spiritual lives. And our individual awareness of God’s presence helps shape our common life.”¹⁶⁸ The encouraging of daily prayer and devotions can be done through a daily meditation sent via email or providing a list of websites and podcasts, etc.

The final question results on the post-survey—What activities/experiences would you like to see become a part of this parish’s life together?— did include new ideas. Participants asked for consideration of a healing service, hymn sing, a Sunday adult education experience, and an outdoor worship experience on our own property. Music, as previously discussed, received mention as well. Of note, two people did not see the need to add anything more, but to add to the attendance of what is already in place. Personal invitation is core to increasing attendance. The discussion on these can take place at a Spiritual Life Team meeting.

The Listening Circles held early upon my call to TELCOS together with the responses to the Post-survey gives insight into how the congregations’ life together has shaped individuals’ spiritual lives and how individuals’ awareness of God’s presence help shape their common life. Ongoing listening is important to a parish as a spiritual life center. As pastor, I need to be attentive to changes that occur in the life of the congregation. It is time to invite the members of TELCOS into Listening Circles once again. I see the sharing of this research as the opening to these meetings.

¹⁶⁸ Ackerman, *Listening to God*, 2.

V. CONCLUSION

“All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved”. – Acts 2: 44-47

We gather. We gather to worship. We draw in our souls as we pray. We meet to study scripture. We unite in serving God as we serve one another. We get together as we enjoy one another’s presence as blessed children of God. We are also still and know God.

Parish as a spiritual life center is about a close community of believers worshipping, praying, studying scripture, serving, and sharing life in the Spirit. It celebrates the presence of God in one another’s lives. It is where people learn to love God with all their hearts, with all their souls, and with all their minds, and to love their neighbors as themselves.

Protestants, more specifically Lutherans, are opening themselves to the understanding of God’s presence in their lives and the role of the Holy Spirit. We are moving from spirituality as a way of being (as it was at the time of the Reformation) to a way of acting and a way of being present in the world—at our chosen vocations, with our families, at the places where we play, in the tasks of our daily schedules, and in the world where we live among others.

We learn to do this in and through our lives as a parish, as a community gathered in the presence of God. The Body of Christ comes together to embrace more fully what it means to be the Body of Christ for the world. We open ourselves to the full presence of God in our lives and what this means to the living of our lives. That is the role of the

parish, to give opportunities for people to be still and know that God is God, ever present to them, and ever dwelling within them. The parish's role is to encourage, support, and strengthen people to live this presence in the world.

The primary way parishes do this is through its central act—worship. In worship we deliberately pause and step away from the busyness of life to be in the presence of God. We release the burden of our sins and hear the grace of forgiveness. We praise God in word and music for God's bountiful goodness. We hear God's word read and proclaimed for our edification and our daily living. We pray for one another, our communities, the nation, creation, and the whole world. We re-connect as the communion of saints as we share in the Lord's Supper, in the body and blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We depart in God's peace, as God's peace and presence to the world.

Within the parish, we dwell in the word of God through bible study. We hear God's story in humanity's history and come to see our story in God's history. Our hearts burn within us as the scriptures are opened to us (Luke 24:32).

As a parish, we unite in serving God. We see the needs of those who are hungry, and not only feed those who are hungry but advocate for better distribution of goods and living wages. We provide water to those who thirst by being conscious of our own use of water and we give funds for the creation of wells. We tend to the sick with meals, transportation, words of comfort, and prayers for healing. We visit those in prison and advocate for a fairer justice system (Matthew 25: 34-46). We see God in one another and honor God by honoring one another.

Through our mutual conversations, we share God's presence with one another. We grow in faith as we see God in the lives of others. Fellowship teaches us to be in the

presence of God with one another, not only in the parish but, in the people we encounter in our everyday lives.

Parish as “Spiritual Life Center” is all of this, not for the sake of the parish, nor fully for the sake of each individual, but for the sake of God and God’s world. As we realize God more fully in us, we become more fully in God. As we are more fully in the world, so too is God more fully in the world. Would not the world be a better place as we live God’s love with all our heart, and with all our mind, and with all our soul?

That is where I see the members of The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Our Saviour—out in the world, as God’s presence in the world. Yet, I also see it as the body of Christ to one another. I see and hope for greater worship attendance as members come to relish the quiet that worship brings against the busyness of their everyday lives, and as they sense the uninterrupted presence of God. I see additional gatherings in worship beyond what we already have fulfilling the wishes and needs of our members.

I see and hope for prayer and devotions to be a part of their daily lives at meal times, as they awake to each new day and as they close the day in thanksgiving to God for all the blessings of the day. I see and hope for more bible study sessions and greater participation within these sessions as we sense God’s presence for our lives through God’s word. I see and hope for a parish that fully embraces its call to serve God by serving one another. While we engage in several ministries, I know that we have the resources of talent and finances to do so much more. Finally, I see and hope for additional fellowship opportunities (beyond our current weekly coffee hours, Mid-week Lent Soup and Bread meals, and the fellowship time that is part of Praise and Pizza).

I see my hopes and dreams come to fruition as we create a Spiritual Life Team, as we define and commit to the spiritual growth of the members of TELCOS. I see God at work in, through, and with the membership as we commit our lives more fully to God and God's world, as we still ourselves and know God more fully.

In these last few months, we have moved from gathering physically to gathering remotely due to the Covid-19 global pandemic. The spiritual life of the congregation lives on through worship that is pre-recorded yet includes centering prayer, music, moments of silence, scripture, prayers and preaching. Zoom technology allows the parish to connect for bible study, the Living Lutheran discussion group, a fellowship hour, council meeting and even confirmation lessons. Morning devotions during Holy Week were recorded and included guided reflections based on the scripture texts read. Worship, the study of scripture, prayer, service and fellowship has not lost its centrality to who we are as a parish in being central to spiritual growth.

Members are calling one another to check on each other. Members have noticed neighbors in need and the parish has reached out together to assist those families. A van filled with Gatorade for nurses was delivered to a local hospital. A confirmation student's response to this was, "God is in the Gatorade." God is indeed in the Gatorade as well as the masks and ear savers made and donated, rocks painted and shared around neighborhoods, and in sidewalks and driveways chalked with encouragement. Service, caring for others in need has not halted even as we stay at home, in fact, it has increased as the Holy Spirit moves the hearts of the members of TELCOS.

Beyond these walls, beyond this people of God who gather as The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Our Saviour I serve on the New Jersey Synod of the ELCA's

Equipping for Vitality Team which works with congregations in northern New Jersey. We open each gathering with Dwelling in the Word, introduce spiritual practices to the attendees and offer ways to incorporate them into the life of the congregation. In sharing TELCOS's shared monthly morning prayer, other congregations have adopted this practice as well. Another congregation chose to create monthly prayer partners. Other congregations are learning that the parish is indeed a spiritual life center.

As already stated, a brief review of the volumes on the history of spirituality revealed a dearth of resources specific to Protestant and more specifically a Lutheran history of spirituality. As noted earlier, Dwight Judy found that spiritual formation did not begin to emerge in Protestant Christianity as a special focus until the 1980's. He also noted that Protestant seminaries have only been serious about spiritual formation studies since the early 2000s.

This is reflective of my own seminary education at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (now United Lutheran Seminary), with emphasis on biblical studies from a contextual, literary and theological point of view but not as a source of spiritual formation. An introduction to Spiritual Direction happened in 1998, at which time a local spiritual direction center hosted an open house. As I recall, few of us attended. Directors were offered space on campus so that students could meet with them if they so desired.

The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Chicago for years required a year of spiritual direction of its students in the Master of Divinity program. At present, it lists Spiritual Formation as one of its five main areas of competencies. "Competency in spiritual formation means that students are able to discern ways in which God is at work

in their own lives and in the world and provide guidance for communal participation in the renewing activity of the Spirit in local contexts.”¹⁶⁹ A review of the United Lutheran Seminary catalog finds under “Additional non-credit requirements” spiritual formation. Courses may be taken as electives or students may engage in 32 hours of alternative activities.¹⁷⁰ As seminaries continue to stress the importance of spiritual formation it is my hope that we will see a rise in research and resources to assist parishes becoming spiritual life centers.

As for me, I will continue to be committed to my own spiritual growth through personal devotion and prayer times, spiritual direction and retreats as well as membership in Spiritual Directors International and The Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality, both of which I have found most helpful thus far. For as pastor and as a Spiritual Director it is indeed important that I too, am still and know that God is God.

¹⁶⁹ Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago 2019-2020 Catalog, [w.ww.lstc.edu](http://www.lstc.edu)

¹⁷⁰ catalog.uls.edu

APPENDIX ONE

Letter of Invitation to the Congregation

September 10, 2019

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

In June of 2016, I felt a calling to begin to work on a Doctor of Ministry degree. Last fall I completed the necessary course work and began the process of formulating a project and seeking the necessary approvals. That work is now completed and thus I am able to begin to work on the project and research for the writing of my final paper. The current working title for the project and paper is *Be Still and Know that I am God: Parish as Spiritual Life Center*.

The purpose of the project will be how to best address the congregation's stated desire for spiritual growth as stated in the congregational surveys conducted in 2014 while the congregation was preparing to call a new pastor. At that time 80 surveys were completed in preparation for the Ministry Site Profile. Of these 80 surveys, 27 respondents placed spiritual growth of members as their #1 area of attention needed. Fourteen respondents ranked it as a second area of priority and five ranked it as a third area of priority. In total, 84% of respondents ranked spiritual growth of members as needing some attention with 33% stating that spiritual growth of members was the top priority of need.

The scope of the project is to offer opportunities/experiences where you as members of Our Saviour will be able to engage in spiritual practices. We already have several in place but some additional opportunities will be offered in the month of October. I hope that you will be able to find time to participate in these opportunities as we explore together experiences for spiritual growth.

Thus I invite you to:

- Prayer – please continue to use our monthly morning prayer as you arise each morning. If you don't as yet engage in this practice I encourage you to do so. Each Sunday our prayer concerns are listed in the bulletin for your prayer time.
- Bible Study – please consider joining the already established time of study on Mondays at 10:30am and 7:30pm. Additional opportunity for study is being offered on Thursday October 3 and Thursday October 17 at 10:30am and 7:30pm.
- Service – you may want to consider assisting in worship, joining the Prayer Shawl Ministry, cut quilt squares or sew a quilt for our Lutheran World Relief ministry, crochet a bedroll for the homeless ministry or make plan for that ministry, engage in a volunteer opportunity in the community.
- Learn – The Spiritual Life Seminar *Finding God in All Things* is being offered on Sunday, October 6 at noon, following fellowship hour. This seminar will explore ways that we can choose to reorient our lives to God so as to make them more meaningful. Our Living Lutheran Study group is another opportunity for learning.
- Worship – in addition to worship on Sunday mornings, we worship outside as Worship Without Walls on Saturday, October 12 at the Laurelwood Arboretum in Wayne. Praise and Pizza will take place on Friday, October 25th.

I am very excited to be able to offer these opportunities to you in October. I look forward to developing a plan of action for our future based on your engagement in these experiences. Please feel free to invite friends and neighbors to join you.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at pastor@oursaviourchurch.org.

Blessings,
Rev. Wendy L. Abrahamson

Appendix Two

Pre-Project Survey

In 2014, the membership of The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Our Saviour(TELCOS) was asked to complete a Ministry Site Profile(MSP) as you began your search for a pastoral candidate. To shape this MSP you were asked to complete a survey. Under the Pastoral Preferences section you were asked to prioritize areas of emphasis for pastoral ministry. These areas were: Adult education opportunities, Building/new or renovation, Confirmation ministry, Congregational climate(fellowship, communication, etc.), Ecumenical work with other congregations, Instruction and assimilation of new members, Leadership development, Ministry with children, Ministry with youth, Mission outreach to the community/evangelism, Spiritual growth of members, Social ministry and advocacy for justice, Stewardship development, Worship and music.

Eighty surveys were completed. Of these 80, 27 respondents (33%) placed spiritual growth of members as their #1 area of attention needed, 84% of respondents ranked spiritual growth of members as needing some attention.

My Doctor of Ministry project's purpose is to address this desire. As I begin my project I am establishing a baseline of the definition of spiritual growth among members, the areas in which members are currently participating and how they see this participation in relation to their spiritual growth journey.

Name: _____

(If you wish to remain anonymous you may do so, please assign yourself a pseudonym. Please remember this pseudonym as you will be asked to complete a post-survey)

- 1) How do you define spiritual growth?
- 2) What experiences/opportunities do you currently participate in?

Worship

___ Sunday mornings How often? _____

___ Worship Without Walls

___ Praise and Pizza

___ Advent Evening Prayer

___ Mid-week Lent Services

Education

Book of Faith Bible Study

Living Lutheran discussion group

Prayer

The shared monthly morning prayer

Daily devotions

Prayer at Meal time

Prayer at other times during the day

Service

Quilt making (cutting fabric, sewing the tops, assembling the layers, tying completed quilts)

Bedrolls for the Homeless (cutting the bags, tying the plarn, crocheting the mats)

Prayer Shawl Ministry

Worship Assistant (Usher, Greeter, Assisting Minister, Communion Assistant, Choir Member, Altar Guild)

Good Samaritan Squad

A team ministry (Please list) _____

Volunteering for a nonprofit organization

Other (please list) _____

Giving

Regular giving to the spending plan

Do you tithe?

___ ELCA World Hunger or Good Gifts

___ Lutheran Disaster Relief

___ Mother's Day Blankets

___ Father's Day Bricks

___ Occasional In-Kind Gatherings

___ ELCA Youth Gathering Fund Raisers

___ Other (please list) _____

Fellowship

___ Attend Fellowship Hour after worship How often? _____

___ Attend Mid-week Lent Soup and Bread suppers

How does participating in or experience within any of the above help shape your relationship with God?

How do you define your relationship with God?

Appendix Three

Post-Project Survey

Thank you for participating in the project: Parish as Spiritual Life Center. Please take a few moments to complete this post-project survey

Name or Pseudonym used for Pre-survey: _____

1) How do you define spiritual growth?

2) What experiences/opportunities did you participate in during the duration of the project?

Worship

___ Sunday mornings How often? _____

___ Worship Without Walls

___ Praise and Pizza

Education

___ Communal Reading of a Psalm

___ Dwelling in the Word

___ Parents and Grandparents as Spiritual Companions

___ Spirituality for the Golden Years

___ Finding God in All Things

Prayer

___ The shared monthly morning prayer

___ Labyrinth Workshop

___ Seminar on Prayer

Service

___ Day of Service

Giving

___ Regular giving to the spending plan

___ Do you tithe?

___ ELCA World Hunger or Good Gifts

___ Lutheran Disaster Relief

___ Other (please list) _____

Fellowship

___ Attend Fellowship Hour after worship How often? _____

___ Game Night

How did participating in or experience within any of the above help shape your relationship with God?

Do you see a difference in your relationship with God through having participated in this project?

What activities/experiences would you like to see become a part of this parish's life together?

APPENDIX FOUR

Spiritual Life Team

PURPOSE: The purpose of the Spiritual Life Team is to create and promote activities and experiences that allow participants to deepen their relationship with God. These experiences recognize that we do so with our whole selves—mind, body, soul and strength. Team members encourage participation of congregation and community members in these activities.

INITIAL ACTION:

1. Host Listening Circles. Meet with members of the congregation in small groups. Engage in conversation on:
 - a. What they most enjoy about being a part of this congregation.
 - b. How they are currently active within the life of the congregation.
 - c. Where they currently see God at work in the congregation.
 - d. How would they define spiritual growth.
 - e. What within the life of the congregation helps their spiritual growth.
2. Create a definition of spiritual growth for the congregation.
3. Review current programs.
4. Meet with the standing committees of the congregation to review information obtained from the Listening Circles, share the definition of spiritual growth, and begin an action plan for creating and promoting participation in activities.
5. Create an action plan that includes ways to engage the full congregation in spiritual growth.

ON-GOING ACTION:

1. Meet quarterly
 - a. Begin each meeting with a minimum of twenty minutes of Dwelling in the Word and prayer. Rotate the leading of this among the members of the team.
 - b. Each member share where they have seen God at work in the congregation since the last meeting.
 - c. What are the current concerns within the parish and the community?
 - d. Review action plan. Is the action plan still meeting the current needs of the parish?
2. Host Listening Circles every two years.
3. Work with the standing committees of the congregation on an on-going basis.

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