

**Hinton  
Model of Ministry**

## **SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN THE LOCAL CHURCH**

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*Models for Ministry in small membership churches are occasional publications of the Hinton Rural Life Center and demonstrate examples of programs, organization or procedures that have provided effective ministry and mission in small membership church settings. The models are suggestions by which a local church may gain insights for strengthening their own ministry and mission.*

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### **An Old Hasidic Tale**

*Once there was a rabbi named Zusya. One night Zusya dreamed that he died and went to stand before the judgment seat of God. As Zusya waited for God, he reviewed his life and wondered what God would call him to account for. He wondered if his life had been adequate. He wondered if he had been faithful to the task God had called him to do. As Zusya pondered his life, he began to be filled with great fear. “What if God comes to me and says, ‘Why weren’t you Moses?’ or ‘Why weren’t you David?’” thought Zusya. “What could I possibly say?”*

*But when God did appear, God didn’t ask Zusya, “Why weren’t you Moses?” or “Why weren’t you David?” Instead, God totally surprised Zusya. God asked him, “Why weren’t you Zusya?”*

Let’s begin by considering three questions:

- 1. What does it mean to be a Christian?**
- 2. How does one become such a creature?**
- 3. What is the role of the church in this process?**

In the Old Testament, we read that “...God created humankind in God’s image, in the image of God, God created them...” (Gen. 1:27). This does not mean human beings were created to look like God. It means that we were created to be *in relationship with God* and to represent God’s creative activity within the world.

In the New Testament Paul writes, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” (Phil. 2:5-7).

To the church in Galatia, Paul says, “My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.” (Gal. 4:20).

**To be a Christian is to have the mind of Christ formed within us. It is to become that which we were created to be, a representative likeness of God upon the earth; the image of God.**

### An Illustration

*If we were to empty a lump of clay out of its container we would see that the clay has conformed to the shape of the container. If we take that lump of clay and squeeze it between the palms of our hands, the clay changes shape, and is conformed to the shape of our palms. Then, if we take the clay and roll it between our fingers, it begins to take the shape of the new pressure that is applied. It becomes an elongated cylinder.*

The clay must have a form. The same is true with our lives; they must have a form, or take a shape. The question then is not whether or not our lives will be formed, but “*What form will they have?*” or “*Who or what will give them their shape?*” In Christian Spiritual Formation the final form we long for is the mind of Christ. The grace-full work of the Holy Spirit gives us this shape.

**In Christian Spiritual Formation the final form we long for is the mind of Christ. It is the grace of the Holy Spirit which gives shape to our lives. Christian Spiritual Formation is an intentional practice of disciplines for the formation of one’s life that not only effects your relationship with God but also your relationship with others.**

### An Old Story

*Once upon a time, on a bone-chilling winter day, a father and son sat beside a roaring fire. As the time for their evening meal approached, the father raked a bank of coals to one side of the hearth and placed a pot of beans upon them, as he did so he placed one coal upon the hearth alone. In a few minutes the individual coal went out, while the bank of coals continued to cook the pot of beans. As they ate the meal, the father turned to the son and said, “What did you learn about coals today?” The son replied, “They need each other in order to be on fire.”*

In the book of Acts the birth of the church is described as: “...[on] that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship and to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ...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 the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:41b-47).

**The role of the church in Christian Spiritual Formation is to be a fellowship where disciplines are learned and practiced. Disciplines are learned from the teachings of others and through practicing them, as individuals, and as a community of faith.**

### Beginning the Practice ~

The beginning of an intentional spiritual practice requires that one begin. You have to start, be regular, and intentional. Often this means setting a regular time and place for meditation on Scripture and for prayer.

Meditating upon Scripture denotes much more than just reading for information. It includes, but is not limited to, reading, study (study Bibles, commentaries, dictionaries, etc.) imaginatively

entering the text, and allowing the story to speak to us. Meditating upon Scripture is to read with both the *head* and the *heart*.

Prayer is the language of the heart. It is where *deep speaks to deep*. There are many ways to pray; all are basically the process of communication with God. Prayer can be verbal or non-verbal, visual or non-visual, and can actively engage the senses or seek to totally cease all thought except for concentration on the presence of God. Exploring and learning various ways to pray can be one of the most exciting parts of the intentional spiritual practice. Some ways to experience new forms of prayer can be through readings, retreats, and experimental practice.

The reason for setting a daily time for prayer and meditation is to help foster *an awareness of God in all of daily life*. To this end other disciplines may also be practiced, some in the daily time period and others throughout the day. Such disciplines might include: *fasting, reading devotional material, journaling, confession, solitude, service outreach, worship, spiritual friendship or guidance*.

The Christian Spiritual Life weaves a path in and out of solitude and community. A balance between individual, small group and community practices is necessary for the formative life.

### What about my local church? ~

How can we begin to cultivate Christian Spiritual Formation within our own local churches? Here are some ways we might start:

1. Begin with your own spiritual life.  
Begin a daily practice of prayer and meditation.
2. Start a small group.  
This group could meet for prayer, for mutual support, for mutual spiritual guidance. Published formats could be used, or the group could meet to discern the Spirit of God in its own way. [There is no “wrong way” to pray. All prayer comes from God and God will teach us “how”.]
3. Attend a retreat or direct your own.  
Opportunities may be found at retreat centers, you might bring in a retreat leader to conduct a retreat, or lead your own retreat – using published materials for guidance, or developing a format of your own. [Individuals or groups might choose to participate in such retreats.]
4. Begin an intentional program within your church.  
Use programs such as *Disciple Bible Study*, Richard Foster’s *RENOVARE*, or others.
5. Begin exploring and building a resource base.  
Retreat centers, persons in your area who are interested in spiritual formation, small groups that are currently meeting, various denominational resources, etc.
6. Whatever you do, approach it with much prayer and discernment.  
The question is “What is God calling me/my church to be about?”

# *A One-Day Retreat Model*

## *Personal*

### **Centering**

*This may include assuming a comfortable position, creating sacred space {lighting a candle, etc.} focusing on one's breathing and relaxing, a prayer for guidance, etc.*

### **Silence**

### **Scripture Reading**

### **Reflection**

*This might include silent reflection, entering the text through imagination, a walk in the woods, journaling, etc.*

### **Meal, Rest, Physical Activity**

### **Spiritual Reading**

### **Reflection**

### **Closing Prayer**

### **Return**

## *Small Groups*

### **Gathering**

*This may include refreshments, making name tags, etc.*

### **Introductions**

*Set an environment of trust. What is said here, stays here. Have people introduce themselves however they would like to be known. Singing or some form of ice breaker games could be used. A devotional by the leader or group member could follow.*

### **Learnings**

*This could be a time for a leader to share information about a certain form of prayer, spiritual discipline, etc. If so, then what is learned should be practiced later in the day.*

### **Faith Journey**

*Invite persons to reflect on their spiritual journey up to this point. How have they experienced God? When? Where? What was it like? When was the first time? the last? the most memorable? Invite people to share these answers. If you have more than six divide into smaller groups.*

### **Meal, Leisure, Informal Conversation**

### **Scripture**

### **Individual Reflection, Rest, Recreation**

*Allow individuals to reflect on Scriptures in their own way. Silence may be kept. Walking, resting, journaling, etc. may occur.*

### **Sharing**

*Invite persons out of individual reflections at a set time. Gather and invite them to share what God has "said" to them during this time. You may wish to divide into smaller groups or one-on-one.*

### **Closing**

*Eucharist could be celebrated, business done and dismissal in some way appropriate to the day.*

## Creating a Praying Congregation

### A Month of Prayer

1. Set a date for the first meeting of the Prayer Partners
2. For the four Sundays before the organizational meeting, preach sermons on prayer and build the worship services around a “Praying Community” theme.

Possible sermon ideas:

- 1) I Kings 18 and 19: Elijah and fire from heaven and the still small voice
- 2) II Chronicles 7:14: “if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray...”
- 3) Jesus’ rhythm of prayer and action: alone, small group, world.
- 4) Luke 22: 39-45: Jesus in the garden.

In each sermon, invite people to consider and pray about joining the Prayer Partners and announce the date of the organizational meeting. Ask for a one month commitment to pray for the church and its ministries daily.

### 3. Organizational meeting:

#### 1) **Give out Daily Guide to Prayer and review it.**

For each day of the month, the guide should contain:

Hymn of the day from UMH to read or sing

Psalm to read

Text for the day

Daily prayer focus, people, committees, ministries of the Church

Lord’s Prayer

#### 2) **Set up small groups of no more than five**

They will meet weekly before worship to check in and pray for the service and the Pastor.

#### 4. At the end of the month, hold a celebration meal –

Invite entire congregation, share stories, encourage participants to continue in the prayer program and invite others to join.