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This ministry focus paper entitled

BUILDING GOOD SHEPHERD'S CHINESE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (GSCCC)
INTO A PRAYING CONGREGATION

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requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

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upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:



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BUILDING GOOD SHEPHERD'S CHINESE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (GSCCC)
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A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
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ABSTRACT

Building Good Shepherd's Chinese Christian Church (GSCCC) into a Praying Congregation

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2012

In order to build up a former Word-oriented, Hong Kong immigrant, non-denominational, discipleship church in Toronto, Canada, into a praying congregation, this paper explores the effects of implementing a spiritual literacy project for the spiritual formation and life transformation of the church.

My vision as a pastor is to build up my congregation (GSCCC) to be “a house of prayer for all nations” (Mark 11:17), where together the church becomes a nurturing environment for whoever comes to encounter God and to continue in their life-transformation process. As the congregation is more theologically than spiritually trained, this paper focuses on implementing a spiritual literacy project to assist their balance in knowing God. Spiritual literacy refers to learning the language of God in order to communicate with God, to keep hearts attentive to the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit, and to allow the Word to transform them to be more Christ-like. Thus they may enjoy a closer walk with God.

This paper firstly defines the issues of the congregation seen as stagnation in their spiritual growth. It contains a cultural and spiritual exegesis on the background and history of GSCCC showing that their lack of Christian spirituality training and practices relates to the lack of joy and vitality in their Christian life.

Secondly, it reflects on the biblical and theological grounds and implications of this project. It studies Mark 11:17 to confirm this vision, and examine the concepts and importance of on-going conversion in this pilgrimage, balanced spiritual and theological literacy in enhancing the life-transforming effect of the Word, and the pitfalls of hypocrisy when the life-transforming process comes to a halt.

Thirdly, this paper reports on the ministry strategy and outcomes of this project. Based on current outcomes, I reflect on project continuation to realize the vision, and the importance of character formation for a pastor to implement such a project.

Content Reader: Richard Peace, PhD

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INTRODUCTION

Theologian Mark Burrows noted a rising interest in “spirituality” that has defined the cultural temperament of our times as seen in students enrolling in mainline Protestant seminaries. During the past quarter century, they have expressed the “soul hunger” of a new generation by attending courses and seminars in mysticism and spiritual formation. Graduate programs have begun to focus increasing attention on this phenomenon.¹ This interest and hunger has also been felt in my church in Toronto in the last ten years.

Late-modern Christians, unsatisfied by the diet of conventional pieties, yearn for a theology with “expressive/experiential” depths.² My congregation also felt stuck in their spiritual journey in their former church.³ The more biblical knowledge they acquired, the less zeal they had for the Lord. Their love for the Lord grew cold. Even though aware of this, they were unable to do anything about it.

In 2001, two years after this present church started, the congregation picked their annual camp theme to be “More Love for Thee.” They acknowledged that they knew they should love the Lord more, but just could not do so. They knew that they lacked this “zeal for thy house [that] consumes me” which Jesus had (Jn 2:17; cf. Ps 69:9). They likened themselves to Paul in Romans 7 not in Romans 8. In Bible studies, some openly

¹ Mark S. Burrows, “A Review of Bernard McGinn’s *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany*,” *Harvard Theological Review* 100, no. 1 (January 2007): 97-98.

² *Ibid.*, 103.

³ All the members of my current church came from the same former church.

shared that they would settle for being a Sunday Christian. They wanted God to love them but not too much, so that they would not have to repay too much of God's love.

Such sharing burdened my heart. I felt the responsibility as their pastor to find a way out for them. My husband, the founding minister, and I are the only two paid staff to take care of the needs of the church, providing spiritual care and Word ministry. My focus is on the music ministry in worship services, small group Bible studies, prayer ministry, fellowship, and outreach ministry while my husband oversees all the other preaching, teaching, training, and administrative work of the church.

My vision is to build up my church--the Good Shepherd's Chinese Christian Church (GSCCC)--to be "a house of prayer for all nations" (Mk 11:17; c.f. Jn 2:16; Lk 19:46; Mt 21:13). Jane Vennard, a pastor, spiritual director, author, and faculty member teaching courses on spirituality, calls this "house of prayer" a "praying congregation."⁴

A praying congregation is not just one in which all members sink into silent prayer as soon as they arrive at church. Rather, they are a group of diverse people longing to take their relationship with God seriously, eager and willing to learn the language of God and communicate with God. Individually, they are Christians, whose first love for the Lord has not grown cold and, even more, whose zeal for the Lord and His house will consume them. Their love for their neighbors will be natural, as it stems from their love for God. Together they will form a better nurturing environment for whoever comes into their midst to encounter God, and then both members and newcomers will continue in God's life-transforming process to be persons reflecting

⁴ Jane E. Vennard, *A Praying Congregation* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2005), xix.

God's love and grace. Church will become a place where people can look for spiritual guidance and wisdom from God, a place where people gather to meet with and worship God, to talk about their relationship with God, and to talk about and practice how to pray to God individually and corporately.⁵

A church has to have both spiritual and theological literacy before it can become a praying congregation as God meant it to be. My church was formerly a Word-oriented, Hong Kong-immigrant, non-denominational, discipleship church in Toronto, Canada. As these believers are more theologically than spiritually trained in their formative background, this paper focuses on implementing a spiritual literacy project to help them to be balanced in both. This paper also explores the nurturing effects of implementing such a project for the on-going spiritual formation and life transformation of a Christian. (The definition of spiritual and theological literacy will be given in chapter 2.)

This paper first looks at the context and defining issues of the congregation in view of their stagnation in spiritual growth and relationship with God. Chapter 1 engages in cultural and spiritual exegesis focusing on the history and background of the members in order to analyze and understand the nature and needs of the church. Chapter 2 presents a theological reflection on the needs discerned and looks into how the lack of a more holistic and systematic Christian spirituality training and practice contributes to the lack of joy and vitality in the members' Christian life. It also explains why a church has to have both spiritual and theological literacy before it can become "a house of prayer" as God meant it to be.

⁵ Vennard, *A Praying Congregation*, 1-22.

The second part of this paper reflects on the biblical and theological grounds of the spiritual literacy project and its implications for the continual growth of the church toward “a house of prayer.” Chapter 3 studies Mark 11:17 to confirm this vision is biblically grounded. It looks into the biblical meaning of being “a house of prayer for all nations” and how this relates to the need for spiritual literacy. It also defines the “zeal” of Christ for God’s house and points out what the church can learn from it as it moves toward being “a house of prayer.” Chapter 4 reflects on the theological concept of pilgrimage and how it relates to the life-transformation process and on-going Christian conversion experiences. Learning from the Medieval pilgrims, it reviews how Christian spirituality training and practice, added to the Word, become transforming agents in Christian life, and the importance of a balance between spiritual and theological literacy in enhancing the life-transforming effect of the Word. It also looks at the pitfalls of hypocrisy when one refuses to be transformed by the Word in their pilgrimage.

The third part of this paper reports on the ministry strategy and outcomes of this spiritual literacy project. Chapter 5 lays out the ministry strategy, the content, and the overall plan in the implementation of this project in stages and in various group settings. It also gives a summary report of the implementation process of those spirituality training and practice programs, whose plan was put in place in December 2004. Details about the content of the programs are put in the appendix wherever necessary.

Chapter 6 reports on the positive and negative outcomes of this project’s implementation in the life of the church. Based on the outcome, chapter 7 looks to the future and reflects on how to continue the project to bring the church to realize this

vision: to please and honor God as “a house of prayer for all nations.” It looks into areas that the church needs to take note of, finds out which spiritual disciplines its members may need to practice more and when will they be ready for the practices without falling into the sickness of indigestion and hypocrisy again.

The conclusion looks into the importance of continuing with this project, as life-transformation is a slow and life-long process and spiritual literacy is a way of life and a life-long form of learning. Spiritual literacy is an essential element to the wholeness of a healthy Christian life as it creates a rich contemplative environment and culture, which is an ideal nurturing ground for God’s life transformation to take place. Fuller professor Richard Peace said, “Christian spirituality is a lifestyle and not just an experience.”⁶ Similarly, Dallas Willard reminds us that for any spiritual discipline, a person has to practice it well enough and often enough to become experienced in it before he or she can use it effectively as part of direct service to God.⁷ Life transformation into the image of Christ is the goal. I hope to learn lessons in pursuing personal spirituality from church history to make sure that I am leading the church in moving towards God and in being with God eternally. Last but not least, I look into the importance of having a shepherd’s heart and the necessary character formation for a pastor to implement this project.

⁶ Richard Peace, “From Discipleship to Spiritual Direction: The Changing Face of Evangelical Spirituality,” *Theology, News and Notes*, “Spirituality in the New Millennium” (March 1999): 9.

⁷ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (New York: Harper San Francisco, Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 168.

PART ONE

CONTEXT AND DEFINING ISSUES

CHAPTER 1

AUDIENCE ANALYSIS OF GSCCC

The Good Shepherd's Chinese Christian Church (GSCCC) is an independent evangelical Protestant church located in Toronto, Canada. It leans toward Wesleyan theology, stressing the importance of discipleship and the pursuit of a holy life by the grace of God, with the goal of being a faithful disciple of Jesus unto death. The Mission Statement of the church is: "Following, Modeling after, and Preaching the Good Shepherd Jesus Christ until His Return." It was founded in January 2000, borrowing the newness of the millennium, with fifty people and grew to one hundred in 2004, by the time this study started.

This analysis, based on the church directory for the year 2004-2005 and updated yearly, identifies those who were an initial part of the spiritual literacy project. It is meant to collect data revealing church needs, gathered from its physical profile, cultural and spiritual formation background. The results of this objective analysis are then used to cross-check my subjective observations, as a pastor, of the church's characteristics. From these, I form a contextual study to locate and confirm the needs of this church. Theological reflection will be done on these confirmed needs thereafter.

Physical Profile

Under the mode given in the course handouts “The Five Generations,”⁸ GSCCC has no senior citizens (born 1926 and earlier). Out of one hundred people, thirteen are Builders (born 1927-1945), thirty-three are Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964), eight are Generation-X (born 1965-1983), and forty-six are Millennials (born 1984-2002).

Most of the people in the church are in family units. Only eleven of our Boomers and Generation-Xs are singles. From these, seven are female and four are male. The gender ratio in our church is basically balanced, with a few more females than males.

The Baby Boomers are the breadwinners at home supporting their Builder parents and Millennial children. They are also the core members of the church. They contribute the most to the offerings in the church. Ten of them are board members of the church, and most of the others are lay leaders doing the majority of the routine work, including doing all the administrative work, leading Bible studies, leading small friendship prayer groups, and teaching Sunday school.

Of the four male singles, two have mental illnesses that require medication. Of the seven female singles, one is on such medication. Out of the Boomer families, one husband is on medication, with the wife being the breadwinner of the family. So, in one hundred people, four people have mental illnesses that require on-going medication.

The upcoming lay leaders in the church are some of our senior Millennials, who have been baptized and gone through some basic Christian Living training. They are all

⁸ Richard Peace, “The Five Generations,” Day 2 of “Understanding Your Audience,” handouts in “The Bible as a Transforming Agent,” Fuller Theological Seminary, October 18, 2005.

university students taking part in teaching Sunday school, leading Bible studies, and reaching out to their peers and those younger who have not yet been baptized.

Cultural Exegesis of the Church

Hong Kong Immigrants

All the adults in our church are immigrants. Most of them came from Hong Kong, with only a few from Mainland China. Hong Kong is a highly populated and developed city, one of the top financial centers in Asia. Of those from Hong Kong, most immigrated to Canada around 1990 in order to flee from the threat of Hong Kong's return to Mainland China by the British government in 1997.

These Hong Kong Baby Boomers were born and grew up in a culture where the East meets with the West. Their mother tongue is Cantonese-Chinese, yet they have learned English throughout their education, since it is the official government and business language. Basically, they are bi-lingual, at least high school educated, and many returned to Hong Kong after graduating from overseas universities. However, their spoken English may not be fluent or accent free due to lack of practice as their daily environment is almost exclusively Chinese.

The dilemma in languages reflects the uniqueness of their culture. That is, their mindset is westernized with roots in eastern moral values. They are used to enjoying the greater freedom of the western cultures allowed by the British Colony government as compared with Chinese culture under the communist government in Mainland China. They chose to flee from the motherland they loved to foreign countries all over the world

as immigrants, for fear of losing their treasured freedom when Communist China took over Hong Kong in 1997.

Those who qualified as Canadian immigrants were from the middle class or higher, economically. Mostly, they were young professionals bringing their parents and children to Canada. They brought money with them, so all of them would own a house, and most of these houses are mortgage free. However, without Canadian work experience and culture, all of them faced setbacks in becoming rooted in a new country. Those who cannot speak Canadian English fluently will never be able to enter the mainstream, even if their written English is adequate. Thus, most of those in my church have fallen into the lower to middle-lower income group. It is not that they do not have money in the bank, but they have experienced the frustrations and even hurts of falling from their previous social status, sense of achievement, and job satisfaction. Most cannot maintain the same level of jobs or similar earning power. Some even had to change to doing manual labor, to which they were not physically accustomed.

Most who chose to stay in Canada did so for the sake of their children so that they could grow up and live in a free country. They have had to accept that they would be unlikely to reach the height of their previous careers, leaving their talents underused and settling for an income far below the middle-level. They have to be content with having a house, having enough to bring up their children in a stable and comfortable living standard, and holding onto the savings that they brought with them for a rainy day. They have given up their dreams of climbing the social ladder or being somebody in this new country. They have given up their activist interest in changing their world as Boomers.

As the Boomers are reaching mid-life, their fear of losing their jobs is increasing. They have to work long hours, often under a lot of stress. This turned some to thinking seriously about life, and they have become Christians in this crisis. In contrast, some who were Christians have slid back and are caught by the world, struggling to find time to be with God and to serve God.

The Hong Kong Builders in the church either migrated to Canada as parents reunited with the family of their Boomer adult children, or migrated to Canada bringing with them their adult single children. All of them went through World War II, suffering oppression, the horror of death and starvation from the Japanese invasion, the time of great depression after the war in Hong Kong, or fleeing to Hong Kong from the communist government in China. They are a generation who have gone through a lot of suffering and have experienced being immigrants in a new country before.

All the Builders in the church are retired, and most of them are better off than their children, our Boomers. They are well-established, having made their way, through hardships, from nothing to great success. A few of them are even “hidden millionaires.” However, few of them can communicate in English, so they have to depend on their children, or even grandchildren, for transportation and translation. Most of them live with insecurity and hold onto their money for their sense of security. Even having become Christians, they do not trust that their future is secure in God’s hands alone. Their offerings to the church are minimal as they deem themselves to have no income and to be poor, since they are not working.

Most of the Builders live with their children and grandchildren. It is part of the Chinese culture for the younger generation to take care of and to honor the elderly, especially parents, while the older generation helps out their Boomer children by looking after the grandchildren so that their children can go out to work. They have transmitted their Chinese values, culture, and language to their grandchildren, our Millennials, as they are the ones who have brought them up.

All the Generation-X in my church migrated to Canada, following their Hong Kong Builder parents in early adulthood. They would have finished school and just started working in Hong Kong. There were only a few late Generation-X individuals in the church in the year 2004, and they are less active, so their impact on the church culture as a whole is not evident.

Most of the Generation-Xs in our church are still single. Since they have well-off Builder parents and do not have the responsibility of the Boomers in providing for a family, they have relatively little motivation to do something with their life. Similar to other Generation-Xs in North America, they “reject the workaholism often needed to acquire money and titles and to climb the career ladder.”⁹ As a result, few of them have developed their careers or been established in society. They just take life easy and live with what they have. Other similar lifestyles that they share as mentioned in the course notes are:¹⁰ they are afraid of commitments, have delayed experiences, and see entertainment as a central fact of life.

⁹ Gary L. McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 131.

¹⁰ Richard Peace, “Generation X,” Section III, Day 2 of ““Understanding Your Audience” handouts in “The Bible as a Transforming Agent.”

However, in comparison to the North American Generation-Xs, they are a bit different since they were raised with eastern values in Hong Kong and their “mixing the West with the East” culture had mostly been shaped in Hong Kong, as with the Boomers. For example, they are not angry at the Boomers, nor depressed. Also, they are still more willing to attain additional higher education, something vital in the Hong Kong culture. Since they were relatively young and single, most of them went back to school in Canada to get some professional qualifications, with a mind to find a better job and be accepted into the mainstream though, in practice, they have an ambivalent attitude to work.

Canadian-Born Chinese Millennials

All the Millennials in our church either are Canadian-born Chinese or they immigrated here at a very young age. They grew up in a multicultural Toronto environment where there are many different immigrant groups living together. They were raised in the North American culture under the influence of the media and their peers at school, yet with some influence of eastern culture from their parents, especially their grandparents, if they live with them and have a close relationship.

They are basically bilingual. Their first language is English, yet they understand some Chinese from their parents--some know more Chinese, some less. For those Boomer parents in our church who are less proficient in spoken English, they speak in Cantonese-Chinese at home to their children; they watch television programs on Chinese channels with children at home, read Chinese newspapers, and keep up with the Hong Kong news and culture. This situation is accentuated if they live with grandparents who

speak no English at all. Since the grandparents stay home, watching Hong Kong television soap opera series and movies the whole day is their normal daily routine.

As a result of the above, the church uses Cantonese-Chinese as its first language, with translation into English when needed, or power-point highlights in English to help our Millennials to follow the biblical teaching and get involved in the church life. In terms of culture, the Millennials call themselves Canadian but are growing up in a Chinese family. Usually, the more Chinese language they have learned, the more Chinese culture will be mixed into their Canadian culture, and this varies from family to family.

However, none of them has the notion of being an immigrant. They have dreams to do something with their lives in this country, as their Boomer parents once had while they were in Hong Kong. Some even have a mission to fulfill the dreams of their Boomer parents, who vowed on the day they landed in this new country that their children would enter the mainstream and be happy and proud Canadians.

All the Millennials in our church are the precious pearls in their parents' eyes, since they are either the only child or a child with just one sibling. Their parents would give the children the best of everything that they could, especially in education, the most advanced technologies, and digital gadgets. These children have a high living standard and are used to having all the quality goods and food that they want. They have grown up with all the material comforts of life. Their schedule is filled with all kinds of after-school activities and classes.

There are very few single-parent families in this church, as the divorce rate is still low among Chinese Christians. Divorce is not something conventional in traditional

Chinese family values, so Chinese Christians will hold onto the biblical teaching on this. Most of our Millennials are growing up in a loving environment—love from their parents, grandparents, relatives, and church communities—as the Chinese culture values family ties and unity. At present, we have few Millennials who are from abusive or broken homes. Even though their parents may have small fights between themselves once in a while, their love for their children remains strong.

Children growing up in a loving home and in a church family are relatively happy children. Our Millennials are “neotraditional,”⁴ making home life a priority and holding romantic views of love and marriage because they have tasted the goodness of a happy home. There is not as much backlash to their personal experience from an unstable family life and values as is found in the general North American society.

However, the views of sex and marriage in the West are somewhat more liberal than those of the Chinese culture. Even among those North American Millennials “opposed to sleeping around” and who believe in making home life a priority,¹¹ the practices of having sex before marriage, living together instead of getting married, and so forth are still more than the Hong Kong Chinese Christian culture can accept. Therefore, the Millennials in my church face a conflict of moral standards between home and their peers, which confuses them regarding their interpretation of biblical teaching.

⁴ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 172.

¹¹ Ibid.

Spiritual Exegesis of the Church

Little Previous Church Background in Hong Kong

Christianity reached China through missionaries from the West as early as AD 635. However, it had a meaningful effect only in the last two centuries when there were more organized missionary efforts to bring the gospel to China. Much of these went into China through Hong Kong and Macau, two deep-sea ports at the southern tip of China rented out to the governments of Britain and Portugal respectively. Many Chinese evangelical churches are traditionally rooted in Reformed theology. This is because the Reformed tradition is a good fit with the traditional Chinese philosophical culture, especially with Confucian philosophy, which has a high view of intellectual discipline and moral education.¹² The traditional spirituality of Chinese Protestant churches, thus, has always been Word-oriented. Study and reading of the Bible are still a commendable tradition in most evangelical Chinese churches today.¹³

Though it was a British Colony, Hong Kong was not a Christian country since the Chinese were the predominant population. In the eyes of the Chinese, Christianity was and is seen as a foreign religion from the West. Chinese culture is more deeply influenced by Confucian philosophy, Buddhism, and Taoism than by Christianity.

Thus, most of the adults in my church came from non-Christian families and a non-church background. They might have heard of the gospel while they were studying

¹² Herrick Ping-tong Liu, *Towards an Evangelical Spirituality* (Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 2000), 140.

¹³ Wing Hung Lam, "The Historical Perspective of the Canadian Chinese Church," in *A Canadian Chinese Church for the New Millennium*, 21-22 (Peterborough, ONT: Chinese Coordination Centre of World Evangelism, 2000).

in Christian schools or getting to know some Christian friends in Hong Kong; however, most only came to think about life issues seriously and become Christians after they had gone through all the frustrations of settling in a foreign city, that is, after landing in Toronto. They are like a blank sheet, with no knowledge of denominational or theological issues. They just accept whatever their church teaches them of biblical truth.

Discipleship and Word-Oriented Formation Background

Chinese Protestant believers in Toronto brought with them a Word-oriented Chinese spirituality tradition from Hong Kong. According to the *2006 Directory* of the Toronto Chinese Evangelical Ministerial Fellowship, over 65 percent of member churches are influenced by Reformed theology and tradition.¹⁴ Such dominance of Reformed theology among the Chinese churches in Toronto sets up these churches as prototypes of Chinese Protestantism today.

The group who started this church, GSCCC, grew up in a strong discipleship and Word-oriented background. Their former church taught them to look up to and obey the church founder as their ultimate spiritual father, a strong authority figure who made the final decisions for all its churches in various locations by himself alone with no accountability. Under the teaching of their former church, a typically Word-oriented Chinese Protestant church, they had been encouraged to study the Bible, be trained in biblical principles, learn the techniques of doing exegesis, and practice ministering the Word to others after they became Christians. They had gone through various discipleship

¹⁴ Toronto Chinese Evangelical Ministerial Fellowship, *2006 Directory* (Toronto: Toronto Chinese Evangelical Ministerial Fellowship, 2006), 1-35.

training programs in a mentoring relationship with their immediate local church leaders. Many of them were even lay leaders and core members of the former church.

Spiritual Wounds

When GSCCC started in 2000, over half of the present church members came from the same former discipleship church. Most of the GSCCC initial members had been Christians for five to ten years by the time the spiritual problems of their former church founder surfaced and affected their local church in Toronto.

The entitlement spirit of the founder of the former church became so dominant that Christ was no longer the head of the church and the Word of God was no more the highest authority. Decisions were made, not for the advancement of the gospel in the local church, nor for the spiritual wellbeing of its people, but for the building up of the founder's personal kingdom. As two of the local church pastoral staff in Toronto at that time, both my husband and I knew that it was time to leave the church when we could no longer serve Christ nor lead the church to follow Christ if we followed the instructions of the church founder. To avoid falling into conflicts among church leaders, which would cause negative effects for the congregation, we resigned from that church while we were still on relatively peaceful terms.

After we resigned, the founder came to the Toronto church with several of his other pastoral staff and led the church in his way. His spirit of entitlement threw the church into disbelief and confusion over their image of a Good Shepherd in Scripture. Over 80 percent of the church members left the church, one-by-one, within the following months. All the adults were spiritually wounded when they left. The Millennials were

too young to know what exactly had happened and, thus, were not hurt as much as the adults were but missed the church life that they had once enjoyed. Those who were more involved were more wounded; this was especially so with the Boomers, who had been the core members of that church.

Those who left were like sheep without a shepherd, running around to look for a church that they could call home. They gathered to fellowship on their own at one of their homes every Sunday after they had worshipped in different churches. They called us to lead them to form a church and be their shepherds again. We suggested that the group give six months for both the two of us and the group to pray over this idea of starting our own church, to see if the Lord confirmed the direction. Coming to the end of the six months and before the start of 2000, one member of this group found a meeting place at a surprisingly low rental fee from the Salvation Army Community Church. We took this as a sign from the Lord to form our own church and start anew.

To maintain a discipleship lifestyle submitting to church authority in this present age is not easy for it contradicts the present Western culture, which values individual freedom, personal truth, and unrestricted choice.¹⁵ To make it worse, this group had experienced the shadow side of discipleship formation pattern. Trusting the church authority had shaken their faith in the biblical values and truth that they had learned.

My husband and I, as their local church pastors, in starting this church upon their request, did not want to act as another hireling and desert them. We held onto the

¹⁵ Richard Peace, "Discipleship," Day 4—"The Process of Pilgrimage" handouts in "Spiritual Formation and Discipleship in a Postmodern World," 1, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, October 7, 2004.

discipleship framework of the church, for we believed as Dr. Peace said, “It is the master who determines the content of discipleship,” and that the discipleship pattern of lifestyle is biblically grounded—“it is the way God has designed human beings to live.”¹⁶ We, the pastors and lay leaders, recognized that the problems experienced by these Christians were not caused by the discipleship pattern formation, but by the human agent who had selfish ambitions and played God under its cover. We set “Jesus the Good Shepherd” as the image in the mission statement of the church; he is the one that we model together.

Together, the whole church aims to experience more of Jesus as our Good Shepherd, and we want to treat one another as Jesus treats us. We are called to follow our Good Shepherd and be good shepherds in the church, leading the sheep to follow the Good Shepherd, not as hirelings, nor thieves. The sheep are the Good Shepherd’s and not those of any human agent. One of our pastoral goals was to heal their wounds. Thus, at the start of this church, my husband and I had a healing time after Sunday worship every week for about half a year. Throughout the years, we have given pastoral counseling and tended to their wounds. Some of the deeper wounds still remain to be healed.

Classic Forms of Spirituality Formation Background

As their pastors, both my husband and I have been learning and practicing the classic spiritual disciplines. Since 1996, we have been attending workshops and silent retreats in the Jesuits’ Loyola House at Guelph in Ontario, Canada. In addition to our seminary education with Tyndale Seminary in Toronto, we continued our spirituality

¹⁶ Peace, “Discipleship,” 1-2.

formation training with the Jesuits' Regis College, Toronto. I focused on Spiritual Direction Ministry there before pursuing my Doctor of Ministry program in Christian Spirituality at Fuller Theological Seminary starting in 2005.

Since this church started, it has been holding Taizé Prayer meetings on the fourth Friday of every month, as a spiritual practice open to all. Prayer is the center of the Taizé community life, and their mission is to strive for reconciliation and communion among all. We followed the liturgy structure and the chants developed by the Taizé community in France. This was meant to create a prayerful environment to heal wounds, to nurture consciousness of the Lord's presence, and to encourage the church to get used to praying together for others in public.

The Taizé Prayer meeting has been well accepted by most of our church people, including children aged eight and up. After some explanation and practice in praying together in class, the children have no problem with singing along and then with sitting in silence (with their teachers or parents accompanying them) until the end of the meeting. A few of them have shown the courage to pray aloud for their family in the meeting, which was not easy for them to do. The regular attendance is around sixty people.

When this church started in 2000, some in attendance were non-Christians or teenagers. They followed the group who started this church and later were baptized. In the past four years, in addition to providing regular discipleship training for these newborn Christians, the practice of some spiritual disciplines was also introduced, such as praying with Scriptures, *lectio divina*, breath prayer, centering prayer, journaling, meditation on symbols, and weekend silent retreats. Some of those baptized have

become lay leaders of the church by this time. By 2004, the adults in the church were mostly Christians. There has been no Christian baptized in our church who has not been trained in some basic discipleship and Christian spirituality programs after their baptism. The non-Christians in the church are mostly the newcomers and the Millennials, who are not old enough to make a life commitment to God.

However, the Millennials who came with their parents to church have grown up in the church and have been brought up in Christian values. Though many of them are not old enough to be baptized, through Sunday school education, their biblical knowledge is no less than that of the average adult in the church.

Conclusion to This Study

This chapter analyzed the people of my church (GSCCC), based on their physical profile, cultural background as immigrants from Hong Kong, and spiritual formation from their former church background, in order to find out their need of spiritual literacy.

To complete this contextual study of their needs, the next chapter will combine these results with the symptoms in the church I have observed as a pastor. It then presents a theological reflection on the defining issues of this church.

CHAPTER 2

THE DEFINING ISSUES IN GSCCC

Spiritual and Theological Literacy

The Christian life is a spiritual journey. The pattern of spiritual pilgrimage is well known throughout the Bible (e.g. Heb 11). A Christian's pilgrimage is shaped by one's experiences. It is the Christian belief that all human experiences, all of life and time, are held in God's hands. That means a Christian has a relationship with God in which God never stops communicating to the person and working in the person's heart (e.g. Jn 5:17, "My Father goes on working, and so do I go on working..."). A Christian can journey toward or away from God since all have free will.¹⁷ How a person responds to God's workings forms the journey.

To respond to God, a Christian first needs to notice and understand God's language. Dr. Peace mentioned in class "the discipline of noticing" (e.g. 1 Thes 5:17, "Praying without ceasing...").¹⁸ Williams called it spiritual literacy, which refers to

¹⁷Richard Peace, "Spiritual Pilgrimage," Day 4—"The Process of Pilgrimage," handouts in "Spiritual Formation and Discipleship in a Postmodern World," Fuller Theological Seminary, October 7, 2004.

¹⁸Ibid.

learning the language of God so that one knows how God speaks or does not speak to a person, and how one speaks or does not speak to God.¹⁹ This enables those in the church to communicate with God, to keep their hearts soft and attentive to the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit, and to allow the Word to transform their lives to be more Christ-like. In the end, it helps them to journey with God and towards God in pilgrimage.

As a Word-oriented, discipleship-background church, there is no doubt that GSCCC takes the Bible as the fundamental change agent God uses, and the church's primary teaching is focused on the Bible.²⁰ We pastors preach, teach, and train the church to have a high level of theological literacy, that is, to be knowledgeable of the values and teaching of God in the Word so that the church can live them out. However, God speaks to a Christian through one's life experiences as well. As Dr. Bradley pointed out, the distinguishing feature of Augustinianism is that the inward teaching of the Spirit should be allowed a proper place in determining our theology.²¹

Without enough theological literacy, a church cannot discern the right from the wrong and cannot stand up for the value of God in the face of the world and cannot fight against the devil's schemes (e.g. Eph 5:15-20, 6:10-18; 1 Tim 4:1-2, 3:7). However, without enough spiritual literacy, theological literacy alone will lead one to accumulate

¹⁹ Monty Williams, "Finding God in the Dark," Workshop at Loyola House, Guelph, Ontario, Canada, March 24, 2006.

²⁰ Richard Peace, "Inductive Bible Study," handouts in Day 6 of "Spiritual Formation and Discipleship in a Postmodern World."

²¹ James Bradley, "The Character and Spirituality of the Pastor in Primitive Christianity," handouts for Day 6 of "Spiritual Formation in History and Ministry," Fuller Theological Seminary, October 24, 2005.

biblical knowledge as information in one's head instead of allowing it to fulfill its life transformative purpose in one's life. Spiritual literacy will strengthen one's theological literacy and vice versa. Hence, Christians need a balance of both types of literacy to become a church that is built on "the foundation on the rock" (Mt 7:24) as Jesus taught.

Symptoms Observed in the Lack of Spiritual Literacy

In the former church, emphasis was put on character development by getting biblical concepts right, and it was assumed that life transformation would follow automatically. Stress was put on training and practice in doing exegesis and in leading Bible study in small groups. As a result, the church members accumulated more biblical knowledge than they lived out. They moved from zeal to complacency as Dr. Peace also noted in many Christians' lives.²² They struggled with self-righteousness—lacking compassion and tolerance for differences and others' human weaknesses.²³ The more biblical head knowledge one accumulates without life being transformed, the more one will fall into hypocrisy as Jesus warned in Matthew 23. Additionally, as Paul warns in 2 Corinthians 3:6, "... the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

With the Word-oriented formation background, people in GSCCC basically accept the value that Christians need to have a living relationship with God and allow God to transform one's life to be more like Christ. Few are knowingly and deliberately refusing God. There are signs in most people showing that the spirit is willing, but the

²² Richard Peace, *Pilgrimage: A Handbook on Christian Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), 1.

²³ Peace, "Spiritual Formation," 1.

flesh is weak. As a result, their lives have become stagnant and bearing the characteristics of a “settler,” in which they have stopped moving forward, when they should be pilgrims, as defined by Dr. Peace.²⁴ Whenever one is not going forward and the growth becomes stifled, one gets rotten gradually and slowly. Some older members of GSCCC who had been serving a lot in their former church have become stuck in their spiritual journey for various reasons. One thing they have in common, though, is a lack of spiritual literacy. Their knowledge of God is more in their head than in their personal spiritual experiences. God seems so distant from them and they do not know what praying to God really means, nor what is God’s will in each of the specific events in their daily life. When they are in trouble, they do not know where and how to find God. Randomly, they will experience the grace of God, but not for sure.

Yet GSCCC shows interest in spirituality and in practicing experiential worship and spiritual disciplines. For example, we pastors introduced a regular Taizé prayer meeting as a pilot test, and various forms of contemplative candlelight programs during the Lent and Advent seasons. All these were well received by the church – old and young. Also, when a spiritual disciplines interest group was offered in 2002, there were twelve people out of the fifty adult Christians in the church who applied to join it.

Some classic spiritual disciplines and prayer exercises were introduced to them here and there. However, unlike the on-going discipleship and Word training programs in this church, there was not a holistic and systematic spirituality training project to nurture and support their practice of spiritual disciplines. So there is a need to

²⁴ Peace, *Pilgrimage: A Handbook on Christian Growth*, 7.

implement a comprehensive spiritual literacy project to regularly and systematically offer different levels and different forms of spiritual discipline programs to consolidate their spiritual experiences into a way of life. As Dr. Peace said, “Christian spirituality is a lifestyle and not just an experience.”²⁵

Theological Reflection on the Needs of GSCCC

Boomers (thirty-three) and Millennials (forty-six) constitute the main population of GSCCC. Most of the Boomers are trailing-edge Boomers (1955 – 1964).²⁶ With the sophisticated Millennials²⁷ growing up and being baptized into the body of Christ, they are going to take over the lay leadership in the church and run ahead of the X-generation, who are inactive. The trend of membership in this church is becoming younger in age, and the Millennial culture will soon become the driving force.

Since the majority of the church people are Boomers and Millennials, their needs are the needs of this church. Examining the course notes on the needs of the Boomers, I find that some of those listed are the common needs of my church too.²⁸ They also have some of the needs common to people living in this post-modern, North American culture. On top of these, they of course have their own special needs as Hong Kong immigrants

²⁵Richard Peace, “From Discipleship to Spiritual Direction: The Changing Face of Evangelical Spirituality,” handout for Day 4, “Exploring the Transforming Process,” in “The Bible as a Transforming Agent,” Fuller Theological Seminary, October 20, 2005.

²⁶ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 74.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 173-174.

²⁸Richard Peace, “The Baby Boomers,” Section IV, handouts for day 2, “Understanding Your Audience,” in “The Bible As a Transforming Agent,” October 18, 2005.

and Canadian-born Chinese, with discipleship and Word-oriented formation as spiritual background. Each of these needs will be discussed below.

Need to Try Out New Things

My congregation is rooted in the Hong Kong Chinese culture, characterized by mixing the East and the West. After migrating to the city of Toronto where multiculturalism is promoted, they have no problem in maintaining their multi-cultural openness. Thus, in terms of experimenting, our Boomers share with the North American Boomers the spirit of trying out new things. They look forward to experimenting with new styles of worship, different kinds of music, bringing drama and dance into the service, and various kinds of spiritual disciplines and practices that are foreign to them but that come from various Christian traditions.

Being an independent church of medium size, our church has the flexibility to carry out new programs and projects quickly in response to the needs. Due to the influence of Chinese culture, our Boomers are less questioners of authority than are the North American Boomers. That is why they have no problem in accepting the discipleship pattern in their Christian formation. After they went through the disappointment of discipleship formation in their former church experience, they were wounded, and their faith was shaken by having put their trust in the erring leaders of the church. However, when my husband and I started this new church with them, they were willing to continue in the discipleship pattern of formation and to choose the Presbyterian mode of governing hierarchy in running this church. The church so far welcomes all the new spiritual programs and plans that we, as their pastors, have suggested.

Since the church is willing to follow our spiritual guidance, we have the greater need to make sure that we are not the blind leading the blind. To make ourselves accountable for the direction that we are leading them and for all the changes that we suggest they try out, we keep our seminary learning and spirituality practices as our life-long continuing education. Also, we have our own spiritual director and mentor and keep in dialogue with other church leaders to keep ourselves on track.

Relational Needs

Since this church is of small to medium size, those who stay in it must not be those Boomers who look for a lot of activity and want to get something specific from a church as “consumers,” or lay stress on quality in programming, facilities, and music in their church.²⁹ Rather, they must value relational human interactions over programs before they appreciate and choose to commit to GSCCC, which has not had its own premises until recently. Being relational and committed to relationship has to be GSCCC’s church culture and characteristic that makes us different from mega churches.

There is a need to use more small mixed-group settings for the training programs and retreats in order to break the barriers of language, age, and gender and foster a big-family relationship with one another. GSCCC need to build up its members’ spirituality to a state that, by God’s grace, they can be a friend to others at all times instead of waiting for others to befriend them, continue to love as Jesus loves instead of expecting to be loved; and be willing to take the risk that they may get hurt in the process.

²⁹ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 95-96.

Healing Needs

There are various hurts and wounds in the people's lives that need God's healing. Being healed is more than knowing the model answers in the Word; rather, it involves encountering the healing power of God. Prayer exercises and spiritual disciplines handed down from Christian traditions can help one to experience God's healing power. One-to-one pastoral counseling and spiritual direction will also be needed in walking with a person to allow God to heal the wounds according to each individual's needs and progress. The common wounds and hurts that need to be healed are listed as follows.

Wounds in Relationships

Wherever there is a breach of trust in a close relationship, the hurts are deep. Due to the wounds encountered in a discipleship formation church where relationships are intensely close, those coming from the former church needed to rebuild their trust in church leadership, in the discipleship formation pattern as biblically founded, and in intimate Christian community life, where they build their life with one another on the same pilgrimage and see the church as a family of God.³⁰

Also, as this church continues to pursue the relational culture as God meant it to be, wounds and hurts in the friendship building process can be avoided. The need to heal relational wounds and hurts will be ever present. One needs to maintain a very close relationship with God before one has the strength to love as God loves and to overcome the hurts caused by the weaknesses and sinfulness in humanity.

³⁰Richard Peace, "Discipleship," p. 1 and 5, handouts for Day 4 of "The Process of Pilgrimage," in "Spiritual Formation and Discipleship in a Postmodern World," Fuller Theological Seminary, October 7, 2004.

Wounds in Pride and Respect

Because most of the GSCCC Boomers who are their family's breadwinners have fallen from being at the top of their professions and have had to settle for being second-class citizens in a new country, they have to start everything from the bottom. Even for those who can get into the mainstream, they have to accept the reality that they will never be on the top or climb to the top again. They have to face their inability to have the spoken language skills to express themselves to be successful in a new country and bear with others' impatience and even disrespect towards their spoken English deficiencies. All of our Boomers have gone through this frustration and struggle in their spiritual journey in adjusting to this change in their self-image, and everyone has a story to tell.

They need to rebuild their self-confidence and self-worth based on God's love for them, instead of on their own ability and strength. Some of them became Christians during their struggle to accept this reality of falling from their previous social status and career ladder by settling in Toronto. They became the first generation of Christians in their family and would then bring their family to church with them once they were healed and turned around. So their spiritual wellness affects their whole family.

Commitment and Life Transformation Needs

Due to their fear of commitment (not only because they are Boomers, but because of their previous negative experience of "radical discipleship" in a church), Boomers in GSCCC need to be encouraged or coached to realize how this lack of commitment affects their life-long conversion in their Christian life personally and affects the health of the church as a community. An example of their commitment problem is time.

Time is a problem with everyone in the church. Adults of all ages never have time for spiritual things due to various kinds of work; that includes the retirees, as well. Millennials have no time due to studies and all sorts of after school classes. So the duration of the programs in church cannot be open ended. People will ask how long the training will be. Even for choir, people will come for a special choir for special occasions but will hesitate if it is an on-going choir.

Another need is to learn to live under obligations or vows in today's "vow-less" society that promotes infidelity. They may start with a short-term commitment of joining a choir for special occasions or fulfilling the covenantal requirements of a small group training program. Gradually, they can be built up to make longer-term commitments.

Children's and Youth Ministry Needs

Boomer parents look for quality children and youth programs so they know their children are being well taken care of. As long as their children are happy coming to church, even non-Christian parents will allow them to come, though sometimes by themselves. So there are a number of children and teens coming with their friends and schoolmates. Some of their parents are new immigrants working in corner stores, food stalls in shopping malls, dollar marts, and so forth and have to work on Sunday.

Almost half of our church people are Millennials, so it is important to have children's and youth programs that they enjoy and, at the same time, build their faith. In view of the ratio of adults to children, there is a great need for volunteers to take care of that many children and teenagers, and even more so experienced teachers with a burden for children and youth ministry.

From trailing-edge Boomers to Millennials, all of them were raised with television, and digital technologies, so they are more interactive, technology savvy, and media-oriented. Other generations have to work hard to catch up with and close the technology gap with the Millennials if they are to work together in serving the church.³¹

Need to Learn to Listen

As all in the church have grown up and are living in the media-oriented or TV culture, they share the common needs of today's people--that is, how to listen.³² Their concentration span is short. Oral announcements or instructions often fall on "deaf" ears. Posters, printouts, and power-point presentations are needed to help them focus so that they can listen.

They are not used to "silence." They do not have the patience to do things when they do not "see" the immediate result or effect, or do not receive any kind of "sensational" stimulus. As a result, they tend to be impulsive and restless, thus lacking depth in life and in their relationship with God. The practice of *lectio divina* and other spiritual disciplines would be particularly important to them.

Need to Live a Simple Life

In the North American lifestyle, people get used to material riches and a high quality of life. As most of GSCCC people were immigrants from Hong Kong, which is also an important financial city in Southeast Asia, the style and quality of life there is no

³¹ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 173.

³² Richard Peace, "Television as a Window into Culture," handout in "Exegeting the Culture," day 1 in "The Bible As a Transforming Agent," Fuller Theological Seminary, October 17, 2005.

less than that in the large cities of North America. The majority of people in this congregation are generally educated and affluent. If not, they would not have met the Canadian requirements to immigrate as professionals. After they came to Toronto, one of the larger cities of Canada, they assumed they would just continue to pursue that kind of life quality. It is difficult for them to reject the world and be attracted to the true life as they do not even realize that what they are pursuing is more than their basic needs. This is in contrast with the asceticism and monasticism of the early saints,³³ and thus in conflict with their interest in spirituality. It takes a lot of labor and time to practice spiritual disciplines.

This need becomes stronger among the younger generation at GSCCC that have grown up in prosperity. Teens and children have refused to go to a wilderness camp since the summer of 2005. They prefer to walk in the mall rather than swimming at the beach. They prefer to sleep through the morning on weekends rather than going out for a picnic or any outdoor activities. Any activity that is hard for the body they will avoid if they can. They are addicted to the Internet and text messages, and they cannot live without their cell phone and iPod.

Need to Reach Out

Under the influence of the Chinese culture, the church has relatively strong family ties and is largely made up of family units. Almost everyone is related to someone in the

³³ James Bradley, handout for “Monasticism and Christian Mysticism,” in “Spiritual Formation in History and Ministry,” Fuller Theological Seminary, October 26, 2005.

church. This is something good until they become too inward and do not have space to reach out to people outside of their family and clan.

So Boomers, being the head of the family, need to extend their love to people outside of their family. They need to practice hospitality and be willing to open their homes for small group gatherings, to host household dinners, to receive out-of-town visitors of GSCCC and so forth.

Most of our Builders are affluent. Due to their Chinese culture of putting the family first, they save up all their money for their children and grandchildren. They genuinely feel that they have no money to give to offerings and tithing as they are not working and their money is their children's. They need to learn to allow God to be the Lord of their money and channel their money for the gospel's use.

The teens and children are mostly the only child in their family. The church community life is important to them for it is where they can experience and learn how to share and get along with others. They need to belong to a small group where they can grow together with others. Going to retreats and recreation camps in a group will help to provide them a community life.

Need of Tapping into Unused Human Resources

As mentioned before, most of Boomers in our church cannot fully utilize their talents in their present jobs in Toronto due to their spoken English deficiency and lack of Canadian culture. Therefore, it will be good to inspire them to find out how they can use their gifts, received from the Lord, for God's ministry.

In particular, empty-nest Boomers need to find out how their energy and time can be put to good use. They often feel that they do not have time for God and His work, but actually it is the problem of whether they see the value of doing so. They always spend time doing things that are worthwhile in their eyes. They need to be inspired and touched by the Spirit to see the value of doing works of love to extend the Kingdom of God, and what specific works of love that they can do. Then they will not feel that their life is being wasted here in their new home country, they can regain their self-worth in the Lord, and they can maintain their youthfulness and dynamism at heart.

Need to Prepare for Death

From our Boomers, who are in their mid-life crisis, to our aging Builders, these face the reality of deteriorating health and death. They desperately need to build up a living friendship with God to face the last lap of their life journey ahead. Only God can walk with them through the gate of death as they enter fully into their eternal life.

The last thing that one can still do is pray. Thus it is important that they learn and practice prayer exercises now until praying becomes their lifestyle and natural response toward God. When their health fails them, they may no longer have the strength to focus on learning new things, yet they can still pray since this has become their lifestyle.

Need to Stand Up for God's Values

The moral teaching in traditional Chinese culture is close to scriptural values. Due to their Chinese roots and Word-oriented formation background, unlike the North American Boomers, our Boomers take a conservative Christian stand in their views on

cohabitation, divorce and remarriage, drugs, and alcohol.³⁴ They do not have the baggage of the theological arguments developed throughout the church history.

Traditional Chinese culture is relational. Faithfulness and sacrificial love in relationships are still upheld and aspired to. Chinese worship “Heaven,” an unknown God. Once they discover that this unknown God is Christ in the Bible and turn to Christianity, they have the potential to stand up for God’s values to counter the world’s anti- or false-Christ culture today. They need to first be able to enjoy their relationship with God and be rooted in the Word. Guiding them into this is my call as their pastor.

“My House Is a House of Prayer for All the Nations”

The week before His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus was teaching in the temple in Jerusalem. He asked the people, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’” (Mk 11:17)? This passage reminds Christians that Jesus is calling them to transform their worshipping communities into a house of prayer for all nations.³⁵ It is the longing of God for His church to fulfill this plan of salvation in turning all nations back to Him. A church is God’s house, God’s temple, as Augustine stressed.³⁶ In it, God the Trinity dwells and reigns. Thus, as Dr. Bradley pointed out, the early church had a notion that there was no salvation outside of the church.³⁷

³⁴ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 94.

³⁵ Vennard, *A Praying Congregation*, 141.

³⁶ Henry Paolucci, ed. *The Enchiridion of Faith, Hope, and Love of St. Augustine*, trans. J. F. Shaw (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1961), chapter 56-57, p. 66-69.

³⁷ James Bradley, “The Church, the Hierarchy, and the Afterlife,” handouts from day 7, “Spiritual Formation in History and Ministry,” Fuller Theological Seminary, October 25, 2005.

It is my goal that my church will also have spiritual literacy, and not just theological literacy. This is for the building up of the Kingdom of God on earth, the wellbeing of the corporate Christian life as a whole, and not just for the wellbeing of individual Christian's lives. GSCCC, being a praying congregation, will be a Christian community that can help one another to discern the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit in living out the Word, and be the light and salt of the world. Its members can encourage each other to keep moving toward God throughout life, journeying with God in each step, and allowing God to continue with the transforming process in each one's life.

The remainder of this paper will focus on the proposed spiritual literacy project as its scope of study. It is understood that to accompany this proposed spiritual literacy project, GSCCC needs to offer other programs to teach the biblical principles regarding the richness and value of the disciplined life style.

PART TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR THE SPIRITUAL LITERACY PROJECT

This chapter will look into the biblical and theological foundations for the spiritual literacy project that this paper proposes to implement at GSCCC. Biblically, the concept of this project is primarily based on Jesus' teaching in the cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem as recorded in Mark 11:15-19. Parallel but abbreviated recordings are found in Luke 19:45-46 and Matthew 21:12-13. Jesus pointed out in all these three passages that the proper use of the temple of God should be as "a house of prayer" (quoted from Isa 56:7). A similar account is found in John 2:13-22. John has not used the exact wording of "house of prayer" to describe the proper use of the temple of God; however, his rebuke that they have made it into "a house of merchandise" (Jn 2:16) carries a meaning similar to "a den of robbers" (quoted from Jer 7:11) in the other three gospel accounts (Mk 11:17, c.f. Mt 21:13, Lk 19:46). If all four Gospels have recorded a similar incident, it must have an important message that God wants Christians to look into.

The call for conversion was in Jesus' heart when He cleansed the temple in Jerusalem. As pointed out by Dr. Peace, Christian conversion is a key theme of Mark's

Gospel.³⁸ Throughout the whole book, Mark recorded Jesus teaching on this issue of conversion and bringing his twelve disciples into the conversion process. When Jesus began His ministry, He proclaimed, “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is near...” and calling to “repent and believe in the good news” (Mk 1:14-15). In response to the kingdom of God, when repentance and belief in the good news combine, they produce the experience of conversion.³⁹

Since this spiritual literacy project is related to conversion, I will focus on Mark’s account and use the other parallel passages as references. I aim to uncover the proper use of the temple of God – the use that Jesus was calling people to return to – and the vision of God for His “House” that He would like Jesus’ disciples to realize on earth.

The Zeal of Christ for God’s House to be a “House of Prayer”

The word *zeal* was used in John’s account only, not in Mark’s or in the other Gospel accounts. However, from the literary analysis of the passage, the zeal of Jesus could be felt in his use of words and actions, which express his sense of urgency and importance and his emotions.

The Sense of Importance and Urgency

Mark recorded the cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem in the context of approaching the last Passover week of Jesus’ ministry on earth (Mk 11:1, 14:1; cf Mt 21:1, 26:2; Lk 22:1). Passover was a time when there would be many Jewish people

³⁸Richard V. Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), chapter 9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 222.

from the surrounding areas returning to Jerusalem to worship God in the temple in order to fulfill their pilgrimage. They gathered to remember and celebrate God's rescuing them from slavery in Egypt (Ex 12).⁴⁰ This was especially meaningful to them as they were under the Roman reign as a captive people in Jesus' time and longing for God to fulfill His promise of sending them their Messiah. They were pilgrims on earth looking for a better life as promised by God.

By the last week of Jesus' ministry on earth, Jesus' fame had drawn a lot of attention from the whole vicinity. Wherever He went, the crowds would recognize Him and be curious to hear Him (Mt 21:10-11; Mk 11:8-10, cf Lk 19:37-39). Thus, in the way this event was recorded in the last week of Jesus' life on earth, which was also the Passover week, it was obvious that Jesus would naturally make use of this festival time, where so many people were gathered, and his "fame," to teach every day in the temple area what He saw as important to the people (Lk 19:47, 21:37-22:6). He wanted to reach out to as many people as possible to tell them what they needed to know the most. Among all His teaching that week, the cleansing of the temple was the first thing that He did on the first morning when He re-entered the temple and was in front of the "multitudes" (Mk 11:18) in public. This showed the importance of the message in this incident in Jesus' mind.

⁴⁰ Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary on Mark 8:27-16:20*, vol. 34B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 354.

The Emotions Jesus Expressed in Delivering This Message

Prophetic Warnings

In the cleansing incident, Jesus used very aggressive and drastic actions in the way he “drove out” (Mk 11:15-16 c.f. Lk 19:45, Mt 21:12) all those who were buying and selling; he “overturned” the tables and the seats of the money changers and those who sold pigeons. The description of those who were abusing the temple of God as robbers (in “den of robbers” Mk 11:17b) was also strong. “Robber” is a stronger word than “thief” in terms of the violence involved.

It was rare for Jesus to take such a fierce and violent stand against wrongdoers. Such strong actions and words bring a serious and absolute tone to the warning message that Jesus wanted to bring to his hearers. Only with such dramatic actions would He be able to draw the attention of the crowds in such a marketplace-like environment (where everyone was busy in buying and selling, yelling and running around) to this serious problem. He was putting up a symbolic protest to the present use of the temple of God.

Jesus supported His actions by quoting a few Old Testament passages in His message to the crowds. The historical context of these passages that Jesus quoted (Mk 11:17 c.f. Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11) shows them to be absolute prophetic warnings against those Israelites who did not live according to God’s will and had profaned the name and the temple of God. God had warned of His presence, leaving them and their temple (Isa 57:11-13, 59:1-2; Jer 7:14-15). God, through the prophets, had pronounced that His wrath would be poured out on them like burning fire that would not be quenched (Jer 7:20). They would be rejected and abandoned by God (Jer 7:29). Their eternal judgment

was guaranteed (Mal 4:1-3). These warnings were meant to call for their repentance as Jer 7:5-7 had made clear the possibilities for their repentance and restoration: “If you truly amend your ways and actions ...then I will let you live in this place”

Jesus performed a miracle just before he re-entered the city in that morning. He cursed a fig tree that was not bearing fruit. The next morning, after he had cleansed the temple, that fig tree was found withered (Mk 11:12-14, 20-21). This context gave a warning of God’s judgment and wrath to the persistently unrepentant people. Continuing so in Mk 13:1-2, Jesus prophesied the explicit destruction of the temple. Evans noted in cleansing the temple, “Jesus did not wish to destroy the temple or the system of sacrifice; he wished to save it, to propel it to achieve its prophetic calling and destiny.”⁴¹

“Jesus Wept”

The sinful lives of the Israelites wearied God (Mal 2:17), which drove Him to send the Messiah, the Lord of the temple, to cleanse the temple (Mal 3:1-2) and help the people to repent (Mal 4:5-6). When Jesus the Messiah came and saw the still unrepentant lives of the people, the same weariness was burdening His heart as He entered Jerusalem. Luke 19:41 says, “As He drew near, seeing the city (of Jerusalem), he wept over it.”

Jesus was worried for the Israelites as He recalled the prophetic warnings regarding the serious consequence of sins that the Israelites would have to bear if they persisted in their present way of living and refused to be transformed by God (Lk 19:42-43). Jesus was anxious to awaken them as God had been calling them to repent through

⁴¹ Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary on Mark 8:27-16:20*, 182.

the prophets of old (e.g. Mal 3:6-7); Jesus hoped for Jerusalem's salvation, so, as soon as he entered the city, He "looked around at everything" (Mk 11:11)--though it was already late at night and he could not do anything about it.

Laying Down His Life in Delivering This Message

The impact of this incident in Mark's account was so great that there were many people "astonished at His teaching." The Jewish authority feared to attack Jesus openly and immediately (Mk 11:18) though they questioned and rejected Jesus' messianic and prophetic authority in His teaching and His view of the proper use of the temple of God.

In John's account (Jn 2:17), when His disciples saw how Jesus cleansed the temple, it reminded them of Psalm 69:9, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The word *zeal* connoted a strong love emotion expressing a positive attitude to the temple. *Consume* means eat up, or "destroy" as in Revelation 11:5; 12:4; 20:9.⁴² The Psalmist was expressing his desire to share God's heart for His people and His temple over his own life. Jesus' action here was expressing the same. This incident provoked the Jewish authority so much that they decided to "destroy" Him (Mk 11:18, c.f. Lk 19:47). This action led to Jesus' crucifixion at the end of Passover week, which was the anticipated cost that Jesus was willing to pay for delivering such an important message to God's people. Jesus' love for God's people was proven here as He laid down His life to call them back to the path to God.

⁴² George R. Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary on John*, vol. 36 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 38-39.

The Messianic Nature of This Message

In Mark's account, Peter was the first to confess that Jesus was the Messiah (8:29). And in 9:7, the heavenly voice declared that Jesus was God's Son. Now in cleansing the temple, when Jesus invoked an existing prohibition within Jewish law to disallow any trader in the temple (Mk 11:16 c.f. Zec 14:21) and quoted from the Old Testament prophets, this incident was messianic in nature, as noted by Cranfield. He quoted Calvin, "Jesus declared Himself to be both King and High Priest, who presided over the Temple and the worship of God."⁴³ The context, actions, and teaching of Jesus in this incident were in fulfillment of Malachi 3:1-2. Jesus was coming as the Messiah to His temple to purge it like a refiner's fire, so that it could meet the conditions for the coming of the Kingdom of God. He was to purge and make the city holy so that nations would come from the ends of the earth to see its glory and the glory of the Lord.⁴⁴ As in the beginning of His ministry on earth (Mk 1:14-15), He was still warning them of God's judgment as the Kingdom of God was near, and calling for repentance as much and as soon as He possibly could since He was coming to the end of His ministry on earth. All these details explain how Jesus, being the Messiah, shared God's heart and zealously longed for the Israelites to repent from their sinful way of life and how Jesus wanted to reclaim the standard of holiness appropriate in using the temple of God.⁴⁵ As the Lord of

⁴³ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, The Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary (Cambridge, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1985, reprint), 359.

⁴⁴ Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary on Mark 8:27-16:20*, 179.

⁴⁵ Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Mark*, Kregel Reprint Library Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1977), 256.

the temple (Jn 2:21), what Jesus taught about God's will in the use of the temple of God sets the standard and guidelines for His disciples to follow.

The Proper Use of the Temple of God

A house of prayer for all nations is a vision that the people of God should realize for the House of God on earth. Jesus quoted Isaiah (Is 56:7) to remind the people of this by stressing that it "shall be called" a house of prayer for all nations and contrasting that with its contemporary state of being made into a den of robbers as in Jeremiah's time (Mk 11:17 and Lk 19:46, "You have made it..."; Mt 21:13, "you are making it..."). Since it is God's house, God's will should be respected as to what His house is used for.

A House of Prayer

The Temple Is the House of God

Jesus called the temple in Jerusalem the House of God (Mk 11:15, 17), quoting Isaiah 56:7 in which God said, "My house..." interchangeably with "My temple" (Is 56:5). Since the Ancient Near East time, the temple of God and the House of God have referred to the same thing – a place where man might meet gods. During the biblical period, a house was usually a dwelling place and a store room for all the possessions that one had. The ancient temple, thus, also served as the dwelling place of God and the state treasury for its people. Out of reverence for God, one called God's house a temple.

In Abraham's time, the gentiles and the Israelites shared similar notions of worship, except that their gods were not Abraham's God. Each gentile city had a temple dedicated to its god, who was the owner of the land. The semi-nomadic Israelites only

built pillars, altars, wherever they met God (e.g. Gn 22:9, 28:22). This lasted until they settled in their land as a powerful country under the leadership of King David. God granted King Solomon to finish David's dream of building their first temple for Yahweh in seven years (1 Ki 6:37, 38, c.f. 2 Sa 7:2-16).⁴⁶ From their history, the Israelites understood the temple to be God's dwelling place, designated by God (e.g. Dt 26:2, 5, 7, 11, 16, "the place He will choose as a dwelling for His Name...") and put it under the care of their Kings and priests. In it, they were allowed to meet and dwell with God.

The Temple Is a Symbol of God Hearing the Prayers of His People

The temple is a symbol of "God dwells on earth with men" in the sense that He is ever willing to hear and uphold "the prayer and plea for mercy" of His people praying in His presence (2 Chr 6:18-19). God promised regarding His temple, "Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there" (2 Chr 7:15-16, c.f. Jer 7:11). That was why Jesus reinstated the teaching that the temple is supposed to be "a house of prayer" (Mk 11:17, c.f. Lk 19:46).

Thus, the temple is a God-ordained home of God. It is open for anyone to come individually or corporately to find God's special presence there in order to commune with Him heart-to-heart under divine initiative, which is what prayer is about.⁴⁷ Communion with God can be in the form of bringing offerings and sacrifices to worship and adore

⁴⁶ J. D. Douglas, *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1975, reprint), s.v. "Temple," 1243-1245.

⁴⁷ Douglas, *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "prayer," 1019.

Him, asking for forgiveness, or making supplications as listed in Solomon's prayer when he dedicated the temple to God (e.g. 2 Chr 6:12-21). God promises that His temple is to give rest to those who come to pray in His presence for He will listen to their prayers. Rest in Him includes having His providence and protection from one's enemies on earth and His promise of entering into eternal rest after death (e.g. 2 Sa 7:10-11, Jn 14:2-3).

Prayer Is Seeking and Submitting to God's Will

Since the patriarchal period, prayer is always closely connected with sacrifice (e.g. Gn 13:4, 26:25, 28:20-22). The *New Bible Dictionary* concludes that, "This offering of prayer in the context of sacrifice suggests a union of man's will with God's will, an abandonment and submission of the self to God." It also quotes Westcott to sum up the heart of the biblical doctrine of prayer: "True prayer--the prayer that must be answered--is the personal recognition and acceptance of the divine will" (Jn 14:7 c.f. Mk 11:24).⁴⁸

A Christian worships God when he or she adores, confesses, praises, and supplicates Him to the extent of entering into communion with God. Thus, prayer is to engage God wholeheartedly in a heart-to-heart talk and surrender to God's will in responding to the divine initiation of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus taught his disciples to end their prayer by offering it "in the name of Christ." Praying in the name of Jesus means that it is through Christ one has access to the Father, and that it is prayed as Christ Himself prayed, so the prayer is in harmony with the Father's will.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Douglas, *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Prayer," 1020-1022.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1021.

A Prayerful Life Marked a Father/Son Relationship with God

The above described prayer life is the sign that one is redeemed and accepted to be part of God's family, His very own. That is why Jesus would call the temple "my" Father's House (e.g. Jn 2:16, Lk 2:49), and why He taught His disciples to pray by offering their prayer to God calling Him, "Our Father in Heaven," which invoked a personal sonship with God (e.g. Mt 6:6, 9, c.f. Lk 11:1-2). Paul, in the book of Romans, also reconfirmed this sign of one's sonship with God expressed in prayer. The Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of sonship." Once a Christian received the Spirit to dwell in one's heart, it enables one to cry to God (which is another way to describe "pray"), calling Him, "Abba, Father..." (Rom 8:15). So Paul declared that "those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God" (Rom 8:14). Whenever one prays to God, one is calling on him as "Our Father..." (e.g. Jas 1:27, 1 Pt 1:17). Paul testified that the Holy Spirit assisted him in prayer as he sought to know and do God's will (Rom 8:26-27).

God promised to those who are His: that one can enjoy an especially close covenantal father/son relationship with Him and that one can receive all the promises that He has made to His own forever. These promises had been announced to Israelites through Moses long ago (Ex 6:6-8), and God later reconfirmed this covenant with Solomon (2 Chr 7:12-22), the night after Solomon dedicated the temple to Him.

God promised His forever father/son loving relationship with those praying in His temple (2 Sa 7:14-16). To keep this relationship, He promised that He would discipline His sons when they did wrong and did not continue wholeheartedly in His way (Jer 7:12-15) in order to help them to repent and to live in a right relationship with Him again. God

declared, “But am I the one they are provoking? ... Are they not rather harming themselves, to their own shame” (Jer 7:19)? For their own good, God promised that He might uproot them, reject this temple, thrust them from His presence, and do anything to discipline them in order to awaken them that they might repent and to keep His temple consecrated so that His name might be there forever (e.g. 2 Chr 7:15-16).

His name is who He is. Allowing a person to bear His name denoted His pledge of a father/son relationship. That is why He also promised His forgiveness and healing whenever His people repented, and why God sent Jesus the Messiah to dwell with the Israelites for a while to help them repent. That was why Jesus was doing what He was doing in cleansing the Temple as recorded here in all the four Gospels.

The House of Prayer Is for All the Nations

Desiring All Nations to Become His People

God made it very clear at the dedication of His first temple that it is to be used as a “house of prayer” and is for “all the nations,” not just for the Israelites. It is open to anyone “who chooses what pleases me and holds fast to my covenant” (Is 56:4; 2 Chr 6:32-33). God made known His will and way of reaching out to all the nations on earth as far back as when He first made His covenant with Abraham (Gn 12:2-3). The prophet in Isaiah 58:3 reminded God’s people not to let the Gentiles say that they are being “separated from His people.”

God aims to unite the Israelites with all nations into one community and to save all—”I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered” (Is 56:7-8). It is an eschatological scenario in which the nations come to Jerusalem to worship God. Jesus

commissioned this aim to His disciples before His ascension (Mt 28:16-20). They later gathered to pray and the Spirit was poured out upon them (Acts 1:4, 2:4). Thus, the New Testament Church was born in community prayer.

Nurturing Oneness through Praying in the Temple

God desires that His temple be a rallying point, gathering all nations who are responding to the call of the Holy Spirit to come and enter into this Father/Son relationship with Him (Is 58:3, 6, “who has joined himself to the Lord...”) so that all can worship and dwell with Him individually and corporately as one from there until eternity.

God’s Temple does not just refer to the physical building, but, more, it refers to the life of God’s people, who reflect the sharing of an intimate son/father relationship with God, and an intimate family relationship with one another in God. Thus the Temple was the household of God and the home to God’s people. God wills that all who have “joined to” Him as their father become one family to minister to him, love His name, and be joyful in making offerings and sacrifices to Him in His House of prayer (Is 58:6-7).

Reflecting the Name of the Lord – the Fruit of Prayer

When the above-mentioned prayerful relationship with God is there, God’s people will bear the fruit of a transforming life reflecting the holy name of the Lord in His house, which bears His name (Jer 7:1-14). As Barry pointed out, one becomes like God through one’s deepening intimate prayerful relationship with Him, not through sheer will-power, as a person becomes like what one loves.⁵⁰ As Christians know and love Jesus more,

⁵⁰William A. Barry, *Here’s My Heart, Here’s My Hand* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2009), 9.

they grow in likeness to him and thus in likeness to God.⁵¹ Together, they keep justice and do righteousness as God Himself wills (Is 58:1) and do not give up gathering for corporate prayer in order to keep “spurring one another on toward love and good deeds” and “encourage one another all the more as the Day approaching” (Heb 10:19-25).

Josephus interpreted “the gentile access to the temple” in Solomon’s prayer of dedication of the temple in 1 Kings 8:41-43⁵² to mean that, when nations see the glorious holy name of the Lord through the transformed life of His people gathering in His Temple, they will be drawn and wish to be God’s people so that they can also receive the same blessings of His people and enjoy the same intimate relationship with the Lord. Barry also noted that God called His people to make disciples for Him not by forcing their beliefs on others but by witnessing to the truth about this real world with one’s words, and especially with one’s life, as the early Christians did.⁵³ In this way, God’s purpose for His Temple can then be accomplished: that all nations shall be His people.

The Improper Use of the Temple of God

A Den of Robbers

Jesus came to cleanse the temple in order to fulfill God’s promises to keep His temple holy and to discipline His people when they walked away from following His way wholeheartedly. Thus the cleansing is more of purification than a disruption to the temple worship. Jesus meant to call them to repent. Sadly, some, especially the Jewish

⁵¹ Barry, *Here’s My Heart, Here’s My Hand*, 155.

⁵² Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 34B, 176.

⁵³ Barry, *Here’s My Heart, Here’s My Hand*, 155.

religious authorities persisted in their sins and were growing worse by deciding to get rid of Jesus (Mk 11:18). It further confirmed Jesus' calling them "robbers" in Mark 11:17 and "violent murderers" in Mark 12:1-12.

Rob means "to seize as prey." It usually has a negative sense with an implied use of force.⁵⁴ The person being robbed may be badly wounded as in Luke 10:30. Robbery of temples was a most serious offense in Greek and Roman eyes, on a par with treason and murder, involving drastic penalties as this was an action of blasphemy against the gods of that temple (Acts 19:37); whereas the rabbis viewed temple robbery more leniently.⁵⁵ Jesus here reminded them of how serious it is in God's eyes.

Evans noted "den of robbers" is antithetical parallelism to "house of prayer." He agreed with Harland and Holladay that the use of the word *robbers* in Jer 7:11 did not mean people were literally being mugged in the temple precincts. Rather, the robbers were violent men who "shed blood" in the course of their oppressive and grasping business. *Rob* can refer to any action performed that lacks reverence for the god of the temple, and are getting benefits from others in unrighteous ways, causing loss to others.

Robbing God (Mal 3:8-9)

Robbing the temple is robbing God as it is the House of God. One form of robbing the temple is making a personal profit out of temple offerings (Rom 2:22).

Another form is as in Malachi 3:8, where the prophet was rebuking the people for

⁵⁴ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, abridged in one volume (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985, reprint), 532.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 354.

robbing God by not giving tithes and offerings that belong to God. In response to the vineyard tenants who refused to pay rent due to the owner in Mark 12:1-12, Jesus taught the offering and tithing principle in Mark 12:13-17 – “give to God the things of God....” As Evans pointed out, “When one ponders what is it that one owes God, it forces one to probe deeply into one’s motives and loyalties in order to answer the question.”⁵⁶ Thus, offerings to God express one’s dedication to God in keeping God’s decrees, which are holy and pleasing in God’s eyes (Mal 3:7). It was, then, a very serious offense to take what was God’s into one’s own pocket; Malachi had to warn them of God’s wrath and curse (Mal 3:9) to stop them from further sinning in this way.

The “den of robbers” in Mark 11:17 is quoted from Jeremiah 7:11. Its context (7:9) listed examples of sins in God’s eyes: “steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal” The “robbers’ den” in Jeremiah 7:11 was referring generally to people who dare to sin openly and even by force, rather than only to those who rob. They are people who knowingly commit sins in God’s eyes. Yet, as God rebuked in Jeremiah 7:10, they still dared to “come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say ‘We are safe’—safe to do all these detestable things?” There was no fear of God in their eyes and no respect for God’s name of holiness in their heart. When they gathered together, they became a “den of robbers.” It was not so much the activities in the temple, but the lives of the people because of their ungodly attitude toward God, which contrasted with the religious front they assumed.

⁵⁶ Kittle and Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 248.

Following this rebuke, Jesus told the parable of the wicked vineyard tenants in Mark 12:1-12 (quoting Isaiah 5:12 in the opening and Psalm 118:22-23 in the concluding remark). The vineyard referred to God's people, the New Testament church (Rom 11). The fearless attitude of the tenants led to a series of violence actions to shedding innocent blood, even of the son of the vineyard owner. This was fulfilled when the religious authorities sought to seize Jesus by "stealth" and kill him in Mark 14:1-2. To contrast with the robbers in the temple, Jesus quoted the offering of the widow in the temple in Mark 12:41-44, "who cast in all that she has." This is the true godliness and prayerful offering that God is looking for in His temple—a house of prayer.

Robbing Worshippers of God

Josephus' interpretation of the context of Mark 11:15 is commonly accepted: that it took place in the court of the Gentiles of the temple. This was where money-changers and traffickers of sacrificial animals were found. The temple is the house of prayer for all nations (Mk 11:17) as this outer court was open to all⁵⁷ and meant to be a place where Gentiles might worship God. When it was turned into a marketplace for making money, it distracted people from praying to God, making it difficult for them to worship. It was robbing the Gentiles of the chance to worship God in His Temple.

The temple traders and money changers also exploited the pilgrims by making excessive charges for services provided, rather than lovingly making it easier for the out-of-town pilgrims to worship God in the temple. To rob is "to take" from others as Paul

⁵⁷ Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 34B, 171.

mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11:8. This is the opposite of “giving” as in the spirit of offering sacrifices to God. Thus trade in the sense of “taking” from the other worshippers in the temple is a desecration of the temple’s spiritual purpose.

In rebuking the animal vendors and money changers, Jesus was pinpointing the temple establishment. It was by the authority of the ruling priests that these commercial activities took place in the temple court. In Mark 12:38-40, Jesus pointed out the acts of violence in the life of the religious establishment, who “devour” the estates of widows. In cleansing the temple to protest against the economic oppression and inequity on the lives of the poor and weak, Jesus was in fact protesting against the Jewish religious authorities because holiness of the temple was the responsibility of the leaders.

A Market-Place (Jn 2:16)

John used the description of “a marketplace” instead of “robbers’ den” to describe the state of the Temple in Jesus’ time. A marketplace in the Old Testament might refer to a trading center among nations (Ez 27:24; Is 23:3). In the New Testament times, it might refer to a place of assembly,⁵⁸ where a lot of social activities went on (Mt 11:16; Mt 23:7; Acts 17:17-18). However, these activities were not what God’s temple was for, as implied here in the context of John’s passage, even if they were not illegal or immoral on the surface. Turning the temple court into a market-place implied something not in God’s will for God’s house. It distracted people from focusing on God and turned their attention to making profits. In Zechariah 14:20-21, the prophet foretells the day when

⁵⁸ Douglas, *New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Market,” 786.

traders will no longer be present in the temple when the worship in Jerusalem is restored to what God wills it to be. Thus, the “market-place” points to the same problem of the “robbers’ den” as mentioned-above.

Also the other three Gospel passages used the terms *buying and selling* (Mk 11:15-16, c.f. Mt 21:12, Lk 19:45), which were the activities of commerce in a market-place. The word *sell* was translated as “business” in Matthew 22:5 and *people doing business* was translated “merchants” as in Matthew 13:45, Revelation 18:3. This word *business* has the same root word as *marketplace*. Trading, by nature, aimed to make gain of the trade (Acts 4:34, Jas 4:13). This was already against the spirit of praying to God in the temple as mentioned above. According to the context, these would also be corrupt commercial activities, making unrighteous or oppressive gains (Rev 18:3, Hos. 12:8) so that Jesus would call the place a robbers’ den. Anything not reflecting the name of God in the temple will not be what God wills for His temple.

Spiritual Literacy as a Means to Becoming “A House of Prayer”

The proposed spiritual literacy project in this paper is a means to build up GSCCC into “a house of prayer.” It is to prevent it from unconsciously falling into becoming “a den of robbers” or “a market-place” as happened to the Temple in Jesus’ time.

The Temple Image of the New Testament Church

In the New Testament teachings, the temple in Jerusalem was replaced by the new temple of Christ. Jesus claimed that He would “destroy this one and build another made without hands within three days,” referring to His death and resurrection in three days

(Jn 2:19-22; Mk 14:58 c.f. 15:29). This new temple of Christ was the image for the New Testament Church, where Christ dwells with His disciples (1 Cor 3:16-17). This fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy of the messianic temple (2 Cor 6:16, c.f. Ez 37:27).

Since Christian communities are the realization of the long-cherished hope of the glorious temple, Christians ought to live holy lives in unity as God is one (2 Cor 6:17-7:1; 1 Cor 6:17-20). Ephesians stressed the interracial character of the church (Eph 2:19-22), which was the Old Testament hope of the ingathering of Israel and the nations to the eschatological Temple at Jerusalem, the ancient hope of a reunited mankind. When the temple lived up to its biblical obligations, then it was working for all nations to come to the Lord, then and forever. The church triumphant is the heavenly temple (Heb 12:23),⁵⁹ which is God's dream for the whole planet: that the lion and the lamb all sit down together to have fellowship with Him and with one another in the new heavenly temple, the new Jerusalem (Is 65:17-25 c.f. Is 11:6-9). Thus, schism is tantamount to profanation of the Temple and merits the same terrible penalty of death (e.g. 1 Cor 3:5-17).⁶⁰

The Household Image of the New Testament Church

The temple is the house of God, which is a term used as the image for the Christian community (e.g. Heb 3:1, 5-6; 1 Pt 4:17), stressing the blood relationship and the special bond in a family. This kind of relationship is a specific type of friendship denoting certain depth and intimacy. The Greek word *house* means dwelling, which can

⁵⁹ Douglas, *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Temple," 249.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 248.

be a temple, or any place.⁶¹ It also means family (Mt 10:12; 12:25). Believers of all nations are God's family members (Eph 2:19-22, Ga 6:10, 1 Tim 3:15) bonded together by Christ, who is the head of the family and the source of each being.

The house is holy because God dwells in it (Mt 23:21, Rev 15:8) and it is the home for believers of all nations to dwell with God (cf. Jn 2:16, which recalls Zec 14:21). In the early church, Christians met in private houses (Acts 5:42; Col 4:15; Phil 2), as well as in the temple which could hold more people (Acts 2:46, 21:26-30). So the teachings for the temple in Jerusalem in Mark 11 can also be applied to the New Testament Church.

Fulfilling God's Vision for His Church Today

To summarize the above study on Jesus' cleansing of the Temple based on the account of Mark, one finds God's vision for His temple is to be a house of prayer for all nations. Jesus was zealously fulfilling this vision of God to the point of laying down His life. He passed down the guidelines for His disciples to follow through what He had started to fulfill God's vision. Applications for our church today are listed below.

A House of Prayer Is the Fruit of Spiritual Literacy

A house here refers to the gathering of Christian communities or congregations united in the worship of the Lord. Believers then take the church as their spiritual home, where they learn to live as children, brothers and sisters, with the Lord as their Father. As Jesus taught, whoever does the will of the Father is His mother and brothers (Mt 12:50, c.f. Mk 3:35). God dwells with them as being their Father, the head of the family.

⁶¹ Kittle and Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "House," 674.

Prayer is a way of transforming life, expressing a healthy covenantal Father/son friendship with God where Christians and God lovingly dwell together in open dialogue, treasuring and respecting one another's presence, and faithfully and sacrificially fulfilling one another's roles and responsibilities out of free will and love for others. The Father is faithfully providing for the children's needs (hearing their prayers), teaching, guiding, and transforming them to walk rightly and bear His name. They, thus, share His being and He protects them from harm so that they may have peace and rest to eternity. And the children gratefully bring in offerings and sacrifices to acknowledge the Father's providence and love. They are to give zealous and unreserved obedience to the will of the Father as in response to the loving and holy prompting of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. And Jesus has set an example for them to follow.

As defined in chapter 2 of this paper, spiritual literacy refers to the proficiency in learning the language of God so that one can live a prayerful life as described above. This spiritual literacy project aims to help a child of God hold an open dialogue with God, dwell in the presence of God, and be sensitive in discerning the prompting of the Holy Spirit in one's soft and attentive heart. Without this knowledge and skill to live out a prayerful life, one cannot hold a meaningful and living Father/son relationship with God. The fewer professed Christians in a community that are living out such a prayerful life, the less it would become a house of prayer when these people gathered corporately.

Zeal in Living Out the Spirit of Prayer for All Nations

Non-Christians who come into such a Christian community will find the people are transformed to live out a prayerful life in love, joy, and peace, expressing their

Father/son relationship with God and family relationships with one another. This is the praying congregation described in the introduction of this paper. This will spark the non-Christian to reflect on what is missing in one's own life, which one has longed for or has been seeking after but could not find elsewhere. In the Christian community, one can find the encouragement and training needed for learning and practicing to develop and deepen one's prayerful life. The Father's will is for His children and for His whole creation, to be "fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28). Living out a prayerful life is God's way of evangelism--reaching out and bearing future generations of disciples. It is how His church family is evermore expanding with more and more non-Christians wanting to be His children, aspiring to live such a prayerful life with Him, and holding a Father/son relationship with Him. The Father most hoped that "not one soul is lost."

Barry, in his book *Changed Heart, Changed World*, writing of friendship with God, quoted Luke 19:41-44 and asked a provocative question: "Imagine Jesus looking down on your city or town. Is he still weeping that we have not known the things that make for peace?" Jesus wept because people then still did not understand that God wanted their friendship expressed in their prayerful life in His House. They did not know what made for their peace, in terms of their friendship with God and with one another, and for the peace of the world - those who had not known Him yet. Barry's answer to his own question is, "I sense that he is. What will wipe those tears away? You and I, and all of us together, can accept the offer of friendship and help wipe his tears away."⁶²

⁶² William A. Barry, *Changed Heart, Changed World* (Chicago, ILL: Loyola Press, 2011), 172.

Thus, it is necessary for a church to provide some form of spiritual literacy project to train and nurture its congregations to be able to maintain a prayerful life in order to fulfill God's vision for His church today. Without a healthy prayer life, one will not have the motivation to keep the conversion process going: choosing to live well and not sin, continuing to be transformed to be good as God is good throughout life, to have the motivation and zeal to share the heart of God and Jesus, to weep for those who live in sin, and lay down one's life to bring them back to God.

CHAPTER 4

REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS IN A BELIEVER'S PILGRIMAGE

On-going Christian Conversion and Life Transformation

The Biblical Concept and Definition of Pilgrimage

Dr. Peace noted the idea of pilgrimage as a central concept in the Old Testament. It was by means of Abraham's pilgrimage in response to God's calling that the nation of Israel began (Gen 12:1).⁶³ As mentioned in the last chapter, in celebrating the Passover, the Israelites were remembering their pilgrimage, leaving the slavery of Egypt, traveling through the wilderness for forty years, and finally coming into a land of its own (Exodus). The Israelites needed all those years in the wilderness as a pilgrim people in order to discover the unique thing that God was making out of them. The image of the pilgrim was imprinted in the mind of the Israelites.

Jesus also lived as a pilgrim (Lk 13:22, Mt 8:20). The writer of Hebrews, after listing the Old Testament pilgrims of faith (Heb 10:32-12:29), pointed to Jesus as the "pioneer and the perfecter of our faith (spiritual journey)" in Heb 12:2 to reiterate the call

⁶³ Peace, *Pilgrimage: A Handbook on Christian Growth*, 18.

to be pilgrims for all Christians. And, in the process, it defined the pilgrim of faith as a model (Heb 11:13-16).

The New Testament image of pilgrim is understood less in the physical sense than is the pilgrim of the Old Testament. The New Testament's pilgrim has as the destination of the city of the New Jerusalem, which is not geographical in nature, but a heavenly entity (Heb 11:16). The whole new city is the temple of God, which symbolizes the wholeness and fullness of God's presence. It is a state, which we call heaven, when and where one finds holistic union with God and fellow Christians (Rev 21:1-5, 22-27). Thus, all the Old Testament pilgrims listed in Hebrews 11 "did not receive the things promised." "They were living by faith when they died," and "they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance" (Heb 11:13).

Pilgrimage is a life-long spiritual journey on earth, whether one is aware of it or not. This concept is based on the creation fact that human beings are made in the image of God (Gn 1:26-27) and were created to know God; so all people are involved in a spiritual pilgrimage from birth. Dr. Peace has proposed a three-part process⁶⁴ to describe the different stages in the pilgrimage to help people to realize where they stand in this pilgrimage and what conversion they need to make in order to move on to reach the destination that God wills for a Christian. The Quest phase is the first part of the pilgrimage, where there is a divine restlessness in each person until one opens oneself to the life of the Spirit and to the presence of God. Then the journey moves into the Commitment phase, where one learns what it means to be fully committed to Jesus and is

⁶⁴ Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, 311-316.

willing to make an initial commitment to become a true disciple of Jesus. The journey concludes in the Formation phase, in which one seeks to follow God as a disciple of Jesus and conform to the image of Christ as the goal. This process never ends on earth as no one will ever attain to the full likeness of Christ.

Throughout the different stages of pilgrimage are conversion experiences, which begin with understanding (of the insight revealed and prompted by the Holy Spirit), moving to a response of repentance and faith (turning to God or God's way), and living it out in discipleship (life transformation).⁶⁵ Some may convert to be Christ's disciple like Paul in a sudden, total and definitive, punctilinear conversion. However, many like the twelve disciples enter into the Formation phase with conversion taking place over time in an unfolding and even slow process.⁶⁶ Either way, the conversion has to be continued after one has made a conscious initial commitment to be a disciple of Christ and before one can live through the Formation phase to reach the destination of the pilgrimage.

Each real conversion experience leads to an "inside-out" mode of life transformation (Eph 4:22-24),⁶⁷ which involves growth in one's perceptions and inner attitude, which then naturally generates outward into relationships with God, self, and others, and actions of mercy⁶⁸ aligned with the will and heart of God (Phil 2:12-13) and

⁶⁵ Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, 216.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶⁷ Richard Peace, *Spiritual Transformation*, The Spiritual Disciplines Series (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 1997), 11.

⁶⁸ Kathleen McAlpin, *Ministry That Transforms* (Toronto, Ontario: Novalis Publishing Inc., 2009), 119.

in the footsteps of Jesus. In short, pilgrimage is a faith conversion journey bringing forth life transformation in the whole person in the image of Christ (Phil 3:20-21) on the way until one arrives at the destination of the journey: to be in full union with the triune God and fellow Christians, and sharing the holy name of the Lord in fact, and at last—”His name will be on their forehead” (Rv 22:4, cf. 21:27).

The Medieval Concept of the Pilgrimage

As the Reformation began in AD 1516 (the late Medieval period according to the Medieval timeline) under Martin Luther, the understanding of spirituality in this period served as the context in which the traditions and practices of the Protestant Church and western Christianity were born. Therefore, this section will explore the spirituality of the Medieval period as a model for developing GSCCC’s spiritual literacy.

The concept of spiritual journey or pilgrimage was fundamental to Medieval spirituality. Under the influence of the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius (476-533), the Medieval concept of the spiritual journey used the “Triple Way,” the threefold movements to God from purgation, to illumination, and to union with God.⁶⁹ (Purgation is the way of new believers, in which they learn to say no to sin and yes to virtues and to purify all that hinders their approach to God. Illumination is the gift from God. It is the way of mature believers, in which there is intense divine presence and the love of Christ becomes the center of decision-making. Union with God is the way of the saint, in which there is constant sanctification toward perfection in Christ.)

⁶⁹ Peace, “The Roots of Medieval Spirituality,” Day 2--in “Medieval and Catholic Reformation Spirituality,” Fuller Theological Seminary, June 17, 2009.

To Denys (or Dionysius), the end of the pilgrimage is “not so much knowledge about God, as knowledge of God through communion with him and union with him, knowing by ‘being known’.”⁷⁰ Also, mystic journey was not about one’s personal salvation, but becoming a co-worker of God. His *Celestial Hierarchies* stressed the need of the illumination of God to stir, lift up, and return a believer back to oneness with God.

This concept was deeply sensitive to the manifold variety of God’s manifestations of his inexhaustible being in creation and redemption. At the same time, Denys longed to encounter God in himself in the mysterious darkness of unknowing and have some kind of mystical experience.⁷¹ Dyrness pointed out that Denys’s mystical framework defined Medieval spirituality, this was the journey that many Medieval saints walked,⁷² and it was modeled for their fellow Christians.

Life Transformation in Medieval Pilgrims

Integration of Christian Spirituality and Everyday Life

Spirituality is, by definition, a living religion, faith being lived out, and life engaging in the transforming process. Many Medieval Christians were living out a transforming life. In those days, countries were Christian communities where politics integrated with Christian faith. Civic virtues were as Christian virtues; spiritual and

⁷⁰ Andrew Louth, “Denys the Areopagite,” in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and E. Yarnold (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1986), 187.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁷² William Dyrness, “Philosophical and Theological Context of Medieval Spirituality,” Day 10— in “Medieval Art and Theology,” Fuller Theological Seminary, June 24, 2009.

politic were seen as two sides of a coin.⁷³ For example, community love and charity was greater and more important than that of personal salvation, and common good was placed over personal good. Also, shared religious faith underlay all the arts in that time as the artists presented from a worldview of faith. One has to be a person of faith before one can fully appreciate the arts in the movement at that time.⁷⁴

Imitation of Christ in Time of Crisis

The period around 1300 was a bloody time with a lot of wars. For example, Dante (1265-1321) wrote his “The Divine Comedy” in around 1312-1320, aiming to cheer up the people who were living in adverse conditions and in the state of misery.⁷⁵ On top of that, the Black Death killed a large number of people in Europe throughout the century. For example, on June 9, 1348, the Black Death swept through Siena, central Italy. By 1349 half of the population in Siena had died. In 1363, it struck again, and these strikes continued periodically until 1500.

Life expectancy was short. People either ate, drank, and were merry or pursued the monastic life and put God in heaven as the goal of life to escape the judgment after death. As Dr. Peace pointed out, the key theme in Medieval spirituality is to live out the

⁷³ William Dyrness, “Introduction: Siena, Lorenzetti and Medieval Political Theology,” Day 1—in “Medieval Art and Theology,” Fuller Theological Seminary, June 16, 2009.

⁷⁴ Chris Slatoff, “Setting of Medieval Sculpture,” Day 1—in “Medieval Art and Theology,” Fuller Theological Seminary, June 16, 2009.

⁷⁵ William Dyrness, “Innovation and Reform of the Arts, Bernard, and Dante,” Day 5—in “Medieval Art and Theology,” Fuller Theological Seminary, June 20, 2009.

way of Christ.⁷⁶ Different saints in those days lived out Christ's life in the way that they perceived to be pleasing God. For example, Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) imitated Christ in poverty, which was the beginning of humanism in the Franciscan movement. Bringing forth the idea of "*Civitas Liberas*," or free state, corresponded to a free person and human rights in John Calvin's time.⁷⁷

In order to participate in the suffering of Jesus (Col 1:28-30), martyrdom changed in the Medieval period from dying for one's faith, which began in AD 60, to the form of monastic life. In monasteries, men and women of God made the vow of obedience, self-denial, and chastity. In living out the way of Christ, people sought for holiness as their ideal. Medieval saints were looked upon as models for sanctity. When the days became more difficult in the late Medieval time, many turned to monastic life as a way out of sufferings and death as mentioned-above. As monasticism became popular, monasteries grew rich and became political powerhouses.

Spiritual Literacy Proficiency to Keep the Conversion Process Going

Difficulties in Keeping the Conversion Ongoing

Dr. Peace pointed out three distinguishing marks in a Christian pilgrim: there is movement in one's journey of conversion, one is progressing purposefully toward a very distinctive and real objective and goal, and has the willingness to pay the price for such lifestyle despite the difficulty and pain that it sometimes involves.⁷⁸ How to keep the

⁷⁶ Peace, "The Roots of Medieval Spirituality."

⁷⁷ Dyrness, "Introduction: Siena, Lorenzetti and Medieval Political Theology."

⁷⁸ Peace, *Pilgrimage: A Handbook on Christian Growth*, 18-19.

movement going in this conversion process is crucial to one's pilgrimage in its reach to the end. Often the conversion process stops or gets stuck because one has lost the motivation to pay the price to continue on with such a lifestyle as a pilgrim.

Pilgrims are called "strangers and exiles on earth" in Heb 11:13. In the ancient world, foreigners and strangers were greeted with suspicion and contempt. So exile was a humiliating experience. Dr. Peace applied these concepts to today's context and found it would be similar to the experience of new immigrants trying to fit into their new country. Many face humiliation and discrimination due to the lack of the language proficiency and the culture differences. As, in Abraham's case, he left the heart of civilization to journey into the unknown, instead of seeking fame and fortune in rich lands and leaving the primitive backwaters. Mesopotamia in Abraham's time was the Cradle of Civilization.⁷⁹

This is the familiar experience of our church people as most of them are immigrants. They left their fame and glory in their birthplace as professional immigrants to Canada just because of the political crisis in Hong Kong at that time. Many converted to Christianity were due to going through culture shock and humiliation in trying to fit into the new country, as mentioned in chapter 1. Many others chose to return to Hong Kong when the political crisis was over. However, compared to the cost of being a pilgrim in the faith journey, the latter is even harder. Many in my church survived the cost of being a Hong Kong immigrant, but got stuck when confronting the continuing cost to be a faithful pilgrim.

⁷⁹ Peace, *Pilgrimage: A Handbook on Christian Growth*, 28.

Each pilgrimage is unique as each person is different. There are external and internal difficulties. However, the ultimate cost is always the letting go of the self-will and flesh. With the right attitude to accept what one cannot change, one can always learn from the incident as Paul encouraged: "...all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom 8:28).⁸⁰ To love God and one's neighbor more than one's own will, self interest, and life is the common ultimate struggle many take a lifetime to achieve. The conversion process will slow down or get stuck when Christians lose the motivation to pay the cost to submit to God's will accordingly. If they struggle through the unwillingness to let go in response to God's working in their heart, then the process goes on again. This will result in progress and depth in their life transformation.

Spiritual Literacy Generates Motivation to Keep Going

Spiritual literacy can keep this conversion process going, with the number and length of stops decreasing as one's proficiency level rises. With higher spiritual literacy proficiency, one is more often keeping in touch with God and holding a deeper friendship with God. One is more sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in one's heart to follow God's will. The more one is used to letting go of one's will to let God take charge, the easier it is to yield to God's will when it is different from one's own. Such a person will have greater flexibility in meeting and learning from new and difficult circumstances. It is easier to love as God loves when one has a living relationship with God to allow God to step in to enable one to do so.

⁸⁰ Peace, *Pilgrimage: A Handbook on Christian Growth*, 102.

On the individual level

We in the church can learn from many Medieval pilgrims to see how spiritual literacy enhances one's conversion progression. When the celebration of the Eucharist moved from home to basilicas starting from the fourth century, it began to be conducted by ordained clergy instead of by lay people, and liturgy was standardized and developed into the Mass. A priest took communion daily for the people, and the laity took communion once a year. Since the Church ordained the priest to conduct the ritual, people had to come to the church to find God and be saved.

Then, though, Denys's symbolic, cataphatic, and mystical theology moved people to contemplation, where through communion with God, one entered into a personal mystical experience of God. He has since been accused of reducing the whole sacramental life of the Church to a system for individual enlightenment.⁸¹ People began to put devotional paintings and images in their own homes for personal devotion and quiet time use.

Saints and mystics were becoming popular, and there were even women mystics in the Medieval period. They all had mystical experiences and met God outside of the church, which set an example for the lay people to follow to look for direct connection with God on their own outside of the church. For example, saints like Catherine of Sienna and Teresa of Avila became the models for sanctity and for experiencing the

⁸¹ Louth, "Denys," 187.

formative power of images. Though some cautioned against the private imagination, the rise of mystical experiences gave a strong emotional appeal to stimulate private prayer.⁸²

In difficult circumstances where there were lots of deaths, human suffering, and corruption in the religious authorities, the monastic and mystic movements were at their peak. There was an intense interest among the general Christians to learn the language of God in order to enter into a more intimate and lively personal relationship with God. Though not everyone who turned to monastic life or sought mystical experiences came with pure motives or perfect scriptural reasons to begin with, they at least chose to keep their conversion towards God by seeking to attain spiritual literacy proficiency. They identified with the importance of being transformed to bear God's name and were willing to lay down their lives to reach out to share others' sufferings to please God. As a result, they received numerous experiences of miracles and mystical encounters with God.

On the institutional level

The Church as the House of God is to provide avenues of growth for God's children. On the institutional level, it has to be in the conversion and transforming process just as any individual. Dr. Peace pointed out, "Individual and institutional growth parallel one another and there is great cross-fertilization."⁸³ When a church becomes static or slowed down in changing for good, it cannot catch up with the needs of

⁸² Dymness, "Philosophical and Theological Context."

⁸³ Peace, *Pilgrimage: A Handbook on Christian Growth*, 94-101.

the people. Even worse, it becomes an external impediment to individual Christian growth.

That was why Martin Luther (1483-1546) led the Reformation to start the Protestant Church, beginning in 1516. In 1215, at the Fourth Lateran Council,⁸⁴ Pope Innocent III had begun to make some papal reform efforts in response to the heretics and threats of personal mystical experiences to the Church and to deal with the corruption in the Church. However, the effort at change in the Church came too late and too little and could not catch up with the spiritual needs of the many people at that time. Our church's coming out from the former church was similar. It came to a point where leaving would be less destructive to oneself and to the others, as analyzed by Dr. Peace.⁸⁵

Learning from these negative experiences in the history of the church and looking at pilgrimage from a process mode, it is good advice from Dr. Peace that, as the leader of the church, I need to constantly ask, "Am I connecting with the real issues of these particular people at this point in time in their pilgrimages?"⁸⁶ To tend to the specific conversion need of each person in my church as each person stands at a different point of the journey, my spiritual literacy proficiency needs to keep growing. There, I shall be more used to disciplining myself to be more open to listen to the others and to the Lord's leading. Only when God is the head of the church, and everyone listens to the will of God, will the church keep growing to be the House of Prayer for all nations.

⁸⁴ Dyrness, "Historical and Theological Background of Medieval Liturgy and Art."

⁸⁵ Peace, *Pilgrimage: A Handbook on Christian Growth*, 97.

⁸⁶ Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, 330-331.

Christian Spirituality Practices and the Word as Transforming Agents

Balance between the Two Kinds of Agents

Both the Word and spiritual practices are transforming agents to keep the conversion process going. What believers can do is to put themselves in the places where growth or transformation can occur (Phil 3:17; Rom 12:2) as Paul reminded.⁸⁷ There is no conflict between the two kinds of agents. Rather, the two have to come side-by-side and complement one another. Neither will be complete and balanced without the other.

Without a prayerful heart and disciplined life, the Word will only stay as information and cannot fully release its transformation power. That was why Jesus warned about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees so much (e.g. Mt 23). On the other hand, spiritual training and practices not founded on or guided by the Word will stay on the sensation level, rather than in God's will and with God's enabling power. It is not the spiritual literacy as meant in this paper (Phil 2:12-13, 2 Cor 3:18). Otherwise, it will be salvation by works and not by faith. Thus, theologians like Thomas Aquinas cautioned the mystical experience where the mind cannot contain God. He believed that one had to have experience before one had knowledge, and one could not have real experience just based on the senses.⁸⁸ That was one of the reasons Medieval mystics were under scrutiny by the Church and there were tensions between Church-based spirituality and experiential

⁸⁷ Peace, *Spiritual Transformation*, 12.

⁸⁸ Dryness, "Philosophical and Theological Context Pt. 2."

spirituality.⁸⁹ The scrutiny was intensified by the Protestant Church so as to separate itself from the spirituality practices of the Catholic Church, which it deemed corrupted.

Used by Jesus and the Early Churches

Throughout Jesus' life on earth, one can see how He kept in balance teaching God's Word and His practice of a prayerful life. He lived by example, having a customary practice to pray to God whenever and wherever he could. After a long day of work, or when He was facing the critical moments of His life, He made it a point to go to a lonely place (e.g. Mk 1:35; Lk 5:16), such as the hills (Lk 6:12) or a garden (Lk 22:45, c.f. Mt 24:36, 39, 44), where he could pray alone, or pray alone in the presence of His disciples (e.g. Lk 9:18, 28-29). He also taught His disciples how to pray (Lk 11:1).

Apostles and saints in the early churches also practiced living out a prayerful life with God and with one another. A strong bond can be seen in their lives as they had all things in common. Believers joined in "continuous prayer" (Acts 1:14) when the church was born, and they "remained faithful" to this prayerful life together (Acts 2:42). The Apostles were devoted to prayer as the priority of their ministry (Acts 6:4).

Immediately after Christ revealed Himself to Paul on the Damascus road, it is said that Paul became a man of prayer. Paul practiced a prayerful life and taught others to do the same (Rom 1:9; Eph 1:6; 1 Thes 1:2). He found that prayer was absolutely essential for the Christian (Rom 12:12) and included it in the full armor of God. Christians are called to pray in the Spirit on all ... with all ... and for all the saints and for the servant of

⁸⁹ Peace, "The Central Role of the Eucharist in Medieval Spirituality."

God (e.g. Paul) that their mouths be open to make known the gospel fearlessly to reach out to all nations (Eph 6:18-20). He taught Christians about praying constantly (1 Thes 5:17), continuously (2 Thes 1:11), reverently (1 Tim 2:8), and for everyone (1 Tim 2:1). He connected prayer to the Holy Spirit as it is in fact a gift of the Spirit (1 Cor 14:14-16). Thus, believers pray “in the Spirit” (Eph 6:18).

The writer of Hebrews taught that prayer was possible because Christians have Christ as their great High Priest (Heb 4:14-16). He stressed corporate prayer (Heb 10:19-25) and the motives in prayer. James also stressed on the correct motives in prayer (Jas 4:1-3). He also touched on prayer in perplexity, and in times of sickness (Jas 5:13-18). John reinforced the relation between prayer and the will of God (1 Jn 5:14-16). He described the prayers of the saints as “incense” before God (Rev 5:8; 8:3, 4).

Used by Medieval Pilgrims

Many Medieval Christians followed closely in the footsteps of the early Fathers. They further developed more refined methodologies, both for studying the Word and for practicing a prayerful life in order to teach others to follow. What they have done is briefly listed below. Afterwards this section will show how we Christians can apply them into our times.

Spiritual Exegesis of Scripture

The Early Fathers long knew the importance of balancing spiritual and theological literacy. Therefore, John Cassian introduced a four-fold exegetical method, widely used

from the sixth to thirteenth centuries, to find the deeper meaning of the Word, starting from.⁹⁰

- literal/historical meaning giving all the facts of the passage,
- allegorical/typological meaning giving symbolic meaning if it has any,
- moral/topological meaning which is the key part of Medieval spirituality as this was to find out how we Christians could live out the text as we pursue holiness, and
- mystical/anagogical meaning from contemplation over the passage where one has experienced God personally.

As a result of such practice, Christian life tended to have greater depth and be more firmly rooted in God's Word as they persisted to reach to the moral and mystical level of meaning, where they could tap into the life transforming power of the Word.

The Use of Aesthetic Elements to Get in Touch with God

Filling God's presence through sight

Eyesight was an important sense in Medieval times. Under the influence of Denys's teaching, people began to recognize the need of our human nature to see material things in order to contemplate the heavenly and the immaterial. Also, they understood "that divine and heavenly things are appropriately revealed even through dissimilar symbols."⁹¹ It was believed that, when used rightly, sight could lead us back to God.

Denys noted, "Deity is far beyond every manifestation of being and of life; no reference to light can characterize it; reason or intelligence falls short of similarity to it," and "God is in no way like the things that have being and we have no knowledge at all of

⁹⁰ Peace, "The Roots of Medieval Spirituality."

⁹¹ Colm Luibheid, trans., "The Celestial Hierarachy," in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 145-147.

his incomprehensible and ineffable transcendence and invisibility.”⁹² However, since Scriptures tell us that everything created by God at the beginning was good (Gn 1:31), Denys believed that “Everything, then, can be a help to contemplation...” and suggested using the way of negation to the interpretation of perceptible symbols.⁹³ He encouraged us not to dwell on imagery, but let our mind be “provoked to get behind the material show, to get accustomed to the idea of going beyond appearances to those upliftings which are not of this world.”⁹⁴ Denys’s *Celestial Hierarchies* mediated and facilitated the spiritual journey toward union with God through symbols.

Illustrated books

Illustrated books in the Medieval period came to be used as a kind of spiritual sight, other than the *lectio divina* that they had been practicing since the fourth century, or contemplating Bible passages as taught by Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556). The images were meant to stimulate a devotional experience between the reader and God.

For example, the book *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, written by a Franciscan in the fourteenth century, used images to intentionally recollect and incorporate the interpretations of saints like Francis (1181-1226) and Bernard (1090-1153) regarding the events of Christ’s life.⁹⁵ It was the early use of images to portray theological ideas in a

⁹² Luiheid, trans., “The Celestial Hierarachy,” 149, 150.

⁹³ Ibid., 150-151.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 153.

⁹⁵ Isa Ragusa and R. B. Green eds., *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 36.

book format. The images helped readers to visualize as if the events were taking place in their presence while they read the book. This visual rhetoric aimed to lead the reader to the mystical level of the Word in order to deliver the mind from trivial things, fortify it for trials and adversity, and teach readers to avoid their enemies and vices. Throughout the book, the author told the readers repeatedly to “see,” “observe,” “watch,” or “behold” the scenes that were conjured. The images were to be used for prayer and contemplation on the messages read.

Paintings, Sculptures, and Cathedrals

The arts in this period were a form of rhetoric and also used as a spiritual sight. Images were used as means of instruction as in a book, particularly for the many illiterates in those days. As well, these images were meant to incite devotion to God, to persuade in order to guide, and never to be taken as God. Maginnis cited Gregory the Great (590-604),⁹⁶ who wrote a letter to Serenus (bishop of Marseilles) defending the teaching role of pictures and images, especially for those who could not read, as a balanced interpretation of the Second Commandment. He noted that Gregory’s position had been echoed through the centuries and was put in the statute of the Painters’ Guild and in a Dominican antiphony of the late thirteenth century.

According to John of Genoa, based on the above reasons, images were instituted in churches. Great painters in those days worked on the cathedrals, painting altar pieces and devotional images. For example, Fra Angelico (1395-1455) always prayed before

⁹⁶ Hayden B. J. Maginnis, “The Painter’s World,” in *The World of the Early Sienese Painter* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 162.

working. He never painted a crucifix without the tears streaming down.⁹⁷ The Church, then, inherited from the classical civilization “a world in which images abounded and a culture long accustomed to visible manifestations of the divine.”⁹⁸

The Medieval Cathedral was an art in itself and a means of spiritual sight. Its architecture and decorations filled visitors to the building with God’s presence. The founder of Gothic architecture, Abbott Suger, had a mystical journey from material to immaterial things, which moved him into architectural innovations, and he constructed the first Gothic structure in Paris (1144-1148).⁹⁹ Italian cathedrals always have a dome symbolizing the dome of heaven. Pillars direct people to look up and down, and the stained glass sheds light into the building. All its paintings on the walls and sculptures were for preaching purposes, filled with scenes of Christ and with biblical characters. The Gothic structure would transform the building into a collection of Christian arts, allowing light in to tell the story of Christ.

Mass liturgy

Under the influence of Gregory the Great (540-604), the Medieval Mass was about sacrifice, absolution, confirmation, and forgiveness of sins.¹⁰⁰ The liturgies

⁹⁷ William Dyrness, “Orvieto and the Theologia Poetica,” Day 11—in “Medieval Art and Theology,” Fuller Theological Seminary, June 25, 2009.

⁹⁸ Maginnis, “The Painter’s World,” 162-163.

⁹⁹ Dyrness, “Philosophical and Theological Context of Medieval Spirituality.”

¹⁰⁰ William Dyrness, “Historical and Theological Background of Medieval Liturgy and Art,” Day 4--in “Medieval Art and Theology,” Fuller Theological Seminary, June 19, 2009.

conducted in cathedrals provided an environment and atmosphere to nurture the corporeal sight to see God and make some actual, physical connection, and gain spiritual sight.

The Eucharist, not preaching, was the focus of worship in the Medieval Mass and became central to late Medieval spirituality. The Eucharist table was in the center of the altar from the time of the Fourth Lateran Council, as a symbol of the presence of Christ's body. The practice of bowing to the table signified bowing to the body of Christ. Seeing and taking the elements in communion were means of corporeal sight connecting people with the reality of God Himself.

Elaborate processions created a spiritual sight, filling the people with images and signs moving toward the altar. It brought forth the "media" effect. With incense, music (chanting), biblical instructions in the paintings and sculptures all around, and the display of the relics (if they had one) filling the sanctuary, the Medieval Mass became multi-dimensional entertainment, inciting people to worship and receive a personal mystical experience of God.

Spiritual Disciplines Practiced by the Medieval Saints

Looking at the conversion process of Medieval saints like Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), Francis of Assisi (1181-1226), Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), and Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), one can see how through their regular and persistent spiritual practices, they kept their conversion process going no matter how great the difficulties facing them. Dr. Peace

quoted William James calling these “transformational encounters.”¹⁰¹ The emphasis and form of their practices might be different, yet their desire and goal to find God and love God were the same. These practices helped them to get in touch with God and receive religious experiences; thus they became transforming agents used by God to keep their conversion process going. In turn, God used their transformed lives greatly to witness His power and His will and to serve the people of that time. At the end of each of their pilgrimages, they were faithful servants welcomed home by God.

Contemporary Applications of the Uses of These Agents

From the life transformation pilgrimage of the Medieval saints through the agent of spiritual disciplines, one can see that God is big enough for all things and anyone. It is not so much the agents themselves, but the right attitudes in using them that determine how much God uses that agent to touch one’s heart in order to keep the conversion process going. The next section will look at the attitudes of the Medieval saints, which are encompassed in the contemplative way of life, before describing the specific agents.

To Reclaim the Contemplative Way of Life

God reveals Himself in human experiences and brings to a person’s consciousness one’s unconscious experiences in the inner world. Jung called this “psychoid” reality in his theory of personality. As further explained by Dr. Peace, “It is the deepest layer of the unconscious from whence the archetypal images arise. It involves the instinctual

¹⁰¹ Peace, *Pilgrimage: A Handbook on Christian Growth*, 114-115, 134.

drives as well as the spiritual realities.”¹⁰² It is the real center of one’s being that Jung called “Self,” which defines who one really is and gives shape to one’s life, and this Self is also an image of God. This is using a scientific approach to explain contemplation. Shannon defined, “Contemplation is a way of making oneself aware of the presence of God who is always there ... in contemplation I put off my false self, my empirical ego, and find my true self in God.”¹⁰³

The Early Fathers saw that the highest form of contemplation is a direct and total awareness of God, in which there is an immediate experience of oneness with God. This practice flourished in the Medieval period as seen from the pilgrimages of the saints mentioned above. However, in the midst of all this, some Christians pursued mystical experience to its extreme form, spreading heresy and causing misunderstanding of this contemplative mode of functioning.

Shannon noted, “The period after the Reformation up until recent times ... must be seen as an arid period for contemplation and a risky time for espousing the apophatic tradition.”¹⁰⁴ Outside the monastic tradition, contemplation received little attention in the Christian West until the mid twentieth century, in the wake of World War II, which brought forth spiritual emptiness. A search for the higher values of the spirit emerged, and interest in the contemplative way of life revived. Vatican II has vindicated the view that all are called to the contemplative life.

¹⁰² Peace, *Pilgrimage: A Handbook on Christian Growth*, 138.

¹⁰³ Michael Downey, ed., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), s.v. “Contemplation, Contemplative Prayer,” by William H. Shannon.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

The contemplative mode of functioning that we Christians need to reclaim is an openness to be conscious of God's presence at work within and around us, to have the humility to be attentive in listening to the messages that He conveys to us, and to have the submissiveness and readiness to put it into action accordingly and immediately. All these attitudes could be found in the life and teaching of the Medieval saints mentioned above. That was their secret to reaching such proficiency in their spiritual literacy and to receiving so many mystical experiences of union with God.

A Contemplative Process of Theological Reflection

Life experience is a Christian's learning field. The conversion process often stops or slows down when one gets stuck in life experiences, in which one is not willing to pay the price to respond as a Christian. Theological reflection is a tool to help with thinking through life experiences. It is a contemplative reflection method developed in the early 1990s by Sister K. McAlpin, former director of programs of spirituality and ministry in Regis College of the Toronto School of Theology, University of Toronto. It is best used in a Christian community to encourage one another to integrate spirituality into the process of reflecting theologically over life experiences to deepen the conversion process leading to greater life transformation. This awareness and understanding will give Christians the hope of God for humankind.¹⁰⁵

This model consists of four components: contemplating the experience, exploring the context, reflection from and with the faith tradition, and integrating spirituality.

¹⁰⁵ McAlpin, *Ministry that Transforms*, 12-13.

Experience is any issue in daily life that is bothering one. Context is the relationship between the experience one brings to reflection and the realities surrounding that experience. Considering context will prevent one from yielding a fundamentalist interpretation of the reflection. Integrating the faith perspective into the reflection will ensure that one's interpretation will not be secular. Spirituality is the relationship between the way one lives and the faith one has internalized from one's faith tradition. This will keep a Christian from being theoretical.

The fruit of this process is a response to ongoing conversion, expressed in becoming more compassionate and faithful in ministry. As Sister McAlpin cautioned, contemplative prayer and openness are the necessary attitudes in going through this whole process for the model to be effective in bringing the conversion experience and contributing to the transformative quality of the decisions made by the participants.¹⁰⁶

Contemplative mode of Bible reading and noticing

Pilgrimage involves ongoing learning in order to keep growing. God's Word, in the form of Christian education, serves as a stimulus to give insight for change. Learning is not so much knowledge of the external resources, but rather the inward sense of being in touch with the living God, like the first century Christians, and the knowing of one's inner self (1 Jn 5:20, Col 1:25-27). As Dr. Peace reminded, "Christians grew ... because

¹⁰⁶ McAlpin, *Ministry that Transforms*, 119, 129.

they knew God within and listened to His Voice. They grew because they nourished this inward way of knowing.”¹⁰⁷ That is what “abiding” means in John 15:5.

Luke 24:13-35 recorded how, in time of crisis, in making sense of things that they did not understand, the disciples recalled and recognized that their hearts were burning when Jesus explained the Scriptures concerning Himself to them on the road to Emmaus. When God communicates to a person, it burns deep down in one’s heart.¹⁰⁸ Just like the disciples, though, one may not be sensitive enough to connect it to God right away.

Contemplative Bible reading can be in the form of daily *lectio*, or group *lectio*, which is the oldest method of Bible study focusing on approaching the Scripture in a life-transforming way, as noted by Dr. Peace.¹⁰⁹ The open attitude to learn about one’s real self in one’s inner world in reading and noticing is more important than what is read. With a contemplative mode to read with God, consciously asking and listening to God, God can speak to and give new insights about one’s real inner being through a variety of literature and multi-media, other than the Scripture itself.¹¹⁰ Be they books, films, or any form of art that is of human experiences, they touch one’s inner world giving expression in one’s emotions. Dr. Peace said, “It is He, after all, whose Reality and Presence meets us in the depths of our unconscious, at the center of our personality.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Peace, *Pilgrimage: A Handbook on Christian Growth*, 134.

¹⁰⁸ Barry, *Here Is My Heart, Here Is My Hand*, 18, 128, 142.

¹⁰⁹ Richard Peace, *Contemplative Bible Reading* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1998), 11-13, 39.

¹¹⁰ Peace, *Pilgrimage: A Handbook on Christian Growth*, 125-127.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

Re-discover the Power of Images and Aesthetic Elements

Medieval Christians were learning to tune in to symbolic reality and see the world as full of God and seeking to return their love to His love.¹¹² Maginnis called the late Medieval period “the age of vision” because of the concern with the visible and the preoccupation with optics.¹¹³ The rationale was that, since people live in bodies, God provided means (like baptism and Eucharist) for one to attain to the spiritual world. Mystical journey was correlated to liturgical practices, and, during the Mass, there were procession, Eucharist, and other sacraments as symbols of God’s presence and the story of Christ’s redemption to perfect the people’s praise of God and nurture their growth.

The use of images can function positively and negatively. Aesthetics should come after a Christian’s spiritual journey, but, in the late Medieval period, aesthetics took over spiritual connection and journey and thus became superficial.¹¹⁴ Another drawback in using images was that people confused miracles with magic. They turned to believe in the power of images more than they should and added in the notions of magic and astrology. A new concern with idolatry was raised in the early fourteenth century.¹¹⁵ Thus, in the Reformation, images were pushed away in the Protestant Church.

Actually, it is important to differentiate miracles from magic. Otherwise, a Christian could not accommodate stories telling the miraculous power of images in the

¹¹² Louth, “Denys,” 187-188.

¹¹³ Maginnis, “The Painter’s World,” 176.

¹¹⁴ Dyrness, “Philosophical and Theological Context of Medieval Spirituality.”

¹¹⁵ Maginnis, “The Painter’s World,” 164.

life of the approved legends of major Medieval saints like Saint Francis, San Damiano, and Thomas Aquinas. Then, in killing the magic for fear of idolatry, Protestants killed the miracles, downplayed the life example and teaching of the Medieval saints, and overlooked the power of aesthetic elements and the use of symbols and images. To solve this problem, instead of rejecting the use of sights and images, a Christian should rediscover and return to the right way of using sight to contemplate the heavenly as Denys taught in his Celestial Hierarchy.

Appropriate use of the multi-media technologies

People today have the advantage of high-tech, multi-media technologies. The church can make good use of them to present power points, video clips, and so forth to engage the people through sight. As long as one does not put on a show for the sake of promoting oneself, it is good to make use of the things of the world to proclaim the message of God and help people to be touched by God. People in Medieval times had already noticed that the Holy Spirit worked through audio visual means to communicate the message of God, as that was how human beings are created.

Film can also be a transforming agent if viewed contemplatively. It provides images of human experiences, which will then trigger unconscious experiences in one's inner world to surface in the consciousness and express themselves in emotions. By asking God the reason for one's emotions, this will help the person get in touch with his or her inner world where God is speaking and be moved into conversion experiences.

Liturgy and Eucharist in worship

Few Protestant churches keep the Eucharist weekly. In fact, many churches are non-liturgical. Sometimes it is for the reason that many Protestant Christian groups do not fully appreciate the symbol of the communion table on the altar, nor the liturgical acts, while at the same time thinking of themselves as seeker churches. Most think that it is keeping up with the culture to make a church not look like a church in order to attract the seeker to stay. It is important that a church be seeker sensitive in spirit, not just in form. As Dr. Peace suggested, “Once a church is made seeker friendly, it can evaluate how to use its liturgical activities as a way to reach out to new people.”¹¹⁶

GSCCC should rediscover the transforming power of “sight” as in Medieval days. Thus, the church would give the Eucharist back its proper place in worship and re-introduce certain liturgies where appropriate. Sunday worship would not be just about preaching, but also about encountering God through preaching, music, symbols, and sight. The use of Christian paintings, sculptures, icons, images, and symbols could be re-introduced to the church furnishings and decorations, and also for personal prayer use. For example, Taizé prayer meetings use candlelight, Scripture readings, and music. Or, the church could use power points with ritual images related to Bible stories for special holiday worship services, such as on Easter and Christmas.

¹¹⁶ Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, 343.

Spiritual Disciplines and Practices for Today's Christians

Retreats in everyday life

Though Christians are now not living in monasteries, a Christian can bring the spirit of the monastic way of life into everyday life. Through practicing prayer exercises and spiritual disciplines regularly at home, believers can nurture the desire to be with God, the sensitivity to His presence and leading in everyday life. This will result in having the strength to handle their stressful lives as Teresa of Avila experienced.

Prayer is about engaging and developing a loving relationship with God and Jesus, which is a relationship of trust and transparency.¹¹⁷ Much of the aim of spiritual formation is to help people to develop such a deep trust in God's love for His own. Spending good quality time with Jesus everyday in response to the deepest desire of one's heart is the way to grow in friendship with God as in any other friendship, as suggested by Barry.¹¹⁸ All that is required is to spend whatever time one can find regularly; it does not have to be long. As a Christian grows in relationship with God, one develops shared values, dreams, and hopes. Transformation, then, comes through an intimate prayerful relationship with God. It takes time to know, trust, and love him, and thus transform to be more like him. The key is to pay attention to what goes on in one's mind and heart, which is the best way to learn the ways of God. Sometimes it is called discernment of spirits – noticing the interior movement in our heart and mind.

¹¹⁷ Barry, *Here's My Heart, Here's My Hand*, 6, 154-155, 170.

¹¹⁸ Barry, *Changed Heart, Changed World*, 174-175.

There are many resources available to help a Christian to keep connected with God. For example, Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises has been adapted into the form of Annotation 19 to meet the needs of today's busy people. Additionally, one can rediscover the power of praying of the hours as suggested by Phyllis Tickle.¹¹⁹ Barry also suggested some websites that offer suggestions for daily prayer, like Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska; Sacred Space maintained by the Jesuits of Ireland; and many others one can easily search out.¹²⁰

Small groups and weekend retreats

Barry noted, "We do not grow spiritually in isolation from other people. We are made for relationship with God and with one another. In fact, persons are defined by relationships; in this, we mirror God, who is a trinity of "persons" united in bonds of friendship."¹²¹ All Christians need others with whom to talk regularly and share dreams and struggles in one's conversion process in order to keep one going. This is the House of Prayer that God has in mind for His Church, and is the vision for our church.

GSCCC is not living in community, yet we can promote community life to counteract our individualistic culture. Church life is religious community life, where we support one another in our journey and help one another to have better self-knowledge

¹¹⁹ Richard Peace, "St. Benedict and the Liturgy of the Hours," Day 4—in "Medieval and Catholic Reformation Spirituality," Fuller Theological Seminary, June 19, 2009.

¹²⁰ Barry, *Changed Heart, Changed World*, 175.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 176.

through sharing and speaking God's truth in love. As Barry suggested, a church that is a community of shared faith and experience is the ideal for every church entity.¹²²

Dr. Peace also noticed that small groups, which bear a community spirit, have been popular in America over the last ten years.¹²³ These groups provide an environment of love, care, support, trust, and mutuality, allowing the group to discuss information so as to move it from the mind to the heart. They thus become an ideal learning environment and may accomplish much by studying together certain spiritual topics of interest. Small groups are also ideal for prayer and fellowship. They serve the purpose of walking with one another on the pilgrimage; whereas, small group weekend retreats create an environment where Christians live as a community for a few days to pray and to share. However, there has been a renewed interest in spirituality in the last decade as noted by Dr. Peace.¹²⁴ Many resources are available for the church to use in their small groups to re-discover the transforming power of spiritual disciplines.

Spiritual practices of a disciplined life

A vow of poverty is not just about living in poverty; it is about practicing a simple material life, or "detachment" as Teresa named it. This discipline counteracts the materialistic culture of North America. In practicing this, it is more important to deal with the spirit of acknowledging the lordship of Christ in one's material possessions, and to be a faithful steward of God's provision.

¹²² Barry, *Changed Heart, Changed World*, 176.

¹²³ Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, 335.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 340-341.

The spirit of the vow of chastity is to put one's fleshly desire under Spirit guidance. Today's culture confuses sex with love and has fallen under the bondage of sexual desires to abuse one's body as well as others'. Fornication and adultery are no more seen as sins. The church needs to uphold the biblical values and teaching on this and promote the discipline of chastity.

The practice of obedience to authority is an even greater problem in the church today, where everyone demands one's rights and strives to have a say. Those in authority need to first set an example by pursuing humility and living in sacrificial love. Respect is to be won and cannot be demanded. Part of the reason why people have lost respect and faith in authority is that those in authority have failed to live up to their call.

The spirit of discipleship in spiritual direction ministry, as the kind of mentorship of Hildegard under Jetta, and the mentorship practiced in monastic life, is hard to have in most Protestant churches today. Protestants do not live together and thus do not have much time to be together to build up such close human relationships. Besides, most people do not see the need to be mentored and are not used to being told. Good mentoring is actually an effective means to help a Christian to grow in his or her self-knowledge and relationship with God.

It would be good to re-introduce a spiritual direction ministry to the church at this time since it is less imposing than being a mentor in a discipleship relationship. The role of a director is to walk with the directee in his or her pilgrimage. The director helps the directee to find the answer from the Lord through discerning the directee's interior

movements with him or her instead of giving instructions.¹²⁵ If the pastoral staff can give spiritual direction, then the shepherd would regularly spend some quality one-to-one time providing pastoral care for those sheep coming for direction. This will express the spirit of discipleship in a milder form.

Reclaim the hagiographic ideal

Christians today are living in a culture where holiness is no more the ideal or goal, even in many Christians' hearts. Protestant Christianity in general has misconceptions about the "saints" in church history and does not appreciate those radical mystical experiences that the Medieval saints received. People throw away miracles with magic and idol worshipping as mentioned-above. Pastoral staff need to re-introduce to the church the life of the saints as pearls from our Christian heritage in order to recall the standard of holy living that they lived out unto death. All Christians need to learn from them and live like them.¹²⁶

For example, the vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity have become so foreign today that people relate them to being cultic, or being extreme. Regular fasting and prayer are seen as things of the past. In doing exegesis, a Christian tends to stay on the information level as people are in the age of the information explosion. As the desire to pursue holiness is weak, a Christian has no need to push to the moral meaning level, not to mention the mystical meaning as in the Medieval times. To counteract these

¹²⁵ Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, 342.

¹²⁶ Peace, "The Roots of Medieval Spirituality."

trends, for example, *lectio divina* may be re-introduced in the church to train people to use their ears and their heart. This practice helps to sharpen the awareness of listening to God, and to nurture the desire and habit to reach the mystical meaning level in order to live out what one has heard from the Lord.

Services of love and justice

All mystics connected their mystical experience to the service of love and justice to the community, their neighbors, and ended up in a life of love with no shortcuts. For example, the interior castle picture is a broad structure of one's spiritual journey in which everyone will be different in some details, as everyone is different in terms of desire for God and make up; thus God works in various ways in different people's lives accordingly. However, as Teresa reminded her nuns, the more they love God, the more they would have love for all things, as God loves all things. In spiritual marriage with God, one would do good work as this pleases God.¹²⁷

It is in giving that one receives and grows in the Lord. God has given each Christian so many gifts to serve others. It is in doing so that one can understand the truth, as the truth of God is to be experienced in life, not as information stored in the head. To give and return God's love in gratefulness will counteract the spirit of taking in doing business or even in robbing in the temple as Jesus rebuked those who were "buying and selling" in the temple in Mk 11:15-17. God's will for each person in His house is, "to be built into a spiritual house, all become God's people, offering spiritual sacrifices

¹²⁷ Judy Peace, "Teresa of Avila," Day 12-- in "Medieval and Catholic Reformation Spirituality," Fuller Theological Seminary, June 26, 2009.

acceptable to God through Christ” (e.g. 1 Pt 2:5, 9-10). So the church should create many opportunities for members to serve one another. The church also needs to be reminded to go out into the community, to have a sense of social justice, and to put common good over personal good in a culture that so stresses human rights and personal freedom. God had entrusted his creation under human care; Christians have the responsibility to be good stewards in using this earth and protecting the environment.

The Pitfalls of Hypocrisy in the Life-Transforming Process

Life transformation has to be the goal of these spiritual learnings, disciplines, and practices. Once one does not let what has been learned transform one’s life, what has been learned will bring more harm than good. Knowledge (spiritual knowledge even worse) puffs up the self and leads one to live by human righteousness with the “self” being the center, as Paul warned in Galatians (3:10-11 c.f. Hab 2:4), and to fall into hypocrisy as Jesus warned in Matthew 23:8-12.

Pride is the first and foremost enemy that a Christian has to deal with in life. Jesus gave the antidote of humility to keep “God as the only source of our identity.”¹²⁸ In Teresa’s Interior Castle, the first is the Mansions of Humility. The more the self takes charge and becomes the center again, the slower the transformation process will be. This vicious cycle goes on until the conversion process gets stuck and, slowing down silently and gradually, it finally stops, and stops indefinitely.

¹²⁸ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, reprint ed. (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 25.

The more zealously one pursues spirituality practices and learning about the Word of God, the more one has to watch out for the pitfalls of hypocrisy as Jesus warned the Scribes and Pharisees and His disciples in Matthew 23. Those in the modern culture are trained to use more of their minds than their hearts in learning. As a result, they tend to accumulate what they have learned into academic knowledge, even in the learning of spiritual things, and the Word of God, as pointed out by Dr. Peace.¹²⁹ Hodge reminds his readers to “beware of any course of life or study which has a tendency to harden our hearts and deaden the delicate sensibility of the soul to moral truth and beauty.”¹³⁰

Also when one’s spiritual disciplines practice becomes regular, one easily falls into the trap of keeping the letter and forgetting about the spirit behind the practice. This turns the spiritual disciplines into ritual with little spiritual content and slips into legalism, self-righteousness, and hypocrisy (Mt 6:16-18).¹³¹ That was why the ancient discipline of fasting, like other spiritual disciplines, lost its power and eroded into the unhealthy form of asceticism by the Medieval times, and thus has been out of vogue in the churches of the West in the last one and a half centuries.¹³²

A church leader or a spiritual guide has to gauge the transformation progress, not only in the life of the trainees, but more so in the trainers—the ordained, and the lay

¹²⁹ Peace, *Contemplative Bible Reading*, 18.

¹³⁰ Charles Hodge, “Lecture to Theological Students,” in Mark Noll, ed., *The Princeton Theology, 1812-1912* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983), 112-113, quoted in James Bradley, lecture from “Spiritual Formation in the Reformation,” Fuller Theological Seminary, October 17, 2006.

¹³¹ David Bolster and Anna de Lange, *Fasting: A Fresh Look at an Old Discipline*, (Cambridge, UK: Grove Books, 2002), 10.

¹³² Arthur Wallis, *God’s Chosen Fast* (London: Victory Press, 1975), 9-12.

leaders. To bring Light into darkness, one has to start with the ministers, so Nouwen tended to the spiritual life of ministers by training them in the ancient disciplines of solitude, silence, and prayer so that they would not lose their own soul while preaching the gospel to others.¹³³ Dr. Peace quoted Thomas Merton, saying that, without deepening in transformation, one will communicate to others “the contagion of his own obsessions, aggressiveness, ego-centered ambition, delusions about ends and means, doctrinaire prejudice and ideas.”¹³⁴

To whom more is given, more will be asked. The more spiritual knowledge one has accumulated through all this D. Min. education, the more one has to keep the transformation going. Pastors have to practice what they preach/teach (Mt 23:4). Thus, Jesus reminded His disciples in Matthew 23 not to look for being called teacher, as there is only One Teacher (verses 8-10). If there is hypocrisy in the trainers, their disciples will be twice as much sons of hell as they are and they shut the kingdom of heaven in others’ faces (verses 14-15), while they think they are opening it for others to enter.

Conclusion

There is more to learn from the spirituality and spiritual practices of the Medieval saints and mystics than this paper can contain. They showed the pathway to perfection in the pilgrimage that they walked so that today’s Christians can follow in their footsteps and be transformed. In common among all these Medieval mystics are: intense prayer

¹³³ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 11-15, 30.

¹³⁴ Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (New York: Image Books, 1973), 178, quoted in Richard Peace, lecture from “Everyday Spirituality” in “The Practice of Spirituality,” Fuller Theological Seminary, October 13, 2006.

life; a highly disciplined, strong desire to get closer to God; ceaseless willingness to pay whatever it costs to please God; laboring in love to meet the needs of their neighbors despite their own frail health and poverty; the courage to stand for truth and love and to fight for justice for the weak and poor.

We, as pastoral staff of GSCCC, are finding contemporary application of these transforming agents in our pursuit of life transformation for the pilgrimage in order to keep the conversion process going. What is described above will be considered and included in the spiritual literacy project, which will be explained and reported in detail in the next part of this paper.

PART THREE

MINISTRY STRATEGY AND OUTCOMES

CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPIRITUAL LITERACY PROJECT

This spiritual literacy project has been implemented in stages in the church since December 2004. Its purpose is the continual life transformation and spiritual growth of the congregation into “a house of prayer” (Mk 11:17). This project is meant to be on-going and to be adjusted according to the needs of the church in order to balance with the theological literacy level of the church. On the theological literacy training side, in addition to the Friday Bible study, other classes will be offered regularly and continuously, including the baptismal class for seekers, Christian living for newborn Christians, and exegetical training for trained Christians.

Implementation Strategy for the Project

Preparing the Heart to Receive this Project

As Vennard suggested, the ministry of developing a praying congregation must first help people prepare their hearts for prayer, that is, recognize their desire to pray, and then teach them about different methods of prayer.¹³⁵ Thus, attending to people’s hearts,

¹³⁵ Vennard, *A Praying Congregation*, 3.

making them ready for instruction is essential for the success of this project. Since this church started, the following programs have been introduced to prepare people's hearts.

Taizé prayer meeting was introduced in February 2000. It is a practice of silence, singing prayers, communal prayers, and the centering mode of approaching God in prayer. From December 2001 to June 2002, a small interest group was offered on practicing prayer exercises in a home setting using Constance Gefvert's Lenten study book, which reflects on the Easter Vigil readings.¹³⁶ Exercises practiced in class were individual *lectio divina* and *collectio* as in Ignatius' Exercises, centering prayer with music, and the symbol of candle lighting. Journaling was explained and then practiced in take-home assignments. Sharing and communal prayer were part of the structure of the class. Each meeting was about two hours. A weekend silent retreat was held in August 2002 to follow up with this interest group and to collect feedback. Most in the group gave positive comments to practicing these spiritual exercises, which helped them to spend more time with God.¹³⁷

Gradually over these few years, the people were getting used to sharing of their spiritual journey in groups with God and praying together in public. Those who had been practicing the prayer exercises found that it inflicted no harm on their spiritual life, even if they did not find it helpful. Thus, it was time to move to Stage I of the project in this paper. In this stage, starting in December 2004, our church began by offering a small-

¹³⁶Constance Joanna Gefvert, *From Creation to Resurrection* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1990), 1-3.

¹³⁷ Only one person in the class found it hard to pray and listen to God. This person was a non-Christian at the time of the group but requested to join the group as an exception. However, a year later this person was baptized and became a Christian and has been doing fine until now.

group training program on spiritual disciplines (Level I) for those with hearts ready to receive more specific instruction on spiritual disciplines and practices. Detailed reports and assessments of the programs implemented in this project will be given in the remaining chapters of this paper.

Overall Implementation Plan

| <u>Targeted Time Frame</u> | <u>Programs Planned</u> |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Year 2004—05-- Stage I</i> | <p><i>For Trained Christians:</i> <i>Small Group Spiritual Disciplines Training</i> <i>Weekend Directed Silent Retreats</i></p> <p><i>For Church Board Members:</i> <i>3-Day Directed Silent Retreats</i></p> <p><i>On an Individual Basis:</i> <i>Spiritual Direction Ministry</i></p> |
| <i>Year 2006--07—Stage II</i> | <p><i>For Trained Christians:</i> <i>Weekend Directed Silent Retreats</i> <i>(Practice Fasting and Contemplation with Film)</i></p> <p><i>For Church Board Members:</i> <i>3-Day Directed Silent Retreats twice a year</i></p> <p><i>For the Church in General:</i> <i>Lectio Divina in Friday Bible Study Groups</i> <i>Study and Practice on Contemplative Bible Reading</i> <i>Lectio Divina in Small Friendship Prayer Group</i></p> <p><i>On an Individual Basis:</i> <i>Spiritual Direction Ministry</i></p> |
| <i>Year 2008—10—Stage III</i> | <p><i>For Trained Christians:</i> <i>Small Group Serving in Hiddenness Training</i> <i>Weekend Directed Fasting Silent Retreats</i> <i>5-Day Directed Fasting Silent Retreat with Films</i> <i>8-Day Directed Fasting Silent Retreat with Films</i></p> |

*For Church Board Members:
4-Day Directed Silent Retreat twice a year*

*For the Church in General:
Group Lectio in Friday Bible Study Group
Group Lectio in Small Friendship Prayer Group
3-Day Directed Retreat for Teens*

*On Individual Basis:
Spiritual Direction Ministry*

Year 2011—13—Stage IV
*(Going back to Stage I-III
in Cycles)*

*For Trained Christians:
Small Group Spiritual Disciplines Training
Small Group Serving in Hiddenness Training
Weekend Directed Silent Retreats
5/8-Day Directed Fasting Silent Retreats*

(On Going)

*For Church Board Members:
4-Day Directed Silent Retreats twice a year*

(On Going)

*For the Church in General:
Lectio Divina in Small Friendship Prayer Groups
3-Day Directed Retreat for Teens in Church*

(On Going)

*On Individual Basis:
Spiritual Direction Ministry*

(On Request)

*On Need Basis for Trained Christians:
Bi-Weekly Spiritual Direction on Annotation 19
(Include Four Weekend Silent Retreats Using film
to do the Spiritual Exercise of Ignatius)
Group Spiritual Direction
Spiritual Friendship Group*

Adopting Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises in the Project

Aware of Martin Luther's "new learning,"¹³⁸ Ignatius shared the same concern for revitalizing the Christian faith and life by a return to the source, Jesus. His Exercises

¹³⁸ David Lonsdale, *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear*, Traditions of Christian Spirituality Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 14-15.

(Exx 2, 22) used Scriptures and stressed the importance of accurate understanding of the Scripture.¹³⁹ Being a Word-oriented Protestant church, it would be easier for this church's people to accept any exercises when they are "biblical." Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises were therefore picked as the basic text for the programs in this project.

The Exercises have stood the test of time for over four hundred years, since first written and circulated in 1524. They have been widely and faithfully practiced by the Jesuit Community in Canada since 1611. Resources and supports in practicing the Exercises are readily available in the city of Toronto, where our church stands.

The Exercises provide an in-depth, comprehensive, systematic, and progressive four-stage¹⁴⁰ (four Weeks) schedule of prayer exercises for the formation of lay people going "deeper and deeper into an intimacy with God," as Coutinho explained.¹⁴¹ They help a Christian discern and get rid of all inordinate attachments in seeking to live out more fully the will of God (Exx 1). In practicing the Ignatian Exercises for forty-three years, Coutinho found that "the Exercises is more than a spiritual method—it is a way of life."¹⁴² This matched the goals of this project.

The Jesuits usually cover each of these four stages, including the Principle and Foundation, in eight days, thus making it into a forty-day directed silent retreat.

¹³⁹ Louis J. Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951), 14-15.

¹⁴⁰ Monty Williams, SJ, *The Gift of Spiritual Intimacy* (Toronto: Novalis Publishing, Inc., 2009), 28.

¹⁴¹ Paul Coutinho, *An Ignatian Pathway* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2011), xxiv.

¹⁴² Coutinho, *An Ignatian Pathway*, xii.

However, some of our lay people would have difficulty leaving everything for an eight-day retreat, not to mention forty days. To make it more “accessible” for more lay people in this age, “the 1st Week” together with “the First Principle and Foundation” would firstly be offered in the format of a five-day retreat. After the retreatants tried the five-day retreat and wanted to have more, then an eight-day retreat would be offered to continue with the materials not covered. The following three Weeks of the Exercises would continue to be offered in similar, small-group, five- or eight-day silent retreat settings upon request. Some of the materials in the First Week would also be used and practiced in some weekend directed silent retreats.

Annotation 19 is another alternative to cover these Exercises in everyday-life settings. In this format, a person has to spend enough time every day to do the prayer Exercises following the order of the Spiritual Exercises; then he or she meets with a spiritual director either once a week, or in a time span comfortable for both parties. In this Project, Annotation 19 would be given on an individual basis upon request. The Director would adjust the pace and the material to adapt to the aptitude and physical fitness of the exercitant (Exx 18-20). “Each stage is the basis for the next stage. Moved to a stage before its dynamics are fully established in a person’s life distorts the relationship that a person may be developing with God,” as Williams elaborated Ignatius’s instruction in using the Exercises.¹⁴³ How the Exercises can be offered in small group format in this Project will need further thought in the future.

¹⁴³ Williams, *The Gift of Spiritual Intimacy*, 28.

Incorporating Spiritual Direction into the Church Ministry

Spiritual direction emerged in the fourth to sixth centuries. Since the Reformation, it has been put down and even out of the general Protestant Church. Motivated, in part, by the deep interest in spirituality of the Boomer generation in recent years,¹⁴⁴ the power and gift of discernment through spiritual direction has been re-discovered in the Protestant world as Dr. Peace mentioned.¹⁴⁵ However, spiritual direction has been offered mostly by independent directors outside of the church, and has not been included as an in-house ministry of most of the Protestant churches.

In this church, spiritual direction has been one of the programs in the Spiritual Literacy Project since 2004. It has been one of the components of the Christian Living training, which is the first-level of a theological literacy training program offered to nurture the newly baptized. Those in the training were required to come for spiritual direction once a month to give them a taste of what it is like. So they could choose to come and ask for regular direction after their Christian Living training. This would provide one-to-one pastoral care in a discipleship pattern, or at least one-to-one communication and fellowship time to help the church leaders know their sheep.

Implementation Strategy for Stage I (2004-2005)

This project started with spiritual disciplines training from December 2004 to June 2005. This training targeted those who were trained in theological literacy and were

¹⁴⁴ Peace, "Spiritual Formation," 2-3.

¹⁴⁵ Richard Peace, "Spiritual Direction/Director," 2, Day 4—The Process of Pilgrimage, handouts from "Spiritual Formation and Discipleship in a Postmodern World" Fuller Theological Seminary, October 7, 2004.

also interested in spiritual practices. Most come from the previous spirituality interest group (December 2001- June 2002) and were the lay leaders of the church.

In the present media-filled culture, listening is a skill that needs to be developed in every Christian. Without this skill, people cannot be silent in order to listen to the small voice of God and to their own heart. Thus, the first discipline to be taught in the spiritual disciplines training program was *lectio divina*. After this group learned it, they could serve as the core to help others in the church (in the Friday night meetings and in one of the friendship small groups) learn the skill as we moved on to Stage II.

A silent retreat was held in September 2005 to follow up on this spiritual disciplines training group. It was also open to anyone interested in joining to give those who were not in the training a taste of being silent or doing prayer exercises.

Other than this small group, it was crucial to get the church board members involved in order to implement this project in the whole church.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, some three-day, directed, silent retreats were held for the church board starting from February 2004. During this introductory stage, all the activities held would try to keep the “cost” for trying out these new experiences as low as possible in terms of time and money. Retreats were held on weekends so that none needed to take days off from work. After they had tasted the goodness of such silent retreats for their relationship with God, the retreats were shifted to being held during weekdays. This would keep their services in the church on Friday and Sunday uninterrupted, and help them to focus more on the retreat.

¹⁴⁶ Besides, most of the church board members had joined the previous spirituality interest group and/or this present spiritual disciplines training group.

Implementation Strategy for Stage II (2006-2007)

To build up a praying congregation, the contemplative mode of life has to be extended to the whole church and not be confined to a small group of people. The Friday night Bible study meetings included all the core and 70 percent of the regular members of the church. The different small friendship prayer groups were formed by almost 80 percent of the church people aged twelve and up. Both types of groups were good places to nurture this contemplative mode of life for the church as a whole.

Thus, in Stage II of the project, group *lectio divina* (or group *lectio*) was taught and practiced, not only in the small training group, but in all the Bible study groups on Friday nights. This plan started by following Dr. Peace's study guide on *Contemplative Bible Reading*, using it from February to June 2006. In this time, *group lectio* was introduced to the church in general, to people from age eight to seventy-eight. This way of listening to the Word of God was rightly balanced with the objective inductive Bible study the group had previously had. The original meaning of the Scripture always needed to be the foundation for learning this subjective method of interpretation.¹⁴⁷

After studying the book *Contemplative Bible Reading*, the Bible study groups continued to study other topics while still practicing group *lectio* once a month in the Friday meetings. This aimed to help people practice it until most of them felt comfortable to practice it on their own. Around this time, then, group *lectio* was implemented in each of the small friendship prayer groups in the church, which were under the supervision of the lay leaders, most of whom were church board members. This was to help the small

¹⁴⁷Peace, *Contemplative Bible Reading*, 18.

groups focus their fellowship on things related to God and His Word and be more conscious of the presence of God in their meeting, while continue to practice their listening skills. It was also meant to continue to prepare their hearts for more specific instructions in joining the other training programs, and to foster an environment for people to feel free to talk about their relationship with God, their learning of the language of God, and their journey with God.

Bible study topics related to life transformation were chosen to provide them with the biblical knowledge that they needed to renew their minds and be transformed while practicing this contemplative mode of life. *Spiritual Transformation* by Dr. Peace was studied from July 2006 to January 2007, followed by studying Matthew 23, focusing on hypocrisy from February to October 2007. Hypocrisy formed when life transformation stopped while biblical knowledge kept storing up in one's head. To enhance the transformation process, the series on *Learning to Love God, Learning to Love Ourselves, and Learning to Love Others* by Dr. Peace was selected starting from November 2007.

By this time, the church board was ready to make their three-day silent retreats regularly, twice a year. A weekend silent retreat open to all Christians was offered in April 2007 and introduced for the first time the practices of fasting and contemplation with films. Hopefully, these practices would spread out to the church in general from this small training group. Spiritual direction continued to be offered on an individual basis.

Implementation Strategy for Stage III (2008-2010)

Weekend silent retreats with fasting and contemplation with films continued to be offered in January 2009 and February 2010 to those who wanted to try them. Most

people found contemplation with films especially helpful. Lay leaders even used it as a special program on its own in other functions of the church, such as special film nights at Friday meetings, annual church summer camps, and other recreation camps.

Group *lectio* continued to be practiced in the small fellowship prayer groups bi-weekly. Since most people were familiar with the practice by this time, Friday meetings could be used more for Bible studies, so the regular practice of group *lectio* on Fridays was fading out since January 2008, and stopped by January 2009.

Continue to introduce this contemplative lifestyle to the church's general members, a three-day directed retreat was offered to the teens in their 2010 March Break. Spiritual exercises were introduced in the midst of recreation activities to lead them to get in touch with God while they were young. Hopefully, they would find that spiritual exercises were fun and could provide greater satisfaction than their other games. In this retreat, the non-churched teens would mix with the church's teens who were regularly attending the Friday night meetings and a small friendship prayer group. That means they had been introduced to the contemplative mode of life and were practicing group *lectio divina* as much as the other adults.

As more trained people had a greater appetite for practicing spiritual disciplines, practices that involved more time and money were offered to lead them deeper. A five-day and an eight-day silent fasting retreat were held in June 2008 and May 2009 respectively. Also, a new small training group on "Serving in Hiddenness" was offered from September 2008 to October 2009 for those who were trained and actively serving in the church, but had not yet become church board members. This training followed the

study guide of *Service and Secrecy* by Jan Johnson¹⁴⁸ and would become a prerequisite for anyone aspiring to board membership. Spiritual direction for individuals continued.

Silent retreats for the church board continued to be held twice a year and become a requirement to be a board member. Since the present board members chose to increase the retreat duration from three to four days starting in May 2008, and they had covered the “Serving in Hiddenness” study material in their past retreats, future new members would need to learn what they had learned and to appreciate the value of holding retreats for those who serve a lot before they could be merged into the present church board. Also, the new board members would be required to have regular spiritual direction. This was to keep the communications open between the pastoral staff and the board members and to allow the pastoral staff to walk with each board member in a discipleship pattern.

Slowly and quietly, the spiritual literacy requirement for the church board has been raised to be in balance with their theological literacy. If the board members have a closer walk with Christ in their pilgrimage and keep their life transformation going, the decisions that they have made for the church should be more in line with God’s will, and they can set a good example for the whole church to follow.

Implementation Strategy for Stage IV (2011-2013)

This is the final stage of the Project. We will stay in this stage and work on future programs for this Project if it proves worthy of being continued. After reviewing the

¹⁴⁸Jan Johnson, *Service and Secrecy*, Spiritual Disciplines Bible Studies (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

outcomes of the programs implemented from Stages I to III, chapter 7 will discuss and propose details for continuing with this project.

In terms of training programs, this is the time to come back to the start of its cycle in Stage I. For example, spiritual disciplines training, and then Serving in Hiddenness weekend silent retreats, and the five-day/eight-day silent retreats. Those on-going practices like group *lectio* in small friendship prayer groups, retreats for teens, individual spiritual direction, and church board retreats will be continued as scheduled.

New programs like Annotation 19 will be offered on request. Spiritual friendship groups are for those who are experienced in receiving spiritual direction to consider pairing up with another and taking turns to be the director.¹⁴⁹ Group spiritual direction can also be introduced to the church when it has built up a group of people who are experienced in practicing spiritual disciplines. Then one director can lead a small group.

One-to-one spiritual direction is very time consuming. Given the two pastoral workers in this church, there is a limit to how many directees to take on, in view of the other ministries in the church. If this spiritual literacy project works, then more and more people in the church will be interested in seeking direction. In the long run, then, we need to free up some spaces for the upcoming people. Besides, it is always good for whoever is practicing spiritual disciplines to be in a community context to make sure their practice will not lead them into a wrong path of individualistic spirituality. Now, people are gathering into small friendship prayer groups bi-weekly in home settings. Since their desire and understanding of spiritual practices varies, the small groups cannot

¹⁴⁹ Peace, "Spiritual Direction/Director," 1.

reach the state of a spiritual direction group yet. However, it is the goal and vision that, one day, more of these small groups can gradually mature into spiritual friendship or direction groups. These goals and plans will not have a fixed time frame as they are subject to the response of the people toward the working of the Lord in their hearts.

Summary Reports on the Programs Implemented

The programs implemented in this project are reported on the basis of the nature of the program addressing the needs of the targeted participants. For the previously trained Christians, there were the basic training programs on spiritual disciplines, the advanced training program on Serving in Hiddenness, and the training and practices in directed silent retreats with various intensities and focuses. For the church in general, other than the usual monthly Taizé prayer meeting and the activities and application discussion, there were programs introducing them to the contemplative mode of life in the Friday night meetings. Also, there were three-day directed retreats for teens. For church board members, there were the three- and four-day directed silent retreats with ministry focus. For individuals, spiritual direction was given.

Small Group Spiritual Disciplines Training¹⁵⁰

Teaching Methodology

Spiritual disciplines are a matter of regular practice more than learning the concept or theory.¹⁵¹ Going over the theory takes minutes; translating the theory into life

¹⁵⁰ The goals in transformation and resources used for this training have been put in Appendix I for reference.

transformation takes years of faithful practice in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. Thus, lecturing with handouts to teach about the prayer form took only 20 percent of the session time; the rest of the teaching time used methods like: practicing the prayer form together in class, group sharing after the prayer practice experience, group discussion, and praying for one another in the group. These methods are used not only to help participants learn what is being taught but to build up a group spirit and to lay down the foundation for continued practice by individuals after class.¹⁵²

Compared to the class time, to be able to maintain regular practices at home is even more important. Therefore, appropriate homework assignments, as well as journaling assignments, were given to help individuals continue the practice after class. At the beginning of each session, time was given for everyone to share what was learned in doing the homework. This was to help them to be more faithful in practicing what they had heard and learned from one another's experiences.

Instructions for different levels of spiritual disciplines and prayer exercises will be offered in small group settings similar to the one reported in this paper. In pursuing spirituality, there is always the danger of its becoming individualistic spirituality.¹⁵³ On one hand, one needs to find one's own path of Christian discipleship. At the same time, one needs to have the balance of life in a community, so being in a small group setting is

¹⁵¹ Richard Peace, "Spiritual Disciplines," 1, handout from Day 4—The Process of Pilgrimage, in "Spiritual Formation and Discipleship in a Postmodern World" Fuller Theological Seminary, October 7, 2004.

¹⁵² Vennard, *A Praying Congregation*, 114-115.

¹⁵³ Lonsdale, *Eyes to See*, 140-145.

important to implant this community notion and aspect in one's Christian life. This kind of small group training will be offered as needs arise to keep equipping people in the church with conceptual ideas as well as hands-on practice of spiritual disciplines.

Structure of the Program

| <i>Time Frame</i> | <i>Reason</i> |
|-------------------------------|---|
| December 2004 to June 2005 | Start before Christmas to make use of the Advent season to practice <i>lectio divina</i> individually at home. |
| Bi-weekly on Saturday morning | More relaxed on the weekend. |
| 13 sessions | Boomers have difficulty in keeping a long-term commitment. Hopefully the program is long enough for the practices and experiences to form a life style and short enough to maintain the trainee's interest. |
| <i>Format</i> | |
| Small Group in Home Setting | To create a community life as the context for learning and practicing spiritual disciplines. |
| With refreshment | A 10-minute tea break in a 2-hour session, rather than serving before and after sessions to allow more group bonding and building. |
| <i>Participants</i> | |
| 21 people enrolled | Divided into 2 groups to maintain the small group effect. |

When making the announcement for this program, the requirement for application stated: absolute attendance and willingness to do the assignments, to share in the group, and to pray for one another in the group. Detailed commitment requirements were as

outlined in the study guide “Meditative Prayer.”¹⁵⁴ The group read through the covenant together in the first session. This covenant was repeated again in the middle of the program as we covered the session in the book on Prayer of Worship.

Small Group Serving in Hiddenness Training¹⁵⁵

This training was offered in 2008-2009 for those who have learned the basics of spiritual disciplines and practices through the small group spiritual disciplines training or other equivalent means. They needed to have experience in weekend silent retreats to know that they enjoy practicing them when they continue in this pursuit. Also, they needed to have been serving in the church and still want to serve more and better. This training is the prerequisite for joining the church board (since all those on the board at that time had gone through this training material in their bi-yearly silent retreats). Full participation in the training was required in order to foster commitment to one another.

Teaching Methodology

Since this was spirituality training, only half of the session time would use the format of lecturing and Bible study. The rest of the time would use on practices. So each session started with the practice of silence and focusing prayer for ten minutes, followed by a group opening prayer for the session. At the close of the session time, thirty minutes were devoted to the sharing of prayer items and to communal intercession. During the

¹⁵⁴ Richard Peace, *Meditative Prayer, Entering God’s Presence* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1998), 10.

¹⁵⁵ The goals of transformation and the resources used for this training have been put in appendix II for reference.

session, there was group sharing on learning experiences in practicing the assignments in the past month. Then, group members checked the answers for the Bible study of the day, as it was also part of their assignment to do the Bible study on their own at home. On top of sessions, the training also consisted of two silent retreats, using the retreat setting to practice more intensely spiritual exercises and have a longer time to be away from their daily life wholly focusing on God, remaining in a reflective mode to be attentive to God.

This training was on the discipline of service, so the practicum was used as a teaching method. More time and serving opportunities were given so that the trainees could apply what they had learned in the sessions to their services and experience life transformation in the process. Hopefully, these practices would become their lifestyle so that, at any given time, these right attitudes toward serving would be transforming them. The structure of the program was designed in line with this teaching method used.

Structure of the Program

| <i>Time Frame</i> | <i>Reason</i> |
|--|---|
| September 2008 to October 2009 9 sessions in total | Allowed enough time to cover 6 sessions on the discipline of service according to the study guide, ¹⁵⁶ and review sessions in between. |
| Summer break from June to the end of August as their practicum | They could serve full-forced in all the summer programs, which include the summer camp, vacation bible schools, and other outreach activities. |
| <i>Format</i> monthly sessions on weeknights | Met on a weeknight that would not conflict with their services in the other meetings of the church. |

¹⁵⁶ Jan Johnson, *Service and Secrecy*, Spiritual Disciplines Bible Studies (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

And monthly meeting gives them time to continue with their usual services.

| | |
|---|--|
| Small group in home setting with refreshments | To enhance the relationship building dynamic of the group. To provide a relaxed and warm atmosphere to share openly. |
| 3-hour Class time | A 3-hour session allowed enough time for practicing prayer exercises and group sharing. |
| Retreats | Other than class time, there was one weekend retreat (January 2009), one 8-day retreat (May 2009). |
| Monthly Spiritual Direction | Allowed the trainer to keep in touch with the learning of the trainee and provide individualized pastoral care. |

Participants

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| 7 people enrolled | Except for one relatively young Christian, the rest had been to various weekend retreats. And 5 had joined the previous spiritual disciplines training. The commitment for this training was higher as this was the advanced training program. |
|-------------------|--|

Training and Practices in Directed Silent Retreats

To nurture the contemplative life-style, the church has regularly offered some small group directed silent retreats in monastic settings for whoever has gone through the Christian living training or spiritual disciplines training. Retreatants would practice disciplines like silence, solitude, meditation, contemplation, and fasting in a life-style format. The practice of contemplation with film was included in some of the retreats. To get away from everyday life and to be in silence for a prolonged period as a lifestyle has to be experienced in a retreat setting, and it is very effective in spiritual formation.¹⁵⁷ The length of the retreats ranged from a weekend to eight days. Weekend directed silent

¹⁵⁷ Peace, "Spiritual Formation," 4.

retreats were held in September 2005, March 2007, January 2009, and February 2010. Five- and eight-day directed silent retreats were held June 2008 and May 2009.

Each of the weekend retreats chose to practice various spiritual disciplines and prayer exercises. Some were follow-ups of previous spirituality training or weekend retreats, while others were more introductory and were open to anyone interested in trying out the pleasure of the monastic life-style and these spiritual practices. I will report on the first two weekend directed silent retreats in detail below as examples and give the reports on the other two weekend retreats in appendix IV for reference.

Weekend Directed Silent Retreat in Sept 2005

The first weekend directed silent retreat was held September 23-25, 2005. It was a follow-up for the small group spiritual disciplines training group, which ran from December 2004 to June 2005. Its purpose was to introduce participants to the silent retreat lifestyle and to see how well they had been keeping up with what they had learned from their training after a few months.

Goals of this retreat and teaching methodology

The retreat had four main goals: to experience the blessings of God in a structured monastic lifestyle with the practicing of the Hours of the Day; to gauge how much the trainees have been practicing the spirit of the prayer exercise according to their textbook, *Contemplative Bible Reading*, pages 90-95; to chart their life transformation since this training began on December 2004 according to the marks of life transformation on page

101 of *Contemplative Bible Reading* and to support this with incidents that came to their minds; and to be inspired to continue with the spiritual practices as a lifestyle.

There was full participation of the twenty-one people in the training group at the retreat. This time the meetings were held in one group, but broke into groups of five or six for prayer. The retreat was held in an Anglican convent in the city of Toronto. The convent held Morning Prayer, Eucharist, Evensong, and Compline services for the public daily. The trainees were asked to attend all the scheduled services of the convent on Saturday, which was the full day of this weekend retreat. This was meant to introduce them to a style of worship and prayer meetings from a tradition foreign to them and show them the effects in their lives of keeping the Hours of the Day.

No lecture was given at this retreat, but there was sharing and feedback. The emphasis was to lead them to experience. On top of the convent's services, we held our own group meetings once every day during the weekend. They sang and shared in the meeting; otherwise, they were asked to practice silence. To many of them, it was their first experience of silence throughout a weekend and in a silent convent setting.

Structure of the retreat

On Friday evening, the group checked into the retreat center. It began by singing a few songs and practicing centering prayer; the goals of this retreat were explained to them. They were to work on the second and third goal of this retreat while they attended fully the structured monastic life pattern of the Convent on Saturday. Their reflection was to be shared in the coming meetings as their assignment. The meeting closed with small group prayer.

On Saturday evening, the group met to share their reflections on the second and third goal of the retreat. During the rest of the meeting time, they sang a few songs and had small-group prayer. They were asked to reflect on their overall retreat experience as their assignment for the night.

On Sunday morning, feedback from the last assignment of their training was given in order to encourage them to continue to gauge their life transformation progress. Suggestions for continuing growth were also given, in which on-going practices of spiritual disciplines and regular spiritual direction were encouraged. Post-retreat assignments were given and to be due on October 2, 2005. This was to deepen their overall retreat experience, to keep them going with some spiritual thoughts in mind after the retreat, and to be more conscious of their relationship with God.

Weekend Directed Silent Retreat on March 2007

A silent retreat was offered on Palm Sunday weekend of 2007 to introduce for the first time the disciplines of fasting and contemplative prayer through watching films. Both disciplines trained a Christian's awareness. Becoming aware is an important step in the process of spiritual literacy, so this retreat would be the prerequisite for people moving on to longer silent retreats and looking for more intense practices. The goals in transformation and resources used have been put into Appendix III for reference since it involved two practices that were lengthy to report.

This retreat was mainly for those who had gone through the spiritual disciplines training program of Stage I of this project, with the exception of a few who had some knowledge of spiritual disciplines through their Christian living training offered by the

church. Those who have a basic practice of spiritual disciplines may proceed to explore how to use film as a spiritual tool to enter into imaginative contemplation of what is presented, and, out of that engagement with the film, to discover how one is moved and why that happens. It is different from making moral lessons out of the films. Mass media films are good spiritual tools to be used to sharpen a Christian's awareness and to nurture spiritual literacy.¹⁵⁸ In the present television culture, everyone likes watching films. Films trigger our experiences of consolation or desolation and bring them to our awareness, which is the prelude to a deeper contemplative prayer experience.

This kind of weekend silent retreat using film and/or practicing fasting can be offered as often as people are interested. Even for those who have no plan to move on to more intense practices for the time being, practicing fasting once in a while will be a good experience to become more aware of one's bodily desires. Contemplation with film is a spiritual tool that people can use whenever they watch films or television programs. "God in all things" is the essence of Ignatius' spirituality. This way of watching films and television programs will make their watching time more beneficial to their relationship with God, rather than its becoming an idol in their heart. This is using the world to fight against the world, being in the world but not of the world, as Paul taught.

Teaching methodology

This program was conducted in a retreat setting, where spiritual disciplines like silence, solitude, and fasting could be better practiced. Cantonese (a dialect of Chinese)

¹⁵⁸Monty Williams, "Introduction to Using Film as a Spiritual Tool," in *Finding God in the Dark Workshop* (Guelph: Loyola House, 2006).

was used to conduct the retreat, as the majority was Cantonese speaking. The few English speaking people in the group had no problem hearing and speaking in Cantonese. However, handouts were in English since all can read English. And this would make it easier for the English speaking retreatants to follow the lectures. Out of the weekend, less than three hours were spent on lecture time. About five hours were spent on group sharing and worship, and one hour on small group communal prayer. Most of the time was for practicing silence, solitude, and fasting as they planned.

The film “Seabiscuit” was viewed to practice contemplative prayer. Prayer questions were given before and after watching the film to guide the viewers to enter into contemplative prayer. Journal writing was required throughout the retreat to help them to go deeper in their contemplative prayer experience.

Structure of the program

A week before the retreat, a brief handout on the different types of fasting was given to the retreatants. This was to put them in the right mindset and to get them prepared to practice fasting in the retreat, which was a new spiritual discipline for most of them. They were given the freedom to decide on their fasting plan. Whatever level of fasting they practiced, it would be of their own free will and initiative before God.

On Friday evening, the retreat started after work or school. After going over the logistics for the retreat, a one-hour lecture on the discipline of fasting was given. This biblical knowledge would provide a framework for the retreatants to confirm their fasting plan and to practice it in the right manner. There were twenty people joining this retreat. To maintain the small group dynamics, they were broken into groups of five for about

thirty minutes to share and pray for one another after the lecture and at the close of each night. They had the rest of the time to themselves for personal prayer and journaling.

Saturday morning began with corporate worship in songs and prayer for one-half hour. Then a one-half-hour lecture was given on “Using Film as Contemplative Prayer.” A prayer questions sheet was given for them to pray about and get ready to watch the film in the afternoon intentionally. Saturday early afternoon, the group watched the film together in order to allow more time for each person to reflect on the film experience. A sheet of reflection exercises on the film was given after watching the film. Saturday early evening, the group as a whole gathered to share about the film experience and then to close in communal prayer in smaller groups of five before 8:30 p.m., as on the previous night, to allow more space for each person to continue reflecting in the Lord.

Palm Sunday morning, the group gathered for an hour and a half to close the retreat with worship in songs and prayer and thankful sharing for the overall retreat experience. Then the group departed and returned to the church to join the rest of the congregation for Palm Sunday worship in the afternoon.

Five- or Eight-Day Directed Silent Retreats¹⁵⁹

For those who had gone through the spiritual practices in the previous weekend silent retreats and/or the spiritual disciplines training and desired more intense practice, our church offered a five-day directed silent retreat in June 2008 covering part of the First Principle and Foundation and the first Week of Ignatius’ Exercises. To complete what

¹⁵⁹ The goals in transformation and resources used have been put in appendix V for reference.

has been left uncovered in this Week, an eight-day directed silent retreat was offered in May 2009. This eight-day retreat was part of the Serving in Hiddenness training.

After trying out the eight-day retreat, it was found that the material in each Week needed a lot more time to cover than the commonly suggested 8-day retreat in Jesuit practices. The main reason collected from the retreatants was that today's lay people, who were not used to the contemplative stance, found it hard to be so focused for an extended period of time. They needed a break before they could return to the contemplative state to do another reflection exercise. This need did not show up in the previous retreats, as the contemplation time was not yet longer than they could stay.

Teaching methodology

Prerequisites were set for joining these two retreats since they were meant for more in-depth and intense practices. The participants needed to have similar levels of knowledge and spiritual experiences before they could share with the same understanding. Also, none would feel left out or lost in doing the exercises and practices. So prerequisites would screen out those who were not ready for this length of retreats, and no time would be needed to repeat something that most had already learned.

Both retreats were conducted in the form of small mixed groups so that, in practicing these spiritual disciplines of silence, solitude, and fasting individually, the community sharing spirit and awareness would not be overlooked. In the meetings, lecturing and discussion were used to explain the focus and meaning of the subject matter. Praise and communal prayer were included to nurture the worshipful spirit.

Contemplation with films was the main tool used throughout as these retreats were modeled after the book *Finding God in the Dark*.¹⁶⁰ All the retreatants had tried this practice in their previous retreats and found films a powerful tool to lead them toward being in touch with God and their interior movements.

Handouts were given with prayer exercises, reflection questions, and main points of the topic covered so that all could take their time to reflect and pray with the materials. Journal writing was used as in other retreats, as it is an essential tool to deepen one's learning experiences received from the Lord through the prayer exercises.

A retreat center in the countryside was chosen with more trails in the woods and more outdoor meditation spaces and landscaping, like the labyrinth, meditative trail, and prayer hut. Particularly for longer retreats, outdoor spaces and meditative landscaping would enhance the effectiveness of the spiritual practices for the retreatants.

Structure of the program

Five-day directed silent retreat. There were twelve women and one man for a total of thirteen participants. All fulfilled the prerequisites that they had experience in practicing weekend silent retreats, fasting, and contemplative prayer with film. Except for two who were baptized after 2005, all had in fact attended the spiritual disciplines training started in December 2004. Many of them had participated in various weekend silent retreats over the years.

¹⁶⁰ John J. Pungente and Monty Williams, *Finding God in the Dark: Taking the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius to the Movies* (Toronto: Novalis, 2004).

The retreat dates were set at the end of school term and fell over Canada Day, a public holiday. It started on Friday evening and ended on Wednesday noon. These factors minimized the need to take leave from work or school and make the retreat available to whoever fulfilled the prerequisites and was interested to join.

Again, like the previous fasting retreats, the retreatants decided on their fasting plan and handed it in with their retreat goals a week before the retreat. This was to make sure they had prepared their minds and hearts for coming to the retreat. In order to do this, they would have reviewed the previous handouts and guidelines on all the spiritual practices that they were to practice in this retreat.

Friday evening, after everyone had settled in, a one and a half hour introductory meeting was held and started with fifteen minutes of opening prayer and praises. After introducing the first exercise of meditation on sin, leaders distributed and explained the prayer questions to prepare for watching the first film “Magnolia.” Retreatants had the night and the next morning to quiet down, to do the exercise, and to be prepared for viewing the film on Saturday at noon.

Saturday, the group met at noon to share their reflection on the first exercise, and then watched the film, which portrayed the disordered world we are in. Fortunately, one could still find forgiveness. Afterwards they returned to their rooms to pray with the film according to the guiding questions given. They met again at 7 p.m. for another hour and a half meeting for praise and prayer and the discussion of the second exercise of meditation on our sins. They had the night to work on these exercises.

Sunday, the group returned to church for the Sunday worship since it was only an hour drive. It was testing whether they could maintain their silent, contemplative state in heart while they were worshipping or fulfilling their service, which was also a discipline. They returned to the retreat center as soon as they finished their service in the church. To allow them some time to resume their silent mode and to finish with their exercises, the meeting started in the late evening at 8 p.m. and lasted two hours. They shared their experience with the first film. Then the exercise on penance was explained and discussed.

Monday, they had the morning to themselves and met at noon for two hours. The exercise on death was explained and discussed. Prayer questions for the second film, “Big Fish” were distributed and explained. Participants met at 7 p.m. to watch the film, which is about death.

Tuesday was the last whole day of the retreat. A two-hour meeting started at noon to share individual’s prayer experiences with the second film on the topic of death. The assignment for the evening meeting was to reflect and summarize their learning experience over the whole retreat. Since this was the last night of the retreat, the meeting was free for them to share, and everybody was less conscious about time.

Wednesday morning was the last meeting devoted to praise and sharing of prayer items. Then it closed with praying for one another. After checking out of the retreat, the group gathered for a dim sum lunch in a Toronto restaurant to celebrate the close of the retreat and to break the fast together. The community bonding was maintained.

Eight-day directed silent retreat. There were ten women and two men, for a total twelve people joining this retreat. Among the group, nine were returning retreatants

of the five-day retreat. For the three who had not joined the five-day retreat, they still fulfilled the prerequisites listed for these five- or eight-day retreats. The preparation assignments were the same as for the five-day retreat.

This retreat ran from Sunday to Sunday, so the group could stay in the retreat center practicing their silence, solitude, and fasting solidly for the whole eight days without interruption, as in the last five-day retreat. Only one meeting a day was scheduled, except on Monday and Thursday. Whenever we met only once a day, the meeting started at 3 p.m. The group would have more personal time before the meeting, while they could still share more freely without worrying about upsetting their night schedule or sleeping time, in case the sharing went overtime.

Because the retreat was longer, the group watched three films instead of two, and covered five sub-topics with prayer exercises instead of four. However, in proportion to the length of the retreat with the materials covered and exercises practiced, there was more time for silence and solitude. This was done in view of the requests expressed by those in the five-day retreat who asked for a longer silent retreat so that they could go deeper in their practice of silence and solitude. Prayer exercises and reflection questions for the sessions and films were handed out in each meeting.

After Sunday worship, the group left the church for the retreat center directly. The first meeting started at 7 p.m. The retreat started with session 1 reflecting on the “Vision of Life,” as suggested by Ignatius. Then the group watched the first film, “The Kingdom.” Prayer questions were given for both.

On Monday morning, the group held session 2 on “Freedom of Choice and Disorders” in the morning and watched the second film “There Will Be Blood” in the evening. On Tuesday, they met once at 3 p.m. The group shared on the first two films. Then Exercise 2 of “Meditation on our Sins” was given as a repetition from the five-day retreat. On Wednesday, they also met once at 3 p.m. to share on sessions 1 and 2. On Thursday, they met at noon for sharing on exercise 2 and then met at 6 p.m. for session 4 of “God’s love for Sinners.” On Friday, they met once at 3 p.m. to share on session 4. Session 5 on “Living with Disorders” was discussed. Then they watched the third film “Batman Begins.”

On Saturday, the last whole day of the retreat, the group met at 3 p.m. to make room for more free sharing time on the overall retreat experience, prayer experience with the third film and with session 5. On Sunday, the last morning of the retreat, the group gathered at 8:30 am for an hour of thanksgiving and prayer to close the retreat before leaving for Toronto to join the Sunday worship in church at 11:45 a.m.

Introducing the Contemplative Mode of Life

Our Friday night meetings, which most church people in general attend used to focus on inductive Bible studies. When we the pastors noticed that the people were collecting more biblical knowledge than they could live out,¹⁶¹ we brought in the Taizé Prayer meeting in Year 2000. The Taizé prayer style brought the people into a contemplative mode to draw closer to God. As this style of prayer meeting was well

¹⁶¹Peace, *Contemplative Bible Reading*, 18.

accepted by the congregation, we keep it in this spiritual literacy project as one of the Friday night programs, holding it once a month.

Study and Practice of Contemplative Bible Reading

Moving on to Stage II of this project, starting from 2006, the study and practice of the contemplative mode of life was extended to the church people in general through Bible studies and group discussions on the book *Contemplative Bible Reading*, and practicing group *lectio divina* once a month. After the church finished the book *Contemplative Bible Reading*, related topics of spiritual transformation and hypocrisy were chosen to consolidate the practice of the subject as mentioned above.¹⁶²

Teaching methodology

As of May 2002, an activities/application discussion based on the theme of the Bible passages being studied has been added in once a month instead of doing Bible study every week. The format of the discussion can be put into various activities whenever possible, instead of merely talking in the groups. This gives time for people to think over how to apply what they have learned from the Bible passage in a livelier atmosphere, as today's culture is more action filled. Grouping follows the nature of the activities. Smaller groups of five to seven people are used for reflection-based activities, like discussion and sharing. Larger groups are used for action-based activities. This method has been adopted in studying the contemplative Bible reading as it blends well with how the study guide is designed.

¹⁶² The goals in transformation and resources used in studying *Contemplative Bible Reading*, *Spiritual Transformation*, and Hypocrisy have been put in appendix VI for reference.

During Bible study time, people are divided into homogeneous groups. By this arrangement, they have more common ground and can share more freely and deeply. All males from age thirteen and up are put into one group. They regularly have around twenty-five people, with seven of them under twenty-one years old. All married women are in one group, including three elderly women in their seventies. They usually have around twenty people. All single sisters are put into one group. There are around fifteen people in the group, with ten of them under twenty-one years old. There is also a small group for pre-teens aged eight to twelve. Last year there were two of them. We put people with different ages together so that they can broaden their understanding of other people and break the barrier of generation gaps. As we are not a large church, it is our vision to keep the strength of a smaller church, which is to be one big family. Some lay leaders have taken turns to lead the Bible study as their practice of the “discipline of study” in Foster’s categories and the “discipline of service” in Willard’s categories.¹⁶³

Starting in February 2006, group *lectio* was practiced once a month following the method suggested by the book *Contemplative Bible Reading*. In group *lectio* time, all the Bible study groups joined together to listen to the Bible reading in the sanctuary. In this way, I could lead all the groups together and guide them step-by-step. No lay leaders were needed to lead the reading; rather, they too could listen to the reading and practice together. During the sharing time, then, each of the above Bible study groups was further divided into smaller groups of five to seven people so that it did not take too much time

¹⁶³Richard Peace, “Classifications of the Disciplines,” assembled by Paul Jensen, handouts from “The Disciplines of Noticing and Bible Reading,” in “The Practice of Spirituality,” Fuller Theological Seminary, October 10, 2006.

to share and the groups did not have to wait too long for one another before listening to the second and third reading. I chose to practice this in the sanctuary, where we have a better sound system and lighting control to create a more contemplative environment for the people to sit comfortably, relax, quiet down, and focus to listen. The way the *lectio* was conducted is reported in Appendix VII for reference.

Structure of the program

From February 2006 to June 2006, we introduced and practiced *group lectio divina* with all the Bible study groups following the study guide by Dr. Peace on *Contemplative Bible Reading*. The original meaning of the Scripture text always needs to be the foundation for learning this highly subjective method of interpretation.¹⁶⁴ This contemplative mode of “listening” to the word of God immediately followed the objective inductive Bible study, as designed by the book. The structure of the Friday night meeting in a month was changed to:

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| 1 st Friday | Supper, then Activities/Application Discussion |
| 2 nd Friday | Inductive Bible Study |
| 3 rd Friday | Group <i>Lectio Divina</i> |
| 4 th Friday | Taizé Prayer Meeting |

From July 2006 to January 2007, upon request of the Bible study group members, we continued with the same structure and went through the discussion guide of *Spiritual Transformation* by Dr. Peace. Once the people became familiar with contemplative Bible reading, they began to be more conscious of the process of life transformation.

¹⁶⁴Peace, *Contemplative Bible Reading*, 18.

Following the design of the study guide, the first Friday was devoted to discussion on the dynamics of transformation; the second Friday focused on the goal of transformation through studying Romans 12 and 13, in which Paul provides a blueprint for how are to live.¹⁶⁵ The third Friday remained for *group lectio*, using the Bible passage studied on the second Friday.

From February 2007 onward, the Friday night group again continued with this structure as people had found it helpful to their spiritual formation. This time, we focused our Bible study on the theme of hypocrisy by going through the seven woes in Matthew 23. This was running in parallel with Sunday preaching on the book of Galatians, as there are similar warnings on hypocrisy in Galatians. When people were looking more seriously into their lives and into living a God-oriented life,¹⁶⁶ they needed to beware of the pitfalls of hypocrisy along the way.

While the Friday meetings changed their structure and devoted one Friday to practice *lectio divina* together, the friendship small groups were encouraged to practice the same in their meetings. Those who have gone through the spiritual disciplines training would take turns to lead the group *lectio* in their own friendship prayer group. When most of the people felt comfortable to practice group *lectio* in their friendship prayer group, then the practice of group *lectio* in the Friday night meetings began fading out in January 2008 as it was no more needed. Starting in January 2009 the structure of the Friday night meeting has gone back to that of year 2000 as follows:

¹⁶⁵Peace, *Spiritual Transformation*, 7.

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| 1 st Friday | Supper, then Activities (anything from games, discussions, group <i>lectio...</i>) |
| 2 nd Friday | Bible Studies |
| 3 rd Friday | Bible Studies |
| 4 th Friday | Taizé Prayer Meeting |

Three-day Directed Retreat for Teens in 2010 and 2011

These retreats were for teens or young adults in our church from age twelve and up during March break or term break, instead of on the weekend. This, then, would not interfere with the other programs and would keep the participants occupied with meaningful activities during their break time. These retreats were also open to outreach to the teens or young adults outside of the church.

There was a retreat for teen boys and teen girls separately to avoid any distractions in this age range. This report focuses on the teen girls directed retreat in these two years since I was directly involved with the girls. The teen boys retreat was more recreational in 2011 than in 2010, as they could only hold a two-day retreat in 2011. This was because the age range of the teen boys in our church has gotten older, including more young adults, so they could not make use of the March break or term break to hold their three-day retreat. I may need to develop another retreat to cater for their needs according to their profile in this coming year.

Goals in transformation and teaching methodology

The goals of the retreats were to help the teenagers and young adults to naturally experience joy and peace in the contemplative mode of life; find out for themselves during their youth that God is real and personal; discover the fun and power in practicing

the various prayer exercises as a way to get in touch with God; pray to God alone and in groups; learn to share one's experience in God or one's inner thoughts and emotions with one another; and experience that life is not what one has. In both retreats, simple food and meals were served as teens in this culture were used to abundance in material things. They did not even know how simple is the simple life!

To build up the next generation of retreat leaders in the church, these retreats were led by three young working adults who had just graduated from University. They had received most of the spirituality training and joined in the practices in various directed silent retreats offered in this project over the years. Two of them had even become church board members after they finished their Serving in Hiddenness training in October 2009. I worked behind the scenes and provided them with all the spiritual exercise resources and planned with them the time schedule. They, would be in closer touch with the teens' generation in terms of their age, were leading the activities up front.

These retreats had to be fun for teens at this age, especially if we wanted to reach non-churched teens. It was through activities and not lecturing that they were led to experience the excitement in getting in touch with God and in doing spiritual exercises. The teens in our church were used to group *lectio*. They helped the newcomers get into the exercises by setting an example for them in sharing their experience of God naturally.

The discipline of service was introduced to let them discover the joy in labor and serving one another and the church as a group. All the chores were allocated to the girls as a form of fun activities, which they loved to do. That included all the cooking, washing dishes, and cleaning up places after use. The girls thoroughly enjoyed sharing

whatever food they had cooked and laid on the table. Different from the boys, just sitting around the table, eating, joking, and taking pictures was good enough for the girls. So eating, though simple food it was, singing, board games, group games, outdoor activities, and watching films were all means used to draw the group together and to introduce them to some prayer exercises in the midst of these.

In 2010, no specific theme was set, as the goals were that they could taste the goodness of Christ through practicing spiritual exercises in the form of recreational activities and be inspired to see it is “fun” to be a real Christian. The prayer exercises on walking the labyrinth, silent reflection in following the light of Christ in the dark,¹⁶⁷ group *lectio*, and sharing over films watched were all introduced and practiced. The film “The Blind Side” was shown to let them see that being a Christian is something practical with a lifestyle of watching over another’s back with a big and compassionate heart.

In 2011, the theme and goals for this retreat were announced to them at the opening of the retreat: that they would learn to listen and continue to open their ears to let God teach them to listen. In listening rightly, their relationship with their family and friends would be improved, as well as their relationship with God. Contemplation with films was fully taught and practiced. The film “After Shock” was about love and forgiveness in human relationships. Also practiced were prayer exercises on “listening,”¹⁶⁸ with a prayer walk in the park, and group *lectio*. Spiritual direction or pastoral counseling were also offered on request during the “free” time of the retreat.

¹⁶⁷ Jacqueline Syrup Bergan and S. Marie Schwan, “Seeking the Star,” in *Taste and See* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 1996), 52-54.

¹⁶⁸ Jacqueline Syrup Bergan and S. Marie Schwan, “Teach Me to Listen,” in *Taste and See*, 94-97.

Resources and structure of the program

Both retreats used the prayer exercises in the book *Taste and See* (1996) by Jacqueline Syrup Bergan and S. Marie Schwan.¹⁶⁹ Both started on Sunday evening and ended with an early Tuesday dinner together in a restaurant after leaving the retreat place.

Silence had not been introduced, yet they did spiritual exercises where one remained in silence. Praises and prayer along with group sharing time were interspersed throughout the retreats. The 2011 retreat took place in our church building instead of in outside retreat centers, and this marked a historic point in our church. More detailed reports on these two retreats have been put in Appendix VIII for reference.

Directed Silent Retreats for Church Board

The church board members are the innermost core of the church. They hold a lot of things in common in terms of their commitment to this church as their spiritual home, their knowledge and experiences in theological and spiritual literacy, and their willingness to play the role of a lay leader to serve the others in the church. They are co-workers with the pastoral staff and among themselves in their pilgrimage. They make decisions and set policies that formed the plans, direction, and culture of this church. They are the key targeted-participants of this project.

When this type of retreat first started in 2004, it was agreed by the board to be accepted as one of the church board activities. It was understood that every member would be committed to join the retreat once the date was decided on, except in case of

¹⁶⁹ Bergan and Schwan, *Taste and See*.

sickness or emergency. The number of Board members were down to ten from thirteen in 2007. Serving in Hiddenness training was offered to train people for the role of church board member after October 2008. At the end of the training, five of the trainees aspired to join the church board in November 2009. Thus, the number of board members jumped from ten to fifteen people starting with the retreats in April 2010. The couples who left in 2005 applied to return to the board after they had struggled through their spiritual issues. Now there will be seventeen retreatants in the coming November 2011 retreat. A more detailed report on the history of the development of regular directed retreats for the board is included in Appendix IX for reference.

Goals in Transformation

Since the board members are the core and decision makers of the church, how much and how well they are progressing in the life transformation process determines the wellbeing and growth of the church. If they are strong in the Lord, the church will not fall. The goals in holding directed silent retreats regularly twice a year were, first, to remain healthy role models by taking a “spiritual bath” to reflect on their spiritual states, recommit to God, and keep their life transformation going. This is to prevent struggles from persisting beyond the next retreat, thereby throwing them into the trap of hypocrisy.

The second goal is to prevent burnout while practicing the discipline of service, since all of them are working adults, many are breadwinners, and are serving actively in church. The retreats provide an environment where they can practice solitude and stay connected with God, even when they go back to their routine after the retreats.

The third goal is to sharpen and confirm visions and planning for the growth of the church. As lay leaders, they need to have dreams and visions for the church before they can lead the church to a better state. The retreat thus provides vision sharing time.

Fourth is to learn more about and in advance what topics that the church is learning or aiming to learn. Assignments given during and in between the retreats are meant to help participants digest and live out what they are going to teach others.

The fifth goal is to keep up their sensitivity to the will of God, through learning and practicing various spiritual disciplines. They are the decision and policy makers of the church's affairs. It is important that their decisions be made in the will and heart of God. So the biblical understanding of the topics covered and prayer exercise assignments given in the retreat aim to keep their spirituality alive in knowing God's will and sharing God's heart for the well being of His people and the advancement of His kingdom.

Sixth is openness to communicate and listen to one another. As the policy and decision enforcers of the church, it is important that they remember and understand why the church is doing what it does. The retreats provide a platform for them to clarify their doubts about any practices and policies that the church has been keeping and to refresh their memory on the rationales and biblical principles that the decision is based on. During vision sharing time, they can practice the openness to speak out, as well as the trust and patience to listen and understand one another. When they have the same mind in doing what they are doing, they can communicate to the church in general and the church will have fewer grumbling voices and less negative energy.

The last goal is to build up unity in the board. As co-workers and fellow pilgrims in church ministry, it is important that their co-working is friendship building and based. The retreats provide much personal reflection time and group sharing time, aiming to foster and deepen the friendship within the board and build up a stronger community spirit. In the retreat, they can feel safe and free to share their burdens and struggles in serving the Lord, and in their personal lives. The retreat time together also provides an opportunity to iron out any conflicts in their co-working experience with one another and with the pastoral staff. As a result, friendship among the board members deepens, and their co-working experience is more enjoyable, up-building, and moving toward unity.

Teaching Methodology

Since these retreats were for the church board members only, the materials and practices catered to their literacy level and their ministry needs as lay leaders. As they were the same group of people holding retreats on a regular basis, the content of the retreats could be built into a series, to meet the needs of the members and of the church.

A theme was set for each of the retreats to draw the board together to learn the same thing at the same time. Under the theme, they found out and shared which areas in their lives needed to be transformed and which biblical understandings in their mind needed to be renewed or deepened. This focused their conversation with the Lord and with one another throughout the retreat, enhanced understanding among the board and built up the group dynamics. Theme-based follow-up assignments were given, leading from one retreat to the next. Other than as preparation for the upcoming new learning, they could also keep practicing what had been learned in the retreat until their life was

transformed a bit by it before the next retreat. Resources used for these retreats can be found in Appendix IX. Themes covered were:

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| February 2004 | <i>How Free You Are?</i> |
| September 2004 | <i>Walking with God</i> |
| May 2005 | <i>The Good Shepherd</i> |
| September 2006 - November 2008 | <i>Service and Secrecy--A Series of 6 studies.</i> |
| April 2009 - November 2011 | <i>A series of themes on church life building-- Peacemaking, Gratefulness, Hospitality</i> |

When learning new lessons, methods of lecturing, group discussion, prayer exercises, and reflection questions were used. Contemplation with film relating to the retreat theme was used occasionally as means to highlight and enhance the reflection and discussion of the theme. Handouts were given in each meeting with all the materials for the lessons and some related good written prayers from the church traditions. Silence and solitude were practiced throughout the retreats except during the meeting time. In the meeting time, the group worshipped in songs, shared over personal life reflection, and shared and discussed visions and plans related to church matters. Journaling was practiced in doing their assignments all through the retreats and after the retreats. They were asked to hand in their journals as a way to make sure that no one was left behind. However their privacy would be respected.

Structure of the Program

The retreat adapts to the needs of the participants through the years as reported in Appendix IX. The general structure of the retreats includes the elements described here.

Day 1 starts in the evening or late afternoon with something light and entertaining to create a warm, relaxing, slowing down, and quiet mood for the retreat. That includes

meals together in a nearby restaurant, and sometimes contemplation with film. The focus of the first evening is on personal, quiet life reflection and taking a spiritual “bath” before God. The group gathers for an opening prayer, briefing on the retreat schedule, and some logistics. Exercises for quieting down and reflecting alone before God are given: possibly praying with some given Scriptures, reviewing the assignments from the last retreat, and praying reflective prayers like the Prayer of Forgiveness.¹⁷⁰

Day 2 is used for learning and practicing the theme of the retreat. Day 3 is flexible; either it is used to continue learning from the theme, or to start the discussion or sharing on issues related to their roles as church board members as on Day 4. The number of sessions devoted to these discussions or sharing depends on the needs of the church and the board at that time. There is no time left in the monthly board meetings for any personal sharing, clearing up doubts and struggles, and community spirit building. These life and relationship issues are, in fact, more important than the church affairs and thus deserve some good retreat time to sort them out.

Since the retreats extended to a fourth day, it aimed to end on a note as enjoyable and warm as its opening by celebrating the close of the retreat in a big lunch in restaurant. Sharing food that everyone enjoys together builds up community spirit.

Practice of Spiritual Direction

Spiritual direction was given at first as part of the training in the Christian living group in 2004. It was not even included in the spiritual disciplines training group of

¹⁷⁰ John Doberstein, ed., *The Minister's Prayer Book* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 33.

2004. It was at the end of the training that they were encouraged to seek direction either in or outside of the church. Since then, most of the trainings in the church, including the baptismal class, have added spiritual direction as one of the components. This becomes one of the in-house ministries being offered to anyone known in the church, upon request.

Anyone who was old enough to get baptized in our church would have come for spiritual direction. The youngest have been fourteen-year-old high school students and the oldest have been one elderly couple in their seventies, who joined the trainings and thus came for direction. Other than those in the training, there have been about ten people coming regularly for direction upon their own initiation since this was first introduced in 2004. I have been directing women while my husband directs the men. For those who were in the training sessions, the session would be strictly for spiritual direction. Otherwise, depending on the need of the directee, the session might shift between spiritual direction and pastoral counseling.

Conclusion

This chapter has reported how this project has been implemented according to the strategy laid out over the past eight years, not counting the preparation time since the church started in 2000. The chapter has reported all the programs that have been offered and how they developed. Details of the programs are in the Appendix for reference.

The outcomes of each of the programs implemented and reported here will be given in chapter 6 of this paper. The outcomes reflected in the life of the people, both the positive and negative, will be looked into. These outcomes will be the basis to assess and plan for the future of this project in chapter 7.

CHAPTER 6

OUTCOMES OF THE SPIRITUAL LITERACY PROJECT

The outcomes reported in this chapter were collected based on the participation and responses of those in the program, as well as on the observations of signs of life transformation thereafter. The negative outcomes collected will remind our church what areas we need to take note of when offering the programs again and which spiritual disciplines need to be practiced more so that no one in our church will fall into the sickness of hypocrisy as Jesus warned. The damaging effects of inappropriate practices have been seen in church history, which led many Protestants to shun the spiritual disciplines and practices until recently.

Participation in the Programs Offered and Responses to Them

Participation refers to fulfilling the requirements of the programs before and after, as well as attendance and involvement in the discussion and practices in class and during the process of the programs. Responses were the direct feedback from the participants. The outcomes collected were reported on a program basis as below.

Training Programs

In the two levels of training programs offered in this project, attendance was perfect. In the spiritual disciplines training, there was one person who missed three of the homework assignments. All the others handed in their homework, including the one person who had difficulty doing it. This was the first time for all of them to learn this kind of prayer exercise and spiritual practice. Thus, the focus was just on whether they tried it, and not how well they did it. In class, everyone followed instructions in practicing the prayer exercises taught and willingly shared their prayer experiences openly, even when it meant conviction of sins, or their inability to get into the prayer. They really prayed for one another as a group. Such active involvement was especially encouraging as the group members at first did not know everyone in the group well, and the demographic spectrum of the group was vast in terms of gender, culture, and age range; but, a community spirit rose.

The Serving in Hiddenness training was a smaller, close-knit group of seven people in which everyone knew everyone else. Some were childhood friends, others blood-sisters, and all have been in this church either since the beginning of the church or since they were baptized in this church. As this was the advanced training on spiritual disciplines, all of them had experience in doing these exercise-approached assignments. Thus, the expectation was that they would put increasing amounts of effort, before and after class, into doing it, not just to fulfill the letter. With that level of expectation, the result was not that they did not do it at all, but just that they could have done better than they did. They confessed that they knew they had not put their whole heart into doing it.

The work they did put their heart into was in depth and transformative. They knew the difference. Such response from them showed that they have experienced what it means to reflect, to wait before the Lord, and to listen to God’s small voice in their conscience. They have experienced what it is to receive an answer from God. It is just that they did not always put it as a priority. In doing it correctly they knew they would have to let God take charge and they would have lost control of how much time to spend in finishing their assignment. This time consciousness is understandable in today’s mindset. As long as they knew what to do and have tasted the real thing, this served the purpose of the training already. How much they will put into use what they have learned as they progress in their pilgrimage is their choice. What they sow, they reap.

Weekend Directed Silent Retreats

The outcomes of the four weekend directed silent retreats implemented in 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2010 will be summarized in the following. Here is the participation record.

| | 2005 | 2007 | 2009 | 2010 |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <i>retreatants</i> | 21 | 20 | 18 | 13 |
| <i>returning retreatants</i> | 21 | 19 | 07- 2 05, 07-11 | 05- 1 07- 2 07, 09- 2 all- 5 |

Table 6.1. Numbers of retreatants in weekend retreats

There were fewer retreatants in the 2010 retreat because this was offered as an introductory retreat while most people in the church had already participated in the previous weekends. There were thirteen retreatants moving on to the five-day retreat in

2008 and 2009 and they continued to move from the five-day to the eight-day retreats in 2009 instead. However, the high returning rate in these retreats shown above reflected that they enjoyed the retreat experience. The retreatants in Retreat 2005 were all returning from the spiritual disciplines training, which had had twenty-one participants.

In all these retreats, there was full and mostly prompt attendance at all the meetings, active group sharing, and participation. All handed in their before-retreat assignments and all followed instructions to practice the disciplines selected for the retreat on their personal time and do the journaling, though the depth in understanding the disciplines varied. In general, retreatants enjoyed most the discipline of silence, solitude, contemplative prayer and reflection, and contemplation with films.

Most retreatants have difficulty practicing the discipline of fasting though it has been practiced since Retreat 2007. So far, only a few have chosen to practice a full fast, a few chose not to fast at all (not for health reasons), while most would practice partial fasting. All those who were willing to practice fasting could come up with a fasting plan, and most could follow through on their plan on the letter level. However, their fasting plan stayed on the level of eating less dessert and so forth. This will be looked at more closely in the “Negative Outcomes Observed” section of this chapter.

Another common area that most retreatants could not fulfill was doing after-retreat assignments. For example, only two of the twenty in Retreat 2007 handed in the “required” after-retreat assignment, though they all enjoyed the retreat and gave thanks for the grace received at the close of it.

Five- or Eight-Day Directed Silent Retreats

These two advanced retreats called for experienced retreatants, so the five-day retreatants in year 2008 were returning from previous weekend silent retreats. At the end of the five-day retreat, one with less retreat experience than the others did share of having difficulties doing the prayer exercises in such intensity, but the others indicated the interest and intention to go further with the practice in an eight-day retreat. They found the practice of silence and solitude for five days was not long enough, so, upon request from the five-day retreatants, an eight-day retreat was offered a year later. There were four who did not continue with the eight-day for various personal reasons, and two of them were church board members.

| <i>retreatants</i> | 5-day (2008) | 8-day (2009) |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>retuning retreatants</i> | 13 (12F/1M) | 12 (10F/2M) |
| Church Board Members | 10 (6 + 4 to be) | 5-day-- 9 10 (6 + 4 to be) |

Table 6.2. Retreatants attending the five- and eight-day retreats

One of the male participants who had attended the 2004 spiritual disciplines training and the 2005 retreat did not join any other retreats offered thereafter. However, his previous experience with the practices was like seed sown in his heart. He joined this eight-day retreat because of word-of-mouth from those who had attended the five-day retreat. At the end of the retreat, he shared his experience of breakthrough in his relationship with God. The seed in his heart brought forth shoots!

Only one meeting was held for most of the days in order to give the retreatants more time to practice silence and solitude. However, the retreatants were so enthusiastic in sharing their prayer experiences that this meeting tended to run overtime. All attended

on time and shared in their turn, yet some indicated impatience in listening to those whose sharing that they found non-insightful or irrelevant. This reflected that they were still listening with their mind and not their heart in the contemplative stance.

Three-Day Directed Silent Retreats for Teen Girls

When this retreat was first offered in March 2010, out of the five teen girls in the same small friendship prayer group, four attended. Of these four teens, two were baptized in August 2009. This small group reached out to one who was just coming to church and two non-churched teens, bringing them to this retreat. As a result, seven high school teens attended this retreat under the leadership of three fresh university graduates, for a total of ten participants. After the retreat, the one just coming to church joined their small group. Another in the small group was baptized in August 2010. The two non-churched teens began coming more often to the church functions.

| | March 2010 | March 2011 |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Teen girl retreatants</i> | 7 (3 non-churched) | 8 (2 non-churched) |
| <i>Young Adult retreatants</i> | 3 (group leaders) | 3 (group leaders) |
| <i>returning retreatants</i> | | 2010-6 |

Table 6.3. Retreatants attending the three-day silent retreat for girls

In the 2011 retreat, there were six teen girls returning from the 2010 retreat, including one non-churched teen, joined by five from the small friendship prayer group. Their returning rate showed that they had enjoyed the last retreat. With two new teens (1 non-churched) joining in, there were eight high school teens under the leadership of the same three young working adults attending this 2011 retreat.

In both retreats, all fulfilled their duties joyfully. They fully enjoyed and participated in the various directed prayer exercises. They had no problem in following the instructions and house rules set for the retreats. Typical teen lack of punctuality was responded to with good attitudes, though.

Directed Silent Retreats for Church Board

After holding directed silent retreats as a group a few times since 2004, the church board decided in 2006 to set this as their official function with the consensus that all in the board were committed to make this happen by paying the cost in terms of time and money to increase the duration and frequency of the retreat. This reflected their interest in and acceptance of this program.

Full attendance at these retreats over the years posed no problem in general. It happened only a few times that a board member, who was struggling with some spiritual problem, would give some reason for not joining the full retreat. However, the member would fully attend the next retreat because he or she was up in the spiritual curve again.

Some adjustments needed to be made when new members joined the board after October 2009. During 2010, the new members were juggling how to join the full retreat with their present work and family schedules since they knew attending these retreats was required to be on the board. When some of the new members were allowed to join but not stay for the full time, the understanding regarding the value of fully attending the retreats was tested and refined in the heart of the old members. These new members were experienced in silent retreats and spiritual practices. They experienced the loss in not joining the retreat full-time. As they shared their learning experience on this, these new

members witnessed and confirmed to the old members their previous conviction of the value of these retreats. After the adjusting and refining year of 2010, the new and old board members were blended and this whole board attended the May 2011 retreat in full, which came back to the normal tradition of the board.

Friday Night Meetings

Attendance was stable at the Friday night Bible study groups when the new pattern of programs was introduced in Stage II. There were one or two people who did come for the Bible study only, seeing the other forms of meeting as a waste of their time. However, if the majority of the people came along and it is something good for their life transformation, we decided to give it a try.

In practicing group *lectio divina*, most of the people followed instructions and moved from step to step. For some who might not have the mood to fully engage in the practice because of struggling with personal problems, they would participate enough to at least say something or ask the group to pray for their struggles. So, to a certain extent, they did participate in the process and helped to build up the group dynamics.

Every time after the *lectio* practice in the Friday night meetings, the participants were asked for any comments or feedback regarding the practice. In the beginning, some expressed difficulties in step 1. After practiced for two or three times, when nobody had difficulty with step 1, they began to express difficulties in step 2. At the end, they found the most difficult step was step 3. From their response, I noticed that they were able to experience the Lord in this practice, as long as they kept on trying. After a while, there

were no more comments or questions received. Fewer instructions were needed. They knew what to do, at least at the letter level.

The focus, then, was on reminding them how to practice every step as it is meant to be. For example in step 2, they have to allow God to relate the words that they have received to specific incidents in their lives. Otherwise, they will stay on their mind level, thinking of related associations and making up a “lesson” that they learned. In step 3, they needed to receive a response from the Lord and avoid making up their own, which would be superficial. After doing it for several times, they would find themselves repeating and would not have taken many real actions. Without improvement in this area, they will not be able to experience the life transforming power of God, and they will end up losing interest in doing this exercise.

It took two years throughout Stage II of this project for the majority in the Friday Bible study groups to understand what this practice was about and be able to continue the practice in their small friendship prayer group on their own. It was then being faded out as a regular program from the Friday night meetings as of January 2008. It was practiced only occasionally on Fridays as a means of introducing it to any newcomers to the meetings, but it no longer needed to be taught in the form of a program.

People participated in the *discussions and activities time* enthusiastically. When it was their turn, they would not stop talking until the leader called “time up.” Young people enjoyed activities in action form more, while older people preferred more quiet but thought-provoking discussions. There were generally many good comments for the discussion session. Most people found this new pattern of meetings in Stage II gave them

more time to think over the application of what they had learned in the Bible study. Many came for the meetings looked for some application insights that they could bring home.

Bible study time is always welcome, valued, and appreciated by all who came to a Word-oriented church, especially when there was only one Bible study a month during Stage II. Sometimes the group would express that the quality of the Bible study was not as good as they were looking for because different lay people were taking turns to lead the Bible study as their discipline of service. However, the Lord still blessed the people and gave them something from the passage, no matter how the Bible study was led.

The topics chosen (Appendix VI) met the needs of the people, in which they saw the leading and providence of the Lord. The book *Contemplative Bible Reading* corrected their whole mindset in approaching the Word of God – to view it with their heart and not with their mind alone. Once they were more conscious of listening to the Lord, then when the Bible studies reminded them of the calling of the Lord, the cost of discipleship, the priorities of life, and the courage of faith, they were more receptive and responsive. Naturally, they looked into their own life transformation process, and many asked how they could be transformed more. Given the goal and vision of the Christian life and community life in Romans 12-13 on spiritual transformation, they were more conscious of the areas in their lives that needed to be changed. Hypocrisy came into this discussion of life transformation at the right time. When there was no life transformation and one just fulfilled the letter of the Word of God, hypocrisy was could be formed. The pattern of the programs returned to having two Bible studies a month after this learning and practice of contemplative mode of life.

Group *Lectio* in Small Friendship and Prayer Groups

Since the small friendship groups have included *lectio divina* in their meetings in Stage II of this project, they found their conversations more focused on things related to God and His Word, and their fellowship deepened. Not everyone in the group grasped the spirit of the practice in every step, yet their minds were tuned to be more conscious of the presence of God in the meeting and in their everyday lives. Naturally people would feel free to talk about their relationship with God and their journey with God.

Those in the teens' friendship groups could follow the steps, and some had very amazing spiritual experiences. They did not need to sit very still before they could receive something from the Lord. It seemed that the Lord has special grace for the children, who are relatively simple and humble in heart, so the younger age was not an issue for practicing listening to the Lord.

Elderly people have more difficulty in following instructions and in listening physically and spiritually. They were more fixed minded and with too many concerns and considerations. Besides, the elderly people in our church had little Christian background. By the time they heard about Christianity and got baptized, many were in their late sixties or seventies. It was hard for them to learn about their new Christian faith on a deeper level. So, after practicing for some time without getting the points across, group *lectio* was dropped from their small group to prevent them from doing something just in form. They were more used to going straight to sharing their prayer items and then praying for one another. So if a person has not learned these practices while he or she still can, when one reaches a certain age, the learning curve drops.

Spiritual Direction Ministry

When most people first came for direction, they were fulfilling the training requirements only. Some would come for spiritual direction for a few years on and off for they had been participating in different training opportunities in the church. Once the training was finished and they requested for direction of their own initiative, then I counted them as the outcome of this ministry. This showed that they had tasted and appreciated it so they chose to come.

So far, those who come consistently are mostly adults who are mature and independent enough to come regularly. From 2006 until now, each month there have been ten to twelve sisters regularly coming to me for spiritual direction, while my husband, who is the Senior Pastor of the church would give direction to the brothers.

Among these regular directees, five have been coming consistently since 2006. These five have established a stable friendship with me as they have allowed me to walk with them through different stages of their lives and in the midst of their various struggles and learning. Three were originally university students and have now graduated and became working adults; one of them has even been married. The other two are married women in their forties. One of these five is returning to the board in October 2011 after leaving the board due to spiritual struggles in 2004. In other words, she has kept coming for direction after she left the board and in her struggles. It is a joy to see her coming back by the grace of God after walking with her all these years. These are the positive outcomes of keeping spiritual direction in a Christian's life.

Of the others requesting for direction, two have just started to come after their training in 2010. Time will tell if they can keep it consistent. Unlike the five people mentioned above, there were more people who would come for a time but then be pulled away by their busyness in life, especially when they feel that they are fine in the Lord. Until they hit the bottom, they came back regularly again. These include four people who have been church board members since this church started. Though the board members have been encouraged and reminded all along to come for regular spiritual direction, a few did not listen as they indicated that they preferred to keep their privacy.

For the teenagers, they were usually too young to have the persistence and discipline to come regularly on their own. A few asked for direction after their Christian living training. I used Sundays for the appointments in order to save them from getting rides from their parents. However, after a few times, they would tend to forget to come back. I chose not to chase after them, nor keep reminding them to make appointments like a mother. I would like to make sure that it is their will to come, if they do come. They get distracted by their school life easily at this age.

Lately there was an exception. One sixteen-year-old girl has asked for monthly direction since December 2010 for she wanted to be baptized in August 2011. She would like to use the direction to keep her on track and get ready for the baptism, as she was also reviewing her baptismal class notes. She was exceptionally mature at her age, partly due to her character, shaped by her family background, and more due to her bad experience of falling into sin for putting God on hold after her baptismal class training in 2009. She had experienced direction when she was in baptismal class, so, when she got

into trouble, she remembered those good old days in the Father's house, and she decided to get up and walk back home. She needed no reminding to come month after month. She was baptized happily in August 2011 as she had wished. She will continue to be under my direction as now she is in the Christian living training since her baptism. It is another story of the positive outcome of spiritual direction in a person's life, even someone as young as sixteen and a non-Christian, and how the bad has been turned into blessing by God's mercy and grace. This was confirmation of introducing spiritual direction to people of any age, and not just Christians, as long as they follow. This serves to let them taste Christianity so that they have a choice to make. If they have not tried it, they do not know enough to have a choice.

When this ministry was first offered in the church, two married sisters on the church board came to ask for spiritual direction. I advised them to find a director outside of the church, since both of them have a good command of English. I meant to broaden their exposure to different spiritual leaders and introduce them to spiritual directors more experienced than myself, but the effect was not as positive as I expected. After a while, gradually both of them dropped out of their direction when they were busy, as many others do. One of them later came back to ask me for spiritual direction. This time, I accepted, to avoid giving out any rejection signal.

From the above, I noticed that people in my church asking for direction tended to base their request on my relationship with them. If they were not on good terms with me, they would not come. For some, their interest or need for direction has not grown to a point that they would seek direction from anyone outside the church that they do not

know. Additionally, one of the practical difficulties for most people in this church is that their first language is not English, and there are few directors that speak their language in Toronto as I and my husband do.

Signs of Life-Transformation through the Programs

The best assessment of a program is to look at how the life transformation of the participants continued after they finished the program. Often during the training, there would be some behavior changes, but time will tell whether these behavior changes are life transformation from God.

The “Outcomes of *Lectio Divina*” have given some good reference points for the signs of life transformation. It is true also that, in practicing spiritual disciplines, “we do not necessarily become happier or more fulfilled, ... but we will know God better and experience God’s love as more of a reality...”¹⁷¹ An Oblate of St. Benedict has also shed some light on the kind of life transformation to look for when a lay person practices spiritual disciplines.¹⁷² I have modified these and focused on the following areas of life.

Greater Consciousness of the Life-transformation Process

After we went through the Bible study series on the topic of “Spiritual Transformation” with the topics studied in Stage II, people were more conscious to set transformation as their goal in their learning and service in the church. The different

¹⁷¹Peace, “Outcomes of *Lectio Divina*,” in *Contemplative Bible Reading*, 101-102.

¹⁷²James Bradley, “Monasticism and Christian Mysticism,” handouts for Day 8, in “Spiritual Formation in History and Ministry,” Fuller Theological Seminary, October 26, 2005.

stages in the life transformation process¹⁷³ became a common language within the Friday group. In spiritual direction or pastoral counseling, I could refer back to these stages, and the people found it easier to locate where they were in this process and share with me their experiences. This consciousness to name where they were in the process enhanced their growth as it helped them to have more specific aim(s) to pray for transformation, and generated a greater desire to move on as it became more approachable.

Enthusiasm in Serving Others for God

Seeking out opportunities to practice charity and warm hospitality to those around them is a manifestation of one's life getting in touch with Christ's life of love, and a continual conversion to Christ. For those who have not increased their enthusiasm after joining the programs, either because they have not gotten in touch with God through the practices, or they have gotten in touch with God but their life has not changed accordingly. Then, after they went away from the "mirror" as James said (Jas 1:22-24), they forgot about their experience.

In the past, most people would serve as much as they could "see" the need and when they had time. Only a few would be committed to serve even when they ran out of time and found it not burdensome. After implementing this project, service in the church became less burdensome for most people; some are even willing to launch out of their comfort zone to serve in new ministries, new roles. Examples are:

- The number of church board members increased from ten people in November 2007 to fifteen in 2009, and to seventeen in November 2011, although the required commitment to be on the board has increased as this project progressed.

¹⁷³Peace, *Spiritual Transformation*, 19.

Thus, there are more people in the church who aspire to serve more actively and be committed to build up this church as their home.

- Whenever the Lord opened doors to serve in different senior homes, we always had enough people to respond to the call cheerfully. It started with singing carols in one senior home in 2004. By 2011, the ministry has grown to three small teams of five, singing and praying by the bedside of the ailing seniors one weeknight a week, and other bigger teams leading worship and making visits in two other senior homes on alternate Saturday mornings. They were blessed with many touching experiences when they launched out to love these “little ones.”
- For the children and teens who have been attending Friday night meetings since 2006 (some as young as 8 years old, while most around 12 years old), they are growing up in this spiritual practice environment and have been learning the same topics and materials as the adults in this project. Teens in 2006 have grown up to be young adult lay leaders. Children in 2006 were being baptized when they reached age fourteen or more, and most of these teens were baptized by 2011.
- This group of baptized teens and young adults are becoming the next generation of lay leaders and the hope of this church. They bear the mark of youthful zeal and are taking up more and more responsibilities and playing more important roles as they are growing up physically and spiritually. For example,
 - Under the direct supervision of the Pastoral staff, these young adults have been leading small teen friendship prayer groups since 2007, running the VBS program since 2008, and leading the three-day directed retreats for teens since 2009. They are leading and supervising the baptized teens to serve in the other manual works in the church.
 - Two of them have even become board members, making decisions for the church since 2009. They have accumulated so much serving experience since their teen years that now they can and are willing to serve in a full capacity. They write minutes for the board, serve as the Sunday school principal, and are leading many whom they used to call auntie and uncle in Bible studies and coordinating their service in the church.

Closer Bonds in the Community

Being able to be friends and having a closer bond in the community is the best test of the strength and maturity of our relationship with Christ; it takes a lot of openness in humility and spiritual practices to love. Given the size of our church and being in the

same church for some time, everyone knows one another's weaknesses. Remaining humble and in love with God and others is a sign of life transformation, which saints like Bernard did not hesitate to state as treatise.¹⁷⁴ St. Benedict also put these down as the "Rule" for his disciples to practice until it became their lifestyle. Benedict saw these practices of the Rule as "an ever-expanding, enriching exercise of love."¹⁷⁵

Out of the twenty-two people in the Spiritual Disciplines Training in 2004, two had left the church due to relationship problems with others in the church less than a year after the training finished. The training had not transformed their lives to be more in love with God or with others. Neither of them had the openness to ask pastoral staff for counseling on how they could look at the issues as God would, or for prayer support to have greater power to love. They just refused to be in the same church with those that they disliked. Another two of the group are having problems in relating to others due to their lack of humility to listen to others. Other than these few exceptions, the rest have generally improved in their human relationships, at least being willing to keep learning to love as Christ has loved them and being open to conviction of their sins, even when they think they are right. God's love is a reality more than a concept in them.

Group sharing and communal prayer were very much part of the programs of the Project, so a closer bond had definitely and gradually been built up in the group. Since Stage II was implemented, at least ten more newcomers have stayed in the church as of

¹⁷⁴G. R. Evans, trans., *Bernard of Clairavaux: Selected Works* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 8-9, 99-143, 173-205.

¹⁷⁵ Anthony Meisel and M. L. del Mastro, trans., *The Rule of St. Benedict* (New York: Doubleday Publishing Inc., 1975), 11, 47-106.

2008. They expressed that they were attracted by this family-like community life. Half of them joined the baptismal class and were baptized at summer camp the following August. Indirectly, this project has helped non-Christians to find God through the transforming community life in the church. Other signs showing our people are making efforts to build a closer bond in the community are as below.

- Since 2009, we have been offering a Chinese literacy class and a Mandarin oral class for young children to prepare them to blend into the main body of our church since we are a Chinese speaking church. Unexpectedly, all those English-speaking adults in our church come to the Chinese class too, and a group of Cantonese speaking adults joined the Mandarin oral class. Their purpose in taking the trouble to learn another's language is to break the barriers to bonding.
- Besides attending the language class, an English speaking young adult who knows the least Chinese language took the challenge to join the Song Team in September 2010. Encouraged by his courage to break the language, age, and culture barrier with the rest of the team, another two high school girls have also joined the Song Team since January 2011. In a multi-cultural church, the Song Team always has to sing and read in Cantonese, English, and Mandarin. The whole team was learning to grasp the accent of the other's language cheerfully. All these little but not easy ways showed that our people value a closer bond and fellowship.
- After holding so many weekend silent retreats, in 2010 we held some weekend fellowship retreats for bonding purposes for the church in general. There was a retreat for sisters, and ten came; a retreat for couples, fourteen people (seven couples) came, with some others coming in for a day visit; and a retreat for the Song Team to which the whole team of twelve people came. Altogether, around forty people have responded to this call. Some have been asking when this kind of fellowship retreat will be held again.

Spirituality Practices Become Natural

For those who come for spiritual direction regularly after their Christian Living training, spiritual direction becomes individualized coaching on their spiritual practices and follow-up on their spiritual growth and life transformation process. They have not received the spiritual disciplines training, but learned a few spiritual disciplines and

practices in their Christian living training. Without being asked to, many keep practicing what they have learned to maintain a regular quiet time with journaling, and/or joined the weekend silent retreats to learn more. As a result, they enjoy silence and have improved in their reflection and meditation skills and. Some began to be able to discern the voice of God and of their own spirit. These are signs that they are learning the language of God, and these practices are becoming natural to them.

For those who did not come for spiritual direction after their Christian living training, nor joined any of the weekend silent retreats offered, their spirituality practices usually came to a stop. The most some would be doing is keeping a quiet time in their own way, which did not bring forth transformative power. Their growing process became bumpy as they easily got stuck in many struggles and strivings. So far, they have lacked the motivation to join other more advanced programs on theological literacy too.

I have also traced the spiritual practices pattern of the twenty-one people who finished this first training program on spiritual disciplines in 2005 and listed them below.

| | | Weekend Retreat | | | | Advanced Retreat | | | Advanced Sp. Training |
|---|---|------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------------------|--------------|--------------|------------------------------|
| | | 05 | 07 | 09 | 10 | 5-day | 8-day | Board | |
| <i>In SD--10</i> | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | -- | 3 | 3 | (1 return) | 3 |
| | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | -- | -- | 1 | -- |
| | 1 | 1 | 1 | -- | -- | 1 | 1 | 1 | -- |
| | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| <i>No SD--11</i> (3 left church) | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | |
| | 2 | 2 | 2 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | -- | -- | -- | (1 left) | -- |
| | 1 | 1 | -- | -- | -- | -- | Y | -- | -- |
| | 1 | 1 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | (1 return) | -- |

Table 6.4. Spiritual practices of those who finished the first training program

For the ten who have been practicing regular spiritual direction in various intensities, all except one have joined most of the programs in this project. Those on the church board have attended all the silent retreats for the board; of those not on the board, five have joined the advanced training on Serving in Hiddenness, and then all joined the church board after the training. Among these five, one left the church board soon after the training in 2005, but continued participating in most of the programs and finally applied to return to the board in 2011. Judging from the frequency at which they participated in these spirituality training and practice programs out of their own accord, these practices must have been enjoyable and become natural to them.

For the other eleven who have not practiced spiritual direction, eight have remained in the church until now. Among the eight, the three church board members have kept their spiritual practices mainly in their regular bi-annual church board retreats and would join other retreats occasionally. The fact that they got involved in some of the programs offered under this project from time to time also showed their interest and appreciation of these spiritual practices at a certain level. For the other five non-church board people, two have not joined other programs offered after their 2007 retreat and one left the board in 2007, then gradually stopped being involved since 2009. The other two did not join any other programs after their 2005 retreat, they were staying as observers in the church as both chose to sort out their spiritual problems on their own. However, one of them suddenly applied to join the eight-day retreat and experienced a breakthrough. The other one left the board in 2005 but returned to serve on the board in 2011 after “hitting bottom” in life and returning to the Father as with the Parable of the Lost Son.

These outcomes implied that God used these programs to speak to people whenever they came to seek Him. After they have tasted the goodness of the Lord through the practices, these good experiences will stay with them and become a lifeline to draw them back to God, though the person may not have responded at first. Regular spiritual direction will make their practices to become natural faster. Their chance of returning to God will be greater than those who have never learned of these practices.

Attendance at prayer meeting also show that the spiritual practices have become natural. Participants in both church prayer meetings became more stable and active since this project was implemented. The Taizé Prayer meeting became our church's tradition with always fifty to sixty people attending. Most participate in the twenty-minutes public prayer, one after another, and everyone sang. After the meeting, some stay behind to enjoy their private silent prayer before the lit candles until I turn on the electric light in another fifteen minutes. The Saturday prayer meeting is held from 8 to 9 a.m. Regular attendants have been steadily increasing from about twenty to thirty people. All of them are attending the Friday night meetings as well, where people would stay to fellowship well passed 11 p.m. It takes a lot of commitment to get up at that hour on the next day.

The level of appreciation for liturgies and silence also reflect how much these practices have become natural for our people. From a non-liturgical church at the start, since the introduction of the Taizé prayer, and then implementation of this project, our people expressed their preference to celebrate Lent and Advent festivals with candle-lit liturgical services, where we have songs, readings, reflection in silence, and some liturgies. It becomes a "must" to have, before adding on other programs.

Enjoying a More Lively Relationship with God

Soon after finishing the spiritual disciplines training program in 2005, seven of them joined the Christian living training program though they are not newly baptized Christians. This new training program required the trainees to have a session of spiritual direction and a session on biblical counseling every month to check on their relationship with God. At the end, half of this 2005 group had come for spiritual direction. These show that they desire to know God better, to live out a more lively relationship with God and with others, and to be transformed more into the image of Christ.

As mentioned above, whenever silent retreats were offered, there were always people coming to them. This also confirmed that our people were looking for a more lively relationship with God. And the high frequency of returning retreatants in each of the retreats showed that they must be enjoying a lively relationship with God during the retreats. Doing all these activities takes valuable time from their busy work or school schedule. When they were willing to pursue the true life more than the world, this showed the effectiveness of the programs introduced in Friday night meetings, since the topics covered on Friday were all leading up to these retreats.

One fruit of this project was acquiring our own church premises in the form of a miracle.¹⁷⁶ From the first we heard of this property being put on the real estate market on November 13, 2008, to closing the deal on January 22, 2009, we got all our funds arranged and settled in seventy-one days, starting from scratch. By February 22, 2009, we had already renovated the building and moved in to hold our first worship.

¹⁷⁶ A brief record of this miracle has been put in Appendix X for reference.

Whenever we recount how we got our present premises, nobody can deny that it was a miracle granted by God flowing out of a lively relationship with God through spirituality practices. If it had not been for the retreat setting, the board would not have been able to be so focused to pray together for this deal for so many days. Other than the board, those in the Serving in Hiddenness training, who were also the core lay leaders in the church, “so happened” to be praying with the same Bible passage around the same time. Together, they made up almost 20 percent of the congregation who were praying for the same issue with the same heart. Through this, God is confirming the vision and direction that we have been pursuing, and He is encouraging us to continue with our project in order to keep a lively relationship with Him.

Negative Outcomes Observed

Negative outcomes show us areas for improvement. This project was implemented as a try-it-out attempt, and our church needed to know how to keep improving what we are doing so that these programs will bring forth life-transforming effects in the people’s lives, forming us into a praying congregation.

One of the negative outcomes is the dangers of over-information. When I looked back at the spiritual disciplines training and the follow-up silent retreat in 2005, I sadly discovered that two out of the five who could fulfill their time plan in having regular quiet times during the training left the church due to their relationship problems with others outside of the training group. This confirmed that keeping the letter of having quiet times or doing the prayer exercises would not lead to life transformation. It might do more harm as one will fall into self-righteous deceptions as did the Pharisees.

Some people practiced these spiritual disciplines once and thought they knew them already, but in fact they had not begun to understand or grasp the spirit of the practices. These people would conclude that, “it was not for me, it did not work, it is no good” It would be harder, then, to speak to their conscience. Spiritual disciplines take a lot of openness to grasp what the practice is really about. For example, group *lectio* sounded easy, but it has taken us two years to practice and to repeat the explanation step by step. Still, not everyone who practiced the discipline would get it, unless they really put their heart into the practice and focused on the Lord.

Those who seemed to be zealous in practicing the exercises while their life quality did not match up became bad publicity to the newcomers, or to those who were already questioning its value. For example, in group *lectio*, when one just says something out of one’s mind but not what one heard from the reading, it kills the excitement and joy of doing this practice, in which one would have received surprises from God and see how well God knows and loves each person. Another example is a person in the group who had joined every spirituality program offered in this project, but whose life has not been transformed much accordingly. Whoever had worked with this person has struggled or even refused to work with the person again. I had to purposely mark down some requirements for coming to direction for this person to make sure that the person, when coming for direction, really meant what was showing outwardly and came prepared. I turned the person down a few times when the person failed to comply with the requirements in order to convey the message that direction was not for just talking, but for coming into the presence of God to seek direction from God.

Another negative outcome is in practicing the discipline of fasting. I have included this practice in all the silent retreats since it was first introduced in 2007. However this is the only discipline that no one has yet mastered as mentioned above. This lack was evidenced by their self-designed fasting plan, which reflected the mentality of dependency on food in most of us. For example, only one chose a normal fast for twenty-four hours, not even for the length of the retreat; one gave the reason of having a weak stomach (but not on any regular medications) and did not practice fasting even in any form of a partial fast. Most chose partial fasts, but many tried to fast the minimum (for example: skipping dessert for two meals, only bread or fruit for breakfast), with only a few practiced the partial fast throughout the weekend.

The practice though have been superficial and limited, yet the people experience God's unmerited mercy and had a glimpse of the value of it. That motivated them to see the need and be willing to continue to practice this discipline. This discipline is meant to strengthen one's self-control over fleshly desire out of love for the Lord. If Christians cannot learn it right, the world and the flesh will keep them from loving God more. This would hinder their spiritual growth in the long run, or in temptations. This outcome showed that it is the area our church needed to work at in the days to come.

After listing the outcomes of implementing this project from the responses and signs of life transformation of those who have participated, I found that the positive outcomes overwhelmed the few potential negative outcomes. Reflecting on these outcomes, I will propose a plan to continue with this project in the next chapter. This plan can, at the same time, avoid the potential dangers in practicing these spiritual disciplines.

CHAPTER 7

ASSESSMENT AND THE FUTURE OF THE SPIRITUAL LITERACY PROJECT

As Dr. Bradley reminded us, as a church, we needed to continue to build up a deeper spirituality in the lives of our people in the current post-modern setting¹⁷⁷ in order to fulfill our mission to engage with this world's culture and in answer to the people's needs. The positive outcomes reported in chapter 6 confirm that this project is creating a rich contemplative environment and culture, which is an ideal nurturing ground for God's transformation of people's lives. People are finding the ability to be transformed by God through faithful Christian spiritual disciplines and practices, so this project should be continued to nurture the spiritual literacy of our church to keep growing into a praying congregation and remaining so. As the church continues with this project, what is good needs to be retained, but the negative outcomes need to be improved.

I have purposely slowed down in offering silent retreats since the February 2010 weekend retreat (as mentioned in chapter 5), except those regular retreats for the church board and the teens. This was to test out our church's interest and need in this area. As our people have been inquiring when the next spiritual disciplines training and silent

¹⁷⁷Bradley, "The Character and Spirituality," handouts.

retreat will be, it is time to resume implementing this project as outlined in the strategy for Stage IV in chapter 5 of this paper.

God has already given us the church premises that have the potential to develop into an in-house retreat center for a good small group size of around twelve people. The church needs to be a good steward to make full use of this resource to develop and improve this project. Some related thoughts for future plans are listed below.

Blend with Other Programs in the Church in the Pursuit of Wholeness

Spiritual Literacy Is Not a Stand-Alone Project

Spiritual and theological literacy have to be in balance and go hand-in-hand before proper spiritual formation can take place, as mentioned in chapter 4. Wholeness in transformation is always the goal. GSCCC needs to hold onto the “good” in the church’s tradition -- its discipleship formation background -- giving God’s Word the highest regard, and continuing to build up theological literacy while continuing with this project.

To work hand-in-hand with those programs on theological literacy, the sequence and prerequisites in joining the programs in this project have to be kept. For example, the first spiritual disciplines training program in this project has to be for those who have finished their Christian living training; whereas, the weekend silent retreats may be offered to anyone who is in Christian living training, depending on the nature and topics of that particular retreat. The Serving in Hiddenness training is for those who have finished their Christian living training, spiritual disciplines training, and the exegetical training, on top of their experience in silent retreats, and their service record in our church.

I also need to take into consideration different personality types that will fit into different styles or forms of spiritual practices, as Dr. Peace mentioned in his *Meditative Prayer*. For example, some find it more difficult to center in God in silence than others. However, if one is serious in knowing more about God and put in the time and patience to practice the disciplines, they can find out which forms of spiritual practices fit their type. No one is to give the excuse of personality type, claiming not to need spiritual literacy to build a deeper relationship with God. It is important to keep this topic in the spiritual disciplines training and to introduce more variety of practices from different Christian faith traditions for people to try out and find the ones that fit them.

When one cannot grasp the spirit, the practices of spirituality become unbalanced and mislead people to adopt monastic and ascetic practices as in withdrawing from ordinary life. Protestant scholars like Simon Holt and Robert Bank warned against this unbalanced way of practicing spirituality.¹⁷⁸ To safeguard a Christian from this fallacy, one has to grow in wholeness. Therefore, whoever continues on in the project and enrolls in the higher level programs will be required to be connected to the church life, aiming to live out the compassionate life coming forth from one's spirituality practices. Also, the small group format, group sharing, and community prayer time will continue to be used. In addition to being connected with the Godhead, Jesus' spirituality is community and ministry based, as Dr. Peace quoting Holt described, "Jesus himself exemplified a

¹⁷⁸Richard Peace, lecture from "Everyday Spirituality," in "The Practice of Spirituality," Fuller Theological Seminary, October 13, 2006.

domestic spirituality.”¹⁷⁹ Being a loner and practicing spirituality on one’s own and only for one’s own virtue already goes against the definition of spirituality. This only leads the person onto the dangerous path of the false self. As Nouwen pointed out, even practicing solitude is not a private therapeutic place, requiring a place of privacy, and of being alone. It is a place of being alone with God, a place of conversion into the image of Christ, bearing the fruit of a compassionate ministry and radiant with God’s love.¹⁸⁰

Spirituality Training: A Life-long Project

In Vennard’s experience, “becoming a praying congregation is not a linear process but a time of unfolding and deepening.” It is a process of wandering and returning. “It is the faithful practice that turns a church into a praying congregation.”¹⁸¹ As Bernard shared, the three steps of the knowledge of truth make for a long transforming process, starting with one’s reason and will. Following Christ is described as a process of climbing up to the way of truth of God with the foot of grace on the ladder of humility (IX. 26). The three steps of truth have first to be sought in oneself, then in one’s neighbor (IV. 14, VII. 19), before the truth is revealed to one in contemplation.¹⁸²

Our church experienced the same in this project. It has taken almost ten years to move to Stage IV since starting in 2004, not counting the time it took to prepare the

¹⁷⁹ Richard Peace, lecture from “Everyday Spirituality,” quoting Simon Holt, “Towards a Domestic Spirituality” (1997), in “The Practice of Spirituality,” Fuller Theological Seminary, October 13, 2006.

¹⁸⁰ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 26-27, 32-33.

¹⁸¹ Vennard, *A Praying Congregation*, 136-137.

¹⁸² G. R. Evans, trans., *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 111-121.

people's hearts to be interested enough to go along with this project, beginning in 2000. The progress of the project is dictated by the life transformation process of the participants. All that a servant of God can do is to plant and water that plant faithfully. Only the Lord gives life to the plants (1 Cor 3:6-7). As God's coworkers, every servant is called to be patient when growing a plant (Jas 5:7), not only patient with others, but also with one's own life transformation, too, as it is a life-long process of refining in holiness.

Plans for the Future of the Programs in this Project

Our church has come to Stage IV, the last stage of our strategy laid out in chapter 5. The individualized programs will be offered upon request. The programs previously offered in Stages I-III will be classified into levels and be offered in cycles. Programs involving the Friday night meetings are no more needed (as reported in chapter 6), as a certain level of spiritual literacy has already been built up among our church people.

Refined from the plan for Stage IV in chapter 5, this Project in the future will be:

| | |
|------------|---|
| Level I | Spiritual Disciplines Training Weekend Directed Silent Retreats Directed Retreats for Teens |
| Level II | 5-Day Directed Silent Retreats |
| Level III | Serving in Hiddenness Training 8-Day Directed Silent Retreats |
| Level IV | Group Spiritual Direction Spiritual Friendship Group Special Interest Group in Ignatian Exercises, or Annotation 19 (individualized) |
| (On-Going) | Spiritual Direction (individualized) |

Individualized Spirituality Programs Offered on Request

Other than spiritual direction, Ignatius' Annotation 19 is another individualized program to be offered on request. The Jesuits modified the method of conducting the Exercises by going over it in everyday life settings since it is no longer easy for today's ordinary working people to be on retreat for forty days.

The person has to commit to spend enough time every day to do the prayer exercises according to the sequence of the spiritual exercises and to meet with a spiritual director in a time span that is comfortable for both parties. As instructed by Exercises 18-20, the director will adjust the pace and material to adapt to the aptitude and fitness of the exercitant. It will be given only to those who have successfully gone through the First Principle and Foundation of the Exercises (that is Stage III of the project) and have shown that they are willing "to offer God their entire will and liberty" (Exx 5-8).

Small Group Spirituality Programs to Be Offered

This Project will keep introducing various spiritual disciplines to new comers and nurturing these spiritual practices for all the Christians in the church. Previously offered programs will continue to be offered in cycles in Level I-III (see Chapter 5 for the program descriptions). Programs in Level IV are offered on a need-basis. The higher the level of the program, the more it is subjected to the life transformation progress of the participants. The time at which there will be enough participants to form a group at a certain level cannot be planned by human mind, nor dictated by human means. All I can say is, if the Lord wills, then we will offer such programs (Jas 4:15).

The special interest group in Ignatius' Exercises is a new small group program for those who have gone through the five- and eight-day retreats as an alternative to the Annotation 19 program. Each year, an eight-day retreat will be held for the same group of people to cover a Week of the *Exercises*. The group will stay in that Week until the majority are ready to move on to the following Week of the *Exercises* in next year's retreat. The few who need more time may join the next special interest group. In this way, these small interest groups will go through the whole *Exercises* systematically, as well as the prayer methods used in Ignatius' exercises. The goal is not finishing the *Exercises*, but letting one's life be transformed through doing them.

Spiritual Disciplines to Be Practiced in Retreats

All the disciplines that have been introduced and practiced in stages I through III will be continued as they have been well received and enjoyed. That included: silence, solitude, centering prayer, contemplation with films, and so forth. However, two disciplines have not been well received or practiced: fasting and the hours of the day.

Practice the Discipline of Fasting

Today's scholars are calling attention to the present materialistic culture of eating and drinking¹⁸³ and of any easy indulgence: pampering the flesh when one should buffet it, feasting and enjoying oneself instead of fasting and praying. Wallis described the present culture of selfish ease and comfortable affluence.¹⁸⁴ Johnson pointed out that

¹⁸³Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 3rd ed. (NY: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 47-48.

¹⁸⁴Arthur Wallis, *God's Chosen Fast* (London, Eastbourne: Victory Press, 1975), 74.

there is information anxiety, obsessing over the right food and the needs of our body, and endless competition with others.¹⁸⁵ In answer to such concerns, Luther long ago advocated fasting as a discipline “to slay the works of the flesh” in his *A Treatise on Good Works*.¹⁸⁶ Also, Wallis quoted John Wesley who advocated that regular fasting provides a regular opportunity for spiritual examination and re-orientation. Fasting tames the desire deeply rooted in everyone’s heart to “establish our own righteousness” if fasting is practiced with a right motive.¹⁸⁷

This is the discipline that our church has not yet mastered. Therefore, more practice of the discipline of fasting would help in our spiritual growth toward being a praying congregation in this above-described culture. However, learning from the Catholic tradition, this practice cannot be an obligation, but will be only for those who are interested to go deeper in this discipline.¹⁸⁸

Practice the Hours of the Day

Praying the hours of the day was introduced in the directed weekend silent retreat 2005. The feedback was not positive at that time because the format of the worship in the Anglican convent, where it was introduced, was unfamiliar to my group. This practice

¹⁸⁵Jan Johnson, *Simplicity and Fasting* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 9.

¹⁸⁶ Martin Luther, *A Treatise on Good Works, Vol. 44 in Luther’s Works* (St Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 74, referenced by James Bradley, Lecture on Luther and Imputed Righteousness in “Spiritual Formation in the Reformation,” Fuller Theological Seminary, October 16, 2006.

¹⁸⁷Wallis, *God’s Chosen Fast*, 32-35.

¹⁸⁸David Bolster, *Fasting: A Fresh Look at an Old Discipline* (Cambridge, UK: Grove Books, 2002), 7.

stood the test of time and has been practiced by all monastic orders of all religious traditions, which proves that it must have a value to be passed on. Especially in the busy city life of Toronto, this practice should be able to help our church people to “live more mindfully to turn their attention to the Spirit” and to become more conscious of “the grace of each hour” as Wiederkehr experienced.¹⁸⁹

I will re-introduce this practice in the November 2011 church board retreat. Then I will hold some weekend silent retreats for our church in general to practice the same. With the familiar format of worship, praying the hours should be an uplifting experience. With practices, hopefully our church people will “change their daily rhythm to conform to the movement of God,” and experience that “by bringing ourselves continually back to remembrance of the Spirit, we truly pray. We recommit . . .,” as quoted by Wiederkehr.¹⁹⁰ This is the spirit of a praying congregation that this project aims to bring forth.

In-City Retreat Center in the Church Premises

When we first discussed the vision for our church to be a praying congregation, the church board shared the vision of having our own retreat facilities to promote the spiritual practices. If we have our own in-house retreat center, we can hold any form of retreat at a lower price and at the convenience of our church people. We can also open this facility to serve others. In Toronto, there are few retreat centers in the city where

¹⁸⁹ Macrina Wiederkehr, *Seven Sacred Pauses* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2008), xiv.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, xiv.

people can arrive by bus and which have a quiet neighborhood in which to hold silent retreats. The high real estate cost makes this way of using the land very unrealistic.

The first step in achieving this dream was acquiring our own premises with the potential to hold silent retreats in February 2009; and it seemed God had answered our prayer. We gathered enough funds to renovate the building into a retreat venue for a small group of around twelve people; that was the second step God had brought us through. This dream was first realized in March 2011 when the Teens held their retreat in our own premises, followed by the board retreat in November 2011. We are now looking into the possibility of building an extended wing with more and better retreat rooms. God has led us to a Christian architect who understands our dream. This is the third step in God's leading. What will come out of all these, when, and how our dream will be fully fulfilled will be the story that we continue to tell our children. We asked for bread and the Lord has given us fishes that are more than we can eat.

Ways to Guard against Holding onto the Letter of God's Word

When wealth accumulated and power increased, the monks and priests were holding onto the letter instead of living according to the spirit of the Rule, or to that of God's Word. This led into all kinds of corruption and resulted in the decline of the Church and Monasticism.¹⁹¹ While the power and value of asceticism and spiritual disciplines leading to life transformation need to be rediscovered and reintroduced

¹⁹¹ James Bradley, "The Rise of the New Orders—Day 9, handouts for "Spiritual Formation in History and Ministry," Fuller Theological Seminary, October 27, 2005.

according to their biblical basis,¹⁹² I as pastor also need to learn from church history and watch out for the pitfalls. This paper focuses on one of the common pitfalls--holding onto the letter of God's Word and the spiritual disciplines as a way to avoid being transformed by God.

The Growth and Character Development of a Pastor

On-going character development is a sign one is practicing the spirit of what one preaches and teaches. As a shepherd leads the sheep by walking in front, the teacher of spirituality courses has to grasp the spirit of what one teaches. Otherwise, it will be the blind leading the blind as Jesus warned, and the effects of the ministry will be weakened. Spirituality is based on experiences, as Bernard stressed, not the letter of the law that one can just repeat from others' writings.¹⁹³ The experience of my prayer life needs to be the foundation from which I teach.¹⁹⁴ If I have not gone in the Spirit and traversed that path, there are things that I would not know exist. Somehow, something will be missing when I pass it on, and the trainee will not be touched nor inspired.

However, it does not mean that one has to be an "expert" in prayer and know everything about spiritual life before one can teach others to pray. This is Vennard's warning of the fallacy of functional atheism – believing that ultimate responsibility for

¹⁹²James Bradley, "Christian Spirituality before the Reformation –Day 10," handouts for "Spiritual Formation in History and Ministry," Fuller Theological Seminary, October 28, 2005.

¹⁹³ Evans, trans., *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 8, 47.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

everything rests with humans.¹⁹⁵ All is of, with, and by the grace of God (1 Cor 3:6, 15:10). What I need to do is keep to the spirit of the spiritual practices and teach with integrity what I am practicing. Then I can be used by God to walk with others, in front of others, and to encourage one another to keep moving towards God.

When Jesus warned of hypocrisy, it was for the teachers of the law (Mt 23:1) who were practicing spiritual disciplines according to the letter of the law zealously (Mt 23:23-24) out of a self-exalted motivation (Mt 23:5-7) instead of love for God and His people. Vennard suggested to those who teach prayer “to open to the spirit and be guided by the needs of the people.”¹⁹⁶ I find this suggestion helpful to purify the self-exalted motive in being a teacher. Other exercises that I will continue to practice to safeguard myself from falling into hypocrisy are the following: be under spiritual direction myself, practice theological reflection mode exercises like the Horizon Analysis Reflection (as reported in chapter 5) and the examen of consciousness, and develop a discerning heart¹⁹⁷ used often with Ignatius’ Exercises to discern my interior movements.

Re-discover Spiritual Direction in the Church Ministry

To avoid holding onto the letter of the law, individual coaching, or direction in the light of the Holy Spirit is especially needed. In the early churches, spiritual disciplines and practices were carried out in the context of mentorship, overseen by a spiritual guide

¹⁹⁵ Vennard, *A Praying Congregation*, 107.

¹⁹⁶ Vennard, *A Praying Congregation*, 134.

¹⁹⁷ J. Veltri, *Orientations*, vol. 1 (Guelph, Ontario, Canada: Broughton Ltd., 1994 revised), 159-176.

– a spiritual father or mother in the desert and in the Christian communities. Wakefield pointed out that, in the Puritan tradition, “Every faithful minister is to every Christian under his charge, ... either a spiritual Father or a spiritual Tutor; ...”¹⁹⁸

In today’s self-sufficient culture, when the relationship between a director and directee is outside of the church, spiritual direction tends to be spiritual companionship more than mentorship. It is good to receive friendship and guidance from outside directors, but it is different from receiving direction in the context of one’s church life and in connection with pastoral care from one’s pastoral staff in the spirit of mentorship. This is confirmed from the outcomes of asking my church people to receive direction from an outside director (as pointed out in chapter 6).

The outcomes in the life-transforming progress of those who joined the first spiritual disciplines training in 2004 reported in chapter 6 also confirmed that spiritual direction made an important difference to it. Thus, if I give the spiritual disciplines training again, I will include spiritual direction in the training, to walk with the learners and help them grasp the spirit of what they have heard in the sessions.

I will continue to offer spiritual direction as an in-house ministry to encourage GSCCC to turn spiritual direction into an on-going discipline in their Christian life. The outcomes reported confirmed that it is a way to maintain the discipleship framework in the church. Church life is the essence of one’s spiritual life. Normally the pastoral staff would know the sheep well, and thus the best persons to direct and oversee the learning

¹⁹⁸James Bradley, Lecture from “English Reformed Spirituality: The Puritan Tradition,” in “*SP 753 Spiritual Formation in the Reformation*,” Fuller Theological Seminary, October 18, 2006.

progress of trainees/directees. It is easier for the pastor/director to follow up on the growth of the directee since they see each other in the church often. Also, coming for direction reflects certain trust in the director and is a good way to provide an open dialogue to nurture a healthy trusting discipleship relationship between the sheep and the shepherd.

Teens of today face a lot more challenges to their faith in this anti-Christ Canadian culture and thus needed more pastoral care in the form of spiritual direction. I will take a stronger leadership role in offering spiritual direction to teens so as to follow up their growth holistically and walk with them. Especially with those newly baptized teens, after their Christian living training, I will take the initiative to make appointments with them instead of waiting for them to initiate the appointment. This way of “respecting their will” is actually being too harsh on the teens and expecting them to be more mature and independent than they actually are.

Teach and Nurture According to the Faith of the Individuals

Knowledge Has to Be Given According to Faith

The first level in this project will continue to be offered to any Christians in the church who are interested enough to fulfill the requirements of the programs. It is to give every one a taste of the goodness in practicing spiritual disciplines in order to promote and to build up a spiritually and theologically balanced culture in the community. When moving on to the higher levels of spirituality practices, I will proceed with care as these are not only for personal virtue, but for better service for the Lord. It has to be in line with one’s interest and desire to be with the Lord, of the Lord, and for the Lord.

In all kinds of spiritual disciplines, especially when they are offered on a church-wide scale, I have to always watch out for the danger of treating it as a ritual with little spiritual content, slipping into legalism.¹⁹⁹ Not only does a teacher have to watch out for one's own life transformation process as mentioned above, but a teacher also has to discern and keep track of the life transformation progress of the learner, being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit as how much and what should be taught and to whom. Overfeeding will ruin the health of a person as the letter kills (2 Cor 3:6).

Marks of Readiness for Entering into Level III and Up

Teresa of Avila used the image of a castle with many mansions to describe the way to progress in this transformation journey. She specified that one first has to enter into the practice of humility before moving to the second mansion of the practice of prayer, which refers to the practice of various spiritual disciplines.²⁰⁰ Without humility in faith to allow the knowledge of spiritual disciplines to transform one's life, knowledge will only make a person puffed up, as warned by Paul (1 Cor 8:1).

So the programs in level III and beyond are only for those who are ready to learn more in their spiritual life. Readiness is seen in one's experience of practicing humility by getting more used to living in the Lordship of God and embracing all in the name of Christ (that is the ecumenical spirit of unity in diversity) as pointed out by Dr. Bradley in

¹⁹⁹ Bolster, *Fasting*, 10.

²⁰⁰ Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, 11-13.

class.²⁰¹ The fruits of humility reflecting people's readiness to enter into a higher level of training will be described below.

A healthy service record is one of the fruits. Any advanced practices will be for those who are actively serving in the church and desire to serve more and better. Service is a spiritual discipline as it is putting what we learn into practice in love and humility, which transforms our life accordingly (Rom 12:3-16, Mt 20:25-28).²⁰² Actually, the goal of all disciplines, as understood by the Reformers as well as the Catholics, is to serve others, for the good of others.²⁰³

Commitment to practice what is learned is another fruit. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Willard reminded readers that all spiritual disciplines need to be practiced well enough and often enough for the practitioners to become experienced in them before using them effectively as part of direct service to God.²⁰⁴ Each level is the prerequisite for the next level of programs as the programs are built on what has been learned in the previous levels for participants to deepen their practices. The higher levels require more commitment to practice. For example, it takes more commitment to practice a five-day retreat than a weekend retreat. When the participants fulfilled the

²⁰¹James Bradley, Lecture from "Catholic and Protestant Spirituality Compared," in "*SP 753 Spiritual Formation in the Reformation*," Fuller Theological Seminary, October 18, 2006.

²⁰²Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 182-184.

²⁰³James Bradley, Lecture from "The Practice of Piety in the Catholic and Protestant Traditions," in "*SP 753 Spiritual Formation in the Reformation*."

²⁰⁴Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 168.

requirement of that level of programs, then they will know better whether they are ready to move on the next level, which requires still more commitment in practice.

An active and cheerful connected life in the community is another fruit as humility is best learned and shown there. Spiritual direction will continue to be incorporated into all the programs. Since I am the director, other than providing closer pastoral care, direction can also test and keep one's humility before the Lord on track. When one lacks the humility to submit to the mentorship/direction of one's pastor, or to one's peer, one has not grasped the spirit of the disciplines that one has been practicing. One is, in fact, refusing to love as God loves and will live in a lot of struggles and conflicts. Instead of going to higher levels of practice, one should be encouraged to first focus on practicing humility in order to enjoy the community life in love. Johnson sees that practicing more will give time for the disciplines to transform one's life.²⁰⁵ It is better to remain in Level II where one can join some silent retreats from time to time and come for spiritual direction to receive some personal pastoral care until one's life is so transformed that one finds joy in the community life.

People with Mental Illness Need Special Care

Mental health is a common issue in GSCCC, living in this post-modern city life in Toronto. Not counting those who have experienced stress attacks, who have mental illness in the family history, or who are living at a high stress level, those who are on regular psychotropic medications make up to 7 percent of our congregation.

²⁰⁵Johnson, *Simplicity and Fasting*, 33.

This area involves special knowledge that is beyond the scope of this paper. But this need found in GSCCC will be the need in other churches as well and calls for further study. Observations gathered from my past experience with these people who have gone through this implemented project were reported in Appendix XI for future reference when I continue to implement this Project in GSCCC. Suffice it to say, based on the outcomes observed so far, the literacy project is helpful to improve the mental health of a person when used rightly.

Creating and Nurturing a Contemplative Environment and Culture

Assessing the outcomes of each of the programs in this project, I see God's hand has been moving in the people's hearts along the direction and goals of the project. Listed below as examples are the practicing of the contemplative Bible reading, silence, and solitude, which created a contemplative environment and culture in my church.

Creating a Contemplative Environment and Culture

The contemplative Bible reading approach to the Word through *lectio divina* will continue to be taught in the training and practiced in the small friendship groups. It will not only help the groups to focus their fellowship on things related to God and His Word but will naturally and unconsciously transform their attitude and approach in reading the God's Word in their own quiet times. When becoming more sensitive to looking for what catches one's attentions in reading the Word, this contemplative mode of life will help practitioners to be more conscious of God's presence in their everyday life. This is the kind of contemplative culture that we aim to maintain as a praying congregation.

Silence and solitude are very comfortable for our church people because of their experience with Taizé prayer since 2000 and silent retreats since 2005. Few need to be reminded to be silent in Taizé meetings or in silent retreats by now. These practices need to be continued in order to maintain the contemplative culture that has been built up.

On-Going Spiritual Practices in Church Ministry

To sum up the above discussion, by stage IV this church has gradually become a praying congregation. There is a general acceptance and even appreciation of spiritual disciplines and practices in developing a prayerful way of life among our congregation. Some of the spiritual disciplines are so well appreciated by the congregation that they have become part of the regular church ministry and on-going practices, on top of the other programs listed in the future project above. For example:

- Our Sunday worship encourages silence and prayerfulness. The printed program sheet states that we have monthly Taizé prayer meetings as our church tradition. Newcomers hear announcements on weekend silent retreat and spiritual discipline training from time to time. During Lent and Advent, there are liturgical candlelight celebration programs.
- Group *lectio* has become a common practice for those aged twelve and up in their small friendship prayer group, which consists of 70 percent of the church people. So any newcomers will learn *lectio* once they join any of the small groups.
- Spiritual direction has already been included in the baptismal class for seekers and in the Christian living training for newborn Christians. Spiritual direction will be on-going as a regular in-house church ministry open to all.
- The church board has included the bi-annual four-day directed silent retreat as a required, regular spiritual practice for board members.

God has blessed the church as a whole with dreamed-of church premises provided in a miraculous manner. God has also blessed those who have faithfully put their hearts

into these spiritual practices since 2004, in that they could enjoy a steadily deepening prayerful relationship with Him and experience His life-transforming power in their pilgrimage. Not that their journey has been or will be problem-free, but God has changed them so that they could benefit from their problems, and He has provided for their needs along the way. There is always hope in all circumstances. These blessings of God on the people have reinforced the direction of this project and are fulfilling the vision of our church to be a praying congregation.

CONCLUSION

An old Chinese proverb said, “It takes ten years to grow a tree, but it takes one hundred years to build up a person.” I am not called, nor can a human do anything, to keep the physical body from dying, but I am called to be in the spiritual care team to keep the human soul flourishing to eternal life.

This project has been conceived and carried out for more than ten years and actually since this church started in 2000. Writing on this project has become writing my church chronicle from the pastoral perspective. Working on this spiritual literacy project has been like walking on a labyrinth. It takes trusting faith and patience to keep walking on the track knowing that the path is well laid out to lead me to the destination. I just need to make sure I am walking on the track and be faithful in it.

Planning and writing up each of the programs is asking the Lord, “Am I walking on Your laid out path?” The programs in this project are not about “things,” but about “human life.” Things can be put under control and be predicted; human life cannot. As long as God has given the gift of free choice to human life, then human life becomes dynamic. Life is a mystery and is greater than the human mind can contain. However, as long as I am on the path and conscious that He is at the center, then I know it will be all right, even though I am not in control of the outcome of everyone’s response to what I am doing right now, to what the evil one is doing in and around each person’s life, and to what God is doing in the person’s heart.

I have been reminded not to be too conscious of the immediate result, nor to be too short-sighted, for building up the church is building up a person. It calls for more

perseverance than a farmer planting a tree who has to bear the hardship of tilling the ground and tending the plant. It takes time for the root to grow deep and long before the plant can grow tall and strong under all kinds of weather, as taught us in Psalm 1. When the root is growing, it takes faith to see what is yet to be seen. It is the same with the spirituality training and practices in this project. It takes time to see the fruit of the effort. All I am called to do is to faithfully persevere, like a farmer who keeps doing what one needs to do to grow a plant according to the call of the seasons, and wait for the Lord to bring up the plant to its full, ordained stature. Each person's life is not mine, nor ours, nor even of oneself, but the Lord's.

Since the ideas of this project were put into action in 2004, the Lord has been providing all the needed resources to make the project possible. As the only two pastoral staff of the church, both I and my husband were able to get into the D. Min. Spirituality Cohort and received the training that we needed to broaden our minds and enlarge our horizons. As we looked around and searched for resources, we were able to find suitable materials that could be used in the programs, which included all kinds of theme-related secular films. Step by the step, the Lord has been leading us as we lead the church along. As God is working the same in the church people's heart, the church in general is willing to follow our guidance, and the church board is willing to support our proposals. It is all through grace and by grace that we could come to where we are and be what we are individually and as a church today.

Looking at the numbers in congregation, we have not seen a significant increase. However, looking at the maturity in each person's life, there are signs that the people are

growing. For example, the number of church board members has jumped to seventeen from ten over the last few years. Most of the non-Christians in the church have become Christians. That includes the children in the church, who are growing up physically and spiritually. We have more young adults to get baptized than adults. Many of those who were children when this project started have now become young adults and Christians, who have gone through or are going through Christian living training, coming for spiritual direction, serving as big brothers and sisters to other children in the Sunday schools, and doing janitorial work to keep the church clean as much as any adults.

Those who were young adults when this project started, if they have remained in the church, have grown up to working adults, gotten married, are leading Bible studies, teaching Sunday school classes, and playing the roles of coordinators and lay leaders to various church functions. Three of them have become church board members. As a result, there are more young adult newcomers staying in the church than mature adults.

The Lord has given us a church building that we can use to further develop the church as a whole, including implementing this project to promote spiritual disciplines and practices in our church. Hopefully, our facilities and resources can be shared with other churches in Toronto too. Since we have our church building, we have begun to hold small-group silent retreats in our premises. More retreats are planned for the coming year. Other than this project, we have increased our sports day from one a month to two sports nights every week, with each for different sports. There are more church people responding than we expected, and there are non-church people coming. Though the numbers are not a lot, yet it is a good small group size to start with.

Time will tell if these are the signs of root growing of the church. So far, there is a spirit of newness and excitement among the people in general, just like looking at a maple tree turning colors in the fall. It looks great when looking at the tree as a whole, but when one “examines” each leaf, it is hard to find a leaf that is spotless and perfect.

Now the need of the church lies more with several middle-aged men who may be struggling with mid-life crisis. Some of them came to the church when this project’s Stage II had been implemented. They did get baptized afterwards, but so far they are not fully coming along in the direction most church people are going. After going through the Christian living training, they did not continue with spiritual direction, and their participation in the church life has not been as much as those young people who were baptized together with them. Hopefully in the coming year, when the spiritual disciplines training course and some introductory weekend retreats are offered, the situation will improve. Or, we need to find out in what other ways the church can walk with them.

Another need in the church lies with the seniors. By now, all of them have become Christians, which is good news. However, they just lack the motivation to grow as they are quite content with their present life. They have no desire to join any training or retreats, claiming that they are too old for these. A few of them came along with their adult children to the Friday night Bible studies, but more of them are just coming for Sunday worship regularly. Reading the Bible at home or keeping their daily devotion time seems to be a bit too much for them since all came to Christianity in their old age. To a certain extent, this will be the reality due to their aging and physical weakness.

However, my husband and I may pray about this and see if there is more we can do for them other than the present bi-weekly small friendship and prayer group.

Since this is an independent church, we are freer to experiment with new programs. Given my husband's and my relationship with our board members, it has not been difficult to get the understanding and support that we needed to try out new programs and to share our direction and vision for the Church. For example, it is a blessing from God that our board has committed to the bi-annual, four-day, directed silent retreat, as this is vital to our continual growth and nurturing to be a praying congregation.

How far can we go and how long can we keep growing in our vision? We will see how things go and develop as God works in our midst. Hopefully, after another ten years, I will have a better report to give on our continual growth as a church bearing more fruit as a praying congregation to please and honor God as "a house of prayer for all nations" in the image of Christ.

APPENDIX I

SMALL GROUP SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES TRAINING

Goals in Transformation

Cognitive

Understand the use, characteristics, and method of some basic prayer exercises, spiritual disciplines, and theological reflection skill. That includes:

- *Lectio Divina*—Daily Individual and Group
- Centering Prayer
- Meditation and Contemplation
- Spiritual Journaling
- Horizon Analysis Reflection and Prayer of Blessing
- Prayer of Worship
- Meditative Prayer/Gospel Contemplation
- Prayer of *Examen*
- Prayer of Distress
- Prayer Styles and Personality
- Information or Formation Approach towards the Word

Horizon analysis reflection is an introduction to the skill of theological reflection. It is an adult transformative learning approach. It helps a person to be aware of how the Holy Spirit is working with oneself through whatever the person comes across. It can be anything from reading to listening or watching. The person asks to simply notice what the greatest attraction or resistance is and why is it so through prayer. The “why” is more important than the “what.”²⁰⁶

Affective

The inner being of the trainee to be transformed to:

- Become more interested in practicing spirituality exercises.
- Have a greater desire to create space for God in everyday life.
- Have more understanding and compassion towards other people.
- Have the need for on-going spiritual direction.
- Become more grateful.
- Be more sensitive to the conviction of the Holy Spirit.
- Become more natural to respond to God with heart, other than with mind.
- Willing to pursue a simple life.

²⁰⁶ K. McAlpin, “Horizon Analysis Reflection Form,” Handouts in Course RGP 3687, Diploma of Spiritual Direction, Regis College, TST, Toronto, Ontario, September 2002.

Behavioral

The functioning of the trainee to be transformed to:

- Be able to be in silence and to have quiet time regularly.
- Create space for God becoming a way of life.
- Be more in touch with one's interior movements.
- Ask for on-going spiritual direction.
- Serve others for God in greater initiative and joy.
- Be able to build up friendship with others.
- Have better listening skill.
- Show Openness towards God and Others.
- Have Acts of Righteousness.
- Be able to do physical exercises.

Resources for the Small Group Spiritual Disciplines Training Materials

Bergan, J. S., and S. M. Schwan. *Love—Take and Receive Series*. Winona, Minnesota: St. Mary's Press, 1985.

Gefvert, Constance J. *From Creation to Resurrection*. Toronto, Canada: Anglican Book Centre, 1990.

McAlpin, K. "Integration for Ministry: Practicum and Seminar." Handouts for Course RGP 3687, Diploma of Spiritual Direction, Regis College, Theological School of Toronto. Toronto, Ontario, Sept 2002.

Mulholland, M. Robert, Jr. *Shaped By the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*. Rev. ed. Third Printing. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2004.

Peace, Richard. *Contemplative Bible Reading*. Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1998.

_____. *Meditative Prayer: Entering God's Presence*. Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1998.

_____. *Spiritual Journaling*. Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1995.

Weber, Hans-Ruedi. *The Bible Comes Alive*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1996.

APPENDIX II

SMALL GROUP SERVING IN HIDDENNESS TRAINING

Goals in Transformation

Cognitive

Understand the rationale behind life transformation in the discipline of service,

Learn how to prevent burnt-outs in serving God zealously

Learn what it means to keep our service “hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:3)

Through studying the following passages to learn:

- Nehemiah’s serving flows out of beings in Nehemiah 1:1-2:18
- Jesus’ heart for others in Luke 8:26-39
- Jesus’ humble serving others John 13:1-17
- The Peril of the Hypocritical Heart in Matthew 23:1-37
- Secrecy as a discipline in Matthew 6:1-8
- Simple, unpretentious service in Luke 10:25-37

Affective

The inner being of the trainee to be transformed to:

- Appreciate the discipline of service in life transformation
- Be sensitive to God’s will and leading in making decisions
- Be more tenderhearted toward the lowly and unlovely
- Ask for Jesus’ humility in putting others before oneself
- Aspire to be hidden in Christ and not look for praises of men
- Aspire to let one’s “yes be yes”
- Ask for the conscientious heart of a Good Samaritan

Behavioral

The functioning of the trainee to be transformed to:

- Continue practicing spiritual disciplines as the lifestyle.
- Serve actively and effectively in joy and gratitude
- Be conscious to have an interactive relationship with Jesus in serving
- Care for others, especially those marginal people
- Serve humbly
- Serve in secrecy
- Serve in truthfulness
- Serve spontaneously

Resource

The training was following the study guide of:

Jan Johnson, *Service and Secrecy—Spiritual Disciplines Bible Studies*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

APPENDIX III

TRAINING ON FASTING AND CONTEMPLATION WITH FILM IN RETREAT SETTING

Goals in Transformation

Practice the Discipline of Fasting

Cognitive. The concepts learned by the trainee included:

- Understand the biblical teaching on fasting.
- Understand the practices of fasting in the church tradition.
- Understand the pitfalls of fasting from the church history.
- Understand the effects of fasting to one's physical body.
- Understand the practical issues in conducting fasting healthily.
- Understand the value of fasting to one's spiritual formation.
- Understand the various degrees and forms of fasting.

Affective. The inner being of the trainee to be transformed to:

- Have the God-centered motive in practicing fasting.²⁰⁷
- Enjoy the value of fasting physically and spiritually.²⁰⁸
- Have greater self-control and abstinence.²⁰⁹
- Have greater hunger for God and His words than for the world.²¹⁰
- Have more love for others and for God.²¹¹
- Have clear spiritual goals in practicing fasting.²¹²

Behavioral. The functioning of the trainee to be transformed to:

- Practice fasting regularly²¹³ and in a hidden manner out of one's initiative.²¹⁴
- Live a more disciplined life in terms of eating and greed.²¹⁵
- Have improved physical health.²¹⁶

²⁰⁷Wallis, *God's Chosen Fast*, 32-35, 72-73.

²⁰⁸Bolster and de Lange, *Fasting: A Fresh Look at an Old Discipline*, 25.

²⁰⁹Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 159-160.

²¹⁰Bolster de Lange, *Fasting: A Fresh Look at an Old Discipline*, 11-12.

²¹¹Joseph F. Wimmer, *Fasting in the New Testament—A Study in Biblical Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 111-112, 114.

²¹²Bolster de Lange, *Fasting: A Fresh Look at an Old Discipline*, 23.

²¹³Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 168.

²¹⁴Bolster de Lange, *Fasting: A Fresh Look at an Old Discipline*, 26.

²¹⁵Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 56.

²¹⁶Wallis, *God's Chosen Fast*, 76-78.

- Be aware of and willing to deal with any inordinate cravings and egotism.²¹⁷
- Have greater humility before God and man.²¹⁸
- Be more zealous to serve others.²¹⁹
- Practice self-denial for others' benefits.²²⁰
- Be able to practice deeper penitence.²²¹
- Practice more of intercession.²²²

Contemplation with Film

Cognitive. The concepts learned by the trainee included:

- Understand the role of human experiences in one's spiritual formation.
- Understand the function of films in working with human imagination.
- Understand the know-how to enter into imaginative contemplation using films.

Affective. The inner being of the trainee to be transformed to:

- Have faith God is in all things.
- Heighten the desire to become spiritually literate.
- Be more willing to make an act of intention to allow God to bring to one a higher level of awareness through the film.
- Have higher awareness of one's inner movements triggered by the film.
- Have higher awareness of God's hand in one's life experiences.
- Experience God's grace to walk back into one's life experiences and tie them into those moments surfaced in watching the film.

Behavioral. The functioning of the trainee to be transformed to:

- Increase in self-knowledge, in terms of how one was formed and is relating to God.
- Receive a clearer conviction as to what might be the next step on one's spiritual path.

Resources for the Training on Fasting and Contemplation with Film

The retreat materials were based on the following references:

Bolster, David, and Anna de Lange. *Fasting: A Fresh Look at an Old Discipline*. Cambridge: Grove Books, 2002.

²¹⁷Wimmer, *Fasting in the New Testament*, 117.

²¹⁸Ibid., 124.

²¹⁹Wallis, *God's Chosen Fast*, 88-92.

²²⁰Bolster de Lange, *Fasting: A Fresh Look at an Old Discipline*, 17-18.

²²¹Johnson, *Simplicity and Fasting*, 33.

²²²Bolster de Lange, *Fasting: A Fresh Look at an Old Discipline*, 18-19.

- Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline*. 3rd ed. New York, USA: Harper San Francisco, Harper Collins Publishers Inc., 1998.
- Hagin, Kenneth E. *A Commonsense Guide to Fasting*. Islington, ON: Faith Library Publishers; Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1981.
- Johnson, Jan. *Simplicity and Fasting—Spiritual Disciplines Bible Studies*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- Ross, Shirley. *Fasting: the Super Diet*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976.
- Wallis, Arthur. *God's Chosen Fast*. Great Britain: Kingsway Publications Ltd., 1979.
- Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of Disciplines*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991.
- Pungente, John J., and Monty Williams, S.J. *Finding God in the Dark*. Boston: Novalis, Pauline Books and Media, 2004.
- _____. *Finding God in the Dark Workshop*. Loyola House at Guelph, Ontario, Canada. March 24-26, 2006.
- Wimmer, Joseph F. *Fasting in the New Testament: A Study in Biblical Theology*. New York: Paulist Press, 1982.

APPENDIX IV

WEEKEND DIRECTED SILENT RETREATS IN JAN 2009 AND FEB 2010

Weekend Directed Silent Retreat on Jan 2009

A directed weekend silent retreat practicing fasting and contemplation with film was held again in the same conference center (which has good facility in showing film) on January 2009. Together there were 18 people joining this retreat. This was offered basically for the 7 people who were in the “Serving in “Hiddenness” training. But it was also open to anyone who had some basic practices of spiritual disciplines. As a result, there were 5 who had not joined the previous fasting retreat in 2007 but joined this one. All the other 13 people were returning from the 2007 fasting retreat, including 6 in the “Serving in Hiddenness” training.

The goals in transformation and resources for fasting and contemplation with film were the same as the 2007 retreat. The teaching methodology for conducting this retreat was similar too, except that a Chinese gospel film “The Miracle Box” was chosen this time. Also, since most of them had learned the teaching on fasting and contemplation with film already, the theories on the discipline of solitude and silence were taught. They had practiced silence in experience, but the theories behind it had not been formally and comprehensively introduced. The definition, value, and risk for solitude and silence were mentioned, quoted from Dallas Willard’s *The Spirit of Disciplines*, p. 160-165. The retreatants were allowed to leave the meeting when the materials on fasting were taught.

The structure of the program was also similar to the 2007 retreat. So a week before the retreat, a brief handout on the different types of fasting was given to those retreatants who had not learned about the discipline of fasting. All were asked to work out their own fasting plan as God led. This set them on the right mindset to get ready to practice fasting in the retreat. And to maintain the small group dynamics, the 18 retreatants were broke into groups of 5 for about 0.5 hour to share and pray for one another after the lecture and at the close of each night. They had the rest of the time to themselves for personal prayer and journaling.

Weekend Directed Silent Retreat on Feb 2010

A weekend silent retreat was offered on Feb 2010, which was similar to the 2005 retreat. It was open to anyone interested to join and meant to be an introductory retreat. Among the 13 people joining this retreat, 7 of them had no monastic lifestyle retreat experience before, 3 of these 7 had no silent retreat experience at all, and two of these 7 were on regular mental medication.

The goals of this retreat were to introduce people to the experience of practicing silence, monastic structured lifestyle, and fasting. The retreat was held on the weekend close to Valentines Day and thus used the theme “Will you be my valentine?” taken from Joyce Rupp’s *Out of the Ordinary*, p. 234. This was aimed to inspire them to reflect on their loving relationship with the Lord.

Resources used were:

Whitcomb, Holly W. "Practicing the Fast." *Practicing Your Path*.

Rupp, Joyce. "Will You Be My Valentine?" *Out of the Ordinary*. 234.

Teaching Methods were similar to the previous retreat; there were lectures and reflection exercises. Group sharing and communal prayer time to foster the bonds were especially needed as this group was more diversified in their spiritual and physical states.

Language-wise, his retreat was mainly conducted in English since all of them understood English and a few of them knew very little Cantonese. Handouts were also in English. In group sharing, they were free to use their preferred language since some of their English was not good enough to freely express themselves. English translation was provided by the one sitting on the side.

Structure and programs for this retreat were similar to the previous weekend fasting retreats, except this retreat needed to keep more in mind the different physical and spiritual needs of the retreatants. All the practices were flexible to match the desire and strength of the participants. As in the previous fasting practice, they chose their own level of fasting. Those who were on medication were advised not to practice the physical fasting, but the spirit of fasting.

This retreat took place in the same Anglican Convent that the 2005 retreat was held. This time they were only asked to join the Holy Eucharist of the convent, as most found it hard to tune in a foreign worship format in their first attempt in 2005. Due to the shortness of time in weekend retreat, we held our own praise and prayer meetings that they could tune in and be touched by the spirit more easily. However, joining at least one service from a different tradition would be necessary to nurture an open spirit. The convent layout and setting, the silence and structured monastic lifestyle were good training experiences for the new retreatants and a refreshing experience for those returning retreatants.

Throughout this retreat, the programs were reflecting on the theme of "Will you be my Valentine?"²²³ and related it to the relinquishment and self-emptying which were the spirit of fasting as they were learning "Practicing the Fast."²²⁴

At the close of the retreat, a short summary was given to relate the importance of emptying oneself to create sacred space with being Jesus' valentine. Then the group shared their plan of creating space for Jesus in this coming year and their thanksgiving for the retreat experience. The retreat ended with a communal prayer. They handed in their journal before leaving the retreat center. Then the whole group returned to church for the Sunday worship.

²²³ Joyce Rupp, "Will You Be My Valentine?" *Out of the Ordinary*, 234.

²²⁴ Holly W. Whitcomb, *Practicing Your Path*....

APPENDIX V

THE 5-DAY AND 8-DAY DIRECTED SILENT RETREAT

Goals in Transformation

The 5-Day and 8-Day Directed Silent Retreats. Both retreats had the same theme of “A Loved Sinner” (1st Week of the Exercises). The goals for both retreats were:

- To retreat from their daily routines to spend a longer period of time to be alone with God in the contemplative stance to discover a new level of intimacy with God.
- To discipline the body and be able to focus on the Lord alone more through fasting.
- To be able to wait on and fully immerse in the presence of God through silence.
- To discover areas of life that have not experienced God’s love.
- To experience a personal liberation to accept God’s love for them and to be loving.

The 5-Day Directed Silent Retreat. Added to above goals, this retreat focused more on the Exercises of Meditation on Sin and our sins in contrast to the Exercises on Penance and Death. The other goals for the retreatants were:

- To be convicted that our world and we ourselves are greatly disordered.
- To think through death and return to God while we can since we all have to face death.
- To appreciate God’s love in Penance and thus to practice on this more after the retreat.

The 8-Day Directed Silent Retreat. The Spiritual Exercises have more materials than we can cover in any one 8-day retreat. Thus we picked various prayer exercises in this stage according to the needs of the retreatants and the availability of time. So, on top of the common goals set for both retreats as above, this retreat had a longer period of retreat time which allowed us to set the following additional goals:

- To nurture the openness and readiness of the retreatants towards God’s love and will for them through covering the Principle and Foundation more extensively. It aimed to bring them to see the importance of and thus be willing to share God’s vision in creation and in their life. Also, when reminded that they were given the freedom of choice by God, they would make good use of their freedom of choice in this disordered world.
- To realize more of their need of God’s mercy and love through repetitions of the exercise: “Meditation on our Sins.”
- To find out ways that they can live with the disorders in their life after the retreat.

Resources

Both retreats used the same references as follows:

Ignatius, Saint. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. Translated by Louis J. Puhl, SJ. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951.

Pungente, John, SJ and Monty Williams, SJ. *Finding God in the Dark*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Novalis Publishing, Inc., 2004.

Williams, Monty, SJ. *The Gift of Spiritual Intimacy*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Novalis

Publishing, Inc. 2009.

APPENDIX VI
Practice of Contemplative Mode of Life

Goals in Transformation

Studying the Topic of Contemplative Bible Reading

Cognitive. The concepts learned included:

- Understand the steps in doing the Group *Lectio Divina*.
- Understand the goals in practicing Group *Lectio Divina*.
- Understand the dynamics between analytical and contemplative reading of the Bible.

Affective. The inner being of the participants to be transformed to:

- Appreciate the contemplative mode of functioning, not only in studying the Bible, but in how they relate to God.
- Have greater interest in spiritual things when they experienced the reality of God.
- Have the desire to learn more of spiritual disciplines and practices.
- Respond naturally to God with their heart and with their mind.
- Be more conscious to listen to the small voice of God and the voice of their heart in everyday life.
- Be more serious in responding to God's call in actions.

Behavioral. The functioning of the participants to be transformed to:

- Be more intuitive to enter into the state of silence.
- Able to see how God can speak to us and relate to our everyday life.
- Able to share with others deeper things in their heart in a way to bless others.²²⁵
- Build up a closer bond with others in the group.
- Experience how God answered prayer for one another.
- Apply what they have learned from the bible passage in their life and be transformed by God rather than accumulating them as academic knowledge.

Studying the Topic of Spiritual Transformation

Cognitive. The concepts learned included:

- Understand the paradigm and dynamic of the life transformation process.²²⁶
- Understand how to open oneself up to this transformation process.²²⁷
- Understand the goals and vision, the core ideas, attitudes, and actions of life transformation in a Christian community as taught by Paul in Romans 12-13 for the followers of Jesus.²²⁸

²²⁵ Peace, *Contemplative Bible Reading*, 17.

²²⁶ Peace, *Spiritual Transformation*, 5.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

- Understand the rationale and value of doing good to overcome evil.
- Understand the challenge and temptations to live in love in the Last Days.
- **Affective.** The inner being of the participants to be transformed to:
 - Be more open and desire to be transformed into the image of Christ and long to live a God-oriented life.²²⁹
 - Appreciate the community life.
 - Have stronger faith and hope in life transformation.
 - Have greater power to live in love.
 - Be more sensitive to one's own evilness within.

Behavioral. The functioning of the participants to be transformed to:

- Experience the reality of life transformation.
- Keep the life transformation process going under all circumstances.
- Be able to build up a closer relationship with others.
- Take less time to struggle to do good in order to overcome the evil.
- Be more able to acknowledge and confess sins as convicted by the Holy Spirit.
- Be able to locate in which part one is struggling with in the transformation process.

Studying the Topic of Hypocrisy

Cognitive. The concepts learned included:

- Understand the definition of hypocrisy in the Bible.
- Understand the manifestations of hypocrisy in everyday life.
- Understand the antidote to hypocrisy.
- Understand the pitfalls of hypocrisy when they seek righteousness.

Affective. The inner being of the participants to be transformed to:

- Be more God-oriented in one's life and more sensitive to when one is not.
- Keep the Law for the Lord, with the Lord, and by the Lord.
- Pursue hidden life in spirituality practices.
- Live in humility for others' good.
- Experience God's grace in keeping the Laws.

Behavioral. The functioning of the participants to be transformed to:

- Have better self-knowledge.
- Have less discrepancy between what one says and what one does.
- Be more used to discern one's motive in fulfilling the Laws of God.
- Be able to accept and relate to others and to enjoy the community life.
- Serve others for the Lord cheerfully.

²²⁹ Peace, *Spiritual Transformation*, 7.

Resources for Practice of the Contemplative Mode of Life

Emerton, J. A., C. E. B. Cranfield, and G. N. Stanton. *The International Critical Commentary—The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. Vol II. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991.

Hagner, Donald A. *Word Biblical Commentary—Matthew 14-28*. Volume 33b. Dallas, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1995.

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Peace, Richard. *Contemplative Bible Reading—A Spiritual Formation Study Guide*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 1998.

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APPENDIX VII

PRACTICING GROUP *LECTIO DIVINA* AT THE FRIDAY MEETING

Before the reading:

- I would review the background of the passage with them to prevent them from straying too far from the original meaning of the text.²³⁰ Particularly for Chinese Christians like our people who had not grown up in the church, they did not have as much biblical knowledge.
- And sometimes I would give them some discussion or reflection questions to prepare them to listen to the passage as suggested in the study guide by Dr. Peace. Usually I would allow some group sharing time over the guided reflection/discussion questions for about 15 minutes to get them started and warmed up. To share with one another in small group would build up their friendship and group dynamics²³¹ and helped them to articulate what they had received from the Lord.
- Then I would lead them to do some relaxing and focusing exercises, and made sure they were quieted down and ready to listen.²³² This part was most important as it determined whether they could “successfully” enter into this contemplative mode of listen to the readings and encounter the Lord in the process.

After the 3rd reading,

- They took as much time as their group needed to share what they had received and went through the discussion questions given by the book and went through the process of group discernment.²³³
- At the end of their sharing, they closed with praying for one another to continue to build up the community spirit.

²³⁰Peace, *Contemplative Bible Reading*, 18.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

²³² *Ibid.*, 36-38.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 53.

APPENDIX VIII

DIRECTED RETREATS FOR TEEN GIRLS

March 2010 Directed Retreat (Sunday afternoon to Tuesday afternoon)

There were 8 teen girls joining this retreat; 2 of them were new comers. Together with the three leaders and myself, the group consisted of 12 people. The retreat took place in a retreat center which was an hour drive from Toronto. The group went directly from the church to the retreat center after Sunday worship in the afternoon, which reduced the pick up time since all the teens needed rides to the retreat. They arrived and settled in at the retreat center by 5 p.m.

To build up the group dynamics, throughout the retreat the girls took turns in small groups to cook, wash dishes, and clean, as well as play board games, indoor and outdoor group games, and walk trails together. They were excited to get adjusted to a new environment and sleep together in various rooms. To celebrate the close of the retreat, the group leaders treated the teen girls to a simple dinner at a restaurant in Toronto. Spiritual exercises practiced throughout this retreat included:

Monday morning: praised and worshipped for 30 mins., walked the Labyrinth and shared.

Monday night: Practiced a prayer exercise of “Seeking the Star.”²³⁴ (After, listened to Mt 2:1-2 about Jesus Christ being our light and prayed together, then went on a silent and meditative procession in the dark following the leader who carried a lighted candle. The retreat center had a walking path in the open field winding through some bushes leading to a big cross over a small hill. The procession to the cross took about 20 mins. And the group stayed in the dark in silent reflection before the cross for 10 mins before returning to the retreat house for sharing. They were asked to reflect and share on why it was like to follow the light of Christ at this time of your life, and how it was like walking in the dark following the light. In closing, Jeremiah 29:11-13 was read to encourage them to seek God wholeheartedly as God was proclaiming to lead them as light in the dark to peace and hope.)

Tuesday morning: praise and worship for 30 mins., then group *lectio* was practiced. After sharing on the *lectio*, they took turns to share their overall retreat experience.

Tuesday afternoon: left for the church to watch and share on the film “The Blind Side.”

March 2011 Directed Retreat (Sunday afternoon to Tuesday afternoon)

There were also 8 teen girls joining this retreat. Two were new retreatants. (One was newcomer, the other was in the church and has reached the age to join this group this year.) Again the group size was 12, including the 4 leaders of the group. Since most of

²³⁴ Bergan and Schwan, *Taste and See*, 52-54.

them were returning retreatants, this retreat was more spiritually oriented. In the opening of the retreat they were told that the theme of the retreat was “Learning to Listen” and that prayer exercises around this theme would be practiced throughout the retreat. The structure and administrative arrangement like cooking and cleaning and so forth were the same as the last retreat.

This was the second year that the same three young working adults led this kind of retreat. I was more free to take in requests for spiritual direction or pastoral counseling on an individual basis throughout the retreat. Some of the teens were baptized throughout the year and had been attending Christian Living training. It was part of their training elements that they came for spiritual direction and pastoral counseling once a month. I made use of the free time to see two of the teens and helped them sort out their relationship problem during the retreat, which went well with the theme of the retreat.

What made them so excited this time was that they were the first group to hold a retreat in our own church building and could try out all the new facilities for retreat use. The retreat started on Sunday late afternoon when the other people had left the church premises. The first program was to cook the dinner, settling into their new rooms with their roommates. Spiritual exercises practiced included:

Sunday evening: To make full use of the church’s big screen and audio visual facilities, contemplation with film was fully taught and practiced with the group. One of the leaders prepared the reflection questions and led the sharing after viewing the film “After Shock.” The theme of the film was love and forgiveness, especially in the intimate relationship between daughter and mother. This was to prepare them for the next day’s prayer exercises on “Listening.”

Monday morning: Worship in songs for 30 mins. Started to work on the prayer exercise on “Teach Me to Listen” in *Taste and See*.²³⁵ It began with group *Lectio* of Luke 1:26-38, and praying to God to teach them to listen as Mary listened. The meaning of “listening” as different from “hearing” was explained. After an outdoor adventure of a four-hour trail walk along the near-by parks and an early dinner, the prayer exercises continued with the group sitting in a circle on the floor in the sanctuary and reflecting in silence for 20 mins with guided questions to find out how open they were in their relationships with their family and friends in terms of listening to their words for them, be it a word of encouragement or criticism, and how that word could be transforming for them. After taking turns to share, the night closed in prayer for one another.

Tuesday morning: Worship in Songs for 30 mins. The exercise on Listening continued by teaching them to listen to the small voice of the Holy Spirit in their conscience. They were led to the park next to the church and practiced Prayer Walk in silence for 45 mins. The group leader would be the time keeper so that they could just focus on their walk

²³⁵ Bergan, *Taste and See*, 94-97.

alone with God. The park had a spacious and well-maintained field, even in winter/spring, which was safe for them to walk around and big enough for 12 people each to find enough quiet space. Besides, there were chairs along the field that they could sit on when they wanted. After the walk, the group returned to the church sanctuary and took turns to share their prayer experience.

After a big lunch, the group practiced the discipline of service. After they had packed up their own belongings, they cleaned up not only their own room but the whole church as a group. This took them the whole afternoon, since some of them had no experience in cleaning houses. By 4:30 p.m., the group left the church for a nearby restaurant and closed the retreat with a celebration, which was a treat from the leaders to the retreatants as last time.

APPENDIX IX

DIRECTED SILENT RETREATS FOR THE CHURCH BOARD

History of Making Retreats a Regular Board Activity

February 2004: When this Project started, a weekend directed silent retreat for the Board was held on a trial basis. So retreats were held again in September 2004, then May 2005, and September 2006 according to the availability of the members.

September 2006: The retreat was held from Sunday late afternoon to Tuesday afternoon. With more time on Sunday and Tuesday, the Board enjoyed it more. A new series of study on “Service and Secrecy” was introduced to prevent burnouts while serving actively. They found the first session in this retreat helpful. They echoed the need to make the retreats a regular Board activity so all could experience the joy and life transformation in service together as Board members. From then on, every Board member agreed to attend 3-Day Retreats regularly twice a year on week days.

May 2008: After experiencing the 3-Day retreat regularly, they felt the need for 4 days so they could really quiet down and refresh their connection with the Lord. The more they practiced this retreat mode, the more they felt the need to attend this kind of silent retreat regularly to keep their connection with God and the more they enjoyed the fruit of it.

Development of Programs for the Retreats

Day 2 of all the retreats would focus on learning and practicing the theme of the retreat in their life. Especially for 3-Day retreats, Day 2 was the only whole day that allowed longer time to drill on the theme of the retreat more deeply. For 4-Day retreats, Day 3 could be more flexible depending on the needs of the Board and the church at that time. For example, the church was considering the need to buy its own premises in year 2008. So the evening meeting on Day 3 of the May 2008 retreat was devoted to discussing and sharing the vision of owning our own premises and how it would enhance our church development. Then, by the November 2008 retreat, it was the time that the Board needed to decide whether to proceed with bidding for a church building that had been put on the market. So the whole Day 3 and 4 of that retreat were spent discussing, praying about, and working out a plan if it was God’s will and leading to do this at this point of time. Not only the theme for each retreat catered to the needs of the church and the Board, but the amount of retreat time allocated to the theme of the retreat or to the discussion and sharing on the church affairs depended on what was the burning issue at that moment.

After moving into our own church premises in February 2009, our church life entered a new phase. To meet the pressing needs of the church, the themes set for the retreat were:

April 2009 retreat--”How to make use of our church building to build up the church life.” Day 1 contemplated with the film “Pushing Hands,” which was about getting along in peace with people of different cultures and generations. Day 2 studied the peacemaker in the Beatitudes, and prayed with the passage in Mark 11:15-18. Based on this passage, the rest of the retreat was to share about and discuss practical issues in the church and using the church building to enhance the church and keep growing into our vision.

November 2009 to October 2010 retreat--the theme of the retreats was "Gratitude and Thankfulness," which went with the 2010 summer camp theme of "Gratefulness." Our Summer camp takes place in August, and the camp theme is the lesson the whole church aimed to learn through that year. As lay leaders, the Board started to work on this theme ahead of the church in general. Prayer exercises were given to keep them practicing this life quality of gratefulness throughout the year. Both Day 2 and 3 were spent reflecting on the retreat theme, and related church issues were raised and shared on Day 4.

May 2011 retreat--Again, following the 2011 summer camp theme, this retreat theme was "Friendship Building." The group contemplated with the Film "After Shock" at the opening of the retreat, which centered on love and forgiveness in close human relationships and blended into the retreat theme of the "role of forgiveness in friendship building" in Day 2 in the morning. Then the rest of Day 2 and 3 were spent reflecting on the practice of "hospitality in friendship building." This theme of "hospitality in friendship building" will be continued in the upcoming November 2011 retreat as a follow up on the camp theme learning for year 2011.

Resources Used for the Retreats

For Retreat February 2004:

Bergan, J. S. and S. M. Schwan. "Set Free" in *Taste and See*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1996.

For Retreat September 2004:

McRae-McMahon, D. "At Home with God," "Just Walking By," "Jesus Prays Through the Night," "See Christ in a New Way," in *Celebrations along the Way*. Ontario, Canada: Novalis, 2001.

For Retreats September 2006 to November 2008:

Johnson, Jan. *Service and Secrecy*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

For Retreat April 2009:

Williams, Monty, SJ. and John Pungente, SJ. "Blessed are the Peacemakers" in *Finding God in the Dark (I)*. Ontario, Canada: Novalis, 2004.

For Retreat November 2009:

Peace, Richard. "Prayer of Worship" in *Meditative Prayer*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: Navpress, 1998.

For Retreats April to October 2010:

Rupp, Joyce. "The Leaf," "A Pilgrim Heart," "Giving and Receiving," "When," "Discover the Treasures," "Autumn Prayer of Acceptance," "Gratitude for the Little Moments," in *Out of the Ordinary*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2008.

For Retreat May 2011:

Barry, William A. *Here's My Heart, Here's My Hand*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2009.

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Whitcomb, H. W. "Practicing Hospitality." In *Practicing Your Path*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2006.

APPENDIX X

PURCHASING CHURCH PREMISES AS THE FRUIT OF THIS PROJECT

Whenever people recount how we got our present church premises, nobody can deny that it was a miracle and flowed out of a lively relationship with God through the spirituality practices of this project. If we had not been in the retreat setting, we would not be able to be so focused to pray for this deal with so many core members together. Those in the Serving in Hiddenness training were also the core lay leaders. Together with the board, they made up almost 20% of the congregation praying for and leading the church with one heart. God granted this miracle in our chronicle to encourage us to continue with the direction and goal of this project and remind us to keep a lively relationship with Him.

On November 13, 2008, the training group was praying with Nehemiah 1-2:18 and learning from Nehemiah's service flowing out of his relationship with God.²³⁶ As a result, God blessed him so that he could rebuild the city wall in 52 days. The group applied the broken walls of Jerusalem to our church's being without its own premises. At the end of the session, the group was praying for Nehemiah's love for our church.

That morning, the real estates agent had informed us of a church building being put on the market for sale. We brought several of our Church Board members to look at the building the next day and found that it was our dream church premises in terms of its location, condition, and structure, except the price was well beyond our reach. That weekend "happened" to be the Church Board's regular silent retreat. We shared this news with the whole board without dreaming that they would have taken the time to check out the building before the retreat, as they were usually busily preparing for the retreat. So, when we found out at the start of the retreat that the whole board had gone to look at the building before they came to this retreat, we knew the Lord was working in our midst and made it possible for us to include this in the discussion items of our retreat.

It "so happened" that the retreat was also reviewing that passage – Nehemiah 1:1-2:18 – which they had studied before, and the syllabus had been fixed in May 2008. After learning from Nehemiah's building of the city walls, the board went apart to pray for God's will in responding to this deal. Whenever some practical difficulties arose, each went to his or her own room to pray. Then, back together, each shared the fruit of that prayer. It was in this manner that we found ways out for all the practical difficulties that we thought of. At the end of the retreat, the whole board came up with a plan and joined in one heart to present this plan to the church to confirm God's leading in this issue.

The congregation accepted every step with joy. It took only 36 days to raise the funds to bid for the building before the deadline. On December 18, 2008, we won the bid at \$2.7 million, over several other buyers. We closed the deal on January 22, 2009, and got all our funds arranged in 71 days. By February 22, 2009 we had the building renovated and moved in for our first worship. We held our dedication worship on March 22, 2009.

²³⁶ Johnson, *Service and Secrecy*, 12.

APPENDIX XI

PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS NEED SPECIAL CARE

For those on medication, I see the calming effects of spiritual practices to help them to be more stable in their mental state. From the results of this project, they were able to participate in the Level-1 programs. However, the practices have to be monitored to suit their state of mental health. For example, in the discipline of fasting, Ross specified that fasting is inadvisable for people with psychiatric disorders.²³⁷ The more they need to see their psychiatrist and the heavier the medication, the less they are suited to intense, reflective, spiritual practices involving the mind. Often, the spiritual practice that they need most is to take care of their body and emotional state by watching out for stress, practicing relaxation exercises, letting go and letting God, and taking their medications. Anything beyond this belongs to a specialized field out the scope of this paper.

For those who are not on regular medication but have a family history of mental health issues, I recommend they fully participate in this project. Right and faithful practices of spiritual disciplines, together with regular spiritual direction, help one to overcome stress, remain in good mental health, and point to a way-out in this stress-filled life. This understanding is based on the successful outcome of a young adult who has a family history of mental health problems, and was on the verge of breakdown. This person was saved by the experiences received through faithful spiritual practices and regular spiritual direction, which I will encourage for others of similar background to have. For example:

- Experiences of being in right relationship with God and being sound minded. It helps one to be quicker to notice what is not the reality and something that is not in order.
- Learning how to draw close to God through various prayer exercises so that one can keep in touch with God under all circumstances and allow God to take charge.
- Reaching the level of spiritual literacy that could discern the Lord's will in the situation and being assured by God's loving presence in the midst of storms.
- Building up a trusting relationship with the director and having the discipline of humility to call for help and be obedient to instructions as from the Lord.
- Being sensitive to notice one's interior movements and emotional states through faithful practice of the disciplines. Once the person notices the signs of stress, the person knows it is time to draw close to God, to rest, and be calmed down.

The person may be different but not less. One may have to put in more effort than others to take care of the body and soul in order to do what one is doing or aspires to do for the Lord, yet the person has no lack in leading a life as full as one's peers, as in this young adult's life journey by the grace of God in deepening spiritual literacy.

²³⁷Shirley Ross, *Fasting: The Super Diet* (New York: St Martin's Press, Ballantine, 1976), 101.

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