

# THE CENTER'S MISSION

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The Center for Parish Development is an ecumenical missional research, consulting, and teaching agency, founded by denominational mission agencies, theological seminaries, and regional church bodies.

**The role and mission of the Center is to discover how the church in general and the local church in particular can learn to discern and participate in God's mission more faithfully and fruitfully and to provide counsel and resources to facilitate that transformational process.**

The Center forms dynamic learning partnerships with those who bring gifts and concerns for the transformation of the church into a missional posture.

## A MISSIONAL SPIRITUALITY

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*We are identifying a renewal and appreciation for the particular spirituality of the Center. Our goal in writing this statement is to express our testimony to how we are connected with and being shaped by God's active presence in the world, in the church, and among Christians personally. The work of the Holy Spirit affects and shapes who we are, what we do, and how we do it as the Center for Parish Development.*

### Introduction

We understand *spirituality* in relation to God's Spirit: God blesses the world through Jesus Christ by pouring out the Spirit who enables us to participate in God's mission to redeem the world. We are beneficiaries of God's generous work, God working in and through us as we cooperate with the Spirit.<sup>1</sup> A *spirituality* also means for us a kind of framework or set of values, symbols, beliefs, attitudes, and practices that we set about trying to make our own in order to be responsive to what God is doing today in the world.

### Part One

The Center's spirituality begins with God's mission. God is present in creation and human affairs actively creating, saving, and transforming life. Discerning and living out the *mission Dei* happens within the context of a people where the Spirit is creating and forming the church. The

Spirit gives gifts and capacities to the church essential for manifesting Christ in and for the sake of the world. This is what we mean by *formation*.

To participate in and support such formation, the Center brings unique and needed personal and professional gifts.

- We appreciate the importance of processes of formation.
- We assume the giftedness of the worshipping community, a sign of God's abundance and generosity for the sake of God's mission.
- Because the church belongs to the Spirit, the church has available all the gifts needed to participate in God's mission.
- We encourage the seeking, surfacing, sharing, and celebrating the gifts and fruit, the resources and capacities bestowed by the Spirit.
- Exercising the gifts of the Spirit in this way indicates how the church experiences, discerns and participates in God's mission.

A key question for the Center's staff, board, advisory community, and clients ongoing is *how do we support practices that foster sharing resources of the Spirit in ways that express the abundance and generosity of God for participating in God's mission?*

## Part Two

While "spirituality" is popular across the culture today, the church in a sense claims a particular spirituality. The church's spirituality has to do with what it means *to be* church. It is shaped by (and shapes) the enacted life of the church, by what the church *does*. And fundamentally, the church's spirituality is shaped by its relationship to the Triune God. In reality then, the church's spirituality will be richly diverse and complementary in its expressions. Church renewal conversations today require recognition of and attention to cultivating faith communities in the church's unique spirituality.

This spirituality is basic and constitutive of the church as a community of the Spirit participating in God's mission, not just a means of reaching other ends. As such it is:

- integrated within the life and practice of the faith community, learned and practiced in fellowship, the communal worship, prayer, conversation and service of the faithful.
- related to the church's purpose as a called and sent community that witnesses to Christ in the world.
- practiced in ways that the church becomes a tangible sign, foretaste, and instrument of the future toward which God is drawing all creation.

## Part Three

We build on the legacy of Center staff who have brought the theme of spirituality to missional ecclesiology.<sup>2</sup> Recently other writers have contributed to the pneumatological dimension of missional theology and its implications for the church.<sup>3</sup> A most encouraging aspect of this emphasis on the Spirit is its ecumenical potential.<sup>4</sup> The Center's ministry is ecumenical in acknowledgement that the Spirit produces simultaneously an extravagant array of differentness and unity in the church.

A missional or apostolic spirituality is in the DNA of the Center and is foundational in all that we do. This feature particularly stands out in the context of contemporary Western culture.<sup>5</sup> The Center's ministry focuses on the work of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's formation of the people of God. As such, we move away *from* the modernist approach of providing primarily information to congregations and *toward* the embodiment of practices that manifest the reality of God's empowering presence in the life of the faith community as its giftedness for the sake of the world. We seek to reflect this personally and communally in the life, mission, management, and governance of the Center, and in all of our ministries with the church. We provide distinctive and vital support for the spiritual formation of church systems and congregations. We seek to reach as many congregations as possible to share these gifts, in ways that will also continue to sustain the Center's ministry.

This is where we find life. This is where we want to be. This is what we are about.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Volf, Miroslav. 1991. *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf& Stock, ch. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Dietterich, Inagrace T. 2006. *Cultivating Missional Communities*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf& Stock.

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<sup>3</sup>Helland, Roger, & Hjalmanson, Leonard. 2011. *Missional Spirituality: Embodying God's Love from the Inside Out*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press.

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<sup>4</sup>Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. 2002. *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, ch. 4.

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<sup>5</sup>Dietterich, Inagrace T. 1996. Cultivating missional communities: Spirituality. *The Center Letter*, 26(8), August.