



Resources for the Third Millennium

Editor's Notes and Disclaimer

*Of making many books there is no end,
and much study is a weariness of the flesh.*

Ecclesiastes 12:12

Whether or not much study is a weariness of the flesh, there surely is no end to the wonderful books and other resources being produced in spiritual formation. Consequently, it has been difficult to decide what to include and what to leave out of this issue.

Priority was given to newer materials over older ones, although it hardly seems fair to call a book published in the past ten or fifteen years “old”!

Beyond that, I relied upon the submissions from readers. There are serious omissions. Most likely, a resource you find absolutely essential will not be mentioned in these pages. Consider any omission an invitation to write a short review (500 words or less). We will continue to provide information about helpful resources.

On my desk right now is a stack of discarded candidates for cover art. Many were images that evoked a mood of looking ahead to the future – a time of open possibilities and new vistas.

But then I came upon this image of a wall painting from antiquity, perhaps from the catacombs, and I knew this was the right image. Something beckoned through it, perhaps Christ himself, holding the sacred book, gently making the sign of peace and blessing, and bathed in a halo of divine light.

We are entering a new millennium, but not a new dispensation. It is still the Common Era – the time that counts off from the decisive event of the birth of Christ. As we step into this third millennium, there is as much to be gained from looking back to the earlier periods of the church as there is to be gained by squinting to see into the future.

How can we bring the immediacy of those earliest encounters with Christ into the faithfulness of this very different age? Perhaps that is part of the motivation behind the current phenomenon of W.W.J.D. – the wristbands and other paraphernalia that remind us to ask ourselves, “What would *Jesus* do?”

But I have to confess to some uneasiness with that very question, which seems to assume that Jesus is in fact not able to do anything – “What *would* Jesus do, if he *could* do something? (Which of course he can’t, because he’s dead.)”

The question for the church, it seems to me, is rather, “What *is* Jesus doing?” Or, perhaps, “What is the Risen Christ doing?” What is God doing in the world through the Holy Spirit, which is the continuation of Christ’s saving work?

When we celebrate the Eucharist we “proclaim the mystery of our faith” using the words, “Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.”

Christ *is* risen. Not *was* risen, but *is* risen. The one who died but is not dead is among us even now, beckoning us into this third millennium of his life in and among us as we are the Body of Christ.

What *is* Christ doing? As we envision the new century, the beginning of the third millennium, where can we sense the presence of that graceful hand of blessing? Where do we find the light and warmth of that divinely haloed head? Where, among all the many writings, do we find Christ offering us God’s life-giving and sacred word?

Rris

Resources for Congregational Spiritual Formation

by Betty Lou Stull

One of the great joys of serving as a member of the Resource Team for Spiritual Formation is working in the local context and being able to suggest materials for study, reflection and the nurture of congregational spirituality.

One pastor articulated the need this way:

“I’ve been using Chuck Olsen’s book *Transforming Church Boards Into Communities of Spiritual Leaders* (Alban Institute, 1997) with my church session. We also have found Melander and Eppley’s book, *Growing Together: Spiritual Exercises for Church Committees* (reviewed later in this article) a simple format to help committees grow spiritually. So now we’re ready to begin making spiritual formation a congregational focus. What are some books that might stimulate our thinking as we move into the congregational arena?”

Here are some of the suggestions I had for this pastor. Several books came immediately to mind. John Ackerman’s *Spiritual Awakening: A Guide to Spiritual Life in Congregations* (Alban Institute, 1994) lays out a tested process for developing the spiritual life of church members. It is practical, readable, and reflects Ackerman’s own struggle as a pastor to help people develop and deepen a vital personal relationship with God.

This approach meshes well with two books by Corinne Ware. In *Connecting With God: Nurturing Spirituality through Small Groups* (Alban Institute 1997) she sets forth a simple plan for developing spiritual formation groups within the congregation. Her earlier book, *Discover Your Spiritual Type: A Guide to Individual and Congregational Growth* (Alban Institute, 1995) develops more fully Ackerman’s emphasis on acknowledging the God-given variations in the ways our personality types affect our approach to God.

Two recent and very helpful books are Howard Friend’s *Recovering the Sacred Center* [see page 6] and *Growing Together: Spiritual Exercises for Church Committees*, by Rochelle Melander and Harold Eppley (Augsburg, 1998). The latter uses a simple format for committee work that includes an opening prayer, three questions for reflection and response, a biblical reflection with discussion questions, and a closing prayer. For those who may be a bit leery of radically different processes, this format is nonthreatening. The book also includes exercises for first meetings, discovering gifts, setting goals, discerning God’s call, growing closer to each other, facing challenges, working through conflict, and celebrating accomplishments. They have good potential as “community builders,” in a format that the authors envision taking less than half an hour.

For entry level congregational study on practices that impact spiritual formation, it’s hard to find a more helpful resource than Marjorie Thompson’s *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Westminster/John Knox, 1995). Yes, it’s been around since 1995, but it may still be an undiscovered jewel for some who are



Hungryhearts

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unfamiliar with it and are hungering for greater depth and vitality in their faith life. It is a book that can be used, not just read. The wide margins for personal notes, the many appropriate quotations, and the book's genuine ecumenicity and inclusiveness make for a rich feast indeed. As the late Henri Nouwen wrote in the Foreword, "Marjorie Thompson simply invites us to create the space where the life of God in us can be nurtured and brought to fruition."

A newer book that addresses our Reformed tradition's call to balance corporate and personal spiritual practice is *Discovering Community: A Meditation on Community in Christ* by Steve Doughty [see review on page 7].

Another hallmark (and challenge) of Reformed faith is the necessity of integrating spiritual practice and social action. George D. McClain and Walter Wink are able to do this in their book *Claiming All Things for God: Prayer, Discernment and Ritual for Social Change* (Abingdon, 1998). They emphasize the absolute need for a "focused spiritual life in augmenting one's social witness." Interspersed throughout this thought-provoking work are rituals that groups can use to help discern what God is calling them to do in the arena of social action.

James McGinnis and Richard Rohr's book *Journey to Compassion: A Spirituality for the Long Haul* (Orbis, 1993) also addresses our caring action on behalf of God's family, lifting up a spirituality based on prayer and service. Reading this book, alone or with others, is like a retreat in itself.

Finally, Ann Reed Held has provided a resource to help God become more real in the lives of families in her study/workbook *Nurturing the Seeds of Spirituality: Families and Congregations Working Together* (Presbyterian Mariners, 1998). This is a resource that could be used for a Sunday morning study for parents and other adults, for weekend retreats, and even in an intergenerational setting. The "Tips for Teachers," "Prompts for Parents," and guidance on spiritual practices for both individuals and families make this an invaluable and practical congregational resource.

Oh, yes! There also is the new *Spiritual Formation Bible* [see review on page 8], which I thought surely I didn't need but which has proved so helpful . . . And on and on.

But perhaps this is enough to suggest the wonderful variety of helpful resources available to us. All of us on the Resource Team are eager to respond to specific queries for resource needs. Give us a call!

Betty Lou Stull is an elder from Wooster, Ohio, who has served in leadership positions at all levels of the denomination. She is a member of the Resource Team for Spiritual Formation.

Spiritual formation is the activity of the Holy Spirit which molds our lives into the likeness of Jesus Christ. This likeness is one of deep intimacy with God and genuine compassion for all of creation. The Spirit works not only in the lives of individuals but also in the church, shaping it into the Body of Christ. We cooperate with this work of the Spirit through certain practices that make us more open and responsive to the Spirit's touch, disciplines such as sabbath keeping, works of compassion and justice, discernment, worship, hospitality, spiritual friendships, and contemplative silence.

*Office of Spiritual Formation,
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*

The Pastor as Spiritual Guide

by Howard Rice

Nashville, TN: The Upper Room, 1998

reviewed by Kris Haig

Howard Rice has written a book that offers more than its title might suggest. Not just a self-help book for ministers seeking vocational focus, it is a broad ranging examination of the nature of faith communities and the roles of their leaders in the late twentieth century.

Observing the generalized identity crisis of churches today, and their frequently unclear or unrealistic expectations of the pastoral role, Rice suggests a model for church leadership that is both new and radically old: the model of spiritual guidance.

Models for ministry seem to rise and fall with some regularity. There was the pastor as evangelist, the pastor as preacher, the pastor as resident theologian and, more recently, the pastor as manager, and the pastor as servant leader. Each of these models captures some essential element of church leadership, but all are missing something, perhaps what Rice is referring to when he writes:

The ability to assist people toward development of a faith that can celebrate and connect with the mystery at the center of all creation and name that mystery as the God of love is the central service that pastors offer to persons.

In this paradigm, pastoral ministry depends less upon “abilities” than upon the authenticity of the pastor’s own faith and faithfulness.

Several specific elements of church life are examined in depth as arenas for spiritual guidance, including worship, teaching, social change, management, and the care of souls. The latter is an especially clear and helpful treatment of the tendency throughout this century for pastoral care to be viewed increasingly through the lens of psychotherapy, and the value of returning to a perspective that is more anchored in “the fine art of attending to God.”

Rice has devoted much of his own vocational life to the preparation and training of pastors, including 23 years as chaplain and professor of ministry at San Francisco Theological Seminary. He certainly knows the terrain of which he speaks and the real need for this book.

Fortunately, in recent years many denominations (including the PCUSA) have placed increasing emphasis upon the spiritual formation of candidates for ministry, in addition to their academic preparation.

One small quibble I have with the book, however, is that it focuses so exclusively on the uniqueness of the pastor’s role, when much of what is said could apply equally well to other forms of church leadership. For instance, the chapter on Teaching as Spiritual Guidance would be helpful to anyone involved in educational ministry, even outside of the setting of religious education. Similarly, the chapters on social change, care of souls, worship, and management offer insights not restricted to pastoral ministry.

Still, the book is perhaps most urgently needed by pastors. Too often, the very people who are most aware of their spiritual hunger have been frustrated by their experiences in their congregations.

Many parishioners who turn to their pastor for spiritual nurture find that “the cupboard is bare.” While they often find other ways to meet their spiritual needs, such as retreats, conferences, or spiritual direction, they still continue to experience a sense of loss or longing with respect to their own denomination or congregation. Rice’s book points toward a vision of church leadership that will transform congregations into places of spiritual vitality where parishioners’ deep needs to connect with the mystery of God will be recognized and nurtured.



In addition to the conceptual linking of spiritual guidance and pastoral ministry, the book offers two appendices that set forth clear and uncomplicated instructions for a “Group Lectio Process” and a “Group Lectio on Life Process.”

More than just a helpful warning about self-care and clergy burn-out, Rice’s book provides a radically different way of conceptualizing the vocation of pastoral ministry. I hope it will be mandatory reading at our seminaries, and a helpful companion to church leaders everywhere.

This review originally appeared in slightly different form in Presence, the journal of Spiritual Directors International. Do not reprint without permission from the author.

Also by Howard Rice:

Reformed Spirituality: An Introduction for Believers. Westminster/John Knox, 1991.

A Book of Reformed Prayers (editor, with Lamar Williamson). Westminster/John Knox, 1998.

Praying with Body and Soul : A Way to Intimacy with God

by Jane Vennard

reviewed by James R. Laurie

Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1998

This book offers a lively, practical, biblically grounded guide to prayer. God is wooing us, calling us into relationship. For the author, prayer is our response to God, “the practice of bringing all of who I have been, all of who I am, and all of who I am becoming into relationship with God. When I bring all of myself to God, I am praying with body and soul.”

In eight chapters rich with biblical and personal stories and wise suggestions, the author calls the reader beyond the polite and pious responses of a “stripped down spirituality” into a “robust spirituality” that is “large, expansive, embodied, grounded, and imaginative.” She describes how prayer emerges from the natural teachings of our bodies and from our experiences of sexuality and sensuality. Through the stories of five people who have experienced their bodies betraying them, she illuminates how, even then, a deeper relationship with God may be nurtured. In chapters on humor, laughter, and playful prayer; praying with our imaginations; and drawing on the many aspects of ourselves, Vennard opens for us diverse avenues for expanding and expressing our lives with God. Finally, she discusses how prayer may come forth in action through work, service, justice-seeking, and care of the earth, and ends with the power of prayer in community.

Three special qualities make this book worth buying and reading, taking to heart and putting into action, sharing with friends and using in a study group.

Vennard is a natural and active teacher. Her approach is clear-minded and practical. Each chapter concludes with activities for reflection that enables the reader to experience first-hand the themes that have been presented. In the back, there is an outline for a ten-session group study.

There is a depth of humor and poignancy to Vennard’s stories and descriptions that lift the heart and enliven the soul. With self-effacing wit and wry observation, she offers a balanced view of the struggles and foibles she and others share in their seeking to respond to God. With gentle and delicate compassion, she honors the pain and heartache that accompany hard times of grief and illness, injustice and suffering.

This book combines deep grounding in the central story of Judeo-Christian faith with a wise and articulate awareness of how often that story has been distorted or made captive to the culture of the day. The author’s use of *lectio divina*, her encouragement to explore biblical stories with the tools of imagination, her guidance in listening to our dreams, her attention to inclusivity, and her sensitive appreciation for other religious traditions all help the reader open the life of prayer to fresh new possibilities.

Praying With Body and Soul is manna for the journey, wholesome nourishment for the hungry heart.



James R. Laurie is a Presbyterian minister living in Denver, Colorado, who serves as Vice President of the Samaritan Institute, working with an international network of 100 faith-based counseling centers in 34 states and Japan.

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the Sacred Center: Church Renewal from the Inside Out by Howard Friend

Valley Forge, PA; Judson Press, 1998

an impression by R.D. Young

Howard Friend wants to lead church leaders and congregations through a process whereby renewal can happen. This sounds at first like just another “how-to” book, full of practical steps to success, but to think that would overlook the deep theological insights and convictions that the author embraces. Start at a deeper level. There is a mystical center to life, which centers on God and taps the source of all renewal. This is what Howard Friend helps us to discover. Half the book is theory, and half is practical application. The two – theory and practice – must be taken together or you will lose half of what the author intends.

In today’s “church growth” era, it is unusual to find mystic theology (informed by Teresa of Avila, Thomas Merton, and St. John of the Cross, among others) integrated with highly practical applications. Some contemporary expressions of mysticism give up on institutional religion altogether. By the same token, many “how-to” books addressing “steps to effective management” or “keys to pastoral leadership” don’t take the time to ask the basic question of life, “What is at the center of it all?” As Robert Frost said, “We dance around the circle and suppose, the secret sits in the middle and knows.” Howard Friend’s book can be distinguished from superficially practical volumes precisely by calling for the courage to move to that mystic center.

But there’s more to it. Mystical centering means many things to many people. For some, it conjures up quirky meanings and odd paraphernalia. Mysticism can be pursued through some Maharishi with Eastern religious styling, using books filled with New Age strangeness. Without disparaging any seeker of truth, Howard Friend is clear that his own call is to be a servant of *Christ*, informed by a deep reading of scripture and a love of the church that God has called into being and continues to lead on its journey. At its truest, this journey will be guided by an inner compass toward a God-directed destination.

The book makes several assumptions that are worth noting. One is that the institutional church at this turning of the millennium is at a crossroads – the boundary between a modern world that is bankrupt and a new world that God is bringing to pass. This reading of our times is close to that of Walter Brueggeman, Stanley Hauerwas, George Lindbeck, Douglas John Hall, and others. It also is consistent with the biblical theme of renewal, transformation, and resurrection in Christ.

One of Friend’s effective biblical exercises is a pondering of Ephesians 3:14-19 as a way of moving toward your inner self in order to better connect with God in Christ and become aware of possibilities of a new creation. In today’s anxious climate, when mainline denominations are so worried about membership decline, it is refreshing to find a book that refuses to talk about numbers before it has discussed renewal in Christ.

A second assumption of the book is that a church’s life is much like an individual’s life – each has a sacred center. The author describes group exercises that will help a congregation’s members and leaders to discover that center. This discovery is critical, and is the difference between leaders who experience burn-out and cynicism – where “the same wheel deepens the same rut year after year – and leaders who are ready for joyful surprises. If you follow the author’s wise suggestions, you will find the courage to ask the right questions and move accordingly.

The book includes a wealth of exercises that are both simple and profound enough to sustain a worthwhile retreat, such as the exercises in the chapter on “Strategic Planning from the Sacred Center.” Even better, why not contact the author and invite him to lead the retreat?

Unlike most books I read, I know the author of this one. He embodies his theology and offers what has worked for him and for the churches he has served. He has had the courage to act on his theological beliefs. A few years ago, he had the courage to leave a “successful” church that he had served for 23 years in order to more fully devote himself to his ministry in this broader context. In his own life he has experienced the call to undertake an “Exodus” journey, and his story is an example of what it means to live “from the inside out.”

I have found his wisdom helpful in my own parish, and can most heartily recommend both the book and its author to any congregation that wants to feel the excitement of a new start, full of surprises and ready for a new century and indeed a new millennium.

R. D. Young recently retired from being pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Westchester, Pennsylvania.

Recovering the Sacred Center can be ordered directly from Howard Friend, the founder and director of the Parish Empowerment Network. He can be reached at 610-429-3933.



The following are just a few of the many wonderful books to be found in the most recent catalogue from Upper Room Books in Nashville, who graciously permitted us to reprint their descriptive information. They can be contacted at 1-800-972-0433 or through their web site and online bookstore at www.upperroom.org/bookstore/

Discerning God's Will Together

A Spiritual Practice for the Church

by Danny E. Morris and Charles Olsen

Imagine making decisions about your church based on the question, "God, is this your will?" Taking this as its premise, Discerning God's Will Together offers a fresh approach to decision making based on church traditions and biblical examples. A group of any size can use this step-by-step method.

Prior to his retirement, Danny Morris was director of developing ministries of The Upper Room. Charles Olsen is director of Worshipful-Work in Kansas City, Missouri.



Forming Faith in a Hurricane

A Spiritual Primer for Daily Living

by N. Graham Standish

As life swirls around us, many Christians seek a foundation in faith that will sustain and nurture them through the storm. Standish provides a primer for forming and deepening a spiritual core that can withstand life's competing demands. The book examines the nature of faith, deepening our prayer life, finding strength in spiritual communities, and responding with compassion. Scriptural, reflective, and prayerful questions guide readers and offer possibilities for small-group discussion.

N. Graham Standish is a Presbyterian pastor in Zelionople, Pennsylvania, and has worked as a pastoral counselor and retreat leader.



Discovering Community

A Meditation on Community in Christ

by Stephen Doughty

Starting as an experiment in his devotional life, Doughty reflected daily on the question, "Where in the past week have I experienced community in Christ?" This time of reflection produced a new excitement, a renewed sense of personal calling, and a revitalized commitment to the mission and ministry of the church. In Discovering Community, Doughty looks at what it means to be a part of the community of Christ through a number of different lenses, focusing on the diverse ways and places in which Christian disciples grow. Exercises in each chapter invite us to consider our own sense of community. Questions for reflection and meditation may be used in individual or group settings.

Stephen Doughty is executive presbytery of Lake Michigan Presbytery, and a frequent contributor to the journal Weavings.

Gathered in the Word

Praying the Scripture in Small Groups

by Norvene Vest

Gathered in the Word offers a step-by-step approach to lectio divina or divine reading – a form of Bible reading. Vest explains that this type of reading leads to a deeper understanding of scripture as well as a deeper relationship with God. Intended primarily for congregational or group leaders, this book also helps individuals who wish to read the Bible for spiritual insight.

Norvene Vest is a spiritual director and retreat leader, and the author of several books.



Feed My Shepherds

Spiritual Healing and Renewal

for Those in Christian Leadership

by Flora Slosson Wuellner

In a powerful and welcome book, Wuellner looks at the shepherd's need to be spiritually fed, giving much needed focus to the struggles and burnout of those in caregiving ministries. Wuellner uses the healing relationship between the risen Jesus and his disciples as a model for the inner healing and renewal of today's Christian leaders, both lay and clergy.

Flora Slosson Wuellner is a minister of the United Church of Christ and retired professor of ministry at Pacific School of Religion.



Beginning Prayer

by John Killinger

This best-selling "how-to" book on prayer is written for those of us who know little about the experience of prayer but who greatly desire to learn. Killinger examines the attitude of prayer, times for praying, places for praying, the posture of prayer, and the mood of prayer.

John Killinger is a former professor of Religion and Culture at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama.

Journeyman

A Spiritual Guide for Men

(and for Women Who Want to Understand Them)

by Kent Ira Groff

Journeyman encourages readers to make the connection between being men and being Christian, integrating the feeling of power and the power of feeling.

Exploring men's particular wounds and the promise of healing through Christ, *Journeyman* offers biblical examples, the author's own stories and those of other men, prayer exercises, meditations, and reflection questions.

Kent Groff, a Presbyterian minister, is founder and director of Oasis Ministries for Spiritual Development, in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania.



The Spiritual Formation Bible

Growing in Intimacy With God

Through Scripture

Zondervan 1999

A spiritual renaissance is taking place as believers rediscover the spiritual disciplines that Christians have practiced for hundreds of years. *The Spiritual Formation Bible* is a Bible for both the head and the heart. Delving into the pages of this Bible will make it possible for you to:

- + read scripture prayerfully, expectantly, and in ways that will touch you deeply;
- + incorporate the riches of classical spiritual wisdom into your prayer and devotional times;
- + reflect on stories and treasured passages of scripture until they come alive and speak to your everyday situation;
- + help you read the Bible while asking, "What is God saying to me in this passage?"

Praying with Body and Soul

A Way to Intimacy with God *reviewed by James R. Laurie*

by Jane Vennard

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