

What We Believe & How We Live



TRANSFORMING CENTER

Strengthen The Soul Of Your Leadership

What we believe about our faith

The ministry of the Transforming Center is grounded in Scripture and Biblical theology, animated by a Trinitarian approach to the spiritual life, and informed by the richness and diversity of our Christian heritage. The Transforming Center affirms the Apostles' Creed as our statement of faith.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
Creator of Heaven and Earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, the Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
And was born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, died and was buried.
He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
And is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
The holy catholic Church,
The communion of saints,
The forgiveness of sins,
The resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

What we believe about spiritual transformation

A Biblical and Theological Perspective

CHRIST FORMED IN US

Spiritual transformation is the process by which Christ is formed in us ...for the glory of God, for the abundance of our own lives, and for the sake of others. (Galatians 4:19; Romans 8:29; Romans 12:1, 2) The possibility that human beings can be transformed to such an extent that they image Christ is central to the message of the Gospel and therefore it is central to the mission of the Church. Spiritual transformation in the lives of redeemed people is a testimony to the power of the Gospel and it results in an increasing capacity to discern and do the will of God. (Romans 12:2)

RENEWING THE MIND

It is God's will and delight that we actively resist being conformed to this world and seek instead to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. The Greek word *nous* (translated mind in Romans 12:2) includes but goes far beyond intellectual or cognitive knowing. It denotes the seat of reflective consciousness and encompasses a person's faculties of perception and understanding as well as the patterns of feeling, judging and determining that shape our actions and responses in the world. Thus, any approach to transformation that seeks to bring about real change must go beyond merely grasping information at the cognitive level to full knowledge that impacts our deepest inner orientations and trust structures, false-self patterns, and any obstacles that prevent us from fully surrendering to God. This kind of change involves clear teaching about the nature of the Christian life, concrete practices that help us internalize truth in ways that change how we respond in the world, and community that supports and catalyzes the process.

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

Spiritual transformation is something of a paradox in that it is quite natural for Christ followers to grow and to change just as it is natural for human beings to grow from infancy to childhood to adolescence to adulthood. The seed of the Christ life ("everything we need for life and godliness") is planted within us at salvation and if the conditions are right, that seed will grow and flourish. However, the process of transformation is also supernatural in that it is something only God can accomplish in our lives through the work of the Holy Spirit. The third person of the Trinity has been given as our advocate, teacher and counselor to lead us into truth as we are able to bear it (John 15 and 16) and to communicate the depths of God. (I Corinthians 2:9-16) We can find ways to open to this process of transformation as it is guided by the Spirit, but we cannot control it or make it happen ourselves. The wind of the Spirit blows where it will. (John 3:8)

Paul alludes to the paradox of the natural and the supernatural by using two metaphors. The first is the process by which an embryo is formed in its mother's womb: *I am in labor until Christ be formed (morphoo) in you*. Even though human beings have their part to play in conceiving and giving birth to children--and even though we think we understand certain facts about it--there is something that remains a mystery. No matter how much we think we understand it, the process of conception and birth is always a miracle. It is something God does. Every single time.

It is the same with the process of metamorphosis, to which Paul refers in Romans 12:2. *Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed (metamorphoo) by the renewing of your mind*. The Greek work *metamorphoo* refers to the process by which a caterpillar enters into the darkness of the cocoon in order to emerge, eventually, changed almost beyond recognition. Through the process of metamorphosis, the caterpillar transcends its previous existence to take on a completely different form with a completely different set of capacities. The caterpillar's transformation seems to have little to do with cognitive understanding about the process of metamorphosis; something more primal and God-ordained is at work.

EMBRACING MYSTERY

Both the formation of the embryo in its mother's womb and the transformation of a caterpillar in the cocoon are natural phenomena in the physical world but there is also something about it that is a God-thing. These metaphors place the process of spiritual transformation squarely in the category we call mystery—something outside the range of normal human activity and understanding that can only be understood through divine revelation and brought about by divine activity.

In fact, everything we affirm as central to our Christian faith is somewhere in Scripture referred to as a mystery. The mystery of God (I Corinthians 2:1)...We are servants and stewards of God's mysteries (I Corinthians 4:1)...The mystery of God's will (Ephesians 1:9),

the mystery of Christ (Ephesians 3:4)...the mystery of the Gospel (Ephesians 6:19), the mystery of marriage which is applied to Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:31, 32)...the mystery of Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27)...God's mystery which is Christ himself (Colossians 2:2)...the mystery of the faith (I Timothy 3:9)... just to name a few.

If we are not comfortable with mystery, we are not comfortable with the very gospel we preach. The journey of transformation requires some measure of willingness to relinquish control and give ourselves over to a process we cannot fully understand nor can we predict the outcome. We know we will be more like Christ but we cannot predict exactly what the person of Christ lived in and through us will look like or where it will take us.

THE ROLE OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

While we cannot transform ourselves into the image of Christ, we can create the conditions in which spiritual transformation takes place. This is where spiritual practices come in. Spiritual practices are not ways to make brownie points with God or to prove our spiritual superiority to others. They are not a self-help program by which we take control of our journey and change ourselves. Rather, spiritual disciplines are concrete activities that we engage in in order to make ourselves available for the work only God can do.

This is what Paul is referring to when he appeals to the Christians in Rome to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." (Romans 12:1) He is saying we can be intentional about creating the conditions for transformation by engaging disciplines that help us surrender ourselves to God –not just in theory but in reality. As Richard Foster describes it, "[Spiritual] disciplines are the main way we offer our bodies up to God as a living sacrifice. We are doing what we can do with our bodies, our minds, our hearts. God then take this simple offering of ourselves and does with it what we cannot do, producing within us deeply ingrained habits of love and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (*Renovare Perspective*, April 1999)

THE NECESSITY OF COMMUNITY

Spiritual transformation takes place incrementally over time with others in the context of disciplines and practices that open us to God. In general, while we are still on this earth, our transformation will happen by degrees (II Corinthians 3:18) and we need each other in order to grow. (I Corinthians 12)

Paul's teaching on spiritual transformation in Romans 12 and in the other epistles is always given in the context of community—the body of Christ with its many members. We are given to one another in the body of Christ for mutual edification and to spur one another on to love and good deeds. Our spiritual gifts are given, not primarily for our own

benefit or self-aggrandizement, but so we can be agents of grace for one another, building up the Body of which we are only one part. As Robert Mulholland writes, "We can no more be conformed to the image of Christ outside corporate spirituality than a coal can continue to burn outside of the fire." (*Invitation to a Journey*, p.145)

While our spiritual practices certainly include private disciplines (solitude and silence, prayer and meditation, scripture, self-examination and confession, retreat, spiritual direction), to be effective they must also include disciplines in community (corporate prayer and worship, teaching, communion, Sabbath, hospitality, caring for those in need, spiritual friendship and direction), and disciplines of engagement with the world (evangelism, caring for the poor, compassion, justice, etc.)

FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS

Spiritual transformation is both an end in itself in that it brings glory to God and it is a means to other ends in that it enables us to mediate the presence of Christ to others and to discern loving action in the world. The litmus test of mature spirituality is obedience to Christ's commandment (Matthew 28:18-20), which always involves an increasing capacity to love God and to love others. (Mark 12:30, 31; I Corinthians 12; I John 4:7)

Loving presence and action in the world includes sharing our faith (evangelism), giving generously of our resources, reconciliation and peacemaking (interpersonally and also across lines of race, gender, socioeconomic status, and people groups), working for justice, exercising compassion and care for the poor, and working for the betterment of life in the human community in Jesus' name.

All true Christian spiritual formation is for the glory of God, for the abundance of our own lives and *for the sake of others* or it is not *Christian* spiritual formation. For this we toil and struggle with all the energy that God so powerfully inspires within us.

A Rule of Life in Community: Guiding Values and Principles

Spiritual community at the leadership level does not happen by accident nor is it maintained and cultivated in a haphazard way. It is led by leaders who are clear that spiritual community is what they are called to, who are committed to the values that undergird it, and who are willing to embrace the practices that help them to live out their values in concrete ways.

Following are some of the guiding values and practices that have shaped our life together over the years and to which we remain deeply committed.

COMMUNITY

We affirm that we are in our very essence a spiritual community gathered around the presence of Christ. *What we do* flows out of *who we are* in Christ. Learning to come together and stay together in unity is our first and most enduring task as we pattern our relationships after Christ's relationships with his disciples. "He loved his own until the end." (John 13:1, John 15 and 17) To compromise community would be to compromise our essence and then we would not have much that is of value to offer to others.

SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

The best thing any of us have to bring to leadership is our own transforming self! In fact, the ability to *be* a community and to grow in unity is a direct result of a continuing process of spiritual transformation. Thus, each individual is committed to their own personal spiritual disciplines and also to corporate spiritual disciplines that support and catalyze our spiritual transformation in community.

Our corporate disciplines include engaging in the *Transforming Community*® experience, fixed hour prayer, solitude and silence, reading and reflecting on Scripture, sane rhythms of work and rest, and celebration. It is routine for us to check in with each other about our spiritual rhythms when we are sharing privately or as a group. It is routine for us to talk about our pace of life and whether it is enabling us to remain healthy or whether we are approaching dangerous levels of exhaustion. It is routine for us to make scheduling decisions on the basis of this kind of awareness and discussion.

DISCERNMENT

We are committed to the *habit* of discernment—seeking to be attentive and alert to God’s activity among us day by day—and naming that together so that we can seek to respond faithfully. We are also committed to the *practice* of discernment in community—proactively seeking God’s guidance together when we need specific direction for decision-making. Because discernment takes more time and a different kind of attention than decision-making, living out this value requires commitment to a clear process for leadership discernment and the discipline to carry it out. (See Chapter 12 of *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership* for a full description of the practice of leadership discernment to which we are committed.)

An important aspect of our discernment together is our commitment to listening to inner dynamics such as consolation and desolation, fear and resistance. We all experience fear, particularly as we enter more deeply into community and calling. Fear causes people to behave strangely or even badly (to give into “fight or flight” reactions, self-protection, manipulation, etc.) When not acknowledged, fear causes us to shrink back when perhaps God is calling us forward; however, it can also alert us to situations that are truly dangerous. Becoming a leadership community in which it is safe to articulate fear enables us to 1) Exercise wisdom and ask *Is there real danger here?* 2) Hear God’s challenge for us to be courageous, or 3) Pay attention to areas where our trust in God or each other is weak and needs to be strengthened.

LIVED EXPERIENCE

We will not teach theories or things we merely wish were true; we will teach only that which we are experiencing ourselves *to some degree*. “We speak of what we know, we testify to what we have seen.” (John 3:5) Sometimes this means that we choose not to teach on certain topics—even if it would be a great topic!—because we know we are not yet living them effectively.

EQUALITY AND INCLUSIVITY

We believe and affirm that in Christ “there is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave nor free, there is no longer male nor female; for all of you are one in Christ.” (Galatians 3:28) Individuals find their place and bring their gifts to Christian community on the basis of the spiritual reality of their relationship *with* God and their gifting *by* God (I Corinthians 12); they are not defined or limited on the basis of outward characteristics such as race, socio-economic status, or gender.

The primary metaphor that Scripture utilizes to describe our relationship in the Body of Christ is that of a family in which the brothers and sisters are growing in love for each other and learning to serve in harmony with each other. In the Transforming Center we as women and men understand ourselves to be workers together with Christ and with each other on the basis of spiritual gifts and calling. We seek to include one another in all aspects of life and ministry and to grow in our respect for what each person contributes to the life of the community.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE, REPENTANCE, CONFESSION

Closely related to our commitment to spiritual transformation and discernment in community is our commitment to increasing levels of self-knowledge, a willingness to take responsibility for becoming aware of negative patterns that affect interactions in community, and dealing with our own inner dynamics appropriately as we become aware of them.

We believe that spiritual transformation takes place primarily in those places where we are not like Christ; in community, others become "agents of God's troubling grace," (see M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Invitation to a Journey*) giving us many opportunities to see ourselves more clearly, to repent and to confess our sins one to another so that we might receive grace and healing. Thus, we seek to acknowledge and respect the profound role that brokenness plays in the unfolding of the spiritual life and in the formation of true spiritual community. We believe that coming face to face with our weakness and sharing it together prayerfully opens us to the gift of community and also releases God's power among us, within us, beyond us. (II Corinthians 12:7-10) This fosters humility among us as we learn and serve together.

We understand all too well that without a shared willingness to name sin, to cultivate self-awareness relative to what caused our negative behavior, and to confess our sins one to another as needed, communities are prone to splinter and fall apart under pressure—which is counter to Jesus' deepest desire as expressed in John 17—that all of us would be one and that as Christians we would be known by our love.

TRUTH-TELLING AND TRUTH-HEARING

God desires truth in the inward being because truth leads to freedom, spiritual transformation, and deeper levels of discernment. All truth, no matter how delicate or painful or seemingly inconsequential, can contribute to the process of transformation and to the ability to discern faithfully. Since the Holy Spirit has been given to us to guide us into truth, we seek to offer the truth to one another in love and gentleness rather than hiding truth or "spinning" the truth; anything less than this kind of honesty places the community in great peril (see story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5).

Because truth-telling is such a deeply held value, it guides us and gives us courage to go ahead and say the hard thing with grace and love and to support each other in doing so.

KINDNESS

Of course, the commitment to truth-telling must also be balanced with love and kindness. Kindness is a basic characteristic of mature spirituality, but often the Christian community is unkind. Choosing to enter into spiritual community together requires a certain tenderness and gentleness with each other. Many people, particularly pastors, have been treated badly in churches and Christian organizations, that we have often thought, *Wouldn't it be something if we could--at the very least--be a place where people (including ourselves) encountered true kindness and gentleness over the long haul?* Even if that's all we accomplished, it would be very significant!

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

One of the most important aspects of long-term community is very concrete commitments regarding what we will do when we experience significant disagreement or when someone begins to discern a new call from God. What is our commitment relative to discerning together even through conflict or differing perspectives on what God is doing in us and among us? How do we move through conflict and disagreement in ways that helps us 1) open to the presence of Christ among us ("where two or three are gathered to deal with conflict there am I in the midst of them" Matthew 18), 2) honor God and the community, and 3) pursue deeper levels of transformation rather than capitulating to what is worst within us? What is the role of the group in calling individuals and the group back to these commitments during difficult times and what is a Biblical and spiritual process that we agree on and adhere to?

Commitment to engaging conflict in a way that changes us *for the better* and deepens our unity in Christ is a more challenging commitment than "conflict management" or conflict avoidance; *agreeing to this principle in theory* is very different than *living it out* with real people in the midst of a real conflict. It requires a certain level of spiritual maturity and commitment to community to move beyond human tendencies to avoid conflict, to blame others, and to leave when the going gets tough. We recognize it is only by God's grace that we are able to seek unity and deeper levels of transformation in the midst of conflict and disappointment and we choose to rely on that grace.

CELEBRATION

We believe celebration is the spiritual discipline associated with gratitude. Thus, we look for every opportunity to celebrate God's presence with us and his activity among us. Our retreats always have one evening that is specifically designed for celebration.

CONFIDENTIALITY, CONFLICT OF INTEREST, AND NO COMPETE AGREEMENT

Because those in the leadership community of the Transforming Center come to our work together with such openness to share our best thought, learning and practice as it relates to our work and worship together, we adhere to strict confidentiality regarding what is shared by anyone that is of a personal nature, what is shared about others who are involved in the Transforming Center and also leadership matters and decisions. We agree to exercise great care *not* to do anything that could be experienced as a conflict of interest, not in the best interest of the Transforming Center, or in competition with the Transforming Center. (We have additional documents that spell out these commitments in greater detail and although they contain legal verbiage, it is a spirit we are trying to uphold by articulating these commitments—a spirit of intending and choosing to make decisions that are characterized by a commitment to stewarding well and making decisions that are good for the Transforming Center and those who give themselves self-sacrificially to it.)

COVENANT

To the best of our ability, we covenant together to uphold and live out these values together. We are mutually responsible for holding the group accountable for what we have agreed to and for calling the group back to the covenant when any aspect of our adherence slips.

Because community at the leadership level is so challenging, the process of actually articulating covenant commitments and embracing them together in God's presence is of utmost importance. Although we continue to add and fine-tune our guiding values and principles, we believe it is essential that we covenant together around those values that are clear to us and that we can agree upon.

We commit to these guiding values and principles for the sake of this community that is one expression of the Body of Christ here on this earth, for the integrity of the mission God has entrusted to us, and for the sake of Christ's kingdom. *Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

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