

# **Christian Formation in the Local Church**

**A Guidebook for Church  
Discussions, Discernment and Direction**

***Enhancing Our Ability to  
“Present Every Person Mature In Christ”***

## ***Leader’s Guide***

**Produced by the  
Department of Christian Formation  
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## Ordering Information:

This document is also available for download from our website at [www.covchurch.org](http://www.covchurch.org). Go to Departments, then Christian Formation, then Resources. It is also available through the **Covenant Resource Center**. Call 1.800.338.IDEA (4332) or email [resource.center@covchurch.org](mailto:resource.center@covchurch.org).

# Christian Formation in the Local Church

## How to use this document:

We feel that Christian formation encompasses the key elements of the mission of the church. This includes your church, the denomination and the Church in its broader context around the world. Our goal in the church is to encourage the transformation of individual's lives.

*The introductory pages* of this document give you a definition for Christian formation and the various settings and agents that encourage Christian formation to take place. The discussion guide that follows is designed to help your church evaluate your ministry in terms of Christian formation. What are you doing that encourages Christian formation? What are you doing well? What are you doing that needs improvement? What areas of Christian formation are missing and need to be added or enhanced?

*The four sessions* outlined in the discussion guide could be used as a basis for a **one or two day board/council retreat**, or they could be used as a **discussion guide** for your church board **spread over two to four months of regular meetings**. (See page 4) The end result of this retreat will be a holistic, integrated perspective of the body of Christ within your congregation, with a deeper understanding of spiritually forming ministries. **This retreat discussion should include all leaders and pastors so that they can see their ministry in the light of Christian formation.** This discussion must include building and grounds committees as well as your program and ministry groups. All need to realize that their work has a mission that results in Christian formation.

*Begin the planning process* by selecting a **planning task force** to guide it. This group should meet to discuss the introductory article and the discussion guide. They should explore how Christian formation fits into the mission of their church, as well as discuss and critique each section of the article, adjusting the wording as well as the discussion guide to fit their situation. Finally they should schedule and lead a retreat where the various teams of leaders from your church can come together and explore this issue in your local context.

## Planning Time Line for Retreat Format

**First Month:** Name a planning committee to research and guide this retreat.

**Second Month:** The planning committee meets to discuss the materials and plan the retreat logistics. They will need to: set a date for the event, invite all groups to participate, determine how to provide food for lunch and coffee breaks, and identify who will lead the various parts of the process.

**Third Month:** One week before the retreat, distribute the introductory article of this booklet, pages 5-9. Encourage all participants to read it before the event.

## **Adaptation of *Christian Formation in the Local Church* for use within Board/Council/Leadership Team Meetings**

Approximately 30 minutes of four meetings is needed for this focus, plus a fifth one-hour meeting, perhaps involving a larger group. Though we prefer the retreat model, we realize that not all churches can set aside time for such a retreat experience. Please take time to include the devotional elements as they are meant to engage leaders in formational activity as you do your planning.

*Before your first meeting, duplicate and distribute the article, “Foundations of Christian Formation” to your leaders.*

**Meeting #1 “Shifting from Christian Education to Christian Formation”** Use Session 1, Activities A, B and C

**Meeting #2 “Recalling Our Journeys”**  
Use Session 1, Activity D

In addition, review the definition of Christian formation, and ask the question “Where do you see our church implementing Christian formation as part of our ministry?”

**Meeting #3 “How Am I GROWing?”**  
Use Session 2, Activities A and C; Handout 2B

**Meeting #4 “How is Our Church GROWing?”**  
Use Session 3, Activity A (devotional) and Session 2, Activity B

*At this point, we recommend that you hold one additional meeting that would include all ministry leaders (whether or not they are on the Council or Board or Leadership Team). Before this final meeting, ask each of your ministry teams to evaluate current ministries, using the outline as written in Session 3*

**Meeting #5 “Unifying Our Ministry for GROWth”**  
Use Session 4, as written (60 minutes)

*At the end of this meeting you will have a clearer understanding of the contribution each ministry team makes to the whole of your Christian formation emphasis, and you will discover new opportunities to enhance Christian formation ministries within the congregation.*

# FOUNDATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN FORMATION

Doreen Olson, Executive Minister  
Department of Christian Formation

## Introduction

Growing up in a Christian home and within a community of believers, my earliest memories are marked by a keen awareness of God's love for me. At age six I responded to Christ's call to follow him. Did I fully realize the demands of the journey on which I was embarking? Surely not. I firmly believe, however, that God readily and lovingly accepts our first steps on the pilgrim journey, no matter what our age or stage in life.

With all of my six-year-old understanding, I placed my life into God's care and keeping. It was later that I came to a more complete realization that God's desire is not just to "stamp us saved," but to grow us up into the likeness of Jesus Christ.



## Christian Formation Defined

Christian formation concerns that process of growth toward wholeness in Christ. It is our continuing journey of being transformed by the Holy Spirit into the likeness of Christ, experiencing and expressing love for God and others.

The word formation is derived from the Greek word *morphe*, suggesting that the inner being of a person is radically altered in this process. Paul used this word in his letter to the Galatian church: "until Christ is *formed* in you." Paul agonized, he said, as a woman in labor, until they expressed Christ's character and goodness in their whole being. A derivative of this word, *morphoo*, was a term used to describe the formation and growth of an embryo in a mother's body. So here we get a sense that we are truly in a gestation process.

Learning to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, however, is a life-long process. We never "graduate" from the school of Christian living. As we learn to apply and obey Christ's teachings, our lifestyle will increasingly reflect our commitment to Christ. In other words, the result of this life-long process is real, radical change, as expressed in both our individual and our community life.

When transformation happens within us, we don't just do the things Jesus would have done, but we find ourselves actually wanting to do them. It's not a matter of *trying* to do the right things, but we *become* the right kind of persons, through the Spirit's work within us.

Christian formation relies decisively on God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit. While we can choose to work with or against the Spirit, we cannot accomplish growth into Christ's likeness through our own efforts alone. To get a better picture of this concept, I like to consider a sailing analogy. Marjorie Thompson, in her book *Soul Feast*, compares the relationship between our will and the Spirit's transforming work to the interaction between sailor and sailboat. Though the sailor cannot control the wind, he/she can set the sails and position the tiller to maximize the effectiveness of the wind. Likewise, Christian formation requires our conscious choice and a responsive awareness of the Spirit's presence in our lives.



Information or knowledge alone will not result in the radical change that we are seeking. The goal of Christian formation is whole-person learning, which focuses on the heart as well as the head. Though cognitive knowledge is essential, it is only a part of the whole process. Our knowing must lead to new attitudes and new actions that are increasingly consistent with the character of Jesus Christ.

As we increasingly reflect the character of Christ, we learn to live more fully in the kingdom of Christ. In Christ's kingdom, it is normal to experience God's love and to express that love back to God and others. In Christ's kingdom, it is normal and natural to live a life of obedience to his teachings.

Dallas Willard, in *The Divine Conspiracy*, points out that in Christ's kingdom obedient living is really abundant living. Obedience, though sometimes understood to be a rigid legalism, is more rightly understood in terms of the abundant life that leads to blessing others through witness and service. Christian formation leads us to an understanding of Christ's unique call on our lives, an increasing ability to express ourselves freely, and a generosity in using our God-given gifts for the sake of Christ's kingdom.

## **The Critical Role of Growth**

Several years ago, my husband had a poster hanging in his office which read: "*The only evidence of life is growth.*" As we've noted already, growth is to be seen as a normal part of the Christian life. According to Scripture, growth into Christ's likeness is not optional, *it's essential*. Normal Christianity is not conversion only. Neither is it accomplishment or perfection only. It is not pursuit of gratification, nor is it release from our troubles. Normal Christianity is, at its core, continual growth into Christ's likeness.

There are many biblical references indicating the importance of this continuing growth. In 2 Peter 3:18, we are implored to grow, not just in knowledge, but in an attitude, a life, of grace. Ephesians 4:13 articulates the goal of our growth...that we would all become mature as measured against the maturity of Christ himself. Such maturity also results in a unity within the body, which brings glory to God. Therefore, our Christian formation is to be seen as both an individual and a collective growth into maturity.

## The Natural, Normal Settings for Christian Formation

So, what are the natural normal settings in which we all...children, youth, adults...grow spiritually? We believe, in the North American culture anyway, that there are four natural settings in which spiritual growth might take place. Church leaders would do well to consider how they are assisting spiritual growth in each of these settings.

First, growth into Christ's likeness takes places in **peer groups**. This is the one setting that church leaders think of most readily because we've based our educational model in the church on the public education model.

We also grow into Christ's likeness in **congregational** or **intergenerational settings**. Are we being intentional about providing learning opportunities for all ages together? For example, I believe that children learn most effectively to worship by being part of a total worshipping community provided that there is an intentional effort made to include them in the worshipping practices. Are we providing such learning opportunities regularly and intentionally?

Thirdly, we learn to be more like Christ in our **homes** or **family settings**. As church leaders, we need to be equipping families to be growing spiritually as they interact daily in this natural learning environment. As Marjorie Thompson states, in *Family: The Forming Center*, it is difficult to overstate the influence of the family on a child...whether positive or negative. When it comes to the Christian formation of children, church leaders are partners with parents in this endeavor.

Lastly, people learn through **self-study** and **individual practice**. Each one of these venues is a natural normal setting in which growth and learning take place. Now, what are the primary means or agents of this growth?

## The Essential Agents of Growth

As we've looked at Scripture as well as the historical context of our denomination, we believe that there are four essential agents or means of growth into Christ's likeness. Practices within each of these four areas need to be engaged by people of all ages. We've used the word **GROW** as an acronym to make these four areas easy to remember.

The first area or agent of growth is **God's Word...shaping our actions and our lives**. As part of the Evangelical Covenant Church, we are people of the Word, who value Scripture as the only perfect rule for our lives. We desire to know, understand, and live out the truths of the Bible. Our hope is not simply to be Biblically literate, as in knowing the facts, but to make Scripture come alive within us...both individually and collectively as a body of Christ.

The second area or agent of growth is **Relationships...nurturing our growth in the context of**



**community.** Healthy and effective spiritual growth takes place within the context of relationships...both within peer groups and across generations. Because Christian formation takes place within community, we pay close attention to the health of the various dimensions of our community life. We value our differences, learning from people of diverse ages, ethnicity, and cultures.

The third area or agent of growth is **Obedient Living...using our gifts in witness and service.** We believe that the new life we experience in Christ implies radical obedience to all of his teachings. Such obedience, together with the Spirit's work in us, equips us to do kingdom work...giving witness to the good news and serving others in Jesus' name. Our mission flows naturally out of our life in Christ.

The fourth area or agent of growth is **Worship...interacting with and experiencing God.** Knowing that God desires an intimate relationship with us, we are committed to a lifestyle of worship characterized by both individual and collective expressions of devotion. Our daily worship practices empower us for living an obedient, abundant, and joy-filled life in Christ.



## The Continual Nature of Christian Formation

As we grow more and more into Christ's likeness, through engagement in practices within these four essential areas, our journey continues throughout our lives. We are continually...

- *Becoming aware of God*
- *Committing to Christ, and*
- *Maturing through the work of the Holy Spirit*

This growth experience is more like a spiral than a straight path. As followers of Christ, who lean into the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, we are continually becoming more aware of God's character and God's truths, and choosing to commit to those new realities or truths.

The goal of our growth is the maturity of Christ himself. The gospels tell of a Pharisee, an expert in the law, who wanted to know which of the commandments was the greatest. Jesus answered him this way:

*"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment, and the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-39)*

In essence, Jesus here defined two interdependent themes of a Christian's growth toward wholeness in Christ. A deep, life-transforming relationship with a loving God, and a consistent, passionate devotion to serving others. (These two dimensions were also articulated through a large study conducted by Search Institute.)

Other measurements of a maturing faith found in Scripture include the Fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5), the Beatitudes (Matthew 5), unity in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:13), acts of justice and kindness (Micah 6:8). What other measurement tools can you find?



Let me add a word of caution here, however. There is a danger in thinking that we can precisely measure, and even set goals for, the work of transformation within. Let us not forget that this is the work of the Spirit. In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul emphatically reminds the believers that it is not about anything they've done on their own. It is God's work within us that brings about our salvation:

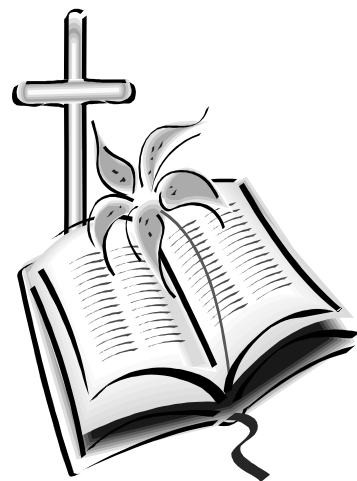
*“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

Our preparation for the work to which God has called us is the result of God's work in us...of the Spirit's transforming work in our lives.

Christian formation is a lifelong process. The main thing, from the Bible's perspective, is that we are continually growing into Christ's likeness...as an individual, as well as a church. “The only evidence of life is growth.” It is definitely not an instantaneous thing. It's a continuing journey we're on.

*“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.”*

**Philippians 1:9-11**



# Session 1

## Christian Formation and Our Mission

***Session Goals:*** To define Christian formation and how it relates to the mission of the local church.

***Objectives:***

- ❖ Experience Holy Reading (*lectio divina*) in community
- ❖ Explore the differences in Christian education, Christian ministry and Christian formation
- ❖ Define Christian formation
- ❖ Evaluate the mission statement of the church

***Total session time:*** 60 minutes

***Pre-session preparation:***

- ❖ Communicate with church board chair (or designated person) the need to have the mission statement of the church available. (Sample church mission statements can be found in the Appendix if needed.)
- ❖ Prepare the church's mission statement (or a sample) on newsprint, an overhead transparency or a PowerPoint slide.
- ❖ Prepare the ***Christian Formation definition*** (page 12) on newsprint, an overhead transparency, or a PowerPoint slide.
- ❖ Prepare a worshipful environment (see "*Note to Leader*" below).

***Materials needed:***

- ❖ Candle
- ❖ Newsprint
- ❖ Markers
- ❖ Church's mission statement printed on newsprint
- ❖ Christian Formation definition printed on newsprint
- ❖ Handout 1: *Reflections on My Spiritual Journey*
- ❖ Overhead projector and screen, if needed
- ❖ Additional resources and all handouts are in the Appendix

***Note to leader:***

To set the overall tone, room set-up is important. We suggest the following to create a worshipful environment:

- ❖ Music softly playing in the background
- ❖ Small table in the front with candle
- ❖ As participants gather, invite them to begin to quiet their hearts before God, spending some time in quiet reflection.

## Opening Activity

(5 minutes)

Help shift participants' focus to being fully present with God by directing their attention to the candle. As you light the candle, tell them that the light is symbolic of the presence of Christ in our midst. Direct them to reflect on an item of concern that is present on their minds/hearts at this time, something that would hinder them from being fully present during this time. With a neighbor, as they feel comfortable, have them share that concern, followed by prayer for one another.

### A. Devotional Exercise (John 15:1-5, 8)

(10 minutes)

Give the following instructions:

**As I read from the gospel, please close your eyes and take in the sacred words of Scripture. I will pause occasionally to give you opportunity to meditate on God's Word. After the reading, we will sit for a brief time, followed by some questions I will ask to further guide your prayer and meditation time.** (This prayed-reading of the scripture is sometimes called "*lectio divina*" or sacred reading.)

1. Read John 15:1-3:

**I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.**

2. Pause for 1 minute.

3. Read John 15:4, 5, 8:

**Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.**

4. Pause for 1 minute.

5. Leader says: **Silently reflect on this question, 'What does Jesus seem to be saying about the Christian life?'**

6. Pause for 2 minutes.

7. Leader says: **Silently begin to pray the concerns or joys that come to you out of these words of Jesus.**

8. Pause for 2 minutes.

9. Invite group members to share briefly with the group a thought about the Christian life.

## B. Connotations

(15 minutes)

1. **Word Association:** In small groups of 3 or as a large group, have each person in the group to respond to one of the terms as follows:

**We've listed 3 terms that are related to the Christian life. What ideas do you associate with each of the following terms?**

- **Christian Education** (*relates to knowledge/cognitive concept; the educational component of the church; "the head"*)
- **Christian Ministry** (*relates to the things we do for ministry, i.e., social justice, compassion ministries; "the hands"*)
- **Christian Formation** (*holistic ministry that includes Christian education, Christian ministry and more; "the head, the hands, and the heart"*)

2. **In your groups, compare the similarities among these three ideas?  
What contrasts do you see among these three ideas?**

*\* Note to leader: "Differences in Christian Education and Christian Formation" chart can be used to add to the discussion (Appendix 1).*

## C. Three Shifts

(5 minutes)

1. **The church has traditionally operated, and done well, in the first two areas (*Christian education and Christian ministry*) through various Christian education ministries and mission or service-related projects. Yet, George Barna and others have noted through extensive research that there is very little or no difference in the behavior of Christians and non-Christians. The church must ask itself, "How, then, can we make true disciples?" We believe that there must be a paradigm shift in our philosophical understanding of the church's educational approach which entails shifting our approach to ministry.**

### Three shifts:

#### **a. From program to personal transformation**

*(Example: in teaching a lesson on God, a child asks, "Where is God?" Instead of taking the time to answer, the teacher continues with the lesson.)*

#### **b. From segmented to integrated/multigenerational, holistic ministry**

*(Example: a segmented ministry is one where everyone is going their own way; a silo ministry with essentially no plan, i.e., the Wednesday staff not talking to the Sunday staff, children not talking to the youth, not talking to the adults, etc.)*

#### **c. From head to head, heart and hand**

*(Example: head – emphasis on Sunday school; hands – focus on mission trips; heart – focus on worship but also includes the other two.)*

*\* Note to leader: Refer to FAQs (Appendix 2) for a more in-depth explanation.*

## D. Definition

*(10 minutes)*

How then, do we help people begin to make that shift in their understanding of Christian education – an understanding that has been quite effective in helping Christians to know more, yet may have been less successful in helping them to GROW more. How can we assist and encourage others in the knowing, being and doing required as we mature in our faith? To address this, we have chosen one of the primary metaphors for the spiritual life, i.e., a journey. Other metaphors can be associated with the spiritual life as well, but the journey is what we've chosen to help define Christian formation. We have found this definition useful on the pathway to faith maturity.

Display the newsprint with the Department of Christian Formation definition for Christian formation written on it.

*Christian Formation is...  
Our continuing journey  
of being transformed by the Holy Spirit  
into Christ's likeness,  
experiencing and expressing love  
for God and others.*

A question often asked by Covenanters is, "Where is it written?" There are many biblical references indicating the importance of continuing to grow in our faith. Second Peter 3:18 implores us to grow...not just in knowledge, but in an attitude, a life, of grace.

Ephesians 4:13 articulates the goal of our growth...that we would all become mature as measured against the maturity of Christ himself. Such maturity also results in a unity within the body, which brings glory to the Father.

Distribute *Handout 1* with reflection questions. To give you an opportunity to reflect on this definition and your own personal journey, take a few minutes to respond to at least one of the questions on the handout.

Allow 2-3 minutes for this personal reflection time. Then have participants pair up and share their responses with a neighbor, taking approximately 1 ½ minutes each. Field a few responses from the large group, asking, "What are some of the things you heard from one another?"

## E. Mission Statement

(10 minutes)

1. Have a copy of your church's Mission Statement displayed for all to see as you move into this section (for samples, see *Appendix 3*).

**It's encouraging to hear the unique pathways of our various journeys; however no spiritual journey stands alone. Consider the question, "How is your journey affecting mine?" Christian formation happens in community. To that end, the Church is a compilation of all of our journeys.**

2. Discuss the following question in small groups: **How is Christian formation as we have described it reflected in the mission of our church?** Read the mission statement aloud, together. Have groups record their reflections on newsprint and post on wall.
3. Allow each group to report their findings.

\* *Note to leader:* This is an activity of awareness, discovering formational language/expressions that may already be in place in the mission statement (an "aha" moment). Hopefully what participants will see is that their mission statement is congruent with the purpose and mission of the church. **DON'T GET BOGGED DOWN HERE!**

## F. Summary of Session 1

(5 minutes)

1. **If we are to take the mission of the Church seriously – "to make disciples" according to Matt. 28: 19 – then the mission of our church must also be a reflection to that end. In summary, take a minute to reflect on where we've been in this first session.**

Summary of session:

- Opening focusing activity – focusing on the presence of Christ
- Devotional exercise – practicing holy reading in community
- Connations – differentiating Christian education, formation and ministry
- Three shifts – shifting our ministry approach to personal transformation, multigenerational and holistic
- Definition – defining Christian formation
- Mission statement – reviewing and reflecting on the church's mission and its formational components

2. **In Session 2, we will explore dimensions of Christian formation and its application, both personally as well as corporately.**
3. With music softly playing in the background, invite groups of three to close in a time of prayer celebrating God's direction in each person's spiritual journey. When groups finish their prayer time they may leave quietly.

# Notes

## Session 2

# Dimensions of Christian Formation (“GROW”)

**Session Goals:** To explore the four dimensions of Christian formation as they apply to the church, the individual and the family.

**Objectives:**

- ❖ Experience Holy Reading (*lectio divina*) in community
- ❖ Define the four dimensions of GROW
- ❖ Identify and evaluate current ministries within the church in the context of GROW
- ❖ Explore ways for Christian formation GROWth, corporately and individually
- ❖ Evaluate personal ways GROW applies to the individual

**Total session time:** 60 minutes

**Pre-session preparation:**

- ❖ Prepare the **Christian Formation definition** from Session 1 on newsprint, an overhead transparency, or a PowerPoint slide.
- ❖ Prepare 4 sheets of newsprint with one dimension of GROW printed at the top of each sheet.
- ❖ Prepare copies of handouts 2A (*G.R.O.W.*) and 2B (*Christian Formation and Me – GROW*).
- ❖ Prepare questions from Part B on newsprint, an overhead transparency, or a PowerPoint slide.
- ❖ Prepare a worshipful environment (see “*Note to Leader*” below).

**Materials needed:**

- ❖ Candle
- ❖ Newsprint
- ❖ Markers
- ❖ Blank paper on tables for Opening Activity (½-sheets are sufficient)
- ❖ Christian Formation definition
- ❖ Overhead projector if needed
- ❖ Additional resources and all handouts are in the Appendix

**Note to leader:**

To set the overall tone, room set-up is important. We suggest the following to create a worshipful environment:

- ❖ Music softly playing in the background
- ❖ Small table in the front with candle
- ❖ As participants gather, invite them to begin to quiet their hearts before God, spending some time in quiet reflection.





## Opening Activity

(6 minutes)

Help shift participants' focus to being fully present with God by directing their attention to the candle.

- ❖ As you light the candle, remind them that the light is symbolic of the presence of Christ in our midst.
- ❖ With music playing in background and blank paper at tables, direct participants to write a brief letter to God about their day. Allow 2 minutes for reflecting and writing.
- ❖ Invite them to share their reflections with a partner (as much as they feel comfortable sharing), followed by praying for one another (3 minutes).
- ❖ Lastly, sit quietly before God for 1 minute, offering up thanksgiving for His presence and each person's day.

## A. Devotional Exercise (Ephesians 4:15-16)

(10 minutes)

Use Ephesians 4:15-16 for your devotional following the pattern of group sacred reading (lectio divina) outlined below.

1. Ask God to bless your time of devotions.
2. Ask the group to listen for the facts and images as you read Ephesians 4:15-16 gently and slowly.

**But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.**

3. Pause, and then ask the group members to take one image or phrase from the passage and hold it in their minds, letting its reality sink in as you *reread the passage*.
4. Keep silent for 2 minutes.
5. *Reread passage a third time*, asking group members to respond silently or audibly in prayer related to the passage after you have reread it a third time. Allow 2 minutes.
6. *Reread the passage a fourth time*, asking the members to respond by sitting in receptive and worshipful silence for 2 minutes.
7. Close with the Lord's Prayer or just say "Amen."
8. Ask the group: **What are some of the ways that we "grow up" into Christ?** (*through our worship, study of the Word, service, prayer, etc.*)

## B. Dimensions of Formation (“GROW”) – Our Church

*(30 minutes)*

Drawing from the group discussion in A: 8, transition into a review of Session 1.

- **Three shifts:** requires a change in mind-set with how we see and do ministry, i.e., a shifting from program to personal transformation; from segmented to multigenerational ministry; and from head to head, heart and hands.
- **Defining Christian formation:** Display the definition of Christian formation, reminding participants that it is a journey of lifelong growth of which we never fully attain but continue to move toward the goal of transformation into the likeness of Christ. This is a journey that is inclusive of both Christian education (knowing) as well as Christian ministry (doing).
- **Mission statement:** Remind participants of the work of reviewing and evaluating the church’s mission statement with an understanding of Christian formation.

**Although we’ve explored a definition of Christian formation, the term can still be somewhat nebulous and not as easy to grasp as Christian education. Christian formation concerns a process of growth toward wholeness in Christ. We believe that there are four essential elements or dimensions that foster the transforming work of the Spirit, applicable for people of all ages, in addition to being a useful assessment and planning tool for the congregation. For ease of understanding, we believe it’s as simple as GROW!**

1. Explain the four major ways in which Christian formation takes place, using the “GROW” acronym to make the four ways memorable. *(Distribute **handout 2A** with brief descriptions of each.)*
  - **God’s Word – shaping our actions and our lives**
  - **Relationships – nurturing our growth**
  - **Obedient Living – using our gifts in witness and service**
  - **Worship – interacting with and experiencing God**
2. Divide participants into four groups *(or complete as a whole group if more appropriate)*. Distribute one sheet of newsprint labeled with one dimensions of GROW to each group. Instruct groups to list the ministries and activities of their church under each appropriate heading. Although all activities could be listed under all four headings, try to have them identify the primary purpose for an activity or ministry. In some cases they will need to list an activity or ministry under more than one heading.
3. Display the following questions to the large group *(written on newsprint or an overhead transparency)*.
  - **Which ministries emphasize one (or two) elements?**
  - **Which ministries are balanced with all four elements?**
  - **What do we do as a church that does not fit into one or more of these categories?**
  - **Are there things that we do that are activities, not ministries?**

## C. Dimensions of Formation (“GROW”) – the Christian

*(20 minutes)*

**Because formation happens in community, Christian formation is imperative in the corporate setting of the church. So too is an individual or personal commitment to the journey. We’ve seen in Session 1 how each of our journeys impact our faith community. Our journeys are non-ending; therefore we must be intentional in our commitment to GROW. Let’s apply this Christian formation GROW principle to the individual and the home/family.**

1. Distribute a copy of the handout *Christian Formation and Me (handout 2B)* to each participant. Allow 8 minutes for them to personally reflect on and evaluate their current Christian formation journey. What are they currently doing to intentionally GROW in the areas of:
  - **God’s Word – shaping our actions and our lives?**
  - **Relationships – nurturing our growth?**
  - **Obedient Living – using our gifts in witness and service?**
  - **Worship – interacting with and experiencing God?**
2. For the sake of time, encourage participants to do a similar assessment of home/family at some point.
3. Returning to the personal evaluation, encourage participants to select one area of the GROW dimensions to make a personal commitment to grow. Once they have chosen an area, instruct them to pair up with another person and share one growth goal with one another.
4. Close in prayer, inviting God to use this activity to encourage new spiritual growth in the lives of your church’s leaders.

*\* Note: If you are pursuing this planning time over a period of weeks or months take a minute to explain the plan for the next session. Each ministry team or group will work independently at that session. Select a date and encourage all teams and groups to meet at that time. If conflicts exist it would be possible for groups or teams to meet independently.*

## *Notes*

## Session 3

# Christian Formation and Your Group's Ministry

***Session Goals:*** To evaluate each ministry's mission in light of the church's overall mission.

***\* This session is designed as a small group activity. Each board, committee, ministry team, or commission will meet separately to identify and evaluate the pieces of its ministry. The result of this meeting will be brought to the large group at the beginning of the next session.***

***Objectives:***

- ❖ Experience Holy Reading (*lectio divina*) in community
- ❖ Identify the mission of the ministry team, board or committee and relate its mission to that of the church
- ❖ List and rate the ministries that the group is responsible for
- ❖ Evaluate effectiveness of the ministries

***Total session time:*** 60 minutes

***Pre-session preparation:***

- ❖ Prepare chart 3 on newsprint
- ❖ Prepare questions for discussion from section B on newsprint, overhead transparency or PowerPoint slide
- ❖ Prepare questions for discussion from section D on newsprint, overhead transparency or PowerPoint slide
- ❖ Prepare a worshipful environment (see "Note to Leader" below).

***Materials needed:***

- ❖ Candle
- ❖ Newsprint
- ❖ Markers
- ❖ Chart 3 on newsprint
- ❖ Additional resources and all handouts are in the Appendix

***Note to leader:***

To set the overall tone, room set-up is important. We suggest the following to create a worshipful environment:

- ❖ Music softly playing in the background
- ❖ Small table in the front with candle
- ❖ As participants gather, invite them to begin to quiet their hearts before God, spending some time in quiet reflection.

## Opening Activity

*(5 minutes)*

As you light the candle, remind participants that Christ is present in our midst. Direct them to reflect on their day. **Consider at least one way Christ was reflected in your life today. Share these reflections with a neighbor.**

### A. Devotional Exercise

*(10 minutes)*

Begin this session with an image of the “body” by having participants mentally visualize a body. Read Romans 12:4-5a slowly, while encouraging the gathered group/ministry team to consider his/her place on the ministry team.

**Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body.**

1. Leader asks: **What is your group’s function and purpose?**  
Allow a minute for silent reflection before open discussion of this question.
2. Read verse 5b slowly.

**...and each member belongs to all the others.**

3. Leader: **Prayerfully consider how each group is needed by the others to carry out the Christian formation task of the church.**
4. Allow another minute for silent reflection.
5. Close this time in prayer by asking God to bless the work of this particular part (ministry team) of the Body.

### B. Our Mission

*(10 minutes)*

Provide a quick review of the Sessions 1 and 2, highlighting the major points: Christian formation definition; the mission of the church; the four dimensions of GROW; and the need to apply GROW corporately, individually and in the home.

Leader: **During the first session we discussed the mission of the church. Now we need to identify the mission of our ministry team, board or committee and relate our group’s mission to the mission of the church. To help with this task, discuss the following questions.** (Display on newsprint or transparency or PowerPoint)

- **Why do we (our group or committee) exist?**
- **What is the mission of our group?**
- **In what ways are we helping our church grow in Christian formation?**
- **What responsibilities does our committee need to add, eliminate or improve to encourage Christian formation in our congregation?** (Brainstorm this list quickly at this time.)

### C. Chart your ministry

(20 minutes)

Distribute **Handout 3**.

**As a group fill in the chart with ministries for which you as a group are responsible. Complete one entire column at a time, up to and including Column 3. Of course if you think of another ministry to add later, you may do so.**

1. **Column 1** – As a group list all of the ministries for which your group is currently responsible.
2. **Column 2** – Rate each ministry regarding its effectiveness
  - 1 = things are great
  - 2 = everything is just fine
  - 3 = things could be better
  - 4 = some improvement is needed
  - 5 = call for life support – things look critical
3. **Column 3** – Identify for whom this ministry is designed
  - Peer Group
  - The entire congregation/multi-generational
  - Home/family
  - The individual

### D. Take a second look

(15 minutes)

1. General discussion. Consider writing these questions on newsprint or an overhead transparency for all to see during the discussion.
  - a. **How does what we do add to the ministry of our church?**
  - b. **Are we responsible for too much? Too little?**
  - c. **What is missing?**
2. **Complete column 4 by answering the following questions.**
  - a. **What do we want/need to keep?**
  - b. **Where do we need to improve?**
  - c. **What do we need to eliminate?**

### E. Bring it to God

**Let us celebrate the things we have done and are currently doing well with prayer.** Invite participants to share their words of thanksgiving “popcorn” style. Bring the prayer time to a close.

**\* Note to leader:** The final session brings all of the groups together with their collective work on “Chart Your Ministry.” Groups will need to bring charts to Session 4.

## Session 4

# Unifying Our Ministry for GROWth

***Session Goals:*** To review and evaluate the combined work of all of the church's ministries for the purpose of unifying for formational ministry.

***\* Begin this session in one large group with all ministry teams, committees and boards meeting together.***

### ***Objectives:***

- ❖ Review each group's ministry evaluations
- ❖ Compile into a master chart in the GROW framework
- ❖ Compare master listing of ministries to church's mission statement
- ❖ Celebrate and affirm the work of the Holy Spirit through God's people
- ❖ Identify opportunities for GROWth
- ❖ Brainstorm next steps

***Total session time:*** 60 minutes

### ***Pre-session preparation:***

- ❖ Prepare a sheet of newsprint with an outline of a body
- ❖ Prepare chart 3 on four sheets of newsprint headed with one dimension of GROW heading each sheet; post before session begins.
- ❖ Prepare newsprint with three shifts.
- ❖ Prepare a worshipful environment (see "Note to Leader" below).

### ***Materials needed:***

- ❖ Candle
- ❖ Newsprint
- ❖ Markers
- ❖ Group worksheets from Session 3
- ❖ Chart 3 on four sheets of newsprint: *God's Word, Relationships, Obedient Living, Worship*
- ❖ Mission statement of the church
- ❖ Copies of responsive reading
- ❖ Additional resources and all handouts are in the Appendix

### ***Note to leader:***

To set the overall tone, room set-up is important. We suggest the following to create a worshipful environment:

- ❖ Music softly playing in the background
- ❖ Small table in the front with candle
- ❖ As participants gather, invite them to begin to quiet their hearts before God, spending some time in quiet reflection.

### **Opening Activity**



*(5 minutes)*

As you light the candle, remind participants that Christ is present in our midst. Allow time for participants to reflect on their day. **Consider at least one way Christ was reflected in your life today. Share these reflections with a neighbor. Close your time together by offering a prayer of thanksgiving for each other's visible witness of Christ.**

### A. Devotional Exercise – Ephesians 4:2-6, 15-17

*(10 minutes)*

1. On newsprint draw a “body” and label the parts.
2. Encourage a time of reflective silence as individuals focus on the image of the “Body of Christ.” Ask groups to reflectively consider what part of the body they represent.
3. Read Ephesians 4:2-6, 15-17 (or have several volunteers to read).
4. Invite team members to pray with their ministry teams for unity within the body. Bring this time of prayer to a close as team prayers are concluding, summarizing the prayers of the teams.

### B. The Big Picture

*(15 minutes)*

1. Give each group a different color marker.
2. Have a representative (or several) from each group transfer the information from the group's worksheet to the posted master sheets: God's Word, Relationship, Obedient Living and Worship. Each group's work is represented by a different color.
3. After all of the information has been compiled, allow a minute for observation and reflection.
4. Form small groups of 3-4. Display the mission statement of the church. Ask participants to find different groups to join and discuss the following questions: *(5 minutes)*
  - a. **As you observe the bigger picture, what areas of the church's ministry are clearly formational in their focus?**
  - b. **What are we doing well that is in line with our mission statement?**
5. Field responses from the large group, recording onto newsprint.
6. Provide a time of celebrative praise and thanksgiving for the work of the Holy Spirit among God's people. Have participants offer spontaneous, “popcorn” prayers of thanksgiving.

### C. 3 Shifts and the Ministry

(15 minutes)

1. Display and review the three shifts.
  - a. Program to personal transformation
  - b. Segmented to integrated, multi-generational, holistic ministry
  - c. Head to head, heart and hand

**In Session 1, we agreed that the church must begin to shift the way we've done ministry in the past in order to make true disciples, as reflected in the philosophy of the three shifts. A visible example of integrated, holistic ministry is occurring right now as we take the time to look at the ministries of our church together.**

**Think through the ministries of the whole church in light of the three shifts – moving towards personal transformation, a more integrated, multi-generational ministry, and a ministry that moves people beyond the head knowledge.**

- a. **Where do we see *evidence* of this philosophy in the ministries of our church?**
- b. **Where do we see *opportunities* to focus more towards that end?**

Field responses and record on newsprint.

### D. Next Steps

(10 minutes)

Referring to the responses above:

**As you've shown, we do have reason to celebrate what God is doing in our midst. The evidence is before us through the witness of His people and their commitment and faithfulness. But we also see that we still have room and reason to GROW. *Room* to grow is seen in the opportunities you have just named. *Reason* comes out of our motivation and desire to continually be transformed into the likeness of Christ, both individually and corporately.**

**So what comes next? Where do we as a church go from here? Within your groups/committees, commit to meeting within the next month to continue the work of evaluating your part of the Body. As a whole church, what next steps can be taken?** Allow a minute or two for brainstorming ideas from the large group. To add to the discussion, offer other ideas, such as:

- ❖ A sermon series
- ❖ Invite someone to come in for consulting
- ❖ Seminars/workshops in specific areas, such as children, youth and adults
- ❖ Celebrate Christian formation Sunday with GROW commitment cards
- ❖ Give every attendee a Church Growth Card
- ❖ Provide opportunities in worship service for testimonies of personal transformation

Encourage a commitment from pastor/church board or council to place this topic on agenda of next board meeting.

## E. Celebrative Closure

*(5 minutes)*

Celebrate the work that has been accomplished by all, the commitment given by group members to participate, the commitment of the church to become a formational ministry, and the presence of Christ.

Options for closing:

1. Close with Responsive Reading of Commitment (*Handout 4*), followed by a prayer of thanksgiving;

*or*

2. Have participants gather in a circle around the candle, standing at arms' length apart. **Now everyone take one step forward. Look around. Take one more step forward. What's happening?** (*As we move closer to Christ, we move closer to one another.*) **As we commit to GROW in God's Word, our Relationships, Obedient living and our Worship to God, we will GROW individually and as the body of Christ.**

Invite God to continue to guide the ensuing work of the church to become a formational congregation, each person committed to continuing their journey, being transformed by the Holy Spirit into the likeness of Christ, experiencing and expressing love for God and others.

## *Notes*

# *Appendix*

# Leader's Guide

## Differences between CE and CF

	<b>Christian Education</b>	<b>Christian Formation</b>
<b>Leader:</b>	<i>Lecturer or teller</i> *determines what the student should learn, do and be. *has the power and authority	<i>Facilitator</i> *helps to bring about learning *encourages participation from student *demonstrates caring and acceptance
<b>Setting:</b>	<i>Formal classroom</i> in an official building or institution	<i>Anywhere and everywhere life happens</i> *holistic - relates to all of life *not restricted to formal classroom
<b>Focus:</b>	<i>Content orientation</i> *organized, highly-planned curriculum that transfers knowledge *learning ends when course ends	<i>Development process</i> *concerned with needs of learner *concerned with learning that continues lifelong
<b>Teaching Methods:</b>	<i>Lecturing/Telling</i> *students given what teacher has learned	<i>Variety</i> *allows practice for the learners in doing and reflecting
<b>Knowledge:</b>	<i>A product</i> transferred from teacher to learner *goal of student: to acquire as much as possible using whatever means necessary (i.e. memorization skills)	<i>A mutually discovered process</i> between student and leader *goal of student: not only to acquire but to practice what is learned; integrate into life
<b>Goal:</b>	<i>Learning/Knowledge</i>	<i>Maturity/Growth</i>
<b>Process:</b>	<i>Teacher-directed</i> *student passively engaged *student becomes dependent upon teacher for learning external truths	<i>Self-directed</i> *student actively engaged in his/her own process *becomes equipped from within to grow and develop spiritually

Appendix 1

## PERSONAL INVENTORY OF CURRENT SPIRITUAL FORMATION PRACTICES

- *Indicate your current practices and their regularity. If you need more space, use back.*
- *Use the results to help you set goals for growth on the GROW commitment card.*

GROWing in Grace and Knowledge	Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
<p><b>GOD'S WORD</b></p> <p><b>Examples:</b> Reading the Bible daily, <b>Weekly Bible study in a group</b>, Memorizing passages of Scripture, Other...</p> <p>I am currently involved in...</p>					
<p><b>RELATIONSHIP</b></p> <p><b>Examples:</b> Building Christian relationships with accountability, <b>Forgiving others</b>, Seeking to build relationships with Christians from other ethnic groups, <b>Providing spiritual nurture for your children</b>, Other...</p> <p>I am currently involved in...</p>					
<p><b>OBEDIENT LIVING</b></p> <p><b>Examples:</b> Using faith to guide life decisions, <b>Using spiritual gifts</b>, Ministering with people who are less fortunate, <b>Sharing the gospel with others</b>, Tithing, Other..</p> <p>I am currently involved in...</p>					
<p><b>WORSHIP</b></p> <p><b>Examples:</b> Spending time with God in prayer daily, <b>Participating in the worshipping community</b>, Other...</p> <p>I am currently involved in...</p>					

# Christian Formation in the Evangelical Covenant Church

## FAQs

(Frequently Asked Questions)

### What do we mean when we use the phrase Christian Formation?

The concept of Christian formation has existed since creation, and has been expressed throughout history by a variety of terms such as character development, spiritual growth, sanctification, faith development, leading individuals to Christ and nurturing them in faith. Christian formation takes place individually as well as corporately as we experience Christ's character being formed in us. We have defined Christian formation as "our continuing journey of being transformed by the Holy Spirit into Christ's likeness, experiencing and expressing love for God and others."

This journey is not just an individual experience. It involves the Christian community. Therefore it is "our" continuing journey. It is a journey that lasts a lifetime. We are continually being transformed. Christian formation is dynamic, ever changing. We are transformed by the Holy Spirit. Our transformation takes place from the inside out. It is not a legalistic series of tasks. Our behavior and response to God, to others, and to life, change as the Holy Spirit draws us closer. We can, however, choose to ignore the Holy Spirit's leading. When we are receptive to the Holy Spirit, we are transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ. Christ is the essence of a mature faith. Our transformation is revealed in our expression of love for God and others. This then is the goal for people of all ages.

### What are the Biblical foundations? In other words, where is it written?

The foundation for the concept of Christian formation is written throughout Scripture. The word *formation* is derived from the Greek word *morphe*, suggesting that the inner being of a person is radically altered in this process. Paul used this word in his letter to the Galatians (4:19): "...until Christ is *formed* in you." Paul agonized, as a woman in labor, until they expressed Christ's character and goodness in their whole being. Ephesians 4:13 describes the goal of this process: "...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." Other passages assisting us in our understanding of Christian formation include Matthew 28:19, Colossians 1:28-29, Romans 8:29, 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, and 2 Peter 3:18.

### Is Christian formation about an individual or a community pursuit?

Our answer is "yes" and "yes." Christian formation is both an individual and a community endeavor. This perspective needs to be continually promoted in the evangelical church in America today. We live in a culture that prioritizes and constantly promotes individualism. This is not consistent with the biblical perspective of the church, which is to be an intentional community seeking to build one another up in Christ.

## How does Christian formation differ from Christian education?

As we've asked people, in a variety of settings, to indicate what words or images come to mind when we use the phrase 'Christian education,' we've heard things like classroom, curriculum, Sunday School, and children. On the other hand, when asked to respond to the phrase 'Christian formation,' people use words like nurture, process, lifelong, and changed behavior. While education is an essential component of Christian formation, the phrase Christian education fails to connote the kind of whole-person learning Jesus sought. Our goal in Christian formation is to move from knowledge to informed practice, through the transforming work of the Spirit, so that the Bible comes alive among us. We seek to integrate our knowing with our being and our doing.

[Also see chart, page 28, comparing CE and CF]

## What changes might need to be made in the local church to accomplish this transition?

Though we see the transition from Christian education to Christian formation as a major paradigm shift, there may not be a great deal of change needed in what we do in our local church ministries. The larger shift might need to be made in the way we perceive what we do. Basically, there are **three essential shifts** in our perceptions, and perhaps in our practices, in the local church.

1. **from a focus on *program* to a more intentional focus on *personal transformation*** in cooperation with the Holy Spirit

*First and foremost Christian Formation is about personal transformation. The church can help to facilitate this through ministries. Ministries are different from programs in that the primary focus is not programmatic but helping others to grow closer to Christ.*

2. **from a primarily *segmented* approach to a more *holistic* and *integrated* approach**

*All the ministries work in coordination to fulfill the mission of the church. There are opportunities for mutigenerational ministry. There is a partnership with the home in the spiritual nurture of children and youth. Christian Formation is viewed as occurring in all aspects of life not just "at church".*

3. **from a primary emphasis on *head*, to a more balanced emphasis on *head, heart, and hands* (knowing, being, doing)**

- a. *Knowing: Head, understanding*
- b. *Doing: Hands, serving*
- c. *Being: Heart and Soul: the essence of who I am*

*Christian Formation focuses on all three not just the knowledge portion of our faith*



## What are the natural, normal settings in which Christian formation occurs?

There are four natural settings in which spiritual growth takes place. Church leaders would do well to consider how they are assisting spiritual growth in each of these settings.

- Home or family settings
- Peer groups
- Congregational or intergenerational experiences
- Self-study or individual practice

Christian formation takes place in any or all of these settings, so church leaders need to encourage and consider providing resources for each setting.

## Are there some key elements for fostering Christian formation?

Christian formation is a lifelong process. The main thing, from the Bible's perspective, is that we are continually growing into Christ's likeness...as individuals, and as a church. "The only evidence of life is growth." It is definitely not an instantaneous thing. It's a continuing journey we're on. When an individual or a congregation seeks to develop practices within each of these four areas, we make room for the Spirit's transforming work within us.

**God's Word...**shaping our lives and our actions

*We are interacting with God's word*

**Know:** To study and understand God's Word.

**Do:** To apply and live out the truths of the Bible.

**Be:** To have an open heart for the Word (Christ) to come alive in us.

**Relationships....**nurturing our spiritual growth

*We are connecting in fellowship*

**Know:** To study, and understand what healthy relationships are.

**Do:** To interact with others in a Christ like way.

**Be:** To be in a growing relationship with God and others.

**Obedient living....**using our gifts in witness and service

*We are engaging in service and mission*

**Know:** To study and understand how God wants us to live, and to know what spiritual gifts we have been given as our contribution to the church's ministry

**Do:** To obey God's Word and to reach out to others through service and witness.

**Be:** To respond obediently to God because of our loving relationship with God, not to complete a check list of tasks for a distant God.

**Worship...**interacting with and experiencing God

*We are experiencing a worshipful life*

**Know:** To study and understand elements and styles of worship.

**Do:** To engage in worship, individually and corporately.

**Be:** To live a worshipful life because we have placed God first in our hearts and no relationship is greater than that which we have with God.

## **Are there tools available through the Department of Christian Formation to measure spiritual growth?**

No, but there are tools available to help you think about your personal spiritual goals. The *Personal Inventory of Current Spiritual Formation Practices* is designed to build awareness of possible GROWth areas. This resource is available through the Covenant Resource Center, as well as in downloadable form through our website (go to [www.covchurch.org/cov/formation](http://www.covchurch.org/cov/formation) and click on Resources). (A copy is also included in the appendix of your Trainer's Manual.) This tool helps build awareness of possible practices in order to make room for the transforming work of the Spirit in our lives. We believe that it is the role of the Holy Spirit to build Christlikeness into our lives, and it is our responsibility to choose to commit to practices that will facilitate that transformational growth.

The *Personal Inventory of Current Spiritual Formation Practices* provides a reflective starting point for the *GROW Commitment Card*.

While there are other measurement tools available that more specifically describe and measure the intended outcomes, congregational leaders need to consider these carefully. What is being measured (e.g. behavior, attitude, knowledge)? What is the purpose of collecting the data, and with whom will it be shared? If such a tool is desired, it is best to begin by careful consideration of the characteristics of a mature Christian as recorded in Scripture. The best list we've found to measure our character against the goal of Christlikeness is the listing of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23).

Here are some examples or sources of measurement tools found on some church websites or in books focusing on the topic of spiritual maturity. Any such tool, however, will always be somewhat limited in its ability to depict Christlikeness.

*Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health*, Donald S. Whitney (NavPress, 2001)

*Spiritual Awakening: A Guide to Spiritual Life in Congregations*, John Ackerman (Alban Institute, 1994)

Spiritual maturity index [SMI] (1983). Ellison CW. IN: Hill PC & Hood RW (1999). Measures of religiosity. Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press. Pg.201-204

Website of Calvary Church in Charlotte, North Carolina  
[www.calvarychurch.com/calvary/nav1024.cfm?cat=19&subcat=65](http://www.calvarychurch.com/calvary/nav1024.cfm?cat=19&subcat=65)

*On Growing Up*, a sermon by Ray Stedman, is available through the website of Peninsula Bible Church (Palo Alto, CA) at <http://www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/ephesians/0116.html> Though it was delivered in 1966, and does not use inclusive language, it provides a very helpful theological perspective. A chapter from John Ortberg's book *Fully Devoted Follower* also informs a proper understanding of our spiritual life and growth. We've included both of these in the appendix, and highly recommend that you read them.

It's a good idea to engage church leaders in dialogue about what characteristics they would like to see developing in those who are followers of Christ. A recent article in *Net Results* (reprinted for inclusion in this appendix) recommends that such an exploration

begin with a study of the early church in the book of Acts. The recommended examination of the church's ministries that are in place to support discipleship is quite similar to the exercise included in the CF in the Local Church plan.

Our preferred strategy, as stated above, has been to encourage church leaders to discuss the marks of spiritual maturity, or Christlikeness, in their own context and to encourage the commitment to practices that will move us toward that ultimate goal. Use of the *Personal Inventory of Current Spiritual Practices*, available through the Covenant Resource Center or our website, will provide both a picture of growth in intentional commitment for individuals and (if desired) provide a profile of congregational spiritual growth.

**What happens if, as we are reviewing and/or evaluating our current activity, a particular ministry falls under more than one GROW heading?**

When a church is evaluating its ministries a ministry may fall under more than one of the GROW areas. There is often a dominant area which can be noted. However, churches with fewer ministries will often find that a particular ministry fits equally in all four areas. This is okay and should be celebrated as such.

**What is the ultimate goal of this process, from the perspective of the denomination and/or conference?**

We believe that Christian formation will be more effectively done when it is considered the responsibility of the whole of the church, rather than compartmentalized into a particular program or "department" of the church. This process aims at helping all church leaders see how their ministries contribute to the spiritual formation of the congregation.

It's our heartfelt desire that Covenant churches would become strong, vibrant communities of faith...congregations filled with children, youth and adults who are growing in knowledge and grace...growing into Christ's likeness, experiencing and expressing love for God and others. This is an ongoing and lifelong pursuit.

The following excerpt expresses our belief that the focus is to be on spiritual growth as part of a lifelong journey whose goal is to become like Christ.

**The Pursuit of Spirituality** (excerpted from [www.theprayerplace.org/kwcc](http://www.theprayerplace.org/kwcc), website for Kingdom Way Christian Church of Columbus, Ohio)

We can never reach spiritual perfection in this life. There are simply too many steps. There are too many high mountains to climb, too many parched deserts to cross, and too many stormy seas to sail. Our pursuit of spiritual perfection is, or should be, a never-ending journey. But what a marvelous journey it can be! Jesus tells us that he came to this earth to set the example—to show the way to this more abundant life.

We have to be careful about using the term *spiritual maturity*, however, because it tends to establish an artificial measuring stick. The Bible, in fact, warns us against measuring ourselves by ourselves. The only true measuring stick of spirituality is Jesus Christ. And when we use that standard for measurement we find ourselves—all of us—still bunched up and trying to break away from the starting line.

Our life in the Spirit is *not about* achieving spiritual maturity. It's *not about* where we are in God, or how far we have yet to go. Rather it is all about the quality and intent of the pursuit. Everything else then happens naturally.

### **How can we find out more about what tools are available to us?**

To learn more about what is offered, visit the Resources and Services pages on the website ([www.covchurch.org/formation](http://www.covchurch.org/formation)) or call the Covenant Resource Center (800.338.4332.)

*“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.” (Philippians 1:9-11)*

## Sample Mission Statements from Covenant Churches

*To know God through His Word, and to make Him known to our world through our lives*



To reach, teach, and unleash committed followers for Jesus



*Based upon the authority of the Bible and the power of the Holy Spirit, the mission of the \_\_\_\_\_ Evangelical Covenant Church is to provide a spiritual home where people belong to Christ, fellowship with God's people, grow in Him and serve others.*



To know Christ and Grow in Him  
To serve Christ and Make Him Known



\_\_\_\_\_ Covenant belongs to the family of the Evangelical Covenant Church of America. We believe the Gospel is “Good News” for the whole person and the whole world. We welcome into membership all who confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. We are a part of the Pacific Southwest Conference whose purpose is to help each local church “effectively fulfill Christ’s mission in its unique setting.” The Great Commandments (Mark 12:29-31) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) of Jesus are the biblical mandates for our mission.

- *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*
- *Love your neighbor as yourself*
- *God and make disciples of all nations*
- *Baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit*
- *Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you*



Our mission is to glorify God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – by becoming mature disciples of Jesus Christ and inviting others to join us through: Bible teaching, prayer, worship, fellowship, service, and evangelism.



*To grow together as a community of faith, as we glorify God in our worship, bring people to faith in Christ, develop mature disciples and equip them to serve in Christ’s name, that God’s love may be proclaimed and His grace made visible.*



We seek to be a loving community of people surrendered to the Lordship of Christ, submitted to the Word of God, and seeking to lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

## Reflections on My Spiritual Journey

Take a minute to reflect on this definition of Christian formation. Then choose a question below to reflect on and respond to as you relate your journey to this definition. Feel free to respond to as many questions as you like.

*Christian Formation is...  
Our continuing journey  
of being transformed by the Holy Spirit  
into Christ's likeness,  
experiencing and expressing love  
for God and others.*

1. In what ways has your personal journey of Christian formation been continuing?
2. How are you being transformed into the likeness of Christ? Describe some tangible ways.
3. When have you recently experienced God? How?
4. In what ways do you express love for and to others?



### **God's Word...shaping our actions and our lives**

We are people of the Word, who value Scripture as the only perfect rule for our lives. We desire to know, understand, and live out the truths of the Bible. Our passion is to see the Scripture come alive among God's people.

### **Relationships...nurturing our growth**

Healthy and effective spiritual growth takes place in the context of relationships...both within peer groups and across generations. We encourage people to be in discipling, mentoring or small group relationships that produce growth.

### **Obedient Living...using our gifts in witness and service**

We believe that discipleship to Jesus implies radical obedience to all of his teachings. Such obedience, together with the Spirit's work in us, equips us to do kingdom work...giving witness to the good news and serving others in Jesus' name.

### **Worship...interacting with and experiencing God**

Knowing that God desires an intimate relationship with us, we are committed to a lifestyle of worship characterized by both individual and corporate expressions of devotion. Our daily worship practices empower us for living an obedient, abundant, and joy-filled life in Christ.

## *Christian Formation and Me – GROW*

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>God's Word</u></b> <b>Shaping our actions and lives</b></p> <p>◆ What am I currently doing? <i>Personally:</i></p> <p><i>Home/family:</i></p> <p>◆ What is my plan? <i>Personally:</i></p> <p><i>Home/family:</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Relationships</u></b> <b>Nurturing our growth</b></p> <p>◆ What am I currently doing? <i>Personally:</i></p> <p><i>Home/family:</i></p> <p>◆ What is my plan? <i>Personally:</i></p> <p><i>Home/family:</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Obedient Living</u></b> <b>Using our gifts in witness and service</b></p> <p>◆ What am I currently doing? <i>Personally:</i></p> <p><i>Home/family:</i></p> <p>◆ What is my plan? <i>Personally:</i></p> <p><i>Home/family:</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Worship</u></b> <b>Interacting with and experiencing God</b></p> <p>◆ What am I currently doing? <i>Personally:</i></p> <p><i>Home/family:</i></p> <p>◆ What is my plan? <i>Personally:</i></p> <p><i>Home/family:</i></p>

*\* I will share this goal with \_\_\_\_\_ (Accountability Partner)*



## *“Chart Your Ministry” Worksheet*

Group Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Group Participants:

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1	2	3	4
<b>Ministries/ Activities for which we are responsible</b>	<b>*Rate the quality</b>	<b>Peer Group Congregation/ Multi-generational Home/Family Individual</b>	<b>Keep Improve Eliminate</b>
<b><i>God’s Word</i></b>			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
<b><i>Relationships</i></b>			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
<b><i>Obedient Living</i></b>			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
<b><i>Worship</i></b>			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			

**\* Rating for column 2**

**1** = things are great

**2** = everything is just fine

**3** = things could be better

**4** = some improvement is needed

**5** = call for life support – things look critical

## Responsive Reading of Commitment

**Leader:** Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!  
**People:** God's steadfast love lasts forever.

**Leader:** We dedicate ourselves to you, Lord Jesus.  
**People:** Help us to read the Bible daily.

**Leader:** We dedicate ourselves to you, Savior and King.  
**People:** As we relate lovingly to others.

**Leader:** We dedicate ourselves to you, Holy Spirit.  
**People:** Through witness, service and obedient living.

**Leader:** We dedicate ourselves to you, Lord God Almighty.  
**People:** As we worship you moment by moment, making you first in our lives.

Handout 4

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