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Editors' Notes

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Editors' Notes

D'Esta Love and Stuart Love

This issue of *Leaven* was inspired by the 2012 Stone-Campbell Dialogue, which met in Dallas, Texas. The Dialogue is a group of church leaders from the three streams of the Stone-Campbell Movement that gathers each year to engage in conversation, mutual understanding and fellowship. D'Esta is one of the members of the Church of Christ delegation, and she took the lead on this issue. The theme for the 2012 Dialogue was *Spiritual Formation* and the meeting consisted of a spiritual retreat led by JACKIE HALSTEAD, director of the Institute for Christian Spirituality at Lipscomb University. The time spent telling our stories, practicing *lectio divina*, exploring spiritual resources for ministry, and finding moments and places for personal prayer and quietude was not only personally refreshing but proved to be a wonderful context for the divergent streams of the Stone-Campbell Movement to come together as one with a deeper appreciation for each other. It was following this experience that Jackie was asked to guest-edit an issue on *Intentional Spiritual Formation* as a resource for individuals as well as our churches and colleges and universities.

We envision this issue being a rich resource for churches, retreats, classrooms, seminars and personal spiritual development. The next issue will be equally helpful and rich. Jeff Miller of Milligan College has guest-edited an issue on *Gender Inclusion in Christian Churches*. The articles Jeff has assembled will benefit all streams of the Restoration Heritage and help us continue to inform and advance our conversations about gender in our various churches. The third or fourth issue of the year will be devoted to the Pepperdine Bible Lectures, emphasizing *Baptism & the Lord's Supper* as related to the formation of Christian community. Ongoing work is being done for an upcoming issue on *The Holy Spirit*. We thank you for your support of *Leaven* and ask that you remember us in your prayers.

Guest Editor's Comments

Jackie Halstead

Much of my work at Lipscomb University revolves around spiritual formation. My job title includes the words *spiritual formation*. I direct the Institute for Christian Spirituality that has as its mission "spiritual formation and missional living." I teach courses on spiritual formation and serve as the spiritual director for Lipscomb's DMin of Missional and Spiritual Formation. I lead retreats and speak on spiritual formation. I continue, however, to wrestle with the implications of these words. The phrase is ambiguous and can be off-putting to some in the Christian community. Some associate new age or eastern mystic philosophy with the term. Marketing the Institute has involved many discussions about how to describe what we do in order to offer some clarity about spiritual formation.

It is, however, not that complicated. The phrase *spiritual formation* is nothing more than just what it says: the manner in which we are formed spiritually. Wikipedia defines spiritual formation as "the growth and development of the whole person by an intentional focus on one's spiritual and interior life, interactions with others in ordinary life, and the spiritual practices (prayer, the study of scripture, fasting, simplicity, solitude, confession, worship, etc.)."¹ I disagree if that definition means spiritual formation only happens by "intentional" effort. We are all spiritually formed whether we are deliberate about the process or not.

1. *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Spiritual formation," accessed July 24, 2013, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritual_formation.

Yet, intentionality is the focus of this issue of *Leaven*. It is about intentional spiritual formation—intentional *Christian* spiritual formation. There are practical ways we can open ourselves to growth and development of our spiritual nature—especially as followers of Christ. In *Renovation of the Heart*, Dallas Willard states that “Christian spiritual formation refers to the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.”² We have a goal to which we advance: incarnational living, growing into the likeness of Christ. Equally important to this goal is the process. We do not proceed by our own efforts. The Spirit who dwells within us shapes us into God’s glory and likeness.

The paradox in spiritual formation is that one does not become spiritually formed in the same manner that one acquires other goals. If I want to be an accomplished pianist, I practice for hours on end. If I want to be an Olympic athlete, I practice for years. There is skill involved, but I must have the willpower to achieve the goal. This is not what we do to become spiritually formed. There are disciplines that I can practice (i.e., Christian spiritual disciplines) but it is not my skill or willpower that forms me into Christ’s image. I cannot do the shaping. All I can do is make myself available. God gives me the grace of making me more and more like Jesus. Nouwen says that we are not able to convert ourselves. We have to make space in our lives to listen to the Spirit within us.³ In an article entitled “From Solitude to Community to Ministry,” he explains the only way we can live incarnational lives is to spend time with the Creator. As we grow deeper and deeper in our relationship with God, we come to understand that God loves us. It is this love that changes us. We make the effort to be with God and God does the changing.

Thus, the focus of this issue of *Leaven* is on this understanding of spiritual formation. I have invited authors to share their hearts and thoughts on the topic of *Christian Spiritual Formation*. They will introduce ways to be with God from a variety of lenses and angles. Included are both individual formation and communal activities. We begin the issue with an article by **DAVID W. WRAY** using the lives of the church mothers and fathers to demonstrate how to live our lives in a sacred rhythm. **TIMOTHY H. ROBINSON** portrays the manner in which we are formed spiritually through God’s revelation in creation. **EARL LAVENDER** encourages us to view our story as part of God’s story and to give God control of that story. **DARRYL TIPPENS** uses St. Augustine of Hippo as a case study to illustrate the role of embodiment in spiritual formation.

We then move to a look at the spiritual formation of various populations. **HOUSTON HEFFLIN** discusses the role of community—both the church and the family—in the spiritual development of adolescents. **CHET BUTTERWORTH** gives us a peek into the life of a seminary student and the possibility of spiritual formation being absent in this context. **SHIRLEY D. STRAKER** lets us journey with her through the life of a preacher’s wife and the spiritual influences that shaped her relationship with God. We shift then to specific practices that can help the church on its spiritual journey. **LISA DURR** explains the role of a spiritual director through the eyes of a midwife and **WES HORN** describes the liturgical calendar and shows how its implementation can benefit a church community. The issue closes with an article written by me on the role of silence and solitude in our spiritual formation. This offers a bookend to the first article by Wray on sacred rhythms.

The articles are written through a variety of lenses, but with a commonality emerging from the experience of people who have a deep love for the Lord. They are on a journey of being shaped by God and have given their lives in service to inviting others to join in knowing the love of God. I hope that as you read the articles, you will grow in wisdom and understanding but, more importantly, I hope you are open to whatever God would have you experience in knowing God’s love and living in that freedom.

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2. Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 22.

3. Henri Nouwen, *Inner Voice of Love: A Journey through Anguish to Freedom* (New York: Random House, 1996), 6.