

Momentum 13

A Five-Fold Path for Nourishing a Church's Soul

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The Upper Room, like the local church, yearns to meet people where they are. And we are particularly keen to encourage spiritual leaders who are seeking nurture and care as they lead others on the path that leads to life. We understand sometimes it's difficult to find grounding beneath the shifting sands of our world and culture. We realize that people in our faith communities wonder if there is a safe place to be vulnerable. And many of us long to develop the spiritual practice and empathy that support a call to action and justice.

As spiritual leaders, it is mission-critical that we ground ourselves in spiritual practices that will strengthen our congregations during challenging times. We must tend to the *soul* of the congregation, to the heart of our call of being disciple-making congregations. We propose a five-fold path for tending the soul of the congregation:

- Choose the **pilgrimage** of faith
- Increase attentiveness to God's **presence**
- Develop regular spiritual **practice**
- Experience God's **power** for healing and mission
- Become **partners** with companions along the way

Choose the pilgrimage of faith. Making the main thing people's spiritual walk and their progress on the Christian journey means rethinking church. For example, people on a spiritual journey may not need a menu of activities to choose from as much as they need a map of the spiritual journey to the promised land - the love of God and neighbor.

Read Luke 24:13-14. Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we find ourselves on an unfolding spiritual journey that may take us by surprise but that we must embrace. Where would you locate yourself and your people in the unfolding drama of this story?

Increase attentiveness to God's presence. Spiritual vitality in our churches stems from our openness to God's transforming presence, not in anxious striving. Tending the soul of the congregation starts with attending to God's presence in our lives as leaders, then bringing the same prayerful openness into the meetings and ministries of the church. Our work is to help the people to pay attention to, listen to, learn from, and live in the Spirit.

Read Luke 24:15-16. The way we learn to recognize God's presence in our lives is in retrospect. Look back on your life and on the common life of your people, when have you experienced the nearness of Christ, a sense of being accompanied by the One who calls? Where have you been surprised by grace, awakened to the Presence?

Develop regular spiritual practice. Tending the soul of the congregation involves fostering spiritual practice among the people so that we as a body have eyes to see and ears to hear (Matthew 13:16). Prayer, searching the scripture, and service are means of entering into and sharing the heart, mind, and work of Christ. A balanced spiritual practice helps us get in step with the transforming rhythm of Jesus' life with God: work and worship, engagement and rest, service and Sabbath, contemplation and action.

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Read Luke 24:17-18. The Emmaus road story is a narrative of spiritual practices ranging from prayer (conversation with Christ) to faith sharing, practices by which they came (and we come) to see, celebrate, and serve the risen Christ. What practices do you find embedded in the story? Which practices do you and your people find most beneficial as means of remaining alive to God and alert to the call of Christ?

Experience God's power for healing and mission. Spiritual leaders foster availability to the God who sends us forth in the power of the Spirit. The journey of becoming a new kind of people is a joint venture with the Holy Spirit. With our cooperation, the Spirit lowers the threshold of our resistance to the new life God offers. We become increasingly available to the gift of "power from on high" for carrying on the mission.

Read Luke 24:33-35. Step by step, the risen Christ turned the disciples around and brought about a resurrection in them. A path of spiritual death turned into a path of spiritual life, a posture of self-preservation changed to joyful abandon to the power of Christ's self-giving presence. What turn about in attitude and direction is Christ inviting you to allow? What would happen if you were to "return to Jerusalem" totally available to the power of God's love in your community?

Become partners with companions along the way. Spiritual leaders seek partners who listen and respond together to the leading of the Holy Spirit. The path to becoming a new kind of people is one we walk together. When we awaken to God's presence in and among us, we join together in practicing the love of God and neighbor. As we make ourselves available to God's "power at work within us to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20), the nature of our relationships is already being transformed.

Read Luke 24:13, 33, 49. The journey to and from Emmaus became a shared pilgrimage and recreated the community of disciples. Together, they were able to recognize Christ, compare experiences, change directions, share stories, and respond to Christ's call in ways that are improbable in isolation. Who are your true companions on the way with whom you share common purpose and practice? In what ways do you facilitate spiritual partnership among your people, for their growth as disciples and for the strengthening of the church body?

Adapted from *Tending the Soul of the Congregation*. Follow this link to download the full booklet:

<https://www.upperroom.org/resources/tending-the-soul-of-the-congregation>

Invitation to connect

The staff and extended community of The Upper Room are experiencing the challenges of leading in a world that no longer automatically turns to the church as authority or guide. We are hearing a call to walk alongside those who are longing for deeper spirituality amidst the turmoil and complexity of the world.

This is an invitation to join the journey with us at The Upper Room Center for Christian Spiritual Formation. It is an invitation to be attentive to the One who loves us, to recognize the sacred in everyday experiences, and to find the courage to live faithful lives. If this meets you where you are, describes the challenges in your congregation, touches the woundedness of those with whom you are journeying, please connect with us at <https://www.upperroom.org/from-the-center>.