



ARTICLES

Pathways to Maturity - Spiritual Formation

By Pastor Kevin Van Wyk

As many of you know, I gave my life to Christ early in my sophomore year of college. I had been attending the InterVarsity prayer time so I could join them for breakfast, but I was terrified to pray. They did get me reading the Gospel of John, which was instrumental to my decision to follow Jesus, but I really had no idea what Bible study, devotions, quiet times, or any other spiritual disciplines were supposed to look like or accomplish.

InterVarsity soon sent me on a weekend retreat where I was coached and then sent on a 3-hour silent retreat with just a Bible. That was life changing. Later that day we began an inductive Bible study on the Gospel of Mark. That, too, was life changing stuff.

I've now spent years learning about and practicing different spiritual disciplines.

Some of you are checking out right now... you're thinking "that's just for pastors." THINK AGAIN. It is for you, and every other believer... stick with me.

Last month I explained... "I am thrilled to see the [Alliance organize pathways](#) toward ordination. I get it, most of you have no desire to be ordained, but you should have a desire to be mature, and the pathways to pastoral ordination lays out the [foundational competencies](#) for ministry leadership. In the

coming months, I hope to walk through the major areas of spiritual maturity outlined by the Alliance.”

Spiritual formation is the first category of competencies. The FIRST! While they are all important, being formed by the Spirit through the Word of God and prayer is the foundation of a Christian life and certainly essential for any pastor. Elders, take note, this is for you. Deacons, Sunday school teachers, youth coaches, this is for you!

Spiritual formation is simply the idea that you, as a believer, are to be formed, molded, grown, matured, and transformed to be more and more like Jesus. This happens as we yield ourselves to the work of the Spirit and the Word in our lives.

The Alliance Ordination Team has agreed the following three competencies are essential for pastors...

#1 Spiritual Disciplines: Practices a range of personal spiritual disciplines routinely.

#2 Christian Friendships: Maintains friendships with Christians who are available for emotional support, counsel, and general enjoyment.

#3 Rest/Sabbath: Observes the sabbath and other rhythms of rest.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES
Prayer: Worship
Prayer: Petition/Intercession
Meditation with the Scriptures
Study of the Scriptures
Worship with other believers
Fellowship with other believers
Confession (of sins to another)
Fasting
Feasting
Hospitality
Service
Silence/solitude

I shared a few weeks ago, a quote from Gladys Kastein’s handwritten devotional. She certainly understood the call of the Christian to practice the spiritual discipline of prayer...

“Why Pray? Prayer is the provision he has given us. He commanded us to pray. Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). He delights in our fellowship. The prayer of the upright is his delight (Prov. 15:8). Our prayers glorify God... (John 14:13) Prayer brings results (James 5:17-18). When we pray we follow Christ’s example. (Mark 1:35) Prayer gives us a peaceful heart and an unworried mind. (Phil. 4:6-7) Prayer brings God into focus in our lives. It shows our dependence upon him and trust in him to work out the concerns of our lives in accordance

with his will.”

I hope you will join me in intentionally pursuing our mission to “know Jesus...” I pray, we, as a church, will pay greater attention to our soul, mind, and heart so that we truly reflect Jesus to the world. Pick a discipline and start growing it.

OPTIONS FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION:

There are several great books on Spiritual disciplines. I’ve enjoyed John Ortberg’s *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*, Richard J. Foster’s [Celebration of Discipline](#), and Dallas Willard’s *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. I recommend the following resources too.

A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World; by Paul E. Miller, David Powlison. (This is an inspiring book that will help you make time for prayer. I just bought his next book “*A Praying Church*,” but have not started it yet.)

A Guide to Spiritual

Formation <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/learn/academy/th250-a-guide-to-spiritual-formation> (Really good stuff on not letting spiritual disciplines be a chore. Dark night of the soul stuff is excellent in addressing God-making disciplines a joyful experience when we are young in faith, but he brings dark nights to purge us of pleasure seeking and developing a mature faith. I enjoyed the challenge to reflect on the state of my walk with Christ.)

End of Summer Prayer Requests for Youth Ministry

By Jessa Ter Beest

- For students and leaders to continue reading their Bibles and spend time resting with Jesus
- 16 students and leaders started a year long Bible reading plan in May. Many of us have fallen a little behind in our reading with the busyness of summer, BUT our prayer is that we will not give up! God is working every time we open His Word so whether we do it in a year or 5, God just wants us to read it!
- For our upcoming school year: Students, teachers, coaches, staff
- For new school year preparations: Calendar planning, lessons, service projects, testimonies

- For good collaboration with other youth groups in the area - how can we support each other and help all of our students grow?
- For all of our youth coaches as we approach the school year. That they will encounter God and be confident in God's ability to equip them for the position they hold with our teens
- Praise for middle school students reading through the book of Philippians this summer!
- Praise for high schoolers who learned more about their spiritual gifts and how to use them for God's purpose!

Library News

This month I would like to introduce you to our non-fiction area in the library. The non-fiction books have been separated into topics. Hopefully, making it helpful for you to find what you are interested in.

Topics include: biography, family/parenting, books written by Max Lucado (one of my favorite authors), theology, discipleship, and books related to men's or women's interests. Also available are devotionals, books about worship, leadership, hot topics, and grief loss/life is hard.

I am sure if you take time to look at this non-fiction area, you will find a book that will be of help in your life, your walk of faith and of interest to you.

MESSAGES

Thank you for sending me to camp this year! I really enjoyed going to camp because I got to learn more about Jesus and God. I also enjoyed hanging out with my friends at Camp Manitoqua! Thank you!

-Jenna Bresser

A huge Thank You to the many people of our church family who helped us celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary! You may have greeted us at church or somewhere else with celebratory and encouraging words; or sent a card, or perhaps were able to come to our open house. There were many different ways you helped us make this a beautiful celebration of a marriage that God has blessed because He was included in our marriage from the day we became husband and wife.

-Rollie & Barb Schroeder

After the months of chemotherapy, and having to avoid crowds during that time, it is a joy to again come to church to worship God. We are so thankful for all of your prayers and also caring for us with visits and cards and phone calls. What a blessing you have been to us!

-Carl and Mary Vander Kooi

EVENTS

Mark your calendar...

Alto Reformed Church
August 2023

Worship Night
August 04 Join us at 7:30pm for a night of worship. Grab dinner with your friends/family and head over to church for an evening of praise and worship.

Outdoor Worship + Church Picnic
August 13 Join us on the church hill for the outdoor worship service at 10am followed by the church picnic at 11:30am. Bring a lawn chair/blanket and check your email/church mailbox for further details.

Summer JAM
August 27 All 3 year olds - incoming 5th graders are invited to join us for Summer JAM (Jesus and Me) during the service. Kids will be invited to the basement before the sermon starts for games, activities or crafts focused around a Bible lesson just for kids (split into PreK & elementary groups).

For detailed information:
Call 920.346.5505 or email office@altoreformedchurch.org

NEWS

Baptisms:

7/2/23 - Makenna Beth, daughter of Marcus & Kelli Vossekul

7/30/23 - Nylah Kaye, daughter of DeQuincy & Amber Gordon

Alto Staffing Progress:

The consultant spent a couple days with us in July and is helping us fine tune a job description. The Executive Team hopes to have this in the hands of the Consistory very soon for their review. From there, Slingshot will begin the search and be presenting candidates in the coming months.

Our Network:

On July 26, Kevin, three elders, and others from the Wisconsin Cluster joined a meeting to explore developing the Upper Mississippi Valley Network. Churches in Illinois and Eastern Iowa have joined the Dakota Network with the same hope we had to start a new network in our area.

The Dakota Network is supportive of this new network. At the same time, they realize they are no longer defined by the “Dakota” geography and will vote to change their name to Midwest Network on Aug. 1. Here’s their latest update...

Facts & Figures (as of 6/30/23):

- The Network is made up of 80 member churches representing 8 former RCA Classes: Dakota, West Sioux, East Sioux, Illinois, Pleasant Prairie, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Central Iowa.
- Six more churches have been invited from Iowa & Wisconsin. More continue to enter the pipeline to be released later this year and have been in contact, too.
- Churches have joined the Network from 4 distinct waves out of the RCA:
 - 37 churches were released Fall ‘21 from 3 Classes (Dakota, Minnesota, Illinois)
 - 5 more were released Spring ‘22 from 2 Classes (Dakota, East Sioux)
 - 30 more were released Fall ‘22 from 6 Classes (Central Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin [Technically, we were released in 2021 and

- joined Dakota in 2022], Pleasant Prairie, West Sioux, Northern Michigan, & Minnesota)
- 8 more were released Spring '23 from 3 Classes (Minnesota, East Sioux, Pleasant Prairie)
- At least 3 more churches are in the pipeline for release this Fall.
- Conversations are underway to create new clusters in the eastern part of our geography who will eventually become a new Upper Mississippi Valley Network (UMVN)
- \$73k cash on hand
- 59 churches have provided Partnership Offerings
- 5 clusters are meeting regularly, 2 more have had initial meetings, and one other is in development
- UMVN churches have begun to build a cash reserve for eventual launch of their new Network.

The Alliance Board has also share a recent update...

Alliance Governing Board Updates to the Churches July 25, 2023

Last month I mentioned that two members of the Alliance Governing Board had completed their terms. We have two new members to the board to announce. Pastor Craig Gilbert, lead pastor of Haven Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, MI will represent The Michigan Catalyst Network, and Pastor Ron Fischer, Director of Operations and Pastor of Outreach and Care, of Christ's Family Church in Davenport, IA will be a board member at large, and the treasurer of the Governing Board. We are pleased to have them joining us on the board!

At this point in time the Alliance Website notes 159 churches fully into the Alliance. Many more are having conversations with Alliance staff or members in regard to that possibility. The Dakota Network has 80 congregations, with additional ones coming after the fall classes meetings. One of our concerns as a network is that we have thirteen congregations who are at some stage of searching for their next pastor. A couple of those thirteen are to the point of having individuals who are candidating this coming weekend. Three additional congregations are waiting to install their new pastors. There is an additional two

congregations who presently have interim pastors. Continue to pray for God to raise up out of the pews leaders for Christ's Church! Pray for the congregations that are vacant and who are in the process of discerning God's leading for a pastor. Pray for the leadership of regions where there are more vacancies than installed pastors!

Many individuals continue to be processed in regard to evaluating their level of preparation through the credentialing pathways for leadership in ministry. That too is encouraging.

The Alliance Gathering is only two weeks away. Two hundred and twenty people have registered to attend. We are looking forward to times of worship, equipping, learning and fellowshiping. Many are coming from the Dakota Network.

We have talked for months about the interest in birthing a new network out of the Dakota Network, and that work continues to move ahead. Congregations in NE/NC Iowa, SE Iowa, Western Illinois, and Wisconsin are looking into such a possibility. Stay tuned!

Finances for the Dakota Network remain stable and encouraging. For the Alliance on the national level, God continues to provide timely gifts. Many of the churches in the Alliance are just now completing their RCA financial commitment, and are now beginning to share their covenant gifts with the Alliance. We are grateful for that.

Work has begun for the planning of the fall Dakota Network Meeting. It is Nov. 10 and 11. American Ref. Church of Worthington MN has agreed to host us. This location is a few miles farther east for our churches in that direction, but not too many additional miles for our churches in the west. More information will be coming on this annual meeting.

I hope you are enjoying life this summer and that ministry is bringing glory to Christ our Lord!

Gary Hegstad

Dakota Network representative on the Alliance Governing Board.