

Spiritual Formation at Pepperdine University

A Vision

University Spiritual Life Committee

This document represents the culmination of several years' work by the University Spiritual Life Committee, in fulfillment of its mission to "develop and refine a comprehensive vision for Christian spiritual formation at Pepperdine University." The USLC, which began meeting in January, 2013, includes faculty representatives from all five schools as well as the University Provost, Director of the Center for Faith and Learning, University Chaplain, Chair of the Seaver Religion Division, and representatives from Student Affairs, University Advancement, Office of Public Affairs, and the Board of Regents. After developing an initial draft, the committee sought input from the University Administration, University Steering Committee, Deans Council, Seaver College Religion Division, and Student Affairs, as well as from the Religious Standards Committee of the Board of Regents and from other faculty members, including faculty representing religious traditions besides Christianity. The committee is grateful for the feedback, support, and encouragement it has universally received from all of these sources. Although the committee considers this statement a living document, it nevertheless represents the vision for spiritual life that the USLC will seek to realize at Pepperdine University.

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to articulate a vision for spiritual formation at Pepperdine University. This vision recognizes Pepperdine's unique character and history as a Christian university and honors George Pepperdine's original dream for the college. It also seeks to be faithful to the highest ideals of Pepperdine's religious heritage, the Churches of Christ, one stream of the Restoration Movement. These ideals include a high view of Scripture, an appreciation for faith and reason, a commitment to the pursuit of truth, and a spirit of unity among all Christians. Anchored in these ideals, this vision statement calls for Pepperdine to create a safe and welcoming environment in which all members of our community (students, faculty, and staff), regardless of background, can thoughtfully explore the Christian way of life. It envisions a university where all members of the community are invited to grow together in their faith, integrate that faith into every dimension of their lives, and become "conformed to the image of Christ" (Rom. 8:29).

Pepperdine's Mandate for Spiritual Formation

The mandate for spiritual formation at Pepperdine University finds its strongest and clearest expression in the University's own mission statement, which begins with this bold pronouncement: **"Pepperdine is a Christian university."** That mission

statement goes on to declare the University's commitment to the highest standards of *both* academic excellence *and* Christian values. Likewise, Pepperdine's vision statement affirms the University's desire to be "known for the integration of faith and learning," insisting that "the educational process may not . . . be divorced from the divine process." By offering a vision for spiritual formation at Pepperdine, then, this document is intended to help the University fulfill what it has already proclaimed as its highest ideal.

That ideal is rooted in George Pepperdine's original vision for his new college, expressed in his 1937 dedicatory address:

I am endowing this institution to help young men and women to prepare themselves for a life of usefulness in this competitive world and *help them build a foundation of Christian character and faith which will survive the storms of life* [emphasis added].¹

In his first address to the student body, on November 30, 1937, he stated his desire that Pepperdine students, drawn from diverse religious backgrounds, would "give some time and thought to the study of the Scriptures."² As he put it,

We want to present to you, in teaching and example, the Christian way of life. We do not compel you to accept it. You are free to make your own choice, but we want you to know what it is.

Elsewhere he said that Pepperdine students should learn not merely "how to make a living," but "how to live."³ Although he did not use the contemporary language of "spiritual formation," George Pepperdine clearly believed that faithfulness to God was central to the education he hoped students would receive here. And although Pepperdine University has grown far beyond the small college he founded, to become a premier, global academic institution, we remain committed to his vision even as we seek to live it out in a dramatically changed world from the one he knew.

Pepperdine's Strategic Plan, *Pepperdine 2020: Boundless Horizons*, boldly reaffirms that original vision; it calls us to strengthen our commitment "to the faith mission of the University" and, specifically, to these goals:

1. Strengthen those components of the University concerned with spiritual formation, including (but not limited to) the Center for Faith and Learning,

¹George Pepperdine Original Founders Day Address (September 21, 1937)

² George Pepperdine's First Address to Students (November 30, 1937), reproduced in Richard L. Clark and Jack W. Bates, *Faith Is My Fortune: The Life Story of George Pepperdine* (Los Angeles: Pepperdine College Bookstore, n.d.), 185d 87.

³ George Pepperdine, "A Vision and a Challenge" (1957 Pepperdine Commencement Address), quoted in Richard L. Clark and Jack W. Bates, *Faith Is My Fortune: The Life Story of George Pepperdine* (Los Angeles: Pepperdine College Bookstore, n.d.), 195.

the University chaplaincy, campus ministries, the Religion Division, the Office of Student Affairs, the Veritas Forum, graduate student fellowships; and encourage greater cooperation among these units.

2. Support and encourage integrative scholarship that inspires discipleship and discipleship that produces rigorous scholarship.

Thus, the vision of Pepperdine as a place of both intellectual *and* spiritual transformation remains vibrant more than seventy-five years after its founding.

Pepperdine benefits from a global reputation for academic excellence. This reputation uniquely positions Pepperdine to model a genuine integration of faith and learning and a commitment to spiritual formation that pervades all aspects of its institutional life. Pepperdine aspires to be an institution where spiritual commitments shape the lives of teachers, scholars, administrators, and staff, and especially where the Christian faith impacts the classrooms of all academic disciplines through research and pedagogy. Realizing such an agenda will enable Pepperdine to be an institution that encourages all members of the community to love God with “heart, soul, strength, and mind” (Luke 10:27).

What is Spiritual Formation?

Spiritual formation is rooted in God’s desire that humans live in loving relationship with God and each other and in harmony with creation, a desire expressed in what Jesus, quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, identified as the two greatest commandments: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” and “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30-31). At the heart of spiritual formation is knowing God, discovering our identity as “God’s beloved,” experiencing intimacy with God, and being shaped into the character and personality of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit. It involves the formation of our minds as well as our hearts, reaching even to the level of “our most fundamental desires and our most basic attunement to the world.”⁴ As Dallas Willard put it, spiritual formation has to do with “those processes through which people are inwardly transformed in such a way that the personality and deeds of Jesus Christ naturally flow out from them when and wherever they are.”⁵

This call to pursue spiritual maturity runs throughout Scripture. David prays, “Create in me a clean heart” (Psalm 51:10). God, through Jeremiah, affirms, “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts” (Jeremiah 31:33). In the Beatitudes Jesus pronounces blessing on those who possess such qualities of

⁴James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 25.

⁵Dallas Willard, “Spiritual Formation: What It Is, and How It Is Done” available online, <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=58>.

character as humility, meekness, mercy, and purity of heart. Later in the Sermon on the Mount he calls disciples to seek a “righteousness” that goes beyond external action, but that also reaches to the internal state of one’s attitudes and dispositions. When questioned about traditional rituals of cleansing, Jesus challenges his followers to pursue purity of character, since “what comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person” (Mark 7:20-23). On the other hand, he says, “The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good” (Luke 6:45). Numerous passages in the NT explicitly use the language of formation to describe this process of developing spiritual maturity, for example, Paul’s challenge to be “transformed by the renewing of your minds” (Romans 12:2) or his description of growth as Christ being “formed in you” (Galatians 4:19).⁶ Finally, Jesus captures the way that spiritual formation leads us to serve the world when he tells his disciples, shortly before his death, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21).

Running through these passages are several themes that stand out as hallmarks of Christian spiritual formation:

- ✚ Intentionality: Spiritual formation is preeminently the work of the Holy Spirit, but it is also a “way of life,” freely chosen and intentionally pursued by followers of Jesus. This intentionality is expressed particularly in the tradition of spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, Bible study, meditation, sabbath, and communal worship.
- ✚ Community: The spiritual life is lived out in relationship with others within a community of faith, a vision ultimately reflected in the gathering of God’s people, the church.
- ✚ Character: The process of spiritual formation reaches not only to our actions, but more deeply, to shaping the patterns of thought, desire, and emotion that make up our very personality; and
- ✚ Mission: Spiritual formation ultimately points us to God’s mission of loving all persons as God loves them. Out of that love, we work to bring God’s vision of *shalom* to the world.

These passages also capture a crucial dimension of spiritual formation as a *process* of change and growth that happens over time. This dimension is reflected in the metaphor of the Christian as a pilgrim or traveler, one learning to “walk as Jesus walked” (1 John 2:6). Thus, the invitation to spiritual formation is an invitation to join with other pilgrims in a journey of faith.

⁶Similar language can be found in such passages as 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 1:17; 3:16-17; Phil. 2:12-13; and 2 Pet. 1:5-7.

Spiritual Formation at Pepperdine: Invitation to a Journey

Pepperdine University welcomes people from all religious backgrounds or no religious background, people who are at dramatically different stages in their spiritual journeys. In keeping with Jesus' call to practice hospitality toward all people, we view Christian spiritual formation as an *invitation* to participate in a spiritual journey, within a community committed to treating each other with care and respect.

We believe that *all* members of the Pepperdine community, regardless of religious background, play a vital role in the spiritual life of this University, through our common pursuit of truth, our participation in interfaith dialog, our engagement with deeper questions of meaning and purpose, and our commitment to shared values. At the same time, given our identity and mission as a Christian university, and growing out of the commitment to spiritual formation expressed both in the Pepperdine University Strategic Plan and in George Pepperdine's original vision for the college, we envision Pepperdine University as a institution that provides opportunity, encouragement, and resources for all members of the Pepperdine community to engage the Christian understanding of spiritual growth.

We understand that this aspiration will be lived out in different ways across our five schools. Nevertheless, all Pepperdine students will

- ✚ Explore the connections between Christianity and their chosen area of study; and
- ✚ Engage with faculty and staff who are excellent teachers and respected scholars, who also model and articulate personal Christian faith and who are equipped to facilitate conversations around deeper questions regarding the meaning and purpose of life.

Further, all Pepperdine students are invited to

- ✚ Receive a basic introduction to the Christian faith and, for those who seek it, to connect with a local Christian church;
- ✚ Discern their vocational calling and explore their unique role in God's mission to the world;
- ✚ Develop habits of spiritual practice that will lead to continued growth after they leave Pepperdine; and
- ✚ Engage in local, national, and international service that is explicitly connected to Pepperdine's mission.

We recognize that Pepperdine University comprises a variety of educational programs offered at multiple campuses, and that we attract diverse students who come with very different aims in mind. Thus, we have framed these goals as opportunities offered in a setting that is safe and welcoming to all. We also understand that they will be fulfilled in a variety of ways, from informal conversations and peer-led organizations, to curricular and co-curricular programs, to University-wide events such as the annual Thanksgiving and Easter services. Nevertheless, as a University committed to the integration of faith and learning, we will be intentional and active in offering all members of our community the opportunity to grow not only in knowledge and skill but also in faith, inviting all to love God with heart, soul, strength and mind.