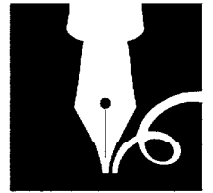


Connections

A monthly letter calling the church to faithful new life

NUMBER 83 - SEPTEMBER 1999



BY BARBARA WENDLAND 505 CHEROKEE DRIVE TEMPLE, TX 76504 254-773-2625 BCWendland@aol.com

All spirituality isn't the same

Responses to the July and August *Connections*, about Jesus talk and Jesus pictures, have reminded me of how different people are, even when they're Christians.



One reader said I must have been desperate for a topic, to come up with one so pointless. A few said in effect that my comments had shown that I wasn't a real Christian. But many other responses were very different from those. "I think you're right on target," one wrote. "I'm with you concerning the pictures of Jesus," wrote another. "They don't do anything for me. In fact, to the contrary."

What reaches some turns others off

Another Christian reader acknowledged that some people need a concrete, personalized view of Jesus, while others—"like me," she said, "and apparently like you"—do much better with a more abstract view. When she realized this several years ago, she told me, "I was relieved to know that I wasn't a heretic." She worries, however, as I do, about the fact that when we express the gospel only in the way that seems essential to some Christians we drive other Christians off.

Different Christians experience and express their spirituality in different ways, and in dealing with each other and planning

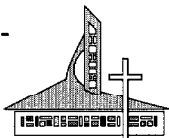
church programs we need to take that into account.

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another. We have gifts that differ ...

—Romans 12:4-6

Important implications for our churches

Steve Langford is a United Methodist pastor who has been investigating the different ways in which Christians



Different folks and strokes

Basic personality differences, which some researchers believe we're born with, have a big influence on how we react to each other and to what happens around us. Realizing this was a life-changing eye-opener for me, and a recent book has reminded me again of its importance, especially for what we do in our churches. We can't assume that our own favorite way of worshipping or expressing our beliefs is the only right way.



In *Personality Type in Congregations: How to Work with Others More Effectively* (Alban Institute, 1998), Lynne M. Baab reminds us how personality differences matter, in church activities and in expressing our faith.

Some of us are drawn more to the outer world of people, places, and things, while for others the inner world of ideas, feelings, and reflections has a much stronger pull. This difference means that large church meetings and social events make some of us feel drained but energize others. It means that some churchgoers relish times of sharing and greeting during worship while others dread such times. It means that silence seems essential to some but miserable to others.



Some of us mainly see concrete details, and notice and rely on the information that comes from our five senses. Others mainly notice overall patterns, and count more on what comes intuitively in a way that we can't clearly explain and that can seem hopelessly fuzzy and unreliable to the people who prefer sensing. This means that some of us want lots of detail about day-to-day church operation, while others focus more on purposes and long-range visions and goals.

Some of us think that being logical, detached, and objective counts most in decision-making, while others give more weight to the decisions' effects on the people that are involved. This means that some value harmony above all and want to avoid controversy, while others want to analyze and discuss all sides of issues even if strong disagreement exists.



Some of us like to decide quickly after getting what seems like enough information, while others prefer to leave the door open for more as long as possible. This means some of us are much more committed than others to deadlines, promptness, schedules, and plans.

Different folks really do need different strokes.

experience and express their spirituality. Like other observers, Steve finds that these differences have crucially important implications for our choices of what kinds of worship, ministry, and prayer we offer in our churches.

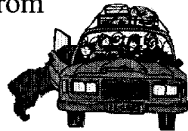


Steve hasn't just investigated, however. He has developed some helpful ways of making pastors and lay members aware of the differences. He has also designed some worship services and other church programs that take the differences into account and thus help more people discover their spirituality.



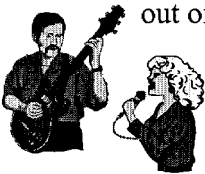
A welcome discovery

For people whose spirituality doesn't match the spiritual expressions that are most common in churches, that discovery can be life-changing. It can let people see for the first time that instead of being hopelessly unspiritual as they may have feared they were, their spirituality is simply different from the spirituality reflected in the worship and other church activities they've seen. Steve Langford saw how important this discovery was for some formerly reluctant church attenders when they came back to town early from family Spring Break trips in order to avoid missing any part of the series he was presenting about spirituality!



Steve's presentations are largely based on the work of Corinne Ware, a therapist and pastoral counselor. She describes her findings in *Discover Your Spiritual Type: A Guide to Individual and Congregational Growth* (Alban Institute, 1995).

Ware finds that many people who are dissatisfied with their faith experience feel that they don't fit in their worship group. "These are often deeply religious people," Ware assures us, "and their distress is genuine." And it isn't just a result of immaturity. "Much of the distress," she observes, "comes out of a deep inner sense that natural tendencies are either being violated by present worship patterns or simply not being allowed expression by those practices."



Ware describes four kinds of spirituality, and Langford uses illustrations from the Bible and Christian history to show how Christians experience

and express each of these kinds of spirituality. As with other ways of categorizing people, few of us fit completely into any one of these categories, but they can help us understand the differences we see in each other.



▪ **Lamplighters** find God mainly through the mind. They emphasize knowing God, and they believe that God is knowable. They focus especially on ways in which God is revealed. Lamplighters tend to see truth as a key aspect of God's nature.

Lamplighters often use formal language for their prayer. They're likely to pray for knowledge and guidance. They see God revealed in scripture, sacraments, and Jesus Christ on the cross. They



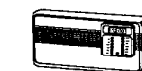
tend to prefer carefully planned worship that is carried out in an orderly way and that begins and ends at announced times.

For many Lamplighters, ritual, music, and liturgy are important especially because they evoke memory and presence and teach traditional truths. Lamplighters tend to believe that God's word, rightly proclaimed, is the centerpiece of worship. As biblical examples of Lamplighters, Steve Langford sees Paul, Mary at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39), and Jesus in his role as teacher and parable-giver.

▪ **Shepherders** also see God mainly as revealed and knowable. However, unlike Lamplighters they experience God mainly through their heart and emotions, and they put strong emphasis on experiencing God rather than on knowing God. Joy is a key part of their spirituality.



Shepherders often prefer deeply moving, spontaneous worship services that aren't restricted to a fixed length. Spontaneous, heartfelt prayers are the most meaningful kind for shepherders. They want music to unite the congregation and give a feeling of warmth. Ritual and liturgy aren't very important to them. Shepherders tend to speak of God's being real in their lives, and of Christ's living in their hearts. They come to church to learn to walk in holiness



with the Lord, and many of them support missions, evangelism, and religious TV and radio. Some biblical examples of Shepherders, Steve finds, are Miriam, John, David, and Jesus as healer.

▪ **Mystics**, as Langford describes them, notice mainly the aspects of God that are mysterious, all-encompassing, and beyond human comprehension. Like Shepherders, many experience God especially through the heart and emotions. Unlike Shepherders, however, mystics tend to emphasize communing with God, not just experiencing God.



Mystics are likely to prefer simple worship services that include times for silent reflection. For mystics a meaningful way to pray is to empty their minds of distractions and simply be in God's presence. They often like quiet, simple music that helps the soul come to quietness and union with God. For mystics, God's word is proclaimed when God's Spirit speaks to the inward heart.



Mystics may come to church to be one with the creator God. They often speak of God as a mystery that can be grasped for but never completely known. Ritual and liturgy are likely to be ways in which God becomes present to Mystics, and they often support spiritual direction, retreats, and liturgical reform. Some biblical examples of Mystics, Steve finds, are Anna (Luke 2), Moses, Isaiah, and Jesus when he withdrew to pray.

▪ **Crusaders**, like Lamplighters, tend to experience God mainly through the mind. They see God as mystery revealed in Christ. Crusaders often express their spirituality through action aimed at promoting justice. They put great emphasis on doing God's will in the world, and they are advocates who urge others to act.



Crusaders tend to give higher priority to ordering themselves for God's service than to participating in worship services. They think it is important to gather whenever and for however long is needed to accomplish the tasks that God wants accomplished. Crusaders are likely to see their life and their work as their prayer. For worship they prefer music that inspires and motivates participants to

If you want to know more about how Steve Langford presents these spiritualities to pastors and lay churchgoers, you may contact him at First United Methodist Church in Round Rock, Texas, where he is Associate Pastor. His phone number, which I'm giving with his permission, is 512-255-3336.

greater dedication and effort. Many Crusaders believe that what we do is our "preaching" and speaks louder than anything we say. For Crusaders, ritual and liturgy are likely to be important mainly as ways to make statements about inner convictions. Crusaders often support political action aimed at establishing justice in institutions and in the whole society. As examples of Crusaders, Steve Langford suggests Deborah (Judges 4-5), John the Baptizer (Matthew 3), and Jesus when he cleansed the Temple (Matthew 21:12-13).



Congregations have different styles, too

As you consider which kind of spirituality you lean toward, you may find it helpful to consider also the spirituality that characterizes your church congregation as a whole. It gives an important message not only to members but also to outsiders who are looking for a church home that will help them experience and express their God-given spirituality.



If all of your worship services are formal and rigidly structured, for example, Shepherders may not feel at home. But if the services include a lot of hugging and spontaneous prayers and testimonies, Lamplighters may be too uncomfortable to keep coming and Mystics may leave in search of the silence they crave. Lack of emphasis on God's call to work actively for justice in the church and the world can keep Crusaders from seeing your congregation as a place for expressing their spirituality.

Our own spirituality isn't the standard

If a congregation's worship services and other activities reflect only one kind of spirituality, it will attract mainly the people whose personal spirituality is that kind. Then because the congregation includes so few Christians whose spirituality is different, the members of the majority can easily get the idea that the others are unspiritual or even unchristian. That can lead to the inappropriate narrowness and harsh attacks that we too often see among Christians, lessening the church's ability to be what God calls it to be.



I feel sad when I see Christians dis-counting and even berating other Christians whose spirituality happens to be



different from the spirituality of the ones doing the discounting. I wonder if the *Connections* readers who saw my recent comments as evidence of not being a real Christian simply have a different kind of spirituality from mine. They may be Shepherders, the spirituality that I'm least able to connect with.

It can be hard to see that others are experiencing God if they claim to experience God's presence or God's call in ways quite different from our own and from what we consider to be the

The circumcised believers ... were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles ...

—Acts 10:45

experience of most Christians. Maybe one of the most important ways in which God calls us to show love, however, is to acknowledge that God sometimes deals with people in ways that we haven't experienced and may not even consider possible. This way of showing love seems especially important right now, when many of our churches are making crucial decisions about issues on which their members have widely different views.

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

—John 13:34-35

Barbara



Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

—Romans 14:10

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

—1 Corinthians 12:4-7

John said to [Jesus], "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not stop him ... Whoever is not against us is for us."

—Mark 9:38-41

If you've just discovered *Connections*

and you want to get it monthly by U.S. mail, send me your name, mailing address, and \$5 for a year's issues. For any of the 6½ years' back issues, add \$5 per year. *Connections* is also available each month from the Internet at www.wisconsinumc.org/connections/index.html.



For more information, write me at the address above, phone 254-773-2625, e-mail BCWendland@aol.com, fax 254-773-2923, or see www.vvm.com/~bcwendland.

I'm a United Methodist laywoman, and neither a church employee nor a clergyman's wife. *Connections* is a one-person ministry that I do largely at my own expense. *Connections* goes to several thousand people in all 50 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico—laity and clergy in at least 12 denominations, plus some non-churchgoers.