

SPIRIT JOURNEY RETREAT: Empowering Our Faith

Compiled and led by John P. Cock for The United Methodist Church of Northfield
at Mount Olivet Conference Center, Farmington, MN, Feb. 16-18, 2007

6:00-6:30 pm Dinner in dining room

Session One (Friday Night) 7:00- 9:45

Rational Aim: To acknowledge the way life is and that the church bows to that power at the heart of life, not to some supernatural understanding.

Experiential Aim: To be faced with reality, and in the midst of that respond to the possibility to say “Yes” and “Thank you.”

7:00

Greeting: We come to journey together more deeply into gracious existence.

I. Introduction: “*a conversation with few words*”

Go round: Lump A/B/C together for everyone; D/E/F randomly.

- A. **Name** and place you were **raised** (John, Galax, VA)?
- B. **How many years at UMC Northfield (or another church)?**
- C. What is something you’d **like this group to know about you** (in a few words)?

- D. **Name** and what is one place in the **world you especially care about** (Indonesia)?
- E. What is one **big concern** you have (species extinction)?
- F. What is one **anticipation** or expectation you have for this **Spirit Journey Retreat** (e.g. “a deeper awareness”)

We’ll have a **great journey** together. (**Let us pray**) *Oh Mysterious Power – who gives us life, sustains us on the journey, and takes us back whence we come – give us the faith of Jesus as we go. Amen.*

7:30

II. Context

My Assumptions about This Group . . . this communion of saints

1. **Spectrum** (draw: I----- -----I) **Everything is diverse** (overwhelming diversity, especially since WWII and since 9/11).
 - **billions of galaxies**
 - **millions of species**
 - **over 200 nations**
 - **world religions**
 - **USA 50 states**
 - **denominations**
 - **UMC congregations**
 - **UMC Church of Northfield**
 - **our families**
 - **and myself** (Unity only happens in diversity.)

2. (R.A.M. = “repeat after me”) “All of us have experienced depth of *spirit*: the **Spirit of God**, the **Spirit of Christ**, the **Holy Spirit**”.
3. I am a spirit guide on our spirit journey this weekend. A facilitator: one who **helps us remember**/ one who **helps us get in touch** with **spirit** . . . that we all **know** and have **experienced**.
4. We long to align the symbols of faith (G/X/HS/C) with our experience of life – with (TWLI) *the way life is* (TWI Augustine said) *the way it is*. When that happens – **when our ultimate symbols and our real lives come together** – we see **human combustion**

(Clay wrote in his letter asking you to come to this retreat: “May you faith burst into blaze!”)

Sum: (1) We are diverse. (2) We have experienced *spirit’s* presence. (3) And we long to get our **faith symbols** and our **real life together**.

7:50

III. The Retreat Format (Five Sessions)

1. Tonight: **G** or how we relate to the **Mysterious Power** we all experience
2. Sat morning: **X** or the **Event and the Word** of our lives
3. Sat afternoon: **HS** or the **Power** that gives us freedom
4. Sat night: (movie to see if our faith symbols and our life are together)
5. Sun morning: **C** or **body of TWC** for each other, the greater community, creation

During each of the **four remaining sessions** there will be a (1) contextual presentation, followed by a (2) seminar on a few paragraphs of theology (or seminary for laity -- all of us called out to be **ministers of God**); (3) special conversations and movie; (4) and worship, spirit exercises, and singing.

We have a “bountiful” schedule. We will try to start and finish on time, and then reward ourselves with some hardy breaks for exercise, looking at the wonder of non-human creation, conversation, and personal reflection and dreaming.

8:00 With no further ado . . . **let us talk about G-O-D**

But first, hear a piece of a poem by Stephen Crane. Hope you like poetry as much as I do.

I walked in a desert.

And I cried:

“Ah, God take me from this place!”

A voice said, “It is no desert.”

I cried: “Well, but . . .

The sand, the heat, the vacant horizon.”

A voice said: “It is no desert.”

We will focus on **four revolutionary theologians** of the 20th century, who didn't know any more about life than we do. We are all theologians.

To prove the point, **Granddaughter Kaitlyn**, when she was about age 5, asked if she could **tell us a story about God**. She began [read *HOC*, p. 27-8], "God pro-che-ated everything in the world. God made plants and animals from some special recipes. Then God made people. God made grown-ups first so that they could have babies. Then God made kids." She continued, "No one knows who made God or who his mother was. It's a mystery. But that's okay. I'll give you some clues." About that time her mother and little brother, Nolan, came, and we never got the clues. ~*At One With the Heart of Creation*

We all have our stories about God. We're all theologians, seeking the "origin, aim, and destiny" of life.

8:10 We're going to get some of **Rudolf Bultmann's clues about "God"** tonight. His *Crisis of Faith* paper lays out the way existence is for every person . . . or every person is always in the "crisis of faith." (Bultmann bio. comments)

I read first 3 paragraphs (with comments).

In paragraph. 4, Bultmann begins to use human examples of our cares.

Let **me be Bultmann** (using his words) and ask each of you a YES or NO question; discuss later (random.)

In **para 4**: "Ed." do we all spend time on *everyday care for the morrow*? (list cares for tomorrow)

In 4: _____, (Y/N) will we ever get the *care for tomorrow* done?

In 4: _____, are we *fools* because we lay up *stores for tomorrow* (e.g., estate/life insurance)?

In 5: _____, (Y/N) are we humans *limited*? (**Anybody**: B. says limited by what?)

In 6: _____, life is driven this way and that by a *longing for the true and the beautiful*?

In 6: _____, " " " " by an *indefinite longing . . . in the 'deep of the night'*?

In 7: _____, (Y/N) humans long for an *eternity of pleasure or pleasure of eternity*?

In 7: _____, humans have no *power over the eternal*? (B. also says "over the temporal"??)

In 8: _____, *life is driven by a desire for love*? (Manifestations of our desire for love?)

In 9: _____, *all are forced into solitude and a final solitude by God*?

In 10: _____, *all thirst for knowledge and have an impulse for action and work*?

In 10: _____, we never *complete our work*?

In 10: _____, our *work* ultimately fulfills our lives?

In 10: _____, (Y/N) behind *Want, Guilt, and Care* is '*brother Death*'?

In 10: Anybody, for x-credit, tell us the **story** about the illusion of the **blind Faust**.

In 10: _____, the *power that sets a terminus [end] to our knowing and doing* is *God*?

In 11: _____, humans operate out of *idea of duty* and *the voice of conscience* that lead to *guilt*?

In 11: _____, (long one) we experience *guilt* because of *thoughtlessness, wasted time, lost opportunity, impure thoughts, mean actions?*

8:30 (Build symbol – arrows – for the “Activity of G-O-D” a la Bultmann)

(UP ARROWS) “Drives”: *Driven Into Life*

1. s 4: **cares for tomorrow**
2. s 6: **longs for the true and beautiful**
3. s 8: **desires love**
4. s 10: **thirsts for knowledge; has impulse to act & work**
5. s 11: **has a sense of duty**

(UP: *Driven*): Arrows: 1.Care 2.Longings 3.Love 4. Knowing/Doing 5. Duty

(DOWN ARROWS) “Limits”: *Cut off from Life*

1. s 4: **cannot make life secure**
2. s 7: **experiences true/beautiful cut short**
3. s 9: **runs into final solitude** (re: love)
4. s 10: **knowing/doing meet their end**
5. s 11: **pronounced guilty**

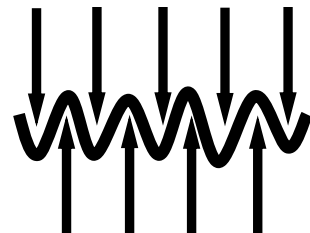
(DOWN: *Cut Off*): Arrows: 1. Security(X) 2.Longings(X) 3.Solitude 4.K/D(X) 5.Guilt

(Read most of para. 3 through “care,” pointing to “symbol of arrows” on the board.)

Read 12: “It is God who makes humanity finite, and who makes a **comedy of one’s care** [cannot make life secure], who allows one’s **longing [for true/beautiful] to miscarry**, who casts one into **solitude** [even ‘final solitude’], who sets a **terminus** to one’s **knowing and doing**, who calls one to duty, and who gives the **guilty** over to torment. And yet at the same time it is God who forces humanity into life and drives one into **care [for tomorrow]**; who puts **longing [for the true and beautiful]** and the **desire to love** in one’s heart; who gives one **thoughts [knowledge]** and strength for **one’s work**, and who places one in the eternal struggle between self-assertion [“willfulness,” another tr.] and **duty**. God is the enigmatic [?] power beyond time, yet master of the temporal; beyond being [existence], yet working in it.”

POINTING TO SYMBOL OF ARROWS:

1. What would you **call a movie** about this situation? (several)
2. Is this situation **good** or **bad**?
3. **Where are humans** in this situation?
4. So you are in the **middle**. **Till when**?
5. What’s it **like** to be in the middle?
6. How does it **affect** us?
7. What would someone **on the street** call such a situation? (Many people on street not that nice.)
8. What do **you call it**? Name that situation?
9. What does **Bultmann** call this picture: **being driven into life and cut off?** (p3/s1: **finiteness**)



10. What did **Jesus call it? (kingdom of *Abba*; at home with my loving Father)** (In this situation J. said, “**Into thy hands I commend my spirit**”). He lived the situation to the full.
11. It is the **great terror** OR the **great blessing**, depending on what? (our **faith/our relation**).
12. So why did **Bultmann call** this paper the *Crisis of Faith*? (decision about my real life)
13. What is the **beginning of wisdom**? (the **fear of God**: *YES* finally means the **love of God**)
14. To **deny** that **life is this way** is to . . . ? (go **against the consensus** of our experience).
15. **Bultmann’s confession is that it is the “Mysterious Power I call God” that puts us in this situation, that this is the way life is.**
16. **If “God” is not at the heart of this situation . . . If “God” is out of it . . . then what?**
17. I have a friend who wrote a **play** about it: she called it *Between the Arrows*. (Denver, 2000) She also considered: *Between Life’s Possibilities and Limits* or *The Great Crunch* or *The Big Squeeze*
18. **I call it *Enthralled by God*.**
19. It makes **all the difference what YOU call it. It signifies your relationship to life as given.** We can call the Mysterious Power “**God**” or “**Bad Luck**” or “**No Friend of Mine**.”
20. This (symbol) is *the way life is* and **Jesus and his followers** say what about it? (**JEWS**: “It Is Very Good!” Or from a **preschool song** Lynda helped write: “I Tell you man I love it here.”)
21. It’s **not a mistake**. “**God**” **did not goof**.
22. So, the **Good News** is “We are in the **right** [perfect] **place for the great life, the great spirit journey of faith**.”

Job, after lost his family, attendants, his animals . . . “**The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh. Blessed be the name of the Lord.**” That is NOT fate, that is **faith!**

Son Johnny, about 6 years old, after this Bultmann session in a children’s retreat (**this symbol of arrows**) when I was **moaning to Lynda** about a situation I was in – you know, “Poor me! – (he gave me the arrows sign (with his **10 little fingers**) and said, “Daddy, **YES or NO?**” We’re all theologians, huh? (I give 10 fingers sign). **YES or NO?** That’s the crisis of faith we’re **always in**, saying **YES or NO?** to our real life and thanking or cursing the Mysterious Power (that **Bultmann calls “God”**).

Song: Let’s **rehearse Bultmann’s paper again**, but this time **as a song**. Turn to page ___ in the “Songs, Rituals” booklet and let’s sing the **“GOD” song**.

9:30 CLOSING

Let’s do a preschool ritual (Fifth City Preschool, Chicago):

Opening Ritual (to be chanted)

*This is the day we have!
This is the day we have!*

*We can live this day
Or throw it away!*

This is the day we have!

So, pick up this day and live!

Song: Now, let's sing a preschool song (Fifth City Preschool: Chicago).

I Love Fifth City

(tune: "I Love the Flowers")

Question: How do this ritual and song accent what we've been saying here tonight about "faith in God"?

9:40 - Practics

Retreat coordinator: _____ will be our retreat coordinator, so if you have any practical questions, see her. "_____, please tell us of practical matters."

9:43 Affirmation (What a great group. This will be an awesome journey together.)

9:45 Benediction: L: The Lord be with you. R: And with thy Spirit. L: **Amen.** R: **Amen.**