

Transforming Center Guiding Values and Principles

“The spiritual radiation of a community depends on the commitment of its members to the transformational journey and to each other. To offer one another space in which to grow is an integral part of this commitment.”

Fr. Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart*

Spiritual community at the leadership level does not happen by accident nor is it maintained and cultivated in a haphazard way. It is led by leaders who are clear that spiritual community is what they are called to, who are committed to the values that undergird it, and who are willing to embrace the practices that help us to live out our values in concrete ways.

Some values are very general, appropriate for any Christian church or organization; others will be more specific to the unique calling of that particular community. As Gordon Cosby, founding pastor of Church of the Savior, observes: “Our written commitment has grown out of our life together. The life occurred first and then it was put down in a written commitment. To make a formal commitment without having drunk deeply of the life of the group is simply to take a husk that can mock us. Only in commitment can there be real belonging.”¹ Following is summation of some of the foundational values and principles that have shaped our life together in the Transforming Center over the years and to which we remain deeply committed.

Community. We affirm that we are in our very essence a spiritual community gathered

around the presence of Christ. *What we do* flows out of *who we are* in Christ. Learning to come together and stay together in unity is our first and most enduring task as we pattern our relationships after Christ's relationships with his disciples. "He loved his own until the end." (John 13:1, John 15 and 17) To compromise community would be to compromise our essence and then we would not have much that is of value to offer to others.

Spiritual Transformation. The best thing any of us have to bring to leadership is our own transforming self! In fact, the ability to *be* a community and to grow in unity is a direct result of a continuing process of spiritual transformation. Thus, each individual is committed to their own personal spiritual disciplines and also to corporate spiritual disciplines that support and catalyze our spiritual transformation in community. Our corporate disciplines include engaging in the *Transforming Community* experience, fixed-hour prayer, solitude and silence, reading and reflecting on Scripture, sane rhythms of work and rest, and celebration. It is routine for us to check in with each other about our spiritual rhythms when we are sharing privately or as a group. It is routine for us to talk about our pace of life and whether it is enabling us to remain healthy or whether we are approaching dangerous levels of exhaustion. It is routine for us to make scheduling decisions on the basis of this kind of awareness and discussion.

Equality and Unity. We believe and affirm that in Christ "there is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave nor free, there is no longer male nor female; for all of you are one in Christ." (Galatians 3:28) Individuals find their place and bring their gifts to Christian community on the basis of the spiritual reality of their relationship *with* God and their gifting *by* God (I Corinthians 12); they are not defined or limited on the basis of outward characteristics such as race, socio-economic status, or gender. The primary metaphor that Scripture utilizes to describe our relationship in the Body of Christ is that of a family in which the brothers and

sisters are growing in love for each other and learning to serve in harmony with each other. In the Transforming Center we as women and men understand ourselves to be workers together with Christ and with each other on the basis of spiritual gifts and calling. We seek to include one another in all aspects of life and ministry and to grow in our respect for what each person contributes to the life of the community.

Leadership Discernment. We are committed to the *habit* of discernment—seeking to be attentive and alert to God’s activity among us day by day—and naming that together so that we can seek to respond faithfully. We are also committed to the *practice* of discernment in community—proactively seeking God’s guidance together when we need specific direction for decision-making. Because discernment takes more time and a different kind of attention than decision-making, living out this value requires commitment to a clear process for leadership discernment and the discipline to carry it out. (See Chapter 12 of *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership* for a full description of the practice of leadership discernment to which we are committed.)

Listening to Fear and Resistance. An important aspect of our discernment together is our commitment to listening to inner dynamics such as consolation and desolation, fear and resistance. We all experience fear, particularly as we enter more deeply into community and calling. Fear causes people to behave strangely or even badly (to give into “fight or flight” reactions, self-protection, manipulation, etc.) When not acknowledged, fear causes us to shrink back when perhaps God is calling us forward; however, it can also alert us to situations that are truly dangerous. Becoming a leadership community in which it is safe to articulate fear enables us to 1) Exercise wisdom and ask *Is there real danger here?* 2) Hear God’s challenge for us to be courageous, or 3) Pay attention to areas where our trust in God or each other is weak and needs

to be strengthened.

Lived Experience. We will not teach theories or things we merely wish were true; we will teach only that which we are experiencing ourselves *to some degree*. “We speak of what we know, we testify to what we have seen.” (John 3:5) Sometimes this means that we choose not to teach on certain topics—even if it would be a great topic!—because we know we are not yet living them effectively.

Self-knowledge, Repentance, Confession. Closely related to our commitment to spiritual transformation and discernment in community is our commitment to increasing levels of self-knowledge, a willingness to take responsibility for becoming aware of negative patterns that affect interactions in community, and dealing with our own inner dynamics appropriately as we become aware of them.

We believe that spiritual transformation takes place primarily in those places where we are not like Christ; in community, others become agents of God’s troubling grace, giving us many opportunities to see ourselves more clearly, to repent and to confess our sins one to another so that we might receive grace and healing.² Thus, we seek to acknowledge and respect the profound role that brokenness plays in the unfolding of the spiritual life and in the formation of true spiritual community. We believe that coming face to face with our weakness and sharing it together prayerfully opens us to the gift of community and also releases God’s power among us, within us, beyond us. (II Corinthians 12:7-10) This fosters humility among us as we learn and serve together.

We understand all too well that without a shared willingness to name sin, to cultivate self-awareness relative to what caused our negative behavior, and to confess our sins one to another as needed, communities are prone to splinter and fall apart under pressure—an

inevitability that undermines Jesus' deepest desire as expressed in John 17—that all of us would be one and that as Christians we would be known by our love.

Truth-telling and Truth-hearing: God desires truth in the inward being because truth leads to freedom, spiritual transformation, and deeper levels of discernment. All truth, no matter how delicate or painful or seemingly inconsequential, can contribute to the process of transformation and to the ability to discern faithfully. Since the Holy Spirit has been given to us to guide us into truth, we seek to offer the truth to one another in love and gentleness rather than hiding truth or “spinning” the truth; anything less than this kind of honesty places the community in great peril (see the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5). Because truth-telling is such a deeply held value, it guides us and gives us courage to go ahead and say the hard thing with grace and love and to support each other in doing so.

Kindness. Of course, the commitment to truth-telling must also be balanced with love and kindness. Kindness is a basic characteristic of mature spirituality but often the Christian community is unkind. Choosing to enter into spiritual community together requires a certain tenderness and gentleness with each other. Many people, particularly pastors, have been treated so badly in churches and Christian organizations. Wouldn't it be something if we could at the very least be a place where people (including ourselves) encountered true kindness and gentleness over the long haul? Even if that's all we accomplished, it would be very significant!

Celebration. We believe celebration is the spiritual discipline associated with gratitude. Thus, we look for every opportunity to celebrate God's presence with us and his activity among us. Our retreats always have one evening that is specifically designed for celebration.

Conflict Transformation. One of the most important aspects of long-term community is very concrete commitments regarding what we will do when we experience significant

disagreement or when someone begins to discern a new call from God. What is our commitment relative to discerning together even through conflict or differing perspectives on what God is doing in us and among us? How do we move through conflict and disagreement in ways that helps us 1) open to the presence of Christ among us (“where two or three are gathered to deal with conflict there am I in the midst of them” Matthew 18), 2) honor God and the community, and 3) pursue deeper levels of transformation rather than capitulating to what is worst within us? What is the role of the group in calling individuals and the group back to these commitments during difficult times and what is a Biblical and spiritual process that we agree to adhere to?

Commitment to engaging conflict in a way that changes us *for the better* and deepens our unity in Christ is a more challenging commitment than “conflict management” or “conflict avoidance.” *Agreeing to this principle in theory* is very different than *living it out* with real people in the midst of a real conflict. It requires a certain level of spiritual maturity and commitment to community to move beyond human tendencies to avoid conflict, to blame others, and to leave when the going gets tough. We recognize it is only by God’s grace that we are able to seek unity and deeper levels of transformation in the midst of conflict and disappointment and we choose to rely on that grace.

Confidentiality, Conflict of Interest, and Non-Compete Agreement. Because those in the leadership community of the TC come to our work together with such openness to share our best thought, learning and practice as it relates to our work and worship together, we adhere to strict confidentiality regarding what is shared by anyone that is of a personal nature, what is shared about others who are involved in the TC and also leadership matters and decisions. We agree to exercise great care *not* to do anything that could be experienced as a conflict of interest, not in the best interest of the TC, or in competition with the TC.

Covenant. To the best of our ability, we covenant together to uphold and live out these values together. We are mutually responsible for holding the group accountable for what we have agreed to and for calling the group back to the covenant when any aspect of our adherence slips.

Because community at the leadership level is so challenging, the process of actually articulating covenant commitments and embracing them together in God's presence is of utmost importance. Although we continue to add and fine-tune our guiding values and principles, we believe it is essential that we covenant together around those values that are clear to us and that we can agree upon. We commit to these guiding values and principles for the sake of this community that is one expression of the Body of Christ here on this earth, for the integrity of the mission God has entrusted to us, and for the sake of Christ's kingdom. *Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

Board/Leadership Community Member

Date

¹ *Good is a Timely Word: from the Preaching of Gordon Cosby*, (Australia, Moonchpa Publishing, 2001), p.108, 109)

² Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993),