

Spiritual styles

A six-part series exploring the variety of ways in which people experience God and make sense of the world around them



'The shoe that fits one person pinches another; there is no recipe for living that suits all cases.' Carl Jung

Part 6 Send them out

Introduction

We come to know and experience God in different ways. Within this diversity, four vital spiritual avenues can be identified: the path of the intellect, the way of the emotions, the journey of mystery, and the road to justice. Congregations that wish to nurture the spirituality of each individual do well to take into account the different spiritual styles through which they can come to know and experience God in real, life-changing ways.

In this six-part series, Dave Csinos helps us to reflect on the impact of the four styles on the way we plan and provide worship and learning opportunities. In this final article he considers the impact of the four styles on the way we send people out at the end of the gathering.

I know of a non-profit programme that supplies underprivileged children with clothes and classroom necessities for heading back to school at the start of each academic year. The programme is called 'Send 'em off smiling' and their mission is 'to set children in need on a more hopeful path – by outfitting them with some basic clothing and school supplies, intended to send 'em off smiling on that first day of school each September'.

As I began thinking about how we in the Church wrap up our services, lessons and programmes, I started wondering: Do we send people off smiling? Do the people who attend worship, and other gatherings of the faith community, leave feeling encouraged and empowered to live as participants in God's story? Do we set the children, young people and adults in our churches on more hopeful paths?

There are many factors at play in shaping whether or not we send people out from church smiling, including our theology, faith practices, demeanour, hospitality and service – to name just a few. When we incorporate elements of all four spiritual styles

into the way we send people out into the world after gathering as a faith community, we can help them connect with God and sense their place within God's epic story.

When provision for each style is made in our sending out activities – whether all at once or spread out over time – members of our congregations can leave feeling 'at home' in the church, connected to God and empowered for Christian living in ways that are meaningful for them. Yet at the same time, they can be stretched and challenged towards growth, by experiencing sending-out activities that encourage them to explore other spiritual styles.

A word-centred send out

Proclaim

Times of sending out can present wonderful spaces in congregational worship and teaching for reminding a community of its professed mission in the community and the world. Try ending church services or Sunday school by having members of the faith community proclaim the church's mission statement.

Final thoughts

When I teach or speak, I sometimes joke about sharing a 'final thought', a short phrase or thought for people to think about as they leave. For word-centred people, using a question, quote, phrase or 'final thought' as a practice of sending helps congregants continue to grow in their understanding, by leaving with something to think about throughout the week.

Extension activities

Why end with worship? Some churches in which I've been involved hold events and activities after services that keep people learning, serving and congregating together. Perhaps you can create an after-church activity aimed at helping children, youth and adults continue to learn about matters of faith. You might have a quiz game modelled on a popular television game show to teach people about the church's history, Scripture passages and social justice issues. Cheesy sequinned jacket optional.

An emotion-centred send out

Watch

Emotion-centred people benefit from having their feelings stirred as they leave church. They want to feel inspired, challenged and uplifted as they leave the gathered community. One way to stir these emotions is by showing a film clip that inspires people to follow Jesus in their day-to-day living, to pursue practices that connect them with God, and to maintain connections with the faith community. Choosing the right film clip can help people leave church or Sunday school on an emotional high.

The arts

As I've said throughout this series, the performing arts are crucial for nurturing the spiritual lives of emotion-centred children, youth and adults. So try ending church services and congregational activities with a song, dance, dramatic performance or even a slam poem. Make sure that the emotions you're conveying and stirring up are appropriate for your context. It's probably not a good idea to end Good Friday services with a fun and uplifting song, nor should we wrap up Christmas services with a sad song. Remember that emotion-centred people connect with God through the highs and lows of their emotions, but that these emotions need to be felt in appropriate ways.

Eat together

Hold an after-church potluck meal. Authentic relationships matter to people who prefer an emotion-centred spirituality, and shared meals can be fodder for building relationships within the faith community. You can have a short programme in which a few people (young or old) or a family share something about their faith journeys, or you can simply provide a space for a no-strings-attached meal to engage people in, as one friend puts it, 'friendshipping and fellowshiping.'

A symbol-centred send out

Silence

Instead of sending people out with a song, question or mission statement, send them out in silence. It can be a good idea to conclude church services and other congregational activities with a moment of quiet reflection. In our fast-paced world of endless digital connectivity, a moment of silence allows people to contemplate the lesson or service in which they have just participated and prepare themselves for going into the world as Christ's disciples. Remind people to turn off their phones!

Pray

It may sound like a simple idea, but sending out the gathered community in prayer can be helpful for encouraging symbol-centred people to connect with God. Experiment with different types of prayer, such as silent personal prayers, call-and-response prayers, classic blessing and benedictions prayed by saints throughout history, and many other forms of prayer. However you choose to pray, remember that symbol-centred people often value prayer that evokes reverence for God and respect for one another and the world that God so loves.

Try out

Try encouraging greater appreciation and deeper understanding of symbol-centred practices by hosting a series of post-worship workshops that explore a different spiritual practice each week. You might include praying the Daily Office, fasting, lighting a candle, going on pilgrimage or keeping the Sabbath. These are practices that all sorts of people can take with them, as they leave the gathered community, and incorporate into their lives beyond the church community.

An action-centred send out

Throughout this series of articles, I've mentioned that it can be difficult to accommodate action-centred individuals in church services, Sunday school and other congregational activities.

People who prefer this spiritual style often want to be out in the world making a difference, instead of cooped up in a church building. When it comes to practices of sending, however, it is not so difficult to find ways of incorporating action-centred practices into the life of the church; after all, these can focus on going into the world and spreading the light of Christ. Reminding your church that it is a gathered *and* scattered community calls the members to think about how their faith ought to influence the way they join God in living into God's kingdom right here on earth.

Issues

Try raising a particular issue – racism, sexism, homelessness, climate change – for people to research or reflect on during the week. During the next church service, lesson or programme, you can speak or teach about this issue with a greater level of depth. Ask children, teens and adults to take note of all the ways they see justice and injustice being manifest in the coming week. Read Bible passages that connect faith and action, like Micah 6.8, Matthew 25.31-46 or James 2.14-19. Such sending out practices call people to take action towards repairing the world as they live into God's story.

Getting engaged

Some churches preach messages about peace and justice, and encourage congregants to get involved in making a difference in the community, but leave people wondering where to begin. Other churches get congregants of all ages and abilities involved in local service projects immediately following church services. Why not partner with some local non-profit organisations and charities – food banks, tutoring programmes, homeless shelters, advocacy groups – and arrange opportunities for your church members to get involved in service activities, as a way of sending the community into the world?

A final thought about spiritual styles

I admitted that I think 'final thoughts' can be helpful. So I'll offer one here.

As we have identified the variety of spiritual styles through this series of articles, I hope that you have been able to imagine how you can incorporate elements of all four styles into the worship and life of your church. Maybe you've even tried out a few ideas and discovered what was helpful for your context. But making our churches and ministries more inclusive of all spiritual styles shouldn't become the end goal of our work in the church. Rather, our goal is to help children, youth and adults of all ages to grow as disciples of Jesus. By helping us identify different ways to encourage meaningful spirit-to-Spirit encounters with Jesus and the One who sent him, an understanding of the varied spiritual styles becomes a means to a greater end. Through words, emotions, symbols and action, we can nurture and challenge people on the path of discipleship.

From the editor

A big thank you to David for this eye-opening series. There are suggestions for using ROOTS inclusively on the [WEB](#) and in the next issue we will begin to explore more practical applications of the four spiritual styles. You can see David introduce the spiritual styles in a short film clip in the support section on the [WEB](#).