

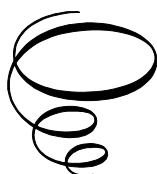
Christian Responses to
Spiritual Incursions
into the 21st Century
Church and Society

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Edited by

Nikolaos Asproulis and Stuart Devenish

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CHAPTER 11

MEASURING SPIRITUAL FORMATION: WORKING WITH PASTORS TO DEVELOP A SPIRITUAL VITALITY INDEX FOR USE IN LOCAL CHURCHES

STUART DEVENISH

Introduction

One important outcome from the re-emergence of spirituality in the twenty-first century Western context, is that ministry professionals (pastors, priests, counsellors and ministry formators) have a growing sense of urgency regarding the need to strengthen the faith of the people under their ministry-care. The dramatic decline in church attendance by those who formerly believed, and a measurable loss of confidence of those who continue to believe, has prompted ministers of all kinds to pay increased attention to the resilience of the faith of those who continue to make their profession, “We believe...”.

Although critical to the maintaining of authentic faith, traditional measures such as *baptism* (inclusion into the membership of the Church), *correct doctrine* (a test of one’s conformity to the historic Creeds and confessions of the Church), or *participation in the sacraments* (traditionally understood as the means of grace to nurture faith in believers) ... are no longer the leading indicators of the health and well-being of an individual’s or a congregation’s faith. In the light of the mass exodus of culture-Christians from churches and the subsequent paring-back of church membership rolls to those who actually attend ... the new challenge is for pastors and spiritual formators in local churches to deal in the currency of *lively, active and real faith*. Contextual factors that shape spiritual formation are: Is it still possible to believe in the post-Christian era? Can local churches support the faith of those who believe through traditional practices

of worship, sacrament, baptism and pulpit ministry? Can Christian communities retain their children in the faith through processes of spiritual formation? And is it possible to pass on the baton of faith to those who continue to believe in Christ in the challenging environment of the liberal-democratic-consumer societies in which they live?

Three probing questions emerge from the present situation. First, in order for the Christian faith to have any future in the present chaotic moment, what kind of Christian education must be offered by churches, schools and believing families to produce the next generation of resilient believers? Second, how can those priests, ministers and spiritual formators who exercise the responsibility for the “care of souls” over others, increase their effectiveness leading to better outcomes in ministry practice? And third, what metric should be applied to act as an effective measure of spiritual formation so that spiritual formators and Christian believers (individuals and entire congregations) know with certainty whether faith has increased or decreased, and what factors have contributed to it? These questions shed light on the kinds of key performance indicators that committed Christians might look for/measure themselves against in their quest to grow in a lively, active and real faith.

The Context of the South Australian Research

In April 2017, the Centre for Church Health in Tabor College’s School of Ministry Theology and Culture, commissioned research addressing the effectiveness of discipleship programs offered in congregational settings in South Australia.¹ The stimulus for the research came from (i) anecdotal observations regarding numerical decline in Christian congregations; (ii) the loss of confidence among Christians when speaking into the culture and the marketplace; and (iii) Christian leaders expressing uncertainty about how best to respond to the challenges of increasing secularization in Western contexts. These anecdotal observations led to the suspicion that a “slow leak” was occurring in spiritual vitality itself among individuals and congregations.

Objectives for the research were:

¹ Tabor College is a Christian Provider of Higher Education in Australia, offering multi-disciplinary training in schools and departments of teacher education, counselling, creative writing, music and theological education of Christian leaders preparing for a variety of ministry roles. Tabor is a multi-denominational College located in Adelaide, South Australia, founded in 1978.

1. To identify and describe discipleship programs offered in churches in South Australia.
2. To develop a definition of spiritual vitality that identified measures for gauging the effectiveness of discipleship programs in churches.
3. To critically evaluate the discipleship programs in participating churches, evaluating (i) how they attempted to make disciples; & (ii) and how they facilitated spiritual growth/formation among disciples under their care.
4. To recommend best-practice discipleship programs for congregational settings in 21st-century Australia.

The design of the research was based on five baseline criteria. (1) First, the research was to be undertaken among Protestant Mainline congregations. Invitations were sent to a wide range of congregations across a spread of denominations. In the final analysis, 18 congregations agreed to participate. (2) Second, social science surveys would be employed. Interviews were conducted among three groups in the form of (a) Pastors (70 took part in face-to-face surveys); (b) Life Group members (150 took part in face-to-face surveys); and (c) an online cohort of church members (220 people responded to online surveys). At the conclusion of the research, 440 people had participated. (3) Third, overlapping research questions. A set of 10 basic questions were developed for each cohort, with some overlap to cater for the needs and self-understandings of pastors, mid-week life group participants, and ordinary church members. (4) Fourth, interpretation would be by means of an ethnographic research methodology. The 140 pages of interview transcripts were processed and interpreted using thematic analysis consistent with the theological ethnography model developed by prominent researchers working in the field of ethnography and ecclesiology (Scharen & Vigan, 2011; and Scharen, 2012). And (5) the resulting report was to be generated on the basis of comprehensive evidence-based research.²

The research drew upon four recent comparable studies relating to the measurement of discipleship and spiritual formation in churches, in the form of:

1. The State of Discipleship in the US (Barna Research, 2015).
2. Qualitative Research on Discipleship in the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

² The report can be found at:

<https://repository.tabor.edu.au/share/s/1iCn1gBKS46STAAjNJrMfg>

3. The Study of Youth Ministry in Congregations (Martinson, Black and Roberto, 2010).
4. Transformational Discipleship Assessment (n.d.)

Six noteworthy findings arose from this research. They were (1) most discipleship undertaken in churches in South Australia is accidental, not intentional;³ (2) most church members and adherents wanted to grow, but didn't know how; (3) most pastors and ministry leaders thought their current programs of preaching, pastoral care and other activities were adequate to nourish the spiritual lives of their people; (4) most participants in the research reported having grown as a disciple in the past 12 months, but often as a result of events outside—not inside—their local churches; (5) attention directed towards the discipleship and spiritual formation of youth and young people in congregations was low, with an estimated 25% or less of children born into a Christian home, remaining identifiably Christian as adults; and (6) nevertheless, church participation and attendance were thought to be core practices that represented a major contributor to spiritual growth and formation among church attenders.

Key Recommendations from the Research

Ten recommendations were made at the close of the research. Those recommendations generated from the research and were directly related to its findings. They were: (1) The need to re-knit the connection between Lordship and discipleship. Discipleship is the logical outcome of the confession that “Jesus Christ is Lord.” (2) To rediscover Christianity's capacity to convert, disciple and transform its own adherents. We live in a culture and world that wants to conform us to its godless value-system. A new allegiance needs to be put in place. (3) Establish a strong culture of discipleship in our churches. Teaching, modelling and setting an expectation for spiritual growth is required. (4) Make multi-generational discipleship a priority in our churches. Discipling our children and keeping them in the faith is our “first mission.” (5) Increase our commitment to innovation in the area of discipleship. Yesterday's mission strategies are not adequate to meet the challenges of today's complex mission environments. (6) Strengthen Christian identity among believers. It is ironic that many non-believing outsiders to the Christian faith and radical reformers (angry

³ There were, however, a number of notable exceptions. 6 of the 18 churches (30%) gave priority to spiritual formation and to growing disciples in their faith-communities.

insiders) have a stronger identity than many everyday Christians. (7) Resource people in their desire to grow as disciples. Most people want to grow in vitality in their spiritual lives, but they don't know how to. (8) Developing a simple tool for measuring spiritual growth in disciples in local churches. If discipleship is what really matters, we need a way to measure spiritual vitality among adherents in churches. (9) Offer opportunities for on-the-road, in-service formation for disciples. Jesus took his disciples on the road, so we can presume the safety of our classrooms and sanctuary walls aren't what he had in mind as the proper kingdom context for discipleship. And (10) denominational leaders in South Australia might consider cooperating to run a state-wide conference on discipleship. Disciples are to be known by the unity and willingness to cooperate to increase discipleship—theirs and others. Running a conference on the topic offers increased opportunity for mutual benefit as Christian disciples.

I will limit my discussion to Recommendation 8, which is the most salient recommendation for this chapter.

#8 The need to develop a simple tool for measuring spiritual growth/regression among congregational members. If discipleship is “what really matters,” then we need to find a way to measure spiritual vitality.

In response to the question, “What measures of success have you been using, and how satisfactory/unsatisfactory have those measures proven?” ... pastors reported that they typically counted (1) attendance; (2) financial giving; (3) willingness to serve on ministry rosters; (4) the number of baptisms annually; and (5) active engagement in evangelism ... as their “core” measures of growth and effectiveness. But when it comes to measuring what actually matters in terms of spiritual vitality among their congregations, they did not believe they had a usable tool available to them for measuring spiritual vitality either over time (diachronic) or in any given moment (synchronic).

Pastors identified the need to measure spiritual vitality, referring to such things as spiritual hunger, passionate worship, the quality of prayer life, teachability, spiritual temperature, resilience/persistence, willingness to serve, Christ-like character, other-centred-ness, credibility/authenticity, receptivity to revelation from the Bible and the Spirit, love for other people, the use of the spiritual disciplines and gifts, a growing Christian identity, and a willingness to be involved in evangelism ... as the “inward” realities that form the substance of spiritual vitality.

In place of the static measures of “bums,” “bucks” and “buildings,” pastors affirmed that what they needed was an instrument capable of measuring spiritual vitality (progression as well as regression) in church

members/disciples. Such an instrument would need to take into account individual disciples, as well as the health of the entire congregation as a spiritual “system,” if it is to provide an accurate and effective measure of spiritual vitality in local churches.

Defining Spiritual Vitality

For the purposes of this research, I have chosen to bypass discussions concerning *religious* vitality, such as can be found in the sociology of religion generally, and the works of Linda Bobbitt (2014) and Volkhard Krech and Markus Hero (2013) in particular; the phenomenology of Christian religious experience, such as can be found in Margaret Alter’s work (1986); the psychology of religion, in particular the work of Marie-Therese Proctor and Maureen Miner-Bridges et al., (2009) with regard to attachment to God; and the international work currently being done on measuring religious affiliation (such as that of Joshua Iyadurai, 2011 in India, and Fenggang Yang, 2014 in China).

Instead, I want to focus on the question of *spiritual* vitality, and how it is used in the literature. As a construct, the language of “spiritual vitality” is employed in the literature, but often in ways that are undefined and unsatisfactory. For example, Albert Hsu wrote *The Suburban Christian*, using the subtitle “Finding Spiritual Vitality in the Land of Plenty” (Hsu 2006). Two things are significant about the way that author employed the phrase “spiritual vitality.” The first is his failure to use the phrase anywhere else in the book other than in the subtitle. And the second is despite the category of spiritual vitality being an important theme in the work, its meaning is not spelled-out anywhere. And unfortunately, this practice of non-definition and un-articulated meanings, sets the scene for how the phrase “spiritual vitality” is used in the literature. A further example can be found in the *New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Sheldrake 2013) which makes no direct reference to *vitality* of any kind, despite its intent and purpose clearly being to facilitate and nurture what might be otherwise described as spiritual “vitality” among worshipping adherents in confessing communities.

Further, Karen E. Smith’s *Christian Spirituality* (Smith, 2007) is a “core text” on the subject, and one of the most widely set textbooks in the discipline. But it too fails to make use of the language of “spiritual vitality” (on the one hand), while everywhere referring to the transformative and enlivening capacity of the spiritual life for those who live it out as a matter of daily practice (on the other hand). And finally, I cite the magisterial work by Kees Waaijman, entitled *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods* as

a resource that similarly overlooks the language of spiritual vitality (Waaijman 2002). Written as a “systematic guide” to the extensive field of spirituality (in particular Christian spirituality), this 960-page book is without peer in its field. Discussing—as it does—such things as awakening, peak-experiences, ecstasy, transformation, maturation and other fundamental aspects of the Christian spiritual life, the one thing it does not do is address itself to spiritual vitality.

That leaves us with the question of how best to define spiritual vitality? If we are to “measure what really matters” (Collins 2014) to the Christian spiritual life, an understanding of what spiritual vitality is represents an important first step, and some key measures or indicators (*markers*), of spiritual health and vitality are an important second step. If that is the case, then—using the responses of pastors and ministry-leaders as a guide—let me attempt an initial definition of spiritual vitality.

For the purposes of this research, I will define spiritual vitality as a whole-person, whole-of-life response to Jesus’ invitation to “Follow me,” as found in the New Testament Gospels, and as mediated by the classical spiritual tradition of historic Christianity. Spiritual vitality is the life-force which is felt by persons-in-community, resulting in their response to God that is often accompanied and performed through worship, submission, obedience, sanctity, service and witness. It forms the disciple’s deepest identity, it shapes who they are, how they live and what they value. It is their heartbeat and their reason-for-being, and is often “held” in opposition to the values and judgements of contemporary culture. Spiritual vitality indicates a disciple’s intimate “connectedness” to Christ, and their determination to “keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal 5:25), to live according to their baptism, as people who “have been washed, have been sanctified, and have been justified” (1 Cor 6:11). On the other hand, a lack of spiritual vitality is indicated by a clear separation from God, a reticence to participate in the sacraments and acts of worship and service, and a growing coldness of heart, since the former disciple has forsaken their first love (Rev 2:4). This away-movement is clearly observable by others, including pastors and ministry leaders who have a duty for the “care of souls” for those in their congregations and beyond.

Existing Instruments for Measuring the Spiritual Life

Several instruments for measuring the spiritual life exist in the literature, each making specific reference to the spiritual life and how it might be assessed and measured. Here I identify five such programs and instruments as a useful point of comparison for this research. I will briefly discuss their

substance, and why I think they do not provide an adequate measure of spiritual life as discussed and imagined by those pastors who participated in the South Australian research.

The Spiritual Experience Index: In her 1991 article on spiritual experience, Vicki Genia discussed an index of spiritual maturity designed by psychologists for use in clinical contexts (Genia 1991). There, she discussed the literature related to the psychology of religion, such as Allport's intrinsic-extrinsic paradigm, as well as Batson's three-dimensional schema of means and ends, and Quest religiousness. While there is evidence of a direct overlap with our concern for spiritual vitality (particularly the fifth stage of Genia's Religious Development schema relating to "transcendent faith"), it is clearly operationalized for use in clinical settings and not pastoral settings in local churches by ministry practitioners. Because pastors are not—for the most part—psychologically trained, they are not able to make use of it.

Spiritual Health Assessment and Spiritual Health Planner: This instrument, developed within the Saddleback Community Church, and authored by Steve Gladen and Todd Olthoff, represents a unique spiritual health assessment tool designed and written by pastors for pastors in local congregational settings (Gladen & Olthoff 2005). It tracks the five vital signs of a healthy Christian life explored by Rick Warren in his book *The Purpose Driven Life*, in terms of (1) worship; (2) fellowship; (3) discipleship; (4) ministry; and (5) involvement in evangelism. Each of these "steps" are accompanied by seven questions, represented in a Likert-type scale, where participants can score themselves according to low-medium-high success rates. The strength of the Spiritual Health Assessment and Spiritual Health Planner is that it attempts to identify elements of the spiritual life that "really matter" and seeks to resource people engaged in the spiritual life to move towards maturity, offering a multi-dimensional "take" on the spiritual life. In many respects, it represents one of the better (although somewhat early) constructs of spiritual health, especially since it is designed for use in the local church. However, it was not known or mentioned by any of the pastors in the South Australian research.

Developing a Discipleship Measurement Tool (Petrie, Hattingh & Ferrett 2016): This tool is the work of six authors from Avondale College, a Seventh-Day Adventist College in outer Sydney, New South Wales. The article offers an extensive literature review, making reference to a number of quality "measures" relating to discipleship and the spiritual life generally.

The authors employed four categories for identifying and measuring Christian discipleship in terms of (1) Godly: prayer, Bible study, accountability and witness; (2) Working: service, gifts, community & church; (3) Obedience: Holy Spirit, commandments, self-denial & giving; and (4) Reproducing: lead, mentor, equip & make. Each of these elements are interdependent and are not introduced in any particular order. Subsequent research was carried out, using extensive interviews and Likert-type scales in seven categories. The purpose of the article is more to describe the process of developing the scales and categories, rather than actually producing an instrument capable of measuring spiritual vitality. The article is preparatory to a later non-yet-developed discipleship measurement tool. Despite its excellent research, we await further work from this team.

Mature Spirituality According to Von Hügel: A Practitioner's Voice (Wrigley-Carr 2008): This paper represents a Masters coursework paper in the discipline of spirituality, written by Robyn Wrigley-Carr in preparation for what would later become her PhD dissertation on the spiritual direction of Friedrich Von Hügel over the years 1915-1925 (Wrigley-Carr, St Andrews University, Scotland 2013). In addition to laying out Von Hügel's doctrine of God, and discussing the spiritual lives of the women for whom he later acted as spiritual director (including Evelyn Underhill), the author discussed the elements of adoration, suffering well, death to self and humility, social action and visiting the poor, the cultivation of non-religious interests, and leisurely spirituality (by which he means the practice of moderation to counter unseemly exuberance among Victorian women). Von Hügel is well-known for his identification of three elements of religion, namely (1) the mystical or emotional element; (2) the intellectual or scientific element; and (3) the institutional or active element. These elements represent the first 80 pages of his renowned two-volume set entitled *The Mystical Element of Religion* (first published 1923). Wrigley-Carr's purpose was historical and biographical in nature. She did not have as her primary goal the development of a spiritual vitality index.

Australian National Church Life Survey "Trends in Church Vitality over 20 Years" (Powell, 2011): This Occasional Paper described nine core qualities which the Australian National Church Life Survey (NCLS) identified as essential features of church life. They are (1) alive and growing faith; (2) vital and nurturing worship; (3) strong and growing belonging; (4) clear and owned vision; (5) inspiring and empowering leadership; (6) imaginative and flexible innovation; (7) practical and diverse purpose; (8) willing and effective faith-sharing; and (9) intentional and welcoming

inclusion. Those qualities have been measured by the NCLS survey on a four-year rotation since 1991, describing a developing trend towards growth in congregational vitality—using these measures—in churches throughout Australia. Increases in (1) the presence of God in worship; (2) helpful preaching; (3) growth and understanding of God; and (4) inspiring worship ... were observed across the timeline 1991-2011, even as church participation in Australia has actually declined on a comparable timeline from 23% of the population in 1993, to 16% of the population in 2009 (CRA, n.d.). Because those statistics and analyses are concerned with institutional church growth more so than spiritual dynamics of individuals and of congregational health, no spiritual vitality index was contained in that research.

Identifying Markers that might Contribute to a Spiritual Vitality Index

The question posed to ministry leaders in the South Australian research was, “What measures of success have you been using, and how satisfactory/unsatisfactory have they proven to be?” The purpose of the question was to identify what—if any—metrics had pastors, churches and ministry programs been employing, what success had they generated in making, growing, and sending disciples as a part of their local congregation. What we were seeking was to better understand spiritual vitality as an expression of health in the spiritual life, and how churches and ministry leaders had been measuring it. In all cases, the answers given were pointedly limited.

One Life Group participant responded to the question, “Have you grown as a disciple in the last 12 months?” in the following way.

It's hard to measure whether I have grown and how much. It's more where my journey has taken me. More a journey than a destination. I can't actually say how faith grows, either by standing still or moving forward. There have been spurts and stalls, ebbs and flows. Has there been growth? Probably. But I don't know how to define it. All I can say is I know I can't stand still.

This candid response provides a window into the everyday disciple's recognition that the spiritual life is the core substrate of his or her existence, but that (in this case) he didn't know how to define it, or to assess whether or not he had grown—or indeed by what criteria one might recognize and evaluate that growth. Hence the need for markers that form the building blocks of a spiritual vitality index.

A series of ten markers arose out of this research, which I am confident offer potential for measuring spiritual vitality in congregational settings. The three aspects I want to draw out are: (1) Any instrument designed to measure spiritual vitality must measure an essential and/or irreplaceable element of Christian discipleship. (2) It needs to represent a positive aspect of the faith-life of the disciple as a lived reality. And (3) it needs to be something measurable, otherwise it remains ephemeral and beyond our ability to gauge in any kind of scale. Up to this point there has not been a spiritual vitality index available for use in Australia that offers a viable and accurate measure for spiritual vitality in local churches. Statements were made by participants as follows: “We don’t have a Geiger counter for the spiritual life”; and “There is no such thing as a thermometer for faith”; and “There is no tape measure for the human heart.”

To counter those deficits, pastors and spiritual formators who participated in this research offered a number of useful markers. When collated together, they provide the following spiritual vitality index which is a “first statement” of a useful SVI.

Marker #1: Passion, temperature and spiritual arousal towards God.

Marker #2: Hunger for God, teachability, responsiveness and willingness to grow.

Marker #3: Knowledge of the Bible, regular study and capacity to teach others.

Marker #4: Christ-like character and authentic sanctity inside and outside.

Marker #5: Positive and intentional engagement with the spiritual life through prayer.

Marker #6: Whole-of-life approach that integrates faith & life without separation.

Marker #7: Regular participation in communal worship, witness and service.

Marker #8: Willingness to testify to their faith, and to live countercultural lives.

Marker #9: Sensitivity to the needs of others and generosity with time and money.

Marker #10: Harmonious relationships with others in church, family and workplace.

It is important to note that pastors did not report their preference for these waymarkers in any particular order, or indeed that they *could* be applied in any particular order. Because of the unique nature of the lives and

circumstances of each person in their life before God, it is likely these waymarkers will come into “play” according to the specific circumstances of their own lives. And none of these are completely conclusive, or achieve a point of completion or arrival. That is, they are essential and recurring elements in the spiritual life, and must be revisited again and again in order to achieve mastery and maturity in their faith. The spiritual life is an ongoing journey, and unlike physical growth where there is a clear developmental pathway from birth to infancy, childhood to youth, adulthood to old age, and infirmity to death ... inner states (including spiritual vitality or lack of it) cannot be defined in that way. Someone who was once in love may not always be in love, as is demonstrated by the high rates of divorce in Western society. And someone who was previously moving towards God and whose arrow of intentionality as in a bounded and centred set model, may subsequently turn away from God, and become distracted by other things.

Nevertheless, I argue that these ten markers are able to communicate and represent vital and invariant elements of the Christian spiritual life. It will be our task in the closing section of this chapter, to craft these into a spiritual vitality index that contains a set of “measures” that can be applied to the spiritual lives of disciples in congregational settings by pastors and spiritual formators. We will return to these markers in the final pages of this chapter to offer an exemplary measure of spiritual vitality.

Informal Measures of Spiritual Vitality Developed by Pastoral Leaders

Despite Tom Cocklereece’s observation regarding the difficulty of measuring spiritual vitality describing it as being “like nailing Jell-O to the wall” (Cocklereece 2014) ... pastors and ministry leaders believe that it *is* possible—despite the fluidity and Jell-O-like quality of the spiritual life—to measure spiritual vitality.

Three informal and home-grown measures of spiritual vitality arose out of the research process. These were developed by different pastors and ministry leaders for use in their ministries, and for their own specific context. These home-grown measures were not offered outside their own congregations. The first was developed by a youth leader for use among a youth cohort, in the form of a *love-o-meter*. With an undergraduate degree in psychology, the youth leader developed what she described as a measure for “heart stuff.” The *love-o-meter* was a somewhat novel but effective way of gauging the spiritual temperature of young people. Because of its informality, it was not transferable or translatable to other contexts, but specific to her own youth ministry.

The second was a 12-step process for identifying “stages” in the spiritual journey. It was developed by the Senior Pastor whose priority was to disciple his people and to ensure they were moving forward towards spiritual maturity. The stages identified were (1) never heard of Jesus; (2) had some contact with Christians/church; (3) have some interest in the gospel and a desire to know more; (4) a stage of further exploration; (5) considering faith for themselves; (6) have decided to embrace the Christian faith; (7) a period of intense feeding to quench hunger; (8) nurture in faith is necessary; (9) opportunity to test and strengthen their faith through service; (10) Jesus called his disciples to contribute and live out their faith; (11) responsible for their own growth and seeking to feed others; and (12) faith is passed on to others through evangelism and service. This sounds very much like a homegrown version of the Engel Scale (Engel 1975). Once again, this process was designed for and applied in a single congregational setting, and not transferred outside it.

And third, another pastor developed a variety of tools and strategies relating to assisting parents to disciple their own children. His concern was to enable the local church to facilitate the discipling role of parents, who were tempted to either divest that role to the Christian church or school, or who were tempted to feel overwhelmed and under-prepared for that responsibility. The model he developed focused on integrating the church’s youth and children into the life of the church in the form of an inter-generational discipleship model for the whole church. The program was delivered through the church’s teaching ministry to parents in the context of programs designed for that purpose and targeted to that end.

A Spiritual Vitality Index for Use in Local Churches

As we conclude this chapter, I return to the “Markers for Spiritual Vitality,” discussed earlier (see Section 5). The task is to craft the 10 elements of 1) temperature; 2) hunger; 3) knowledge; 4) character; 5) intentional engagement; 6) whole-of-life approach; 7) community-participation; 8) willingness to testify; 9) awareness of the needs of others; and 10) harmonious relationships ... into a simple-to-use but effective spiritual vitality index, focused on lively, active and real faith, of people in local churches, by both pastors and spiritual formators *and* by individuals in congregations and small groups, who either want to grow their own spiritual faith, or to assist in offering growth opportunities to others.

I want to make it clear that this spiritual vitality index is not a complex tool with carefully-designed psychometric measures, leading to psychologically validated outcomes. Because of its home-grown nature, this

non-specialist tool will inevitably present a problem for theoreticians ... even as it presents a welcome opportunity for pastors and spiritual formators in local congregations, because it increases their role as the end-users of the SVI in a “return to practice” that facilitates spiritual formation in the local church. The Spiritual Vitality Index offered here has its origins in the local church, is *voiced* through the responses of pastors and spiritual formators and live-group members, and has been carefully re-constructed by me as the researcher who was present in the room. The genius of the present SVI/Spiritual Vitality Index is that it has been designed by pastors for pastors, by spiritual formators for spiritual formators, in the context of the local church. Although it is clearly in need of further work, ongoing development, and careful validation into the future—it represents an important “starting point” for others to build on, and holds potential to become a useful tool for increasing spiritual vitality in individuals and local congregations in the longer term.

Table 11.1: *Spiritual Vitality Index*

Name	Person to whom this INDEX applies	Date
...		
Waymarker	Details: please assign a score by circling the appropriate number	Score
1 -	Passion, temperature and spiritual arousal towards God	
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	+
2 -	Hunger for God, teachability, responsiveness and willingness to grow	
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	+
3 -	Knowledge of the Bible, regular study and capacity to teach others	
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	+
4 -	Christ-like character and authentic sanctity inside and out	
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	+
5 -	Positive and intentional engagement with the spiritual life in prayer	
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	+
6 -	Whole-of-life approach that integrates faith and life without separation	
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	+

7 -	Regular participation in communal worship, witness and service	
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	+
8 -	Willingness to testify to their faith, to live countercultural lives	
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	+
9 -	Sensitivity to the needs of others and generosity with time and money	
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	+
10 -	Harmonious relationships with others in church, family and workplace	
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	+
	TOTAL SCORE	
Explanation of Scores	1. The agreed “norm” for the measure is in the 3-4 range that represents an optimistic starting point. 2. The Scale offers participants an opportunity to identify movement forwards or backwards. 3. Completed on a 3 monthly, or annual cycle, the Scale indicates growth or regression over time. 4. The Scale identifies areas for improvement and intentional self-work. 5. That work is best undertaken under the guidance of the spiritual director, or at least in group work such as the panel referred to below. 6. SCORES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-33: work to be done • 34-66: holding pattern • 67-100: growth is occurring. 	
Names of People on Supporting Panel		
Points at which growth has occurred		
Points at which no growth has occurred		
Identified Actions		
Timeline for Actions		

Conclusion

At the heart of the Christian spiritual impulse is a desire to grow into the image and likeness of Christ, and to “reach towards” the enlargement of our souls in the kind of “from one degree of glory to another” framework identified by Paul (1 Cor 3:18). It is the nature of the transformed person to want more—not less—of the beauty, significance, reality and enlargement they have already experienced. In this regard, Lucy Peppiatt wrote:

The Christian life is one characterized by a dynamic progression. We do not stand still: we follow, see, go, move, grow, bear fruit, and reproduce. We press on towards our prize. The confession of Jesus as Lord and Savior is not the goal or the end of the Christian life—that is only the beginning. The goal of the Christian life is to become like the Savior. We will only press on, however, when we remember that we are always cooperating with God’s gracious initiative in our lives, and not striving to achieve it on our own (Peppiatt 2012, 3).

That being the case, the urgent question becomes one of measurement: how to measure spiritual vitality, and in particular what instruments exist to enable pastors and spiritual formators—whose responsibility it is to “care for the souls” of those under their watch—to identify and measure their spiritual life, vitality and growth. One answer to that question is the kind of Spiritual Vitality Index developed and offered by the discipleship and spiritual formation research undertaken in South Australia, resulting in the “State of Discipleship in South Australia” Report.

This chapter has offered one model of a Spiritual Vitality Index, based on a series of markers generated from participants in the South Australian research. It is hoped that pastors and spiritual formators—along with those in Christian congregations who want to grow as disciples and to increase their spiritual vitality—will make use of this index, in order to grow deeper in their life of faith, and to enter into the fullness of the joy of Jesus their Master, who has called them to “Come, follow me” (Mk 1:17). The apostle Paul, as a pastor and spiritual father to many in the early churches, found himself engaged in the “pains of childbirth,” longing that “Christ may be formed in them” (Gal 4:19). There are many pastors and spiritual formators in the contemporary church who share Paul’s deep longing, that the life of Christ may take form, shape and root in the hearts, minds and lives of the hundreds of thousands—if not millions—of people in our churches and faith-communities who desperately want to grow deeper in their faith. It may be that this long-awaited but yet-to-be-completed spiritual vitality index has something to contribute to the spiritual formation process that

forms a central part of the life of discipleship, not only in local congregations in Western contexts but also around the world.

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CHAPTER 12

TRANSFORMING THE INNER LIFE: A FRANCISCAN REPRISAL OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE, RELATIONALITY AND INTUITION FOR THE RENEWAL OF THE CHURCH IN ITS MISSION TO THE WORLD

CORNELIS (KEES) THÖNISSEN

Introduction

In contexts influenced by Western secularisation, no Christian person and no church today can escape the painful challenges posed to faith by an increasingly materialistic and self-centred culture. The evaporation of a living and vibrant *Christian* faith in the face of such challenges, finds the churches reaching for something beyond the limits of traditional religion. Rote worship, dull conformity, dry teaching, uninspiring preaching, or a know-it-all disposition ... do not birth life. Instead they stifle any capacity for Christianity to renew itself as an ancient spiritual pathway.

Many believers inside the church are disillusioned and dissatisfied. They seek answers to their life questions outside the churches. But many non-believers outside the church have now become spiritual “seekers.” Although wondering why Christianity is needed at all, they long for something more, and spend their lives in search of questions they cannot define, and answers they fail to comprehend.

It is *Christian spirituality* alone that offers the *elan vital* they seek.

The Churches are aware of this malady and are looking for some kind of *breakthrough*. But no amount of “new” theology can offer the church the renewal it seeks. The revitalization of the sleeping giant of the Christian faith must originate from its living, breathing potency arising out of its original apostolic genius. What is needed is a type of revival that moves and