

## EXPLORATIONS



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**Returning to our Monastic Roots**

**The Rt. Rev. Michael Curry**  
**Raleigh, NC**

A few years ago I invited a group of parish clergy and campus chaplains from around the diocese to come together for conversation about our profoundly changing mission context and its implications for us as clergy and for us as the Episcopal Church. My role that day was to be Sarah, if you will, eavesdropping on the conversation between Abraham and the Lord. So I listened to what became an extraordinary conversation that is beginning to have impact on our life together.

The morning was devoted to naming and describing the mission context in which we were living, both in terms of the broader sociology and in terms of our actual lived experience. The participants discussed the reality of the end of Christendom, the profound cultural and religious shifts that we were in the midst of, the reality of a pluralism in which the fastest growing religious self-identification is “unaffiliated,” the impact of social media, and the emergence of the millennial generation.

Phyllis Tickle in her book *The Great Emergence* rightly observes that we are living in a period in which Christianity and the Church are undergoing a profound re-formation that will shake the foundations of the institutional Church as we know it. The conversation that day was confirmation of this emerging reality.

In the afternoon’s conversation we found ourselves in the position of the rich man who came to Jesus and asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mt. 19:21). “What must we do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). After we had kicked around a wide range of ideas and thoughts, a clear and unexpected consensus emerged. Pray! Someone said it this way, in a context of profound shifting and re-formation of the old into an unknown new, we must claim our monastic heritage and grow as men and women of prayer, helping the Church to do the same. The practical possibilities and necessary actions will grow out of that. We must again become people of prayer.

When I read *Keeping in Tune with God*, I almost wondered if Suzanne Farnham and Timothy Grayson had been in the room with us that day. In a sense they were. Clearly they and others have been listening to the deep and often unuttered sigh of clergy longing for a real and living relationship with God. The demands and pressures on clergy are real, and increasing dramatically. Anxieties about the future are going to increase significantly as the Church is re-formed.

While institutions are necessary in our society, it is easy to be seduced into being creatures of the Church as institution rather than disciples of Jesus serving the world in his Name as his body, the Church. The truth is that Jesus didn't found an institution or a religion, he started a movement and a community committed to embodying that movement in the world.

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The Spirit that made that movement happen and that catalyzed a community committed to the movement on Pentecost Day, the Spirit that re-formed a group of timid disciples into courageous and articulate apostolic witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and to the ends of the earth, the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of the living God, that Spirit is the key to staying in touch with the movement of Jesus by "keeping in tune with God."

In my letter inviting clergy to our upcoming clergy conference I wrote: "In a time such as this we who are ordained must return to our monastic roots and origins as men and women of prayer. It is out of that that we will be able to help the people of God witness to the Gospel in the world as people of prayer, steeped in scripture and sacrament, following in the footsteps of Jesus as his disciples and not simply as members of a church. Such a witness, born of a vital relationship with the living God revealed in the living Christ, can change the world in any time or circumstance." It really can. *Keeping in Tune with God* shows us how. Thank you Listening Hearts Ministries for this incredible gift to the Church. I intend to purchase copies for the clergy of our diocese.

*The Rt. Rev. Michael Bruce Curry is Bishop of North Carolina. A longtime supporter of Listening Hearts Ministries, he has a national preaching and teaching ministry, and was recently featured on the award-winning ecumenical radio program, Day 1 (formerly known as The Protestant Hour) as part of their Faith and Global Hunger Series.*

## Church, Community, and the Holy Spirit

**The Rev. Bruce McPherson & Meagan Howell  
Annapolis, MD**

We have been thinking a lot about the Christian Church in the twenty-first century, noticing change in the air almost everywhere and wondering what the nature of that change will be. We have been wondering especially about where the Holy Spirit is to be found in this Church that seems to be in the process of being refreshed, if not born anew.

Until recently in the Church, it has sometimes seemed as if the Holy Spirit has been tidied away, shut behind closed doors. After all, in many settings the Holy Spirit can be downright embarrassing. In response to the pressures of modern rationality, we sometimes reduce the Spirit of God to an entirely interior experience, where it is safe from outside challenges. And yet when we make our spiritual lives strictly private, we shut ourselves off from the Spirit's renewing power in the world beyond our living rooms. If the Holy Spirit seems powerless or marginalized in this modern world, the fault lies not with the Spirit, but with ourselves in that we are endlessly self-absorbed.

Perhaps what we've lost in our misguided efforts to domesticate the Holy Spirit is not the indwelling of the Spirit but the *manifestation* of the Spirit in the lives of the faithful. When our sense of the Spirit is limited to a kind of egocentricity, we are left to our own resources to determine what is and is not of the Spirit. We do not open ourselves to the voices of others. If the Spirit remains a private matter, we become a fragmented people.

The emergent Church rejects the limitations that some of us place upon our spiritual lives and is moving toward something truer: a fuller, more meaningful encounter with the Holy Spirit that can only be realized communally. This twenty-first-century Church recognizes that the practices that shaped early Christian communities are the practices we desperately need to shape us, our children, and our world today: worship, storytelling, and an expansive, expressive spirituality. It was the living, life-giving Spirit that energized and transformed the disciples into apostles, and it is the living, life-giving Spirit that can transform us now.

The Spirit of God is at work in the world as we know it with all its ambiguities and uncertainties. Our job is to cooperate with God's Spirit, which is always already committed to the task of goodness. The Spirit, which English theologian David Ford calls "gift, renewal, and life," calls us into communion with Christ and with each other, transforming us into full members of the community of Christ.

Early Christians spoke of a *locus communis*, a common place where Christians lived in the Spirit together. It is this common place that the twenty-first-century Church yearns to recover and reclaim, one in which the Spirit lives in us (Rom. 8:11), gives us life (2 Cor. 8:6), and transforms us into something closer to the whole persons that Christ calls us to be. The *locus communis* is a true spiritual home.

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### MISSION STATEMENT

Listening Hearts Ministries provides a range of programs, publications, and services that teach people the practice of spiritual discernment through prayerful listening in supportive communities.

*As a community of faith comes to serve as a channel of God's compassion for every member, God's reconciling love is incarnated. It is then that the Body of Christ comes fully to life in that time and place.*

—Keeping in Tune with God, p. 36

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## Church, Community, and...

A Listening Hearts spiritual discernment group is a common place where we live in the Spirit. “We can never achieve wholeness simply by ourselves, but only together with others. Consequently, as we involve the community in discerning call, God enlivens and strengthens both us and the community” (*Listening Hearts*, p.58). In discernment, we often develop a clearer vision of what greater wholeness might mean in practice, for ourselves and others. When we long for home, we long for wholeness; we long for a sense of being fully ourselves in communion with God, other people, and all of creation. In its discipline of attentive spiritual listening, Listening Hearts teaches sensitivity to that call that beckons us home. It is a call that we hear most clearly when we welcome the Holy Spirit in community. Listening Hearts Ministries can enrich and further renew the emergent Church.

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