

April 2009 | Promoting Strong Parent Connections with Messiah College

PARENTS *progress*

Knowing, being, doing: helping students form a faith of their own

By Rebecca Buckham '05

People often reflect on their college years with nostalgia. “It was such a formative time,” they say. For many young people, college is indeed a very formative time; it is when students tend to put together—to form—their own set of ideas, beliefs, and decisions. As a Christian institution, Messiah College understands that a significant part of this formation takes place on the spiritual level. According to Eldon Fry, college pastor at Messiah, between the ages of 18–22 young people tend to experience “a development of the faith of their home culture into more of an owned faith.”

Holistic spiritual formation

In order to help students move toward a faith they can “own” on a deeply personal level, Messiah College has recently articulated a new model of faith development that emphasizes Christian spiritual formation. Departing from older faith development theories, which assumed that people move in a linear fashion from one point to another along a common spiritual path, this new model approaches spiritual identity as an ongoing process that differs



A variety of worship experiences at Messiah provide ample opportunity for students to develop and express their faith in the company of other students on similar spiritual development journeys. Issachar’s Loft (shown above), is a place for students to converse about current cultural topics and how faith can speak into those issues.

IMPORTANT DATES

LAST DAY OF CLASSES

May 5

FINAL EXAMS

May 7–12

BACCALAUREATE

May 15

COMMENCEMENT

May 16

with each individual. Based on the definition of spiritual formation given by Robert Mulholland,¹ professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary—“the process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others”—the College’s model integrates diverse areas of life under three emphases: being, knowing, and doing.

Students at Messiah are encouraged to mature in all three of these areas: to deepen their awareness of themselves as beings made in the image of God; to pursue knowledge in a way that critically reflects on the intersection of faith and scholarship; and to participate in transformative action that obeys God and engages society. Together, these three areas represent an

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From the president

Dear Parents:

Messiah College is now just months away from launching its Centennial year commemoration, and I invite you to join us as we celebrate this significant milestone! (A schedule of events is available at www.messiah.edu/centennial.) Starting in August, the Messiah community will officially begin celebrating 100 years of “shared faith, bold vision, and enduring promise.”

Shared faith is an important aspect of our tri-part Centennial theme because faith is such an integral part of the Messiah experience. Our students and employees represent a variety of denominations and theological perspectives, yet we remain a community committed to “being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others.” At Messiah, we approach this type of transformation with a three-part spiritual formation model that focuses on knowing, being, and doing. In this issue’s feature, you can read about how our campus ministries team unpacks this ministry model and how our method of holistic spiritual formation is transforming students.

Throughout a student’s college experience, there will likely be many memorable moments that they will cherish. As the campus community prepares to celebrate the class of 2009, we hope graduating students and their families will feel especially honored at Commencement on May 16. Our speaker, Dr. Ronald Sider, director of the Sider Center on Ministry and Public Policy at Palmer Theological Seminary, is an



influential teacher, speaker, and author promoting Christian commitments to justice, peacemaking, and concern for the poor. He promises to inspire and motivate our students as they continue their educational and professional journeys.

Finally, this is the last printed edition of the *Parents Progress* newsletter. The informative purpose of this newsletter will be continued by a well-resourced, helpful website—www.messiah.edu/parents—redesigned to provide up-to-date information and news of particular interest to parents—right at your fingertips! I hope you will utilize and enjoy this expanded resource and stay connected to the College through the many opportunities the website provides.

Warm regards,

Kim S. Phipps
President

PARENT PARTNERS Making a difference for all Messiah students

Parent Partners are a select group of current parents who pray for Messiah on a regular basis, promote Messiah to other prospective students, and pledge to contribute a total of \$1,000 (\$250 per year) during their student’s enrollment at Messiah.

Parent Partners help to provide the total Messiah experience to all students, including:

- Study abroad opportunities
- Cutting edge technology in labs and classrooms
- A low faculty/student ratio, ensuring personal attention from professors
- A focus on missions and service
- Internships and career services
- And much more!

This spring, when you receive a call from one of our Phonathon callers, please consider further support of the mission of Messiah College— at the Parent Partner level or at any amount. ALL gifts have a significant positive impact on students at Messiah College!

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approach to spirituality that seeks to integrate all of life. Under this model, worshipping at Powerhouse, researching an economics paper, and tutoring inner-city schoolchildren are all activities that can encourage a student's spiritual formation.

In order to help students move toward a faith they can "own" on a deeply personal level, Messiah College has recently articulated a new model of faith development that emphasizes Christian spiritual formation.

While the language of spiritual formation is new to the College, its underlying premises are not. Many of the characteristics represented by the three-fold emphasis on knowing, being, and doing are consistent with the Anabaptist, Pietist, and Wesleyan traditions that inform Messiah's theological heritage and biblical admonitions for growth towards maturity. Just as these traditions together form a strong faith base for the College, so also do the three aspects of being, knowing, and doing interact to form a strong model for spiritual formation at Messiah.

More than a "checklist"

Because the College has always been committed to educating students toward maturity of Christian faith, the most significant change has been in the language used to talk about spirituality at Messiah. "We're moving away from talking about 'discipleship,'" says Fry, "which often comes across as a checklist: do I go to church, give money, read the Bible, and pray?" Spiritual formation encourages students to move beyond a "checklist" approach to spiritual-

ity. "All those things are important, and we don't want to diminish our emphasis on those," says Fry, "but rather than aiming for a list of accomplishments or a static concept of maturity, we hope students will engage their spiritual life as a lifelong journey and growing relationship that continues as an ongoing discovery process."

In addition to moving beyond a checklist, Messiah's model acknowledges diversity of spiritual experience. Drawing on the work of Allan H. Sager,² author of *Gospel-Centered Spirituality*, the College has identified four "spirituality types" that describe different tendencies in responding to God: activist, scholar, pietist, and contemplative. While the pietist often values the emotional experience of collective worship, the scholar may feel connected to God most strongly when engaged in intellectual work. Similarly, the activist may feel spiritually rooted when working with others to address injustice, while the contemplative thrives in solitary prayer and meditation. Identifying these unique spirituality types allows the College to remain committed to core Christian beliefs while embracing multiple forms of spiritual expression.

Recently, Messiah began using the ASPIRES spirituality inventory³ as part of its efforts to track students' spiritual formation over the course of four years. During Welcome Week last fall, all incoming students were given the ASPIRES inventory as

well as the NEO-PIR⁴ (an inventory based on the five factor model of personality). The College plans to administer the same instruments to a group of 200 graduating seniors this spring, and hopes to re-test the current first-year class upon their graduation in 2012.

"We want to have a sense of how students are changing during their time here and how to identify the factors influencing that change," says Evie Telfer, associate college pastor at Messiah. According to Telfer, who was involved with designing the study, "College is a time when personality, as well as spirituality, is in a period of intense change. We want to try to identify the ways that spirituality and personality are related so we can better understand how to nurture spiritual development in a diverse student population."

While Messiah's spiritual formation model allows for much diversity, the College does identify six distinct outcomes that should characterize its graduates: a sense of self in relationship to God; an understanding of biblical belief and theological application; an appreciation and understanding of the diversity of God's Kingdom; an understanding of and commitment to a community of faith; a commitment to servant leadership; and an understanding of worship through all aspects of life.

"Our goal is that our students will have at least been exposed to and engaged

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The Messiah College Pastoral Team (left to right), Evie Telfer, associate college pastor; Brian Smith, teaching pastor and senior lecturer in Bible; Eldon Fry, college pastor; and Douglas Curry, minister of worship, meet weekly to coordinate their efforts to facilitate spiritual formation within the student body and to pray—for one another, for the programs of the College, and for the hearts of Messiah students.



Knowing, continued from page 3

these six outcomes to some degree,” says Fry. With regards to the outcome concerned with spiritual identity, for example, Fry suggests that students should be able to articulate who God is as well as who they are at some level. “Not everyone will be a theologian,” he says, “but we want everyone to have had opportunities for reflection and a maturing theological understanding of themselves and God.”

Students growing spiritually

College Ministries may have initiated the effort to revise Messiah's model of faith development, but the idea of Christian spiritual formation is gaining momentum around campus. Students seem to connect with the new language. “The phrase ‘spiritual formation’ makes me think of growth in all areas of my life,” says student body chaplain Benjamin Stolz '10. Fellow student Kristin Lombardi '10 also conceives of spiritual formation as growth. “For me, spiritual formation is a broad term which envelops everything we do to grow spiritually,” she says.

Thus far, Messiah's spiritual formation model has generated creative ideas among students about how to pursue the kind of growth Stolz and Lombardi have in mind. One new initiative is Koinonia, a student-led small groups ministry that links student groups with off-campus adult mentors who offer prayer support, encouragement, and hospitality. Lombardi, who serves as mentor liaison on the Koinonia Core Team, says that working with Koinonia has been one of the highlights of her year. “I have seen students minister to one another . . . pushing each other toward godliness in our daily lives,” she says.

According to Fry, a flexible model of spiritual formation allows students to take the initiative for their own faith development. “Spiritual formation isn't something that's forced or imposed on students . . . it's an opportunity,” says Fry. Taking advantage of this opportunity, students like Lombardi recognize their own responsibility for spiritual growth. “If you do not grow spiritually while you are here,” says Lombardi, “it is not because there is a lack of opportunity; perhaps it is because you have not tried hard enough to find those opportunities.”

Parents as models and mentors

Some parents may feel like they no longer have an important role in the spiritual life of a college-aged child. However, Fry suggests that parents often underestimate their own influence. “Messiah is privileged to come beside students during these years,” says Fry, “but parents will be a part of this journey for a lot longer than Messiah College.”

“The phrase ‘spiritual formation’ makes me think of growth in all areas of my life,” says student body chaplain Benjamin Stolz '10.

During this formative time in a student's life, Fry hopes that Messiah College can partner with parents in providing opportunities for their child's spiritual growth. He encourages parents to connect with the College's spiritual formation model via the College Ministries website (www.messiah.edu/ministries/) as well as the College's official booklet on spiritual formation. Through the website, parents may even choose to take the linked spirituality type test in order to open conversation with their students.

Fry also emphasizes the importance of praying for students. “My wife's and my prayer life increased exponentially as our own children intentionally engaged their faith development during the college years,” he says. In addition to prayer, interaction with the people in a student's life at college is important. He suggests that parents make an effort to communicate with advisors and professors, and to attend Homecoming and Parents Day and other special events that involve their child. Finally, Fry encourages parents to set a good spiritual role model for their students. “Parents still have a great deal of influence as models and mentors,” he says, “and that isn't over because your child has left for college.”

¹M. Robert Mulholland Jr, *Invitation to a Journey* (Downer Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

²Allan H. Sager, *Gospel-Centered Spirituality: An Introduction to Our Spiritual Journey* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990).

³Ralph Piedmont, 1999 and 2003

⁴Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc., 1985, 1989, 1992

Several members of Parents Council reflect on how their child's faith has developed and matured during their time at Messiah

Michael and Patricia Robinson, parents of Claire '11, reflect on their daughter's spiritual formation.

“Our daughter, Claire, has come to a greater appreciation of her own spiritual heritage since attending Messiah College. She has developed a greater yearning for the things of God. Her spiritual horizon has been greatly expanded through exposure to diverse viewpoints.”

Dana Britton, mother of Andrea '09, notes her daughter's increased maturity of faith and character.

“Her character and faith have matured as a result of opportunities for service, leadership, and spiritual formation. This formation began during her first weekend as a Messiah student as she joined her entire first-year seminar class on a one-day service trip to the Silence of Mary Home in downtown Harrisburg. Her leadership skills and faith were sharpened as she led a small group Bible study, resided in the Spiritual Formation House, participated in the chapel worship community, and served as the student body chaplain. Faculty and chapel speakers have challenged her to think deeply on issues of faith, justice, and politics, and to process what it means to be a Christian in a hurting and broken world.”

Jeff and Sharon Park, parents of Jenna '12, write of their daughter's experience at Messiah.

“Looking more closely at why she's attending Messiah, she came to realize that she wanted to room with friends that would encourage her faith and relationship in a closer walk with Jesus. We're thanking God for the spiritual climate at Messiah—as ‘iron sharpens iron.’”

Distinguished lecturer Ronald Sider to speak at Commencement

Erin Kriner '10



Ronald Sider has emerged as an influential teacher, speaker, and author promoting Christian involvement in social action. Sider exemplifies a core belief of incorporating his faith into daily practices, an important principle students learn while at Messiah. Sider, who was one of the first faculty members at Messiah's Philadelphia Campus, is currently a professor of theology, holistic ministry, and public policy, as well as the director of the Sider Center on Ministry and Public Policy at Palmer Theological Seminary, an affiliate of Eastern University. His career has led him to become very attuned to Christian involvement in public policy issues.

In addition to teaching, Sider also serves as the president of Evangelicals for Social Action, a group which seeks to promote Christian engagement, analysis, and understanding of major social, cultural, and public policy issues. As a distinguished author, Sider has published 31 books and more than 70 articles. His work includes *Living Like Jesus: Eleven Essentials for Growing a Genuine Faith*; *Churches That Make a Difference: Reaching Your Community with Good News and Good Work*; and

Serving Souls, Serving Society: Understanding the Faith Factor in Church-Based Social Ministry. His most current publication, *I Am Not a Social Activist*, was released in 2008. Sider also contributes to other books and magazines such as *Christianity Today* and *Sojourners* as a corresponding and contributing editor, as well as publishing *PRISM Magazine*.

Sider was named one of the top 12 most influential persons in religion in the U.S. by *The Christian Century*, and his book, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, was chosen by *Christianity Today* as one of the 100 most influential books of religion in the twentieth century. As an ordained minister in both the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches, he has lectured around the world, reaching out to colleges and universities on six different continents. Sider will be awarded an honorary doctorate degree from Messiah College as part of the Commencement ceremony.

Commencement will be held on May 16 at 10 a.m. on Shoemaker Field of Starry Athletic Complex. The latest schedule of events for Commencement can be found at www.messiah.edu/commencement/.

College prepares to celebrate Centennial milestone

For 100 years, Messiah College has been preparing students for lives of service, leadership, and reconciliation, and, from August 2009 until May 2010, the College will commemorate its Centennial year with numerous lectures, exhibits, symposiums, worship experiences, concerts, and visual and performing arts expressions. The latest schedule of Centennial events can be found at www.messiah.edu/centennial.

Throughout the Centennial year, we encourage you to share memories of your experiences at Messiah College. You can respond to memory prompts at <http://blogs.messiah.edu/centennial> or submit stories and reflections to



centennialstories@messiah.edu. Everyone's contributions—parents, students, alumni, employees, friends, and neighbors—will help capture the impact of 100 years of "shared faith, bold vision, and enduring promise," the tri-part Centennial year theme.

In the months to come, many more details regarding the College's Centennial celebrations will be finalized. We invite you to check www.messiah.edu/centennial for the latest information, and we hope you will join us in celebrating this significant milestone!

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Prayer and praise

Prayer

- Leadership selection for all the student organizations for next year (that the selection teams have wisdom in making selections and that students have clarity about God's call)
- Summer mission teams and individuals preparing for service this summer
- That Koinonia small groups would end the year well
- Wisdom for the pastoral team as they plan next year's chapel schedule
- For God's blessing over all the logistics of Service Day on April 23 and for students, faculty, and staff to be effective servants, both that day and beyond
- That each student will grow in faith as they see God's provision in their lives during these challenging economic times
- In concert with the Student Chaplains' theme for the semester and with our February chapel series on Colossians, please pray that EACH student would come to know in a deeper way the hope to which Christ has called them, the depth of God's mystery—Christ in them—and the power of his presence at work in their lives.

Praise

- A renewing and fruitful time for the Koinonia leaders on their retreat in February and for a successful first year for this student-led small group ministry
- New insights gained and new friendships established at the men's and women's retreats in February
- For God's work in and through the Spring Break service project teams
- For the growth that happens within students who are in mentoring relationships all across campus (between students and faculty, coaches, co-curricular advisors, Koinonia mentors, work supervisors, and church members)

Bidding farewell to *Parents Progress*

In September 1996, President Rodney Sawatsky penned these words to parents in the first issue of the *Parents Progress* newsletter: "Welcome to the Messiah family! . . . You will become a part of our family as we become a part of yours in our common quest to educate your son or daughter 'toward maturity of intellect, character, and Christian faith.'" How true! Certainly parents are invaluable within the Messiah College community.

More than 10 years later, the newsletter has evolved from a few stapled, typewritten pages to an expanded, full-color, six-page newsletter. The format may have changed, but the goal of sharing news and information of particular interest to parents remains the same.

Now, the College's means of communicating with parents will undergo another significant change. A newly re-designed website (www.messiah.edu/parents) will replace the printed newsletter that you normally receive in April, August, and December. The website will provide up-to-date information and news that you can access at your convenience. We will continue to provide occasional online stories that examine a topic more in depth—like the spiritual formation feature in this month's issue.

Please know that we remain committed to communicating frequently and openly with you. You are always welcome to send questions and suggestions to parents@messiah.edu or to contact the Alumni and Parent Relations Office directly at (717) 796-5252. Our sincere hope is that you will find the re-designed website to be a helpful resource throughout your son or daughter's time at Messiah.