



靈命與品格塑造中心
SPIRITUAL AND CHARACTER
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2024 North America Chinese Christian Spiritual Formation Discernment Summit Report

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With extensive planning, prayers, and preparation by the Spiritual and Character Formation Center (SCFC), the 2024 North America Chinese Christian Spiritual Formation Discernment Summit was held from September 9 to 11 at Prince of Peace Abbey, Oceanside, CA. Thirty-three spiritual formation leaders from various Chinese seminaries, parachurch organizations, and churches attended the gathering. The summit provided time for participants to share their own spiritual formation journeys, address the importance and obstacles of spiritual formation, give ministry updates, explore effective strategies and discern next steps together. The overarching perspective was that a movement of spiritual formation may be emerging in North American (NA) Chinese churches.

Importance. As first- and second-generation immigrants, NA Chinese churches demonstrate several major tendencies:

1. Emphasis on one-way devotional practices such as Bible reading and prayer
2. A lack of regular self-reflection and confession
3. Limited understanding and personal experience of the work of the Holy Spirit
4. Busyness in ministry (doing) and having little time to nurture a personal relationship with God
5. A focus on education and academic achievement

At the summit, we were invited to envision a church that is aware of the work of the Holy Spirit, responds to His guidance and is empowered by the Holy Spirit to live out Jesus' lifestyle. The impact can be profound on personal, relational, church, and societal levels, bringing freedom to live as God's beloved children, fostering a powerful witness for Jesus, and potentially sparking another spiritual revival in our midst.

Obstacles. Common misunderstandings about spiritual formation persist in NA Chinese churches. We addressed four areas of concern:

1. *Luther vs. Ignatius* – The main obstacles are a lack of understanding of Luther's and Ignatian spiritual traditions within their historical contexts, along with the misconception that Luther ignored spiritual formation.
2. *Evangelical vs. Pentecostal* – To address the fear of Pentecostalism, we should emphasize the importance of biblical teaching on pneumatology and the common ground of sanctification to help evangelicals remain open to the work of the Holy Spirit.
3. *Individualism vs. Community* – Spiritual formation must take place within the community, enabling Christians to mature and discern God's will together.

4. *Busyness vs. Spiritual Formation* – Busyness and hurry counteract the core of our faith: love and joy.

It is only through deliberate spiritual disciplines and time with God that we can experience grace, rest, and love for self and others, creating space to receive God's love.

Strategies. Based on the realities and obstacles facing NA Chinese churches and the process of group discernment, these summarized strategies can be focus areas for promoters of spiritual formation within our organizations and churches:

1. Equip our pastors and church leaders in spiritual formation.
2. Educate seminarians, pastors, and church members on the various ways God speaks and the work of the Holy Spirit, including the prayer of examen and lectio divina, which help people become aware of God's presence and work in their lives.
3. Share life-changing testimonies with the church and offer semi-silent retreats for people to experience God.
4. Emphasize the importance of spiritual formation in church planting and among young and new believers.
5. Integrate spiritual formation into existing discipleship ministries to highlight its value and necessity.
6. Use magazines and media to promote the concept of spiritual formation.
7. Form a network, even society, for summit participants and spiritual formation proponents.

Impact and Implications. The summit is a step towards corporately responding to God's invitation to promote disciples' intentional engagement in spiritual formation process. The vision is to see Christians in NA Chinese churches experience deeper transformation towards Christlikeness from the inside out, subsequently changing our lives, relationships, churches and communities. Many participants have attempted to promote spiritual formation in their churches on their own, however with limited results due to the obstacles mentioned. If summit attendees focus on these corporately discerned strategies and rely on God's power as they continue their efforts, there may be a greater spiritual formation movement in NA Chinese churches ahead.

Interested in learning more? SCFC at CESNA currently offers a Spiritual Formation Diploma (SFD) and a Master of Christian Studies in Spiritual Formation (MCS-SF), along with spiritual formation courses in Theological Extension Education (TEE). SCFC leaders are also available to lead spiritual and character formation workshops and day retreats for interested churches in English and Chinese. For more information, visit <https://www.cesna.edu/en/> and select SCFC or contact Joyce Chen, the Assistant Director of SCFC, at joycechen@cesna.edu.