

Spiritual Formation

In over 40 years of pastoral ministry, I have had the privilege of working with many associate pastors. I have reviewed resumes, conducted interviews, evaluated credentials, and made recommendations to a church board many times over. I then had the joy of working together with these associates in a partnership of ministry. It is out of these experiences that I conclude: **it's all about the heart.**

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE HEART

"It is in part only a rediscovery of the basic biblical disciplines so powerfully expressed in the life of Jesus and His disciples."

by Richard Dresselhaus

Jesus taught repeatedly that all good and evil proceed ultimately from the heart. "Out of the heart" is a common theme in His message. I have been witness to the reality of this instruction over and over. It has proven true in my life and in the lives of those with whom I have worked.

Of course, giftedness and aptitude are essential, but unless these qualifications proceed from a heart that is vertically linked with Jesus and horizontally linked to men, authentic ministry will be impossible.

It has only been recently that seminaries have included spiritual formation in their curriculum. A corpus of writings has been identified which link this discipline to the past in most instructive ways. Reaching back to the "desert fathers" (a medieval expression of heart devotion) and continuing to the present, the Holy Spirit has drawn men and women to live out of a deep center of spiritual vitality and godliness. It is in part only a rediscovery of the basic biblical disciplines so powerfully expressed in the life of Jesus and His disciples.

AGTS models this essential aspect of theological training. Beyond matters of cur-



riculum, you will discover a sense of community on campus. Here, the heart is being nurtured and prepared for a life of ministry. AGTS graduates will have an opportunity to cultivate the inner life from which a vocation of service to Christ and His kingdom will proceed.

As the interim academic dean, I have had the opportunity to observe up close the dynamics of spiritual formation at work on the AGTS campus. The strong commitment of the faculty, staff, and administration, combined with the dedication of the student council has created an atmosphere in which the heart can be nurtured in preparation for a life of service.

This brief and part time hiatus at AGTS has been a personal "oasis." There is something unique about life together at AGTS. It has been personally refreshing and invigorating.

The focus at AGTS is the nurture of the heart. The mind is consistently, and sometimes strenuously, challenged, but above all is the cultivation of a heart after God and the development of a servant spirit in ministry. **R**