

PURPOSE-DRIVEN CHURCH SNUBS CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUALITY

April 2006 --- While contemplative spirituality is currently sweeping across the American evangelical landscape, one Purpose-Driven church in Wichita Falls, Texas has opted not to jump on the bandwagon. "We feel it's very important to focus on one fad at a time," explained Bob Wiggins, pastor of New Day Family Church. "We don't want to confuse people, especially at Easter time when we're gearing up for our annual message series on 'Resurrecting Your Finances.'"

Contemplative spirituality, which is highly touted by many emerging and purpose-driven church proponents, is a form of meditation that endeavors to free the Christian's mind in order to achieve a mystical experience with God. Common names for this meditation discipline are: Lectio Divina (divine reading), Centering Prayer, and Entering the Silence. In the last year, more and more mainstream churches have adopted these practices as part of their new focus on Spiritual Formation training.

Pastor Wiggins acknowledges that the board of elders made preliminary plans last month to implement this mystical discipline into their core objectives, but those plans were later abandoned. "Our Sunday services are all about grabbing the interest of folks who don't have the attention span of a gnat," Wiggins confided. "So when we can't tell the difference between someone 'practicing the presence of God' and someone taking a nap during the service, we get a little nervous."

Wiggins added, "It didn't help that one of the elders thought Lectio Divina was our church janitor."

Youth pastor Josh Dyson, an advocate of contemplative spirituality, was disappointed with his church's decision to maintain their current seeker-sensitive style. Argued Dyson, "Look, I'm all for manipulating the congregation's emotions with a professional worship program, but if I hear another half-hour power praise medley with Barry Manilow crescendos, I'm going to stab pencils in my ears. I need some quiet time right now, dude. Really."

When asked about the elders' concern that contemplative spirituality smacks of Eastern mysticism, Dyson bristled at the charge. "Leave it to some old schoolers to demand biblical support before bringing cool ideas into the church. I mean, why should Buddhists enjoy all the bangin' paths to divinity?" Dyson readily admits to practicing a mantra-like, one-word prayer to empty his mind as part of his morning ritual, followed by Cap'n Crunch and a Red Bull chaser. "It releases my consciousness from earthly restraints and brings me closer to my Source," he revealed. "In fact, I'm still in an altered state of consciousness right now... no, wait. I think I just lost a contact lens. Never mind."

Pastor Wiggins understands his youth pastor's appreciation for contemplative spirituality, but he doesn't believe this practice is part of God's dream for New

Day Family Church right now. “If the Lord wanted our church to be involved with contemplative spirituality He wouldn’t have given us a rockin’ praise band and a quarter million dollar sound system that can blow the cushions off our theater seating,” Wiggins said. “There’s plenty of time for us to ‘enter the silence’ when the congregation begins to suffer more significant hearing loss.”