**10 Things You Can Do to Become a Contemplative Church**

**By Mark Longhurst**

1. **Preach about contemplation.** If you’re a pastor, preach about our relationship with God and the journeys of our souls. Do a series on Christian mystics or delve into the traditions of mystical Biblical interpretation. If you’re a lay leader, ask and expect your pastor to preach about contemplation and prayer. Preaching is one sided if it only focuses on justice issues and not the inner life—and likewise it’s one sided if it focuses only on our relationship with God and not the world. Your congregation needs to hear about God’s invitation of Divine Love to the soul.
2. **Expect and look for the pastor to be on an inner spiritual journey.** The pastor can only help deepen spirituality in a congregation as far as they have gone themselves. If you’re a pastor, commit, build into your contract and schedule regular practices of prayer, retreat, and silence. If you’re in ministry and you have never developed those disciplines, it’s never too late to start! Your future in ministry depends on it. If you’re a lay leader, inquire about how your pastor is taking care of themselves and nurturing their spiritual life. If your pastor is overworked, advocate and provide support on their behalf to free up time.
3. **Lead prayerful meetings.** Begin each Church Council or committee meeting with a contemplative practice, such as lectio divina, or silent meditation. Give space in the meeting for people to share what’s going in their lives. Pray for each other. If you don’t think there’s enough time in the meeting to pray, do it anyway. Church business is important, but transformation is what ultimately matters.
4. **Introduce contemplative practices in public worship.** Add two minutes of silence after the prayer of confession. Sing or chant Psalms or Taizé songs as your opening hymn. Pass the peace in silence. Allow five minutes in the service for people to walk meditatively around the sanctuary. Use less words and more intentional silence in your Eucharistic prayers. Make room to meet God—otherwise, what are we doing on Sundays anyway?
5. **Find a Spiritual Director.** If you’re a pastor and you’re not already in spiritual direction, begin. You need a mentor who can support your spiritual development and with whom you can discuss matters of the soul. You can’t do it alone, and there are burgeoning networks of people trained to help you, such as Spiritual Directors International.
6. **Go to therapy.** Therapy is essential for processing the emotions that attend deep spiritual growth, as well as the many psychological challenges of church ministry. If you’re a pastor and you are already in therapy, great! Keep doing it, even when everything is going well. If you’re a pastor and you’re *not* in therapy, what are you waiting for? It’s self-care, and no one has it all together. If you’re a lay leader, and your pastor is not doing spiritual direction and therapy, ask your pastor about it—and view it as a warning sign of eventual burnout.
7. **Start a contemplative practice group.** One of the most effective ways to plant seeds of contemplation in your church is to hold a weekly or regular contemplative practice time. Some churches have morning and evening prayer; some do meditation sits; others walk a labyrinth at specific times of the year. Find a regular contemplative practice that works for your community and commit to it together.
8. **Read contemplative books together.** Published resources on the contemplative life are rich and plentiful. Whether it’s Richard Rohr classics *Falling Upward* or *Everything Belongs,* Cynthia Bourgeault’s masterful *The Wisdom Jesus*, or new voice Cole Arthur Riley’s *This Here Flesh,* reading a book together can help deepen intellectual and spiritual transformation. Better yet, you can combine book discussion with a group meditation sit or other contemplative practice.
9. **Hold a lay leaders retreat at a monastery.** If you want to strengthen relationships amongst your lay leaders and offer them an unforgettable opportunity for deepening spirituality, bring a group of key lay leaders to a monastery. Create space for each person to discover silence, solitude, and communal prayer. Arrange for one of the monks or nuns to meet with you ahead of time to share about their rhythm of life. Request a group room for meeting sessions to pray and vision cast the future of your church.
10. **Attend a conference together.**  Attending a contemplative conference can be tremendously energizing for leaders in your church. Organizations such as the Center for Action and Contemplation, Shalem Institute, Contemplative Outreach, Spiritual Directors International, Center for Christogenesis frequently hold conferences and/or events with engaging speakers and ample time for contemplative practice. Many seminaries do the same. Look for opportunities that fit your needs and plan a group trip or online streaming party!

**About Mark Longhurst:**

Mark served UCC churches in the Berkshire hills of Massachusetts for ten years. He now is the Managing Editor of Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditations for the Center for Action and Contemplation, and writes semi-regularly at his Substack publication: marklonghurst.substack.com.