

Submission for weekly column “Space for Reflection” in The Current

### **What’s your mission?**

A recent article in the Sun-Sentinel titled “The Gospel of Youth” made the following observation: “Regardless of faith, today’s young adults generally don’t like attending traditional worship services, where their numbers are down. And they shy away from labels, increasingly identifying with no specific religion or, if they are Christian, calling themselves nondenominational. Yet in conversations and in academic surveys, Generations X and Y still demonstrate an overwhelming belief in God and an interest in how all things spiritual relate to their lives and the world around them....(Jamie Malernee, Sept. 25, 2006).

This combination of interest in spirituality but disinterest in organized religion has been described by sociologist Robert Wuthnow as a shift from “a spirituality of dwelling” to “a spirituality of seeking.” Seekers tend to be open-minded and appreciative of diversity. At the same time, though, some worry that young people who aren’t grounded in a religious tradition might become shallow and self-absorbed—seeing spirituality as merely something to make life more pleasant and comfortable.

An organization I’m involved with on campus, the Spiritual Life Council, has been working on a mission statement over the past few weeks. We began by doing an exercise to determine what our core values are as an organization. We identified six values as the Council’s core values: authenticity, contribution, humility, leadership, passion, and respect. Now we’re putting together the actual wording of our mission statement. In his book on facilitation, Schwarz states, “A group’s mission answers the question ‘Why do we exist?’ A group attempts to achieve its mission by accomplishing various goals, which in turn are achieved by performing various tasks.”

So, what does this stuff about a mission statement have to do with college students’ spirituality? When I came across the comment recently about today’s young adults being in danger of shallowness and self-absorption, I started wondering whether one way to avoid this danger would be for us to create our own personal mission statements.

How might this work? Maybe each one of us could set some time aside to reflect on our personal core values. Then we might ask of ourselves, “Why do I exist? What are my goals as a spiritual being? What tasks do I need to perform to achieve those goals, which reflect my overall personal mission in life?” Reflecting on how our actions can express our spirituality may lead to more acts of service and cause us to impact others more consistently in a positive way. After all, we don’t want to be labeled as shallow and self-absorbed! We have too much to contribute to this world.

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