

NEW COLLEGE Berkeley

AWAKEN THEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Fall 2023

Dear friend,

I hope this letter finds you well.

It was 9/11 that awoke me to the deeply fragmented (and confused) nature of the American Church and ignited my sense of call to **connect the body of Christ** - *in all its rich theological and cultural diversity* - that we might *learn* from one another. I bring this call to **New College Berkeley** (NCB), building on its rich history of *thinking Christianly* (David Gill and Earl Palmer)

and *rooting spiritually* (Susan Phillips). We see this new vision of **ecclesial co-learning** as a response to what the Holy Spirit is stirring among the churches: *it is time to repent from our silos*.



We envision NCB as a **“third space”** for the Bay Area Church and the academy to gather and ask big questions. What does it mean to be Christ-honoring stewards of the region’s beauty and natural resources, its prosperity and technological power? What are the implications for discipleship? Congregational formation? Mission?

In short, we think of NCB as a **“think-tank among gospel friends”** amidst a time of great change and uncertainty. We offer online and in-person **classes and “pop-ups”** in the East Bay, Silicon Valley and San Francisco to engage pastors, lay leaders, and everyday disciples along with theologians and subject experts from our relationships with seminaries, institutes, and universities. We are intergenerational, intercultural and interdenominational, with an expectation that all come eager to learn...to be a **company of the curious**. We believe that *rich feasts of theology and spiritual friendship can bring needed renewal to the Church*.

Will you invest in this vision (see attached summary)? Through our summer fundraising drive, we aim to raise \$250,000 by the end of the year. **Your gift of \$100, \$250, \$500, \$2500+** will help us get there. Checks can be sent to the address below. Email-in a pledge, or contact me with any questions you have about where NCB is going. Thanks so much for your time!

In service of our Lord Jesus Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Craig Wong', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Craig Wong, Executive Director, NCB

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A Think Tank Among Gospel Friends

The Church and the academy together asking big questions for love of the Bay Area

Overview

Big questions loom. Where is artificial intelligence taking society? How will wealth disparity further erode human community? What awaits the land and its inhabitants with our present habits of consumption? How are we to steward the region's beauty, resources, prosperity and technological power? What are the implications for faithful discipleship? For congregational life and mission? We believe New College Berkeley (NCB) is positioned to foster learning communities around such inquiries among pastors, ministers, professionals, and the laity in partnership with academics, theologians and subject matter experts. Think of NCB as a *think tank among gospel friends*, setting the table for rich feasts of theology and spiritual company to bring needed renewal for the Church.

NCB: from past to present

NCB was founded in 1977 by Dr. David Gill and Rev. Earl Palmer as a *Center for Advanced Christian Studies* to provide students and working professionals with courses and conferences to "think Christianly" in their vocational lives. In 1994, Dr. Susan Phillips introduced a needed emphasis on spiritual formation for cultivating lives rooted in God. Today, under the leadership of Craig Wong, NCB builds on these two pillars to connect the body of Christ *across culture, tradition and generation* to foster Christ-centered, communal reflection and discernment that is both contemplative and theologically-informed. NCB continues to be an affiliate "center of distinction" of the *Graduate Theological Union* and a member of the *Consortium of Christian Study Centers*.



Co-learning communities: A *third space* vision



In a word, a *third space* is where unlikely partners gather to engage what matters. Sociologist Ray Oldenberg asserts that all third spaces share in common three things: all walks of life gather, conversations happen, and there are regulars. For Oldenberg, pubs and cafes are critical to healthy societies because they gather folks who would otherwise be secluded in their home or

workplace. NCB is like a “pub” for the *ecclesia* where folks gather from otherwise disconnected realms, e.g academy and congregation, mainline and evangelical, Orthodox and Catholic, boomer and Gen Z. Third spaces thrive because all come to the table eager to listen, expecting to learn, honoring one another with dignity and respect, regardless of ecclesial or ideological differences.



Pop-up classes and formational spaces

Our various learning spaces interweave together to create pathways for informing, transforming, and imagining life in Christ in the world, and to forge spiritual friendships that last. Whether in your city or



online, our seminars and workshops in **Bible, Theology & Ethics** integrate Christian belief with Bay Area realities, like our multi-congregational workshop on biblical *shalom* for pastors and lay leaders seeking *the peace* of their cities.

Our **Spiritual Formation** offerings connect us to God’s heart through

group spiritual direction, contemplative retreats, and the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. Our **Creative Arts** engage the whole of our senses through film, iconography, writing and other art forms that help awaken the imagination.



Partnerships that nurture the whole Church



Partnering with congregations and organizations such as WP313, InterVarsity, American Scientific Affiliation, Faith & AI, Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, Faith & Work Journey, and many others, is critical to our mission.

We’re excited about the renewed connection between NCB and *Radix Magazine*. As we engage the big Bay Area questions of technology, environment and the economy, *Radix* will be where our collective discoveries can be published, curated and disseminated for edification of the larger body of Christ.

Partnership with you

How is the new NCB resonating with you? How might NCB be helpful to you, your congregation, or other constituencies? What are ways you can support and invest in NCB’s new vision? We would love to hear more. Contact Craig Wong, Executive Director, at (510) 841-9386 or email at director@newcollegeberkeley.org and we can set up a time. Thanks for your interest! Help us stay in touch with you here ➤

