

The Entertainment Ministry

By Ryan N. Harrison, MA

Ryan N. Harrison, MA is a Holistic Health Educator/Consultant in private practice (<http://www.BeWholeBeWell.com>). He has taught holistic nutrition, therapeutic herbalism and natural health for many years in both online and traditional settings.

[Click Here to Visit the Spiritual Cinema Circle](#)

I am keenly aware that the title of this article might ruffle a few feathers. For the most part, when I hear the word “entertainment” coupled with “ministry” (or even worse, with “worship”) in a single sentence, there is usually a note or two of distaste or disgust attached. *Worship shouldn't be entertainment*, I have heard many, many times. Well, depending on the setting, the desired worship experience, and the gathered group of people, that may be true. But what if there were a way to minister to others, to uplift the downtrodden, give hope to the weary, and inspire the disheartened...and you did it all with movies?

Let me explain.

I'm a Holistic Health Practitioner. I have a private practice through which I help people travel their personal paths to wellness. This is all-encompassing work, requiring that attention be paid not only to the body and mind, but to the spirit. There's no one-size-fits-all approach to this kind of work; the more ways I have to reach people, the better. Accordingly, I'm ceaselessly exploring possibilities, searching for additional ways to help and serve others. Almost two years ago, I stumbled across something that has changed my life, and which can change yours, as well: The Spiritual Cinema Circle.

The Spiritual Cinema Circle (SCC) is an organization dedicated to bringing inspiring and enlightening entertainment to people on a monthly basis. We all know how the media can depress, desensitize, and “dumb down” people. The SCC strives to do just the opposite. By bringing individuals together to view movies with a spiritual theme and then discuss them and how they relate to “real life,” the SCC offers people an opportunity to build community, relate to spiritual matters (in a setting other than a traditional worship service), and to explore what humans can be and do when operating at their very best.

The SCC was co-founded by Stephen Simon, movie director and producer of *What Dreams May Come* and *Somewhere in Time*. His vision was to use movies to help us examine who we are and why we are here, as well as to illuminate the human condition and inspire us to explore what we can do and be when we operate at our very best. (It's important to recognize that in this context, “spiritual” does not refer to any particular religion, but rather, to the unseen and divine part of our nature and of all life around us. This isn't a Christian film fest. Rather, an incredibly wide variety of religious, philosophical, and cultural views are offered for the viewers' education, exploration, and edification.)

Each month, the Circle distributes 4 films on DVD to a worldwide audience of members in over 70 countries. Unlike video rental services, the movies do not need to be returned and are instead collected by members to create a whole library of inspiring movies that can be watched (and

shared) again and again. One of the best things about this “movie club” is that the monthly movie collections include a wide variety of films (features, shorts, animations, and documentaries) that are unlikely to be seen elsewhere. Members don’t receive blockbuster hits that can be found at local theatres. These are films – often internationally produced – that are very hard to find, even though many of them have won major movie festival awards.

I love movies, and I love to share good movies with others. Having found The Spiritual Cinema Circle, I approached the La Verne Church of the Brethren (where I actively participate in worship) and asked if I could promote a Spiritual Cinema Circle gathering that I would host once a month. In its typical fashion – someone once accurately suggested that the La Verne CoB is “the Church of Yes!” – I was invited to make it happen. The church would support me.

That was the beginning of an exciting “movie ministry.” For each month of the past year, I have hosted these Spiritual Cinema Circle gatherings. They started out in my living room, moved to a friend’s larger living room, and finally have become successful enough that I’m holding them at the church in our Fireside Room, where I’m projecting the movies onto a big screen. In fact, our Christian Education Commission recently decided to help support this ministry by signing up to receive the movies (which will be made available to everyone through the church library), and helping me get all the audio and video equipment that is needed to accommodate the large gatherings.

For my part, I personally preview the movies before I show them, and hand-pick the movies I want to share. Since many of them are “shorts,” lasting between 10 and 30 minutes, there’s usually time to show several movies and then to follow the viewing with some great discussion. I always put out a short announcement in both the church’s monthly newsletter, as well as in the Sunday bulletins. A key to success, I have found, is giving a short synopsis of each movie that will be shown. Then, I set up the room before the gathering so that we sit in a semi-circle with the screen visible from each seat. After each film, I invite people to share their thoughts, feelings, experiences and questions. (Very recently, the SCC started adding “Discussion Questions” that follow the movies and show up on the screen. These questions can help provide a starting point for meaningful conversation.)

Through this process, I have gathered groups together to discuss such varied topics as: life after death, the power of love, compassion and forgiveness, stewardship and caring for the planet, personal responsibility, relationships, healing from abuse, creativity, hidden blessings, the transformative power of crisis, cosmic cycles, interconnectedness, and personal transformation. More than a few times, viewers have approached me to express their thanks for the opportunity to explore these subjects in a safe group setting. Some have expressed how wonderful it is to not only see a touching and inspiring film, but to have a chance to discuss it and its relevancy to our lives. I always appreciate that comment, because that’s really the magic of it: the SCC exists to connect, inspire, and enlighten people through meaningful conversation. It seeks to help us uncover our greatest selves by exploring images that stir us into thoughtfulness and discussion. When a group gathers with this intention and shares their feelings, thoughts and experiences, something wonderfully and spiritually enlivening happens: a new kind of “ministry”...a new kind of “worship.”

So, is it possible for entertainment to be a viable part of a ministry? Absolutely! The La Verne CoB congregation is experiencing this on a monthly basis. [And you, your family, group, or congregation can, as well. See the sidebar for more information on how to explore The Spiritual Cinema Circle.] All it takes is some time and an open spirit that fosters dialogue and yearns for connection with others.

I believe in the power of The Spiritual Cinema Circle. I believe it can raise consciousness, promote life-changing discussion, and inspire us to become the grandest versions of ourselves. I hope you take the opportunity to explore this new ministry, as well.

The Spiritual Cinema Circle FAQ

How much does it cost?

The average price on a month-by-month basis is \$25, including shipping. Annual memberships are also available (see sidebar), and will save you around \$70, including shipping.

What do I receive each month?

Each month, you will receive a selection of four films, consisting of a feature, two shorts and a documentary on DVD, all carefully chosen by Stephen Simon and our selection team. Also, as a member of The Circle, you will receive movie reviews, access to contests, and many other members-only benefits.

What kinds of movies will I see?

There is a wide variety of films presented by the CIRCLE. You can get a feeling for the different films available by visiting the CIRCLE online at [Spiritual Cinema Circle](#). Some of the films recently viewed at the La Verne CoB include:

- **Gabrielle** – An intriguing, mysterious movie about a soul waiting to be born. She gets a glimpse of the life she would live, with its triumphs and tragedies. Then, she must decide whether she wants to be born.
- **Retreat** – A beautiful feature film set in Cape Cod that explores sibling relationships and childhood abuse in a way that is both palatable and heart expanding. Four brothers are reunited as adults, and with the help of a special woman, are forced to work at healing their dysfunction.
- **Yin** – A short but delightful animated film that explores love, identity, relationships and non-conformity.
- **Mother Ghost** – Keith, a man who has to deal with his mother's death (and recently reappearing ghost), his wounded relationship with his father, and his failing relationship with his wife and son, turns to a radio talk show psychiatrist for help. This is an amazingly moving story about healing, forgiving, and letting-go.

How will membership benefit my church/congregation?

If your congregation joins The Spiritual Cinema Circle, it will amass a collection of spiritually-themed films of all lengths and genres, which can be used to augment discussions, workshops, Sunday school classes, conferences, and more. Your church will quickly build a library of films with themes including: The Power of Love, Interconnectedness, Respect for Diversity, Forgiveness, Compassion, Honoring the Earth, Transformation, Life After Life, Personal Responsibility, and more. Your congregation will have a viable new ministry to offer the community, capable of responding to those who need or desire another place – outside of the traditional worship service – to explore their spirituality in a group setting.

Can I get my movies on VHS Cassettes rather than DVD?

No. The CIRCLE uses DVDs exclusively because the picture is better (the quality is practically flawless compared to the grainier VHS), and they are much more environmentally friendly and less expensive to ship. Additionally, DVDs can be played on PlayStation, laptops, PC and other

portable and equipped devices. Over the past few years, the cost of DVD players has dropped dramatically. You can now purchase a surprisingly good quality DVD player for under \$100.

What if I already own or have already seen some of the films?

Our selections of films are independently produced and many are only available through The Spiritual Cinema Circle. Unless you attend a large number of independent film festivals, you are not likely to have seen any of our films before.

What ratings will my movies have?

The Circle seeks inspiring and uplifting films without the gratuitous violence, obscenities, and tasteless sexuality of many Hollywood films. With that in mind, The CIRCLE will feature movies of all ratings except X. Please be aware that not all of the offered movies will have received an MPAA rating at the stage in which it is being offered to our members. Prior to receiving the monthly mailing, you will receive descriptions of the upcoming attractions so you'll get a sense of the content, messages and themes of the movies. Commentary on the DVD and written descriptions will also inform you whether there's sexuality, strong language or other elements that might influence whether you watch the movies with children.

What if I don't like a particular selection?

As the adage goes, "There's no accounting for taste." Even our superior selection committee will disagree about what movies to feature and whether they "like" a particular movie. However, beyond "like" and "don't like" there's a bigger world in which the movie inspires, enlightens, heals, transforms or creates other stimulating reactions. The Circle will share what's attractive about the particular selection on the website and in our other materials. Nonetheless, we encourage and greatly appreciate your feedback on our monthly selection of films. Please see below to find information on how to rate our movies.

Can I give input into the kinds of movies I like?

Yes. In order to provide you with the best possible spiritual movies, we need to know what you like! For this reason, we ask our members to visit our "Rate Movies" page every month within the Members area of the website to rate the movies from our most recent volume and give us feedback. And as a special incentive, each month you rate our movies, you'll be entered in a special, members-only drawing for a **FREE MONTH OF MEMBERSHIP**. Your thoughtful input will help immensely in shaping the future selections.

In the event that I want to cancel my subscription, how do I do so?

You can cancel your subscription any time, simply by calling our customer service line at 1-800-280-8290 between 8:00 am and 6:00 pm Pacific Standard Time. Our cancellation policy can be viewed on the website under "Terms of Use" at the bottom of the home page.

Ordering Details

Here's How The Circle Works: Each month, *The Spiritual Cinema Circle* distributes 4 or more spiritual films on DVD to a worldwide audience of members in over 70 countries. Unlike video rental services, **the movies do not need to be returned and are instead collected by members to create a whole library of inspiring movies that can be watched again and again.** Memberships can be cancelled at any time, hassle-free.

Joining is quick and easy and there are two different ways to go about it:

- Month-by-month (at around \$25/month), or
- Yearly (around \$280, including shipping; an overall savings of about \$70).

To join on a month-by-month basis:

<http://www.spiritualcinemacircle.com/?kbid=1692>

Click the "Join Today" link and follow the instructions (credit card required)

To order by phone:

Call 1-888-447-5494

Be sure to mention affiliate number **1692**