

BY CORNELIA SEIGNEUR



Fraternizing with the Enemy

Paul Louis Metzger engages those outside the faith.

Paul Louis Metzger knows what it means to feel shunned. Sometimes mocked for his faith in his youth, he now says, “I have often felt like an outsider. And I’ve seen my wife, a native of Japan, treated as an outsider.”

Breaking down walls is at the heart of Metzger’s work as professor of theology and culture at Multnomah Biblical Seminary—and especially as founder and director of the seminary’s Institute for the Theology of Culture: New Wine, New Wineskins.

He wants to see “authentic expressions of holistic faith lived out” in a diverse culture, and pursues that by engaging various faith groups and secular organizations in conversation. Metzger, author of several books, including *Consuming Jesus: Beyond Race and Class Divisions in a Consumer Church*, is also passionate about racial reconciliation.

Evangelical civil-rights leader John M. Perkins says that in a divided society, “God is creating a post-racist people who are loving God first and sharing his love, and Paul is one of them.”

- 📍 **Hometown** Portland, Oregon
- 🎂 **Age** 46
- 👨‍👩‍👧 **Family** Mariko (wife); Christopher, 15, Julianne, 9 (children)
- 🏛️ **Church** Imago Dei Community
- 📖 **Reading now** *Les Misérables*
- 🦁 **Your hero** John M. Perkins
- 🎬 **Favorite movie** *As Good as It Gets*; *To End All Wars*
- 📖 **Favorite Bible verse** Romans 8:37–39
- 🎧 **Hobbies** Reading, listening to the blues, traveling

question & answer

What is New Wine, New Wineskins?

We host conferences and forums that include leaders from various sides of today’s issues. Topics have included the culture wars, same-sex marriage, racism, and HIV/AIDS. We want to bring the community to our campus, and we want to go out to the community. Friday Night Franks, which my interns lead, is one example, where New Wine faithful gather on 82nd Avenue to share a meal and conversation with diverse people near the bus stop and train. There are drug dealers and prostitutes on 82nd Avenue. One man told one of our interns, “When you’re out here, we feel safer.”

How are you breaking down barriers?

We’re finding common ground where there hasn’t been common ground before, dialoguing with those whom we historically have considered our enemies, and I’m sharing my faith. We’ve brought Unitarian Universalists, Buddhists, and gays onto campus to share our respective views.

Such activities probably aren’t popular with everyone.

I’ve been called a heretic by the Right for befriending gays, Unitarian Universalists, and Buddhists, and a religious bigot by the Left for holding firmly to biblical truth.

Do you want to change the church?

No, I want God to change the church and me. So often, church and theology are shaped by gaining and maintaining power, which is what the “take back America” thinking is often about. We have a lot of things to repent of. In American Christianity, power brokering often replaces brokenness. If we are going to break through divisions, we need to listen to people on the other side first. Why should they listen to us if we don’t listen to them?

More: ConsumingJesus.org, New-Wineskins.org

STUART MULLENBERG

