

Greetings to all enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry Course,
Spiritual Formation/Direction.

My name is John Sumarah and I was asked by Dr. Andrew MacRae of the Acadia School of Divinity to develop and deliver this course. I discerned carefully the decision, given the commitment of time and effort required for such a task. At the time of the request I was finalizing my sabbatical plans for 2005-2006. Part of my leave involved a three-month program on spirituality in Wales. It seemed to me somewhat providential to be asked to teach a course on spirituality at this time, so I was pleased to respond affirmatively to Dr. MacRae's request. I also spent five months in Nairobi, Kenya where I was asked, among other things, to offer a few talks on spirituality and to provide spiritual direction for a number of Kenyans making an annual retreat.

Normally, I have the opportunity of meeting students in person for the first class. Our first "get together," however, is in November, so I thought it might be helpful if I introduced myself and the course to you well in advance of that date so you can begin reading in the area of spiritual formation. This letter is part of a Handbook which includes the course syllabus and a bibliography. While the package is extensive I trust it will be useful in the coming years. We do need to have an early orientation to the course in order to fully benefit from our personal contact times in November and February. Towards this end, I invite you to read the required fall texts before the November meeting. The bibliography is sufficiently comprehensive so that you can begin to consider reading for your research papers. While there are many more resources available I thought it beneficial to provide enough material to "get you started."

I have included my own website in the course syllabus so that you can see the kind of work I have been doing for the last twenty-four years at Acadia. Words do not always capture the spirit of the person or the work but this information should provide you with a "sense" of the work to which I have been called. It may also be useful if I say a few more words about myself so that we are not complete strangers when we meet in November. I am a follower of Jesus. His life, teachings, passion and resurrection continue to inspire, console and challenge me. I am grateful for my Catholic roots (Roman Tradition) and I continue to value and practice my faith. I have a deep respect for other Christian traditions and other faiths as well. For the last sixteen years I have been part of an ecumenical small faith-sharing group. I am happily married with a family. My graduate studies are in counselling psychology and theology. I have accompanied people for the past twenty-four years. It has been my pleasure to accompany several ministers from a variety of Christian traditions. I understand the importance of good spiritual direction and have received good spiritual accompaniment for many years. I see a spiritual director on a regular basis. In the spring my wife Colleen and I made an individually guided silent 30-day retreat based on Ignatian spirituality.

I am looking forward to meeting with you. It would be helpful to me if you sent a short autobiography of yourself, along with a photograph. I would like to make these available to all in the class before November. May grace and peace be yours as you begin this course.

Spiritual Direction/Formation
DMin Course Syllabus
Acadia Divinity College/Graduate School of Theology
Acadia University
2006-2007

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Course Description

This course explores spiritual direction and formation. Special attention is paid to the spiritual formation of the Christian leader and the spiritual life of the church or institution served. The course addresses the rich tradition of Christian spirituality as a foundation from which to explore the personal and social dimensions of spiritual direction/formation. The underlying goal of the course is to enrich the ministry of leaders of the Christian faith through an awareness of the importance of spiritual life, both personally and communally. Theological and developmental dimensions of the spiritual life provide a context from which to explore spiritual direction/formation. Spiritual disciplines and their relevance for spiritual direction/formation will also be addressed.

Rationale

The discourse on spirituality is extensive these days. We hear about new age spirituality, native spirituality, Buddhist spirituality, creation spirituality, etc. There is a considerable desire and search for meaning and purpose within and without the Christian Church. This course will address Christian spirituality with a focus on spiritual direction and formation both for the Christian leader and those served. Issues include the nature and purpose of spiritual formation, various forms of spiritual formation (one-on-one, communal and self-directed), relevant and contemporary means of leading spiritual lives (cultural obstacles and opportunities), discernment as a means of cooperating with God's desire for our lives and the life of the community we serve.

Principles

Some of the principles underlying the development of this course include:

God loves us and works with us in the daily circumstances of our lives.

Spirituality is not separate from but rather an integral part of our daily lives.

The personal and social dimensions of our lives are interrelated and infused with the spiritual dimension.

Our spiritual formation includes others as we form Christian communities.

The call of God is to walk with others.

Our spiritual lives include the important process of discernment: the ability to perceive and understand the signs of the times, as well as the movements of the Spirit.

The goal of all spiritual activities including prayer, worship, Bible study, faith sharing and works of justice is to bring us closer to Jesus and to his gospel message.

All Christian spiritualities are centered on Christ and on participation in his life, passion, death and resurrection.

Our deepest desire is to seek, find and cooperate with God's will for our lives and for all humankind.

Scripture, Church (personal relationships with Jesus and others), prayer, worship, and justice help us to find and cooperate with God's will.

We seek unity within ourselves, with others, with creation and with God.

Our attitudes, words and actions are very important in the living out of our spiritual lives.

Spirituality is a way of life that is dynamic as well as demanding.

Course Objectives:

The academic, professional and personal dimensions of spiritual formation will be addressed. Students will be well grounded in all three dimensions.

1. Students will acquire knowledge of the field of spiritual formation from academics with considerable experience and background.
2. Students will also acquire knowledge of the professional dimension of spiritual formation so as to assist others on their spiritual path.
3. Students will acquire personal knowledge of their own spiritual journey, including an understanding of the challenges and opportunities that enhance their spiritual lives.
4. Students will practice spiritual disciplines as a means to enhance their spiritual growth and learn to integrate spirituality into all aspects of life for self and others.
5. Students will be able to identify factors which contribute to the spiritual character of Christian leaders and others on the spiritual path.

Readings

Spiritual direction/formation has a large body of literature so one must be discerning in what one reads. In addition to the required texts, an extensive bibliography is provided to assist students with their research. Many of the books and articles have extended bibliographies which one may also find helpful throughout their ministry. Some web sites are also included. These may lead to other relevant material. Assigned readings will be distributed well in advance of class time so that students may come prepared for the 2 one-week classes. Approach the reading list with a view to enhancing your awareness and understanding and with a spirit of deepening your relationship with God. Spiritual formation requires a quiet awareness, receptivity and responsiveness to God through readings and discussions. Approximately 3000 pages of reading are required for the course (2000 pages from the required texts for class discussion and 1000 pages for papers and projects).

Required Reading (Fall Term) (1200 pages) The following order is recommended:

- Kenneth Leech. (2001). *Soul Friend: Spiritual Direction in the Modern World*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing. ISBN 0-8192-1888-X (219 pages)
- Tilden Edwards. (2001). *Spiritual Director, Spiritual Companion: Guide to Tending to the Soul*. NY: Paulist Press. ISBN 0-8091-4011-X (219 pages)
- Dallas Willard. (1997). *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. San Francisco: Harper. ISBN 0060693339 (400 pages)
- William Barry. (2004). *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God (Revised Edition)*. NY: Paulist Press. ISBN 0-8091-4294-5 (111 pages)
- Carolyn Gratton. (2000). *The Art of Spiritual Guidance*. Crossroad Publishing Company. ISBN 0-8245-1223-5 (252 pages)

Required Reading (Winter Term) (800 pages) The following order is recommended:

- Margaret Guenther. (2004). *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction*. Darton, Longman and Todd. ISBN 0-232-52008-9 (150 pages)
- Dallas Willard. (1991). *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. San Francisco: Harper. ISBN 0-06-069442-4 (254 pages)
- Richard Foster. (1998). *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco: Harper. ISBN 0-06-062839-1 (210 pages)

Michael Ford, Editor. (2005). *The Dance of Life: Spiritual Direction with Henri Nouwen*. Darton, Longman and Todd. ISBN 0-232-52605-2 (130 pages)

Supplemental (Non-required) Books on Spiritual Formation:

J. Akerman. (2000). *Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations*. Alban Institute. ISBN 1-56699-245-1

K. Anderson & R. Reese. (1999). *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving direction*. Intervarsity Press. ISBN 0-8308-2210-0

J. Bakke. (2000). *Holy Invitations: Exploring Spiritual Direction*. Baker Books. ISBN 0-8010-6327-2

RM Dougherty. (2003). *The Lived Experience of Group Spiritual Direction*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press. ISBN 0809141760

J. English. (1992). *Spiritual Intimacy and Community: An Ignatian View of the Small Faith Community*. New York: Paulist Press. ISBN 0809133849

B. Holt. (2005). *Thirsty for God: A Brief History of Christian Spirituality*. Fortress Press. ISBN 0-8006-3709-7

G. Moon & D. Benner. (2004). *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls*. Downers Grove: Illinois: Intervarsity Press. ISBN 0-8308-2777-3

R. Mulholland. (1993). *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*. Intervarsity Press. ISBN 0-8308-1386-1

R Foster & Griffin. (2000). *Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups on the Twelve Spiritual Disciplines*. San Francisco: Harper. ISBN 0-06-062872-3

R Foster. (1998). *Streams of Living Water*. San Francisco: Harper. ISBN 0-06-062822-7

N. Vest. (2004). *Tending the Holy: Spiritual Direction Across Traditions*. Harrisburg, Penn: Morehouse Publishing. ISBN 0-8192-1918-5

N. Vest. (2000). *Still Listening: New Horizons in Spiritual Direction*. Harrisburg, Penn: Morehouse Publishing. ISBN 0-8192-1814-6

Class Structure

There will be two one-week meetings, one in the fall and one in the winter. Class time will be structured around lectures, guest speakers, presentations and discussion. The class will be structured as a community of learners, acknowledging that spiritual

formation occurs within the context of Christian community. An atmosphere of trust, listening, support and challenge will be encouraged. Graduate work is demanding and requires discernment around boundaries: how much work, how much rest, how much prayer. Spiritual disciplines can be very helpful in addressing these issues. Faith is a good substitute for anxiety, community a good counter to isolation and loneliness, prayer a good counter to worry and Scripture a reassurance in the Lord's call. We are all invited to make this course the very best we can as a community.

Class Assignments

In keeping with the objectives of the course there will be three assignments, one academic, one professional and one personal.

Academic Paper

An academic paper of considerable substance (not less than 25 double spaced pages) on any topic related to spiritual direction/formation. Topics should be chosen in consultation with the instructor. Academic papers should subscribe to the rigor required for published articles; namely, clearly written, referenced, and peer reviewed by at least one other person. Scripture passages and reference to spiritual Masters should be evident in these papers with at least twenty-five references cited to support the argument presented. The paper is due one month after the last class.

Professional/Creative Project

Design a significant project to enhance the spiritual formation of others. Include rationale, objectives, resources, time line and creative activities. An outline of the project should be submitted to and discussed with the instructor prior to the research. The project should have practical value for self and others working in the field of spiritual direction/formation. The project may take many different forms: retreat model, parish model, creative writing, workshop, interviews, photography, and facilitation of small groups on spiritual formation, to mention only a few. The proposal will be shared with the class in February with the final project due a month after the last class.

Spiritual Narrative

Part 1. This paper addresses the significant persons and experiences which have influenced your spiritual formation. Reflect with a critical eye on your experiences with a view to understanding more comprehensively the past experiences, as well as present and future possibilities regarding your spiritual growth. Describe and reflect on the people who have spoken to you in a spiritually significant way, as well as moments which have influenced you spiritually. How has your understanding of spirituality changed over time and what impact have these changes made in your life and in your work? This short reflection should relate stories from your life which will enable others to understand where you are currently on your spiritual path. Be certain to articulate your sense of God's call in your life. Describe the events surrounding your call experience.

Define the personal belief system that convinced you God was acting in and upon your life. The narrative will be shared orally during the first week of class.

Part 2. Throughout this academic year keep a journal of your reflections as you pray, mediate, worship, read, discuss and reflect in a focused way on your spiritual path. Towards this end secure the services of a spiritual director/companion for the duration of the course. Meet on a regular basis with this trusted person, once every two or three weeks. (OR) Make a personal retreat of at least 8 days with individual direction, that is, meet with a spiritual director each day for the 8 days while in silent retreat. Journal about your experience and the impact on your life of this retreat. (OR) Join a small group focused on spirituality and keep a record of your experience in this group. In mind the confidential nature of spiritual conversations in groups. Do you have a personal goal for your spiritual life? How are you moving toward this goal in your daily life? What particular hindrances have you encountered on your spiritual journey (pride, anger, conflict, temptation)? How are you dealing with these challenges? What do you find most helpful on our spiritual journey? If such a journey is not already in place, commit to a daily rhythm of prayer, solitude and spiritual reading (about 1 hour). Reflect on and write about these experiences especially in relation to the Gospel message of Jesus. These varied spiritual experiences and their accompanying growth will form the basis of the second half of a spiritual narrative to be shared during the second week of class in the winter term.

Class attendance and participation

As a community of learners we benefit from others so attendance and participation are of the utmost importance. Much of the learning in this course is appropriated through conversation so if a student is not present s/he has not only missed the learning but has not contributed to the learning of others. If absence is essential notify the instructor beforehand. Listening and sharing are essential elements of participation.

Each student will lead the class in an opening prayer. Choose a passage from Scripture that has influenced your spiritual formation in a special way. Explain why the verses are so important to you and how they have helped your faith. Do not 'preach' or 'exhort.' Simply share in a short concise manner (about 5 minutes) your personal feelings. Conclude your sharing with a prayer.

Topics

Some of the topics included in the course are:

1. Principles and foundations of spiritual formation (Scripture and Tradition)
2. Current cultural interest in spirituality and spiritual formation
3. Philosophical, psychological and ecological discourses about spiritual formation
4. Spiritual disciplines and spiritual conversations
5. Personal and social spirituality-implications for formation and direction

6. Spiritual formation (awareness, action, relationship, hope, community, humility, compassion)
7. Discernment of spirits
8. Small spiritual formation groups (conceptual and practical implications)
9. Ongoing need for spiritual accompaniment
10. Prayer and prayer methods and their relationship to formation
11. Poverty of Spirit and spiritual formation

Class Schedule

- Week 1 November: Discussion of the Fall term required readings
 Come prepared with summaries, comments and questions about the readings. What confirms and challenges you in the readings? Each book will be discussed in class.
 Spiritual Narrative Sharing
- Week 2 February: Discussion of the Winter required readings
 Come prepared with summaries, comments and questions about the readings. What confirms and challenges you in the readings?
 Triads: spiritual direction in class
 Spiritual Narrative Sharing
 Project proposals