

## INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

### SESSION 1: What is Spiritual Mentoring?

**Pre-Reading:** Australian Code of Ethics for Spiritual Directors

This document is available at: <http://spiritualdirection.org.au> If you have someone without Internet access, this Code can be printed and is four pages long.

Although a clear distinction will be made between Spiritual Directors and Spiritual Mentors in Session 1, this Code outlines seven categories of responsible action that apply to participants.

**Session:** Introduces participants to the work and limits of peer companionship. Draws out its differences from Spiritual Direction, Counseling, and Therapy. Describes how different religious traditions name and use spiritual guides. Includes a review of ethics and issues of confidentiality.

#### OUTLINE OF SCHEDULE:

**10 min:** Welcome and Gathering Prayer

**15 min:** Presentation- Helping Relationships Grid

**15 min:** Presentation- Code of Ethics

**20 min:** Discussion- Competencies, Virtues, and Roles

**15 min:** Role Play Exercise- Listening to Two Stories

**05 min:** Large Group Processing

**10 min:** Assignment and Closing Prayer

#### COPIES THAT NEED TO BE MADE:

**1 sheet:** Quotes and reading for Gathering Prayer

**1 copy per participant:**

Helping Relationships Grid (1 pg)

Excerpt of Code of Ethics (1 pg)

*Complete this page with your state's law regarding Mandated Reporting*

Art of Mentoring (1 pg)

Listening to Two Stories (1 pg)

Closing Prayer (1 pg)

Homework Article: Spirituality and Mental Illness (4 pgs)

#### By the end of this session:

##### KNOWLEDGE

- Participants will be able to name the primary distinctions between Spiritual Mentoring and other helping relationships
- Participants will describe the process they are engaging as, "Learning skills to be more effective at peer theological conversations" (i.e. not public presentations or debates with a neighbor)
- Participants will be able to identify the needs and limits of confidentiality
- Participants will articulate the difference between competencies and virtues in Spiritual Mentoring

##### SKILL

- Participants will have practiced listening to another's story and separating their internal story from it

## SESSION 1: INSTRUCTOR'S CONTENT

### 10 min: Welcome and Gathering Prayer

*Before the session:*

*Arrange the room in a circle or semi-circle with only enough chairs for the anticipated group. Do not let participants create back rows or open spaces! Keep this opening arrangement throughout the course.*

*Place a small table with a candle on it either in the center or in the front. Use the same candle each week. If your organization observes liturgical seasons, set the candle on a cloth appropriate to the season.*

*Copy and cut the first page of the Gathering Prayer into strips. Distribute these so that some participants have quotes to read aloud during the prayer. Engage someone (that has experience reading aloud) to read the story. Be sure to keep a full copy for you to lead the prayer!*

*Prayers are written in generic language with the expectation that you will adapt if necessary. So for example if your tradition prays to Someone or in Someone's Name, change the invocations and endings. However, if your group is not from a single Tradition, please be sure to find out the most acceptable way to be inclusive. In some cases, the generic language may be best because it will allow everyone to include their own invocation silently.*

### 15 min: Presentation- Helping Relationships Grid

Basic content:

As alluded to in the Gathering Prayer, helping relationships are natural and ancient. Human beings need each other to develop and survive. This chart shows several types of helping relationships that are concerned with people coping, living well, and finding meaning. In the business world a helping role is a Coach or a Sponsor. Outcomes associated with those roles are focused on success at work. When you look at Therapy, Counseling, and Spiritual Direction (columns 2-4,) you see other approaches, mostly concerned with relieving some distress or problem. These are all very different approaches to helping from what we are doing. In this program, we are focused on Spiritual Mentoring (column 5.) Although you will receive training to be a Spiritual Mentor, it is important to remember you are not a Professional and your function is limited. Nevertheless, even in that limited function the value can be significant because most of us don't need professional help but someone with skill and interest is our lives.

A Spiritual Mentor is a peer companion with skills in listening and asking questions to help the mentee better understand a situation or spiritual issue. You will not fix or resolve something. The language is primarily theological not psychological or dogmatic. This means you will *not* be advising someone to either "knuckle-under and accept a church's authority" nor to "run for the hills." In fact, the only time you will be advising at all is if someone tells you something that your state's law requires you to report to authorities or if you are making a referral to professional services. A Spiritual Mentor is qualified to assist someone through a guided conversation not guidance. A Spiritual Mentor helps a mentee to clarify the issues and reassures the mentee that questions are valuable in the spiritual life. At the end of every conversation, the appropriate question to a mentee is, "What are *you* going to do next?"

Spiritual Mentors function within a community. They are not "free agents" and they do not charge for their services. In our setting, they are part of \_\_\_\_\_ (indicate the department or program, e.g. Formation, Pastoral Care, Programming, etc.) and are under the supervision of \_\_\_\_\_. The role of Spiritual Mentors is important to our community because you offer members and visitors a ready ear, theological preparation, knowledge of our community, and time.

As you can see at the bottom of the page, the ancient Greek origin of Mentor is one who walks with another. In our setting, you will walk with people on a theological path! In our culture, this is a departure

from the self-help craze. As you can see, any number of authors has been writing about Mentoring in faith communities. They all name five main competencies:

- Accountability- Mentors are accountable to the community in which they serve, to mentees, to God or the Source that calls them into service.
- Being active in own growth- Mentors are actively engaged in their own spiritual development. They have a spiritual practice; they study; they practice their skills; they participate in the life of the community.
- Interdependent/ unfixed- Mentors are listening to two stories when they sit down with you--yours and their internal story. Their role is to set aside their personal questions while working with you, but they don't leave those questions on a shelf. Eastern views speak of mentoring like a dance. Indeed, if done with real attention, the process is almost like a Virginia Reel: The mentor attends to you, then turns to attend to their own questions, then the larger community, then another mentee. The process is both defined (i.e. I give you all my attention now) and unfixed or interdependent (i.e. I am also a mentee in another setting.)
- Making space/ waiting- Mentors are inviting in person and in conversation. They make space in their lives for other's questions; they are also comfortable with a conversation taking time--maybe even extending to more than one conversation; in general, they aren't afraid of pauses in thought and won't rush the process.
- Mutuality in learning- Mentors are experts in their own lives and they have skills to offer others, but they are not Professional Experts. They understand this process may raise questions that they've never considered before. They are willing to learn in conversation with a mentee and they are able to say, "I don't know," rather than speak hastily or inappropriately.

The bottom line is very simple and straightforward: You are here to learn skills for peer theological conversations.

*Have participants talk with a partner for 2 minutes. If they don't know each other, have participants greet each other and then ask each other: What seems hardest about the role of Spiritual Mentor?*

*Ask the large group: What did you hear that surprised you--either in the presentation or from your partner?*

*It's really key that they hold onto this information so if there's not enough "buzz," don't be shy about asking folks to repeat back to you what they heard before moving on: How is a Spiritual Mentor different from others in helping relationships?*

*Before continuing have everyone change seats and introduce himself or herself to a new person.*

### **15 min: Presentation- Code of Ethics**

*Before the session be sure you are current on the content of this code. Because it is from Australia, it has some British spellings in it, but the format is very accessible. Include with (or on the back of) the handout, your state's laws regarding Mandatory Reporting regarding abuse, danger, and crime. Begin by confirming that all participants have completed this reading. Have a few extra copies of the Code available in case someone resisted doing the Pre-Reading.*

*Next reiterate the principle: This training is for a helping relationship. It is necessary to think about the weight of the role at the very beginning of the process. The Code of Ethics is not cumbersome; most of it is common sense. But it is very clear. (A similar codes is available in the US, but it is a longer document and only available for purchase.) It is ultimately a statement of respect for your calling, respect for your mentees, and respect for the movement of Spirit in faith-filled people.*

Next distribute the handout and talk through it. Point out that you have attached the Mandated Reporting information for your state. Reiterate that confidentiality does not apply to situations of abuse, danger, or crime. Then, field questions.

Before continuing have everyone change seats and introduce himself or herself to a new person.

## **20 min: Discussion- Competencies, Virtues, and Roles**

Work from right to left on this handout.

(3-4 min) Begin the discussion by asking participants to work in groups of 3-4 to identify the religious Traditions associated with the Role titles. Allow only 2 minutes.

### **Cheat sheet**

Guru- Hindu, Jain, Sikh  
Daoshi- Taoist priest  
Crone- Pagan  
Coach- Humanist  
Elder- Native American  
Lama- Buddhist  
Companion- Christian

Pir- Muslim/Sufi  
Sponsor- Twelve Step Communities  
Godparent- Liturgical Christians  
Rebbe- Jewish  
Friend- Christian  
Covenant Partner- Unitarian Universalist

Read down the list and fill in any that were not identified. This list is not comprehensive; there are many more Traditions. But it is broad enough to attest to the truism that we are social beings--and to instruct us in the universality of the role of a Mentor.

(3-4 min) Next move to the middle column: Virtues.

Define virtues in this way: Good qualities or attitudes that have been practiced until they become a habit. They are a way of behaving in the world and they are noticeable as part of our character. Have participants circle two that they feel mark their lives and put a check mark by one they would like to cultivate or deepen. Ask them to talk with one other person about one thing they circled.

In one minute: Describe to your partner how this virtue became part of your life and who helped you learn to practice this.

Conclude this conversation by reminding the group they are starting this process as a gifted group. "You will have plenty of time to keep working on the things you checked off; in this process, first, it is important to be clear about your virtues and gifts and to be grateful to those who helped shape you."

(12 min) Next move to the column on the left: Competencies.

Define competencies in this way: Attitudes and skills that are demonstrated by words and actions; they can be observed and measured. Offer this example of the distinction between Competencies and Virtues: You may claim to have Self-knowledge and we will be able to measure that by the balanced way you describe yourself and your action and then matching that with your behavior in your working group. We can never measure how much or how well you accept yourself. (You can know yourself inside out and still not have the virtue of Self-acceptance.) The Competencies are the things we work on in this program. The Virtues are for character building and you work on that in your spiritual life. The Virtues will feed your commitment to the work of Spiritual Mentoring. We plan that by working on both, you will be a worthy partner to many mentees.

The one that usually raises questions is Neutralization of Duality. (Don't you use that in everyday conversation?!) It comes from Taoist teachers and it operates on a couple of levels: First, mentoring is a mirroring exercise. Mentor and mentee are both doing the same work of asking questions and seeking meaning. A Mentor needs the experience of being a mentee hence our question about your Role models. So, as noted earlier, the Mentor doesn't interject personal work into the process, but is always aware of his or her own work as well. Second, and maybe more important, a Mentor is working hard to avoid either-or (dualistic) thinking and to guide a mentee out of it. What are the associated measurable skills? For example: Learning to

ask open-ended questions and including them in every conversation. *Have the large group name some more skills that match Competencies on the list. Also name how these skills can be observed or measured. They should have a head start from the Helping Relationships Chart.*

*Finally move to the box at the bottom of the page.*

This set of directives is about how you create a safe space for a personal conversation to happen. Some of them seem really obvious. Of course, you're going to have the space you're meeting ready! Of course, you're going to tell the person what to expect (once you learn the process yourself!) But the last one on the list is huge. It's easy to see that Mentors shouldn't compete with each other, but this directive is about our American style of communicating. Strangely, we often confuse sympathy and one-upmanship; so we have to learn not to compete with our mentees. In Spiritual Mentoring, here are a couple of competitive phrases that should *never* come out of your mouth: "Well, that's nothing; let me tell you what happened to me..." And, "Oh, I have a story that tops that!" *What other kinds of phrases or techniques have you had thrown at you that communicated the other person's story was more significant than what you just said?*

*One last thing to note on this handout:* Do not be afraid to admit someone's questions or needs are bigger than your skills. Be honest about what you can do in the moment and make referrals. When the time comes, we will have a list of local resources for you to have on hand for this circumstance.

### **15 min: Role Play Exercise- Listening to Two Stories**

*These directions appear on the handout:*

In this exercise, you will work in pairs. Use this handout for note-taking. One person begins the exercise by telling a story of something that happened in the last week. It does not have to be spiritually significant, just something you can remember in some detail.

The listener has three tasks:

First, to make notes of the story line (left column on handout.)

Second, to ask questions to elicit more description of the event.

Third, to make notes of personal thoughts, questions, feelings, awarenesses that float through even fleetingly as you are listening (right column on handout.) Don't say them out loud.

The listener is to keep the storyteller "working" for 3-4 minutes. Then the listener is to read back the notes in the left column to confirm that s/he has an accurate record.

Next the roles are reversed. Both stories should be told and confirmed in 10 minutes. After this the leader will explain your last task.

For experienced listeners: Do not worry about maintaining good eye contact while making notes.

*At the 10 minute mark give the directions for the last task:*

Instruct each pair to look at their notes in the right column. This is a quick record of the second story we are always listening to in the background. Ask each pair to name 2-3 points at which the conversation would have been different if they had followed up on their own interest, concerns or feelings instead of probing their partner for more description.

### **05 min: Large Group Processing**

*Process the exercise with the whole group:*

Was it easy or difficult to keep the other person talking and bringing up new detail?

What happened when you acknowledged your own thoughts?

Were you curious when your listener was writing in the right hand column?

Was there any time at which it would have been easy to say something competitive?

What did you learn about your attention while speaking? While listening?

**10 min: Assignment and Closing Prayer**

*Distribute the article on Spirituality and Mental Illness. This is the material for the opening discussion at the next session. Highlight: The intent of the article is to take the edge off any worry you have about being in over your head. You will not be expected to make any diagnosis or to treat anyone with mental illness if they come to you; you will understand what your limits are and merely be a peer companion. Ask participants to also review the material covered today. If they need any clarifications or have questions, bring them back next time.*

Closing Prayer-

*Parts marked for Individual Readers: Pick someone as the first reader and move clockwise to have others follow in turn.*

## Code of Ethics for Spiritual Directors

### Preface

Codes of ethics for spiritual directors have been developed in many parts of the world. The Australian Ecumenical Council for Spiritual Direction (AECSD) offers a national code so that agreement on standards for the practice of this ministry might be achieved among spiritual directors within Australia. While this code follows the lines of other codes, it has added important norms associated with the education, formation and supervision of spiritual directors. Norms for ethical conduct within the Christian ministry of spiritual direction are essential. As this code provides guidelines for all aspects of the practice of spiritual direction ministry, may it also offer spiritual directors valuable material for prayer and reflection.

### Introduction

#### *What is spiritual direction?*

Spiritual direction is a process by which one person helps another grow in intimacy with God and in right relationship with all creation. This ministry has a long and revered history in the Christian tradition and has been practised by lay people, religious and ordained ministers. The focus of this ministry is the relationship between God and the person seeking direction.

#### *Who is a spiritual director?*

A spiritual director is one who helps the person coming for direction to notice how God and God's Spirit is moving in his or her life. Spiritual directors act as spiritual guides or enablers rather than as organisers or instructors.

- Spiritual directors have a sense of call to their ministry, a call that is complemented by appropriate gifts and recognized by the faith community. They are able to listen contemplatively and respond appropriately from a depth of personal experience of life and faith. They are able to allow their Christian faith to grow and mature with an ever-deepening awareness and understanding of struggle, paradox and mystery. They are able to develop a wide vision embracing the various traditions of Christianity.
- Spiritual directors cherish and foster an active life of faith and prayer, and regularly seek spiritual direction and supervision for themselves.
- Spiritual directors have formal qualifications in their practice or, alternatively, have had long experience and demonstrated equivalent competence.

#### *Why do spiritual directors need a code of ethics?*

In common with persons who, in a professional capacity, engage in deep personal contact with others, spiritual directors have responsibilities and are exposed to risks. A person seeking spiritual direction is vulnerable. Any personal interaction between a trained and experienced person and someone without those qualities involves an exercise of power. Without the power that comes from training and experience the practice of spiritual direction would be impossible. The possession of this power exposes the person being directed to the possibility of its abuse.

The practice of spiritual direction takes place in private and potentially places both parties at risk. Directors have consequent public responsibilities. Spiritual directors share these issues with other professionals such as medical practitioners, psychologists, social workers and counsellors.

Spiritual directors need to be prepared in advance for what they may meet in the course of their practice. They may meet ethical issues in unfamiliar guises. They may need to react quickly. This code provides behavioural standards for spiritual directors, so that legal consequences, such as litigation against a director, can be avoided.

Spiritual direction, being set in the context of the Christian faith, has values that are derived from the nature of God in creation and incarnation. Individuals must be regarded as those bearing the image of God and beneficiaries of the sacrificial love of Jesus. They cannot be used for the pleasure, satisfaction or benefit of others.

For all these reasons, a code of ethics is an essential part of the practice of any group that sets out to be involved in the lives of others.

### **About the code**

This code is based on the responsibilities pertaining to the spiritual director's exercise of power within this ministry. It is divided into sections that reflect the different areas of responsibility. Although it begins with responsibility towards the director's own self, there is no order of priority in the code. Each area will assume its own importance on different occasions.

### **Defined Terms**

*Directee*: a person seeking spiritual direction from a spiritual director

*Spiritual direction*: the process by which one person helps another grow in intimacy with God and in right relationship with all creation

*Spiritual director*: the person who helps the directee become more aware of God's self-communication, respond to that self-communication, and live out the consequences of that relationship

*Evaluation*: the intentional process by which a spiritual director and directee assess the progress of spiritual direction and agree on its future

*Termination*: an intentional process by which a spiritual direction relationship is brought to an end

*Education and formation*: a process involving the provision of the necessary knowledge, the learning of skills and the development of personal qualities necessary for the proper practice of spiritual direction

*Supervision*: the processing of the inner experiences of the director during direction sessions so that, growing in awareness of his or her reactions and responses, the director might maintain a contemplative focus and be freer in attending to the needs of the directee. Other secondary tasks and benefits may occur through teaching, consultation and in gaining personal insights and healing

*Supervisee*: the person receiving supervision

### **How spiritual directors act responsibly**

*Spiritual directors act with responsibility towards themselves by:*

- Maintaining responsible association with their own faith community.
- Remaining abreast of developments in the field of spiritual direction through continuous practice and on-going formation.
- Maintaining their own life of faith and prayer.
- Receiving appropriate supervision.
- Maintaining contact with an appropriate spiritual direction community or peer group.
- Consulting other appropriately qualified persons when necessary.
- Maintaining an appropriate understanding of the cultural, socio-historical and environmental contexts in which contemporary spiritual direction operates.
- Exercising self-care by living a wisely balanced life-style.

*Spiritual directors act with responsibility towards their directees by:*

- Commencing spiritual direction by first discussing with the prospective directee:
  - The nature of spiritual direction;
  - The respective roles of spiritual director and directee;
  - The length and frequency of direction sessions;
  - Confidentiality and its limitations;
  - Remuneration, if any;
  - The regular evaluation of the relationship;
- Freedom of both parties to terminate the relationship.
- Limiting the number of directees to that which is reasonably possible.

- Seeking to maintain a reasonable workload by ensuring an appropriate spacing of appointments.
- Referring directees to other appropriately qualified persons as necessary.
- Ensuring that directees who have ongoing relationships with other professionals make known their involvement in spiritual direction where appropriate.
- Ensuring, in situations where they have other professional qualifications (such as a psychologist) that they clarify with their directees the nature of their relationship as a spiritual director.
- Not continuing spiritual direction relationships in cases where they depend on income earned from spiritual direction solely for financial gain.
- Not entering a relationship with a directee where there is a conflict of interest with other directees or relationships maintained outside of spiritual direction.
- Respecting the individuality and dignity of their directees, for example, by:
  - Respecting the directee's values, conscience, spirituality and theology;
  - Limiting inquiry into the personal life of the directee to those matters directly relevant to spiritual direction;
  - Recognising the unequal power relationship between a trained person and a directee and acting to avoid exploitation;
  - Refraining from behaviour that is sexualised, manipulative, abusive or coercive;
  - Maintaining appropriate physical and psychological boundaries;
  - Conducting direction meetings in an appropriate location.
- Respecting the privacy of their directees, for example, by:
  - Protecting the identity of the directee, including the fact that a person is a directee;
  - Keeping confidential all oral communications concerning spiritual direction;
  - Not recording personal information;
  - Conducting direction meetings in an appropriate location;
  - Ensuring that both spiritual director and directee are aware of any legal requirements that may override confidentiality, including, but not limited to, provisions about child abuse, sexual assault of children or adults, elder abuse and physical harm to self and others, and other criminal behaviours.

*Spiritual directors act with responsibility towards faith communities by:*

- Being sensitive to the faith traditions to which their directees belong.
- Not engaging in any proselytising that is directed towards changing the commitment of a directee to the director's faith community.
- Respecting the processes of corporate discernment, accountability and support offered by faith communities.

*Spiritual directors act with responsibility towards colleagues by:*

- Respecting other spiritual directors, ministers and professionals and not disparaging their work.
- Requesting their directees to inform other appropriate professionals that they are in spiritual direction.
- Not giving to or receiving from other spiritual directors, ministers or professionals information about their directee without the written permission of the directee.

*Spiritual directors act with responsibility towards society by:*

- Representing their qualifications clearly and accurately in any public communication.
- Providing information about their services within the context of the Church's ministry and not on an independent basis. Such information may be sent to professional persons, religious institutions and other agencies where appropriate, but only to prospective individual directees in response to inquiries.
- Not making statements that contain any of the following:
  - A false, fraudulent, misleading, deceptive or unfair statement;
  - A misrepresentation of fact or a statement likely to mislead or deceive because in context it makes only a partial disclosure of relevant facts;
  - A testimonial from a directee regarding the quality of spiritual direction received from the spiritual director;

- A statement intended or likely to create false or unjustified expectations of favourable results of spiritual direction;
- A statement implying unusual, unique, or one-of-a-kind abilities, including misrepresentation through sensationalism, exaggeration or superficiality;
- A statement intended or likely to exploit a directee's fears, anxieties or emotions;
- A statement concerning the comparative desirability of the spiritual direction offered;
- A statement of direct solicitation of individual directees.
- Conforming to legislation about non-discrimination.
- Conforming to legislation requiring the disclosure of information to public authorities in cases of abuse, danger or crime.

*Spiritual directors act with responsibility in the role of supervisor by:*

- Not providing supervision or consultation without the necessary knowledge and skill to supervise or consult appropriately and only within their areas of knowledge and competence.
- Working towards setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries.
- Not engaging in any dual or multiple relationships with a supervisee in which there is a risk of exploitation of or potential harm to their supervisee.
- Evaluating their supervisee's performance in a manner that is fair and respectful.

*Spiritual directors act with responsibility towards students by:*

- Instructing only within their areas of knowledge and competence.
- Evaluating their students' performance in a manner that is fair and respectful.
- Ensuring that directees are allocated to students only after appropriate consultation and assessment of both the student and the potential directee.
- Taking reasonable steps to ensure that directees are informed that their director is in formation.
- Ensuring that their relationships with students are constructive, non-exploitative, and respectful.
- Ensuring that ethical responsibilities of spiritual directors, as set out in this code, are an integral part of the student's course work.

Australian Ecumenical Council for Spiritual Direction <http://spiritualdirection.org.au>

## GATHERING PRAYER

**LEADER:** *General Welcome and any housekeeping information*

**LEADER:** Our work together in this session will be very full so let us pause before we start.

Let us collect ourselves in a moment of silence. (*Breathe before continuing.*)

We gather in the light of truth.

The truth given to us, the truth speaking within us, the truth showing us the way onward.

We dedicate our time to learning the skills of helpful listening

that truth may flourish in our lives and others may find their best way.

Hear now what others have said of the importance of listening.

*Ask participants that have slips of paper to read their quotes. Quotes may be read in any order:*

Greek philosopher, Plutarch said:

Know how to listen, and you will profit even from those who talk badly.

American author, Alice Duer Miller said:

People love to talk but hate to listen.

Listening is not merely not talking, though even that is beyond most of our powers;

it means taking a vigorous, human interest in what is being told us.

You can listen like a blank wall

or like a splendid auditorium where every sound comes back fuller and richer.

Russian composer, Igor Stravinski said:

To listen is an effort, and just to hear is no merit. A duck hears also.

French playwright, Albert Guinon said:

There are people who, instead of listening to what is being said to them,

are already listening to what they are going to say themselves.

Indian spiritual teacher, Krishnamurti said:

Listening has importance only

when one is not projecting one's own desires through which one listens.

Can one put aside all these screens through which we listen, and really listen?

American meditation teacher, Richard Moss said:

The greatest gift you can give another is the purity of your attention.

**LEADER:** (Ref: *Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics, 2007*, by Robert B. Kruschwitz, gen ed.)

"The practice of spiritual direction originated in the desert Egyptian communities of the fourth century, where Christians gathered to put some space between themselves and the distorting culture of the Empire. They deferred to the spiritual direction and advice of those with more discretion. In clever stories they peeled back the layers of vanity that could afflict directees and directors in this network of authority. Here is one of the stories they told."

**READER:** (Ref: *The Desert Fathers, 10.115 & 10.114*, trans. by Benedicta Ward)

A brother said to a great hermit, "Abba, I want to find a monk who agrees with me and I'll live and die with him."

The hermit replied, "Your search is good, my lord."

The brother repeated what he wanted, not understanding the irony of the hermit...

Then the hermit said to him, "You do not want to follow the will of anyone,

you want to follow your own will, and that is why you will be at peace with him."

## GATHERING PRAYER CONT.

### LEADER:

Today, you are entering a long line of helpers whose goal has never been agreement, but understanding.

After all, if someone merely agrees with me, I don't learn much or discover ways to live better!

So you are joining the work of other helpers who have offered understanding as a gift.

Admittedly, sometimes understanding is a harsh reality-- it exposes truth we don't want to hear.

But sometimes understanding is liberating--it exposes truth we have never seen before.

The problem is that understanding is much harder than it first seems and it turns on listening well.

Indeed the gift of listening is sorely needed today!

The noise in our culture can be so overwhelming that

many are not heard when they seek help,

many cannot hear the voice of truth within them,

many cannot separate reality from the razzmatazz.

So today we dedicate our time and energy to gathering information, learning and practicing skills,

and shaping our hearts to honor others with the gift of listening well and understanding.

John Maxwell said: Hearing is a function of the ear but listening well is a function of the will.

Let us pray that our wills will be committed to this work.

May our hearts be open, our minds clear, and our work may be blessed.

In peace we pray: Amen.

## **NOTES ON THE CODE OF ETHICS**

### **Comments by Rev. Dr. Claudia A. Ramisch**

The Australian Ecumenical Council for Spiritual Direction Code of Ethics acknowledges that when another trusts you with something personal, you are in a position of power. This adds to the responsibility you must exercise. It outlines seven areas of special concern. These areas are important to Spiritual Mentoring as well.

#### **It says Spiritual Directors act with responsibility towards:**

1. **Themselves-** This section outlines accountabilities to keep you spiritually healthy.
  - In addition to what we have already discussed, you are responsible for "living a wisely balanced life-style." Spiritual Mentors aren't expected to be 'perfected,' but good role models.
2. **Their directees-** This section outlines good professional practice and also what is meant by respecting a difference in "power."
  - Even in this informal role, you may hear very personal details of someone's life and struggles. It is important to hold such details in confidence unless they include information about abuse, an intention to harm self or another, or a planned crime. This means you must tell mentees about these limits to confidentiality. Further it means you cannot use anything you hear for your gain.
  - Also, it is important that mentees understand that you do not replace a Therapist, Counselor, or Spiritual Director. If they are working with one of these helping professionals, it is important to be completely up front about the limits of your role. If you are complimented for your skill or insight, say, "Thank you," but don't be flattered. You are never supposed to be in the way of the process, bad or good!
  - Respect for your mentees means establishing and keeping appropriate boundaries, not asking unnecessary or unrelated questions, meeting in an appropriate place, and even observing basic courtesies (being on time, coming prepared, turning off the cell phone, etc.)
3. **Faith communities-** This section outlines the importance of respecting the Tradition of the directee.
  - It is inappropriate to evangelize or proselytize in this setting.
4. **Colleagues-** This section outlines the way to keep roles clear and to respect the work of others.
  - This restates principles of confidentiality and power: If your mentee is working with a helping professional you can only give or receive information with the mentee's permission (except in cases named above, namely abuse, danger, or crime) or in a supervision setting (and then without names attached.)
5. **Society-** This section outlines the principles for keeping this a ministry and respecting the law.
  - The short version is: Don't set up shop outside the community that authorizes your work. Don't toot your own horn. Don't take advantage of vulnerable people. Obey all applicable law.
  - It is allowable to state your credentials or formation, but not in comparison to anyone else. (There's nothing uglier than a spiritual braggart!)
6. **The role of supervisor-** This section emphasizes the necessity of supervision.
  - Most pertinent to Spiritual Mentors: Be supervised.
7. **Students-** This section describes the role of a teacher of spiritual direction.
  - Most pertinent to Spiritual Mentors: It's session 1; you are not qualified to teach at this stage!

## ART OF MENTORING

Those who seek mentoring, will rule the great expanse under heaven.

Those who boast that they are greater than others, will fall short.

Those who are willing to learn from others, become greater.

Those who are ego-involved, will be humbled and made small.

*Shu Ching*

COMPETENCIES	VIRTUES	POSSIBLE ROLES
Attitudes of trust & respect	Humility	Guru
Interdependent, unfixed relationship	Openness & hospitality	Daoshi
Accountability	Self-acceptance	Crone
Listening & questioning skills	Integrity	Coach
Self-knowledge	Kindness	Elder
Investment in the other	Nonjudgmental	Lama
Neutralization of duality	Trustworthy	Companion
Mutuality in learning	Attentiveness	Pir
Active in own growth	Spiritual practice & discernment	Sponsor
Humor	Patience & empathy	Godparent
Space for wisdom	Perseverance	Rebbe
Sensitivity & emotional IQ	Service	Friend
Confidentiality	Cooperation	Covenant partner

### THE MENTORING ENVIRONMENT

Identify needs.

Set parameters of the relationship.

Prepare/ consecrate space: Make a prayerful setting.

Articulate process and outline steps.

Foster comfort and ease.

Know your own limits. Be able to make referrals.

Don't compete!

## LISTENING TO TWO STORIES

In this exercise, you will work in pairs. Use this handout for note taking. One person begins the exercise by telling a story of something that happened in the last week. It does not have to be spiritually significant, just something you can remember in some detail.

The listener has three tasks:

1<sup>st</sup>: To make notes of the story line (left column on handout.)

2<sup>nd</sup>: To ask questions to elicit more description of the event.

3<sup>rd</sup>: To make notes of personal thoughts, questions, feelings, awarenesses that float through even fleetingly as you are listening (right column on handout. Don't say them out loud.)

The listener is to keep the storyteller "working" for 3-4 minutes. Then the listener is to read back the notes in the left column to confirm that s/he has an accurate record.

Next the roles are reversed. Both stories should be told and confirmed in 10 minutes. After this the leader will explain your last task.

*For experienced listeners: Do not worry about maintaining good eye contact while making notes.*

### The Details of Your Story

### My Interests, Feelings, and Musings As You Were Talking

## CLOSING PRAYER

### LEADER:

Music, chants, mantras, and specific patterns of sound and silence

Are part of every tradition's public worship.

Over the ages, many people have reported a sense of homecoming in a sanctuary

When they heard that *chant*, or that *pipe organ*, or that *singing bowl*,

Or even that *pause* between the sounds of the world and the noise in my head.

Every enduring religious tradition has sacred stories about original or defining sounds—

### INDIVIDUAL READERS

- OM is the oldest name for the Unknown and the Always in Hinduism and Buddhism.  
OM is the sound that predates memory and the sound that outlasts all lifespans.
- In Humanism, the Big Bang is at the very center of cosmological evolution.  
The continuing expansion and dissolution of our lives is centered on this.
- In Christianity the Meaningful and Eternal Word, Logos, is how God lives in the world.  
God speaks and it comes into being; God breathes and it lives.
- In Islam, God has spoken prophetically in every age and the message comes to completion  
In the Qur'an *as it is recited and heard*.  
The language trips off the tongue and caresses the ear as God's Full Presence.

### LEADER:

Thus science and faith speak of an original sound separating nothingness from everythingness.

But in each of these, THE SOUND is more than an originating or lasting sound.

### INDIVIDUAL READERS

- It is the connecting phrase and the poetic lyric of friendship.
- It is the sweet sonnet spoken by lovers.
- It is the unchained melody of community.
- It is the fusion jazz of society.
- It is the sacred sound of the breathing Web of Life.

### LEADER:

What makes you listen, listen deeply?

Stop, whether it's lovely or ugly, stop. Honor it. Tend it.

Be thankful for this awesome noise—dropped in *your* life.

How do you discern the spirit in the soundscape of your current life?

Are you giving your spirit the time it needs to listen well? Are you deepening your inner skills?

Rejoice in your proficiency; develop your capacity.

### ALL:

If words shape our brains, sounds shape our souls.

If words exchange meaning, sounds exchange feelings.

### LEADER:

The OM, BIG BANG, LOGOS, RECITATION is a mystery—

a word *and* a sound handed on from before recorded time—

Listen well; listen closely. The hum of the universe is within you. You are within it.

May you take up this sacred work of listening that others might also hear the holy hum in their souls.

**HOMEWORK SESSION 1**  
**Spirituality and Mental Illness (Part One)**

**Chaplaincy Institute Newsletter Issue: March 2010** [www.chaplaincyinstitute.org](http://www.chaplaincyinstitute.org)

*This article is adapted from a sermon that I offered on February 7, 2010*

*at Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Goleta.*

*—Rev. Laura Mancuso, MS, CRC, Interfaith Chaplain, Goleta, CA, [mancuso@west.net](mailto:mancuso@west.net).*

There are many different lenses through which we can view the experience of mental illness. Today, I would like to speak about it from a spiritual perspective.

For some people reading these words, mental health challenges strike close to your heart. It may be something that you, or a loved one, struggle with on a daily basis. Others may encounter mental illness in the distressing behavior of a neighbor, co-worker, or friend. But everyone is touched by mental health issues in some way.

What do you suppose are the chances that any one of us will experience mental illness in a given year? The National Institute of Mental Health has conducted complex studies of the epidemiology of mental illness. They have calculated that 1 in 4 American adults (26%) will have a diagnosable mental disorder each year— 58 million people. Nearly 1 in 2 people will have a psychiatric disorder over the course of their lifetimes.

I am speaking primarily about depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, and mania (which, when it alternates with depression, is called "bipolar disorder"). While some among us will be fortunate enough to come out ahead in this statistical roulette—living and dying without ever developing a diagnosable mental health condition—none of us who is engaged with life will be able to completely avoid losses which lead to feeling, at least temporarily, grief, disorientation and/or fear.

The good news is that while such suffering cannot be avoided, it is not a cosmic mistake. It is not without meaning, and you are most definitely not alone!

- When a physician is diagnosing depression, the symptoms that he or she looks for are things like: being slowed down; feeling overwhelming sadness, hopelessness, or pessimism; an inability to experience pleasure; difficulty concentrating; sleep disturbance; weight gain or weight loss. This is the medical view of depression. But the main spiritual crisis inherent in depression is DESPAIR.
- The medical symptoms of anxiety disorders include: excessive worry; an inability to fall asleep or stay asleep; irritability; lack of concentration; trembling; shortness of breath, etc. But the main spiritual crisis inherent in anxiety disorders is FEAR and a LACK OF TRUST.
- The medical symptoms of schizophrenia include: delusions; hallucinations; disordered thinking; social withdrawal; blunted emotions. But the primary spiritual crisis in the experience of schizophrenia is ALIENATION.
- The medical description of mania includes things like: racing thoughts; rapid talking; decreased need for sleep; extreme irritability, euphoric feelings, or distraction; poor judgment. But when we consider mania from a spiritual perspective, the main difficulty is a relentless RESTLESSNESS.

I am not saying that mental illnesses are only spiritual in nature. Nor I am saying that they should be treated solely by spiritual practices and spiritual support. What I am saying is that mental distress has a spiritual dimension, like all serious health conditions. Mental health and mental illness are inextricably linked with the spiritual journey.

The spiritual crises I mention as being associated with various mental health issues are not things that any of us would voluntarily sign up for. People can literally get lost in the despair, fear, lack of trust, alienation, and restlessness that characterize mental illnesses. They can even lose their lives.

Yet suffering is an inevitable part of life. We all experience suffering in one form or another. We may enjoy our lives during the good times when everything is going smoothly. But, truth be told, the easy times usually do not result in the most spiritual growth. It is typically the most difficult phases of our lives that produce the most spiritual depth.

As May Sarton says, "Pain is the great teacher...joy [and] happiness, are what we take and do not question...but pain forces us to think, and to make connections, to sort out what is what, to discover what has been happening to cause it."

Fortunately, the spiritual problems of despair, fear, lack of trust, alienation, and restlessness can be addressed directly—both by one's own spiritual practices, and through spiritual support provided by a loving community such as a family or congregation. Spiritual practices that an individual can engage in directly include: tai chi; yoga; other forms of body movement; mindfulness; meditation; prayer; reading sacred or inspiring texts; journal-writing; singing; dancing; artistic expression; making crafts; attending worship services; participating in 12-step groups; taking part in rituals; and consulting with clergy or indigenous healers. Such activities can build resiliency, restore hope, nurture a sense of balance and centeredness, and help us get us through especially difficult times.

All who commit themselves to a spiritual path are bound to experience mental distress. Some religious traditions—such as Hinduism and Buddhism—say that this spiritual journey is our true life's purpose, and that we will need to return to this realm over and over again, with all of its suffering, until we complete it. Earnest spiritual paths will likely involve venturing into spiritual wildernesses, where there may be few signposts and very little that is familiar to comfort us.

People with mental illness are experienced travelers in this sort of terrain. Just as you might purchase a tour book before venturing to a new continent, you may want to get some tips and pointers from people with mental illness—people who have already journeyed somewhere that you have not yet been.

If we can learn to respect and value the spiritual wisdom of people diagnosed with mental health conditions, we will be respecting their very essence. Then perhaps all of us, as a society, will become more capable of loving this part of ourselves: the part that gets disoriented, that is prone to despair, that loses sight of hope, that falls prey to fear, that cannot feel love, that is constantly in motion, and that keeps us from experiencing that beautiful inner stillness where we rest peacefully in the arms of the Divine Presence.

### **Spirituality and Mental Illness (Part Two)**

I came to the mental health field—and even to the intersection of mental health and spirituality—wanting to help, intending to be of service. What I have come to realize is that many people in recovery from mental illness possess a deep spiritual wisdom from which I can learn a great deal.

In [Part One](#) of this article, I described the prevalence of mental health diagnoses and explored the spiritual crises associated with various mental health issues. This second portion of the article suggests ways that individuals and congregations can spiritually accompany those who are experiencing the symptoms of a mental disorder.

At a minimum, we can agree to "do no harm", in the spiritual sense. That means, first of all, not blaming the person or his/her family for the mental health issue, and not judging them for having it. The following concrete actions can provide spiritual support to someone in mental distress.

**1) Be an unflinching guardian of hope.** It may be literally impossible for the person to feel optimistic about their future. Reassure them that they will not always feel as badly as they do when they are in the depths of their suffering. Protect this hope and gently remind them of it, even when they cannot believe you.

**2) Be a trustworthy friend.** When a person's world is in chaos and the ground around them seems unstable, your reliable presence can be safe harbor in a storm. Be very clear about what you can and cannot do; it's OK to take care of yourself first. So promise no more than you can deliver. But always do exactly what you say you will do. And you may need to DO less than you think. Sometimes the most significant way to support another person is simply to show up fully in the midst of his or her suffering, without panicking or looking away.

Thich Nhat Hanh wrote, in his book, *Love in Action*:

"Without doing anything, things can sometimes go more smoothly just because of our peaceful presence. In a small boat when a storm comes, if one person remains solid and calm, others will not panic and the boat is more likely to stay afloat."

**3) Insist that the person you know and love is still alive and present, if hidden.** Just as you would help a friend living with cancer to see that their whole self is not defined by their diagnosis, so you can help a person with mental illness by reminding them that you still see the healthy and whole person within, even if they feel shattered.

A Quaker woman named Mariellen Gilpin has written a booklet, *God's Healing Grace: Reflections on a Journey With Mental & Spiritual Illness*. She acknowledges with gratitude that many in her Quaker meeting simply treat her "as if the essential Mariellen is still in here somewhere." Tell your friend that you know he or she is still whole, and that you are confident of his or her ability to recover with time.

**4) Reference the other person's alternate reality without labeling it as "wrong" or "abnormal".** When someone you care about is experiencing the alienation and self-doubt associated with alternate realities, you can be spiritually supportive by not judging them. This may be the only reality they have at the moment. So if you denigrate it, you are denigrating their entire world and their very self. Don't pretend to agree with it; if you cannot affirm it, you can at least remain neutral.

Jimi Kelley works for the National Alliance on Mental Illness in Tennessee. He shared a story about accompanying a woman who perceived that messages were being broadcast into her brain, which was distressing to her. She didn't want to go to a clinic and have them invalidate her experience. Jimi talked to her about the possibility that she was hearing things that the people at the clinic are not able to hear, and that taking medications might simply reduce her ability to receive the messages. I.e., if she took medications, she might no longer be bothered by the messages...even if they are still being broadcast. Rather than contradicting her experience, his gentle, affirming approach was helpful in enabling her to go for treatment.

**5) Be open to the possibility that mental health crises can co-occur with authentic spiritual awakenings.** Sometimes we need to be broken down in order to let go of the old and provide space for

something new to take root. Christina and Stanislav Grof coined the term "spiritual emergency" to describe an abrupt spiritual transformation that overwhelms one's ability to cope.

These authentic spiritual awakenings can occur at the same time as a mental health crisis. Most importantly, don't assume that the spiritual dimension of the crisis is fabricated or inauthentic just because the individual has been labeled with a psychiatric diagnosis; the two experiences can co-occur, and there are ways to support people to move through these experiences without getting stuck in them. Keep the person safe, meet their basic needs for food, water, sleep, etc., and let them specify what is helpful in the moment. Some people need to be in constant motion, others need stillness. Some feel most safe indoors, while others want to be outside, in nature, and feel sun on their skin. A person may prefer being alone, or may need to be held. It is a very individualized process.

**6) Finally, consider what you may be able to learn from people with mental illness.** Spiritual growth requires us to go directly to where our most tender wounds are and open them up again, so that they can be healed at an ever deeper level.

When you delve really deeply into spiritual exploration, there's some pretty scary stuff in there! For example, when you consider the writings of the Christian mystics, for instance, their lives were not easy! There is THE VOID – there is UNBLINKING SELF-AWARENESS – there are DISORIENTING EXPERIENCES.

One of the necessary steps in devotion to a spiritual path is relinquishing control. Barbara Brown Taylor, an Episcopal priest, writes about this process. She says that when bad things happen to us, we tend to exclaim, "I've lost control of my life!" But what we actually "lose is the illusion that we were ever in control of our lives in the first place.....this is why it takes a lot of courage to be a human being.

I have learned palpably the difference between "helping" and "walking alongside." "Spiritual companioning" leaves open the possibility that today you may be the one in need...but next week, it may be me... and back again, over and over. This is the stuff of which real respect is made. It's not the distanced respect of "I'm in awe of how much you've suffered," but rather, "You have journeyed to places that I want to know more about."

Instead of pitying people with psychiatric diagnoses or stigmatizing their conditions, I believe we should consider learning from them as spiritual teachers.