

1-1-2007

SF 601 Spiritual Guidance

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Recommended Citation

Johnson, Reginald, "SF 601 Spiritual Guidance" (2007). *Syllabi*. Book 287.
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Asbury Theological Seminary
SF 601 "Spiritual Guidance"
Spring, 2007

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Welcome

Welcome to Spiritual Guidance! People sign up for this elective course for many reasons. Perhaps you may be one of the fortunate ones who has benefited from some form of spiritual mentoring and you can't think of anything more fulfilling than to be such a companion to others. Or you may be one who is attracted to this kind of ministry by what you've read, although you've not experienced it first-hand. Regardless of what brought you to this class, I welcome you. I hope that this course will be instructive for your future ministry, and fruitful as you experience spiritual friendship and direction with us this semester.

Course Description:

This course is designed to explore the meaning of spiritual guidance (direction) as well as some of the issues and themes that are involved in such a ministry. Participants will be expected to meet together for mutual spiritual direction during the semester and, at the end of the semester, to reflect upon some of the issues and dynamics they have experienced through the process. Lectures, discussions, guest presentations, and practical exercises will be utilized. The class is designed to be "formational" as well as "informational."

My Own Vision for this Course

The foundational premise for this course is that God has seen fit to use spiritual companions to help us cultivate an awareness of God's transforming presence in our lives. Names for this ministry are varied: Spiritual Guidance, Companionship, Friendship, Direction, Accompaniment, etc. Each term has a different nuance, but all of them relate to what the Christian tradition has known as the "cure of souls." That ancient phrase is still relevant because it captures a picture of nurture as well as healing, and both are involved in the ministry of spiritual direction.

The way I approach this course will reflect some fundamental assumptions: God is present and active in, through and beyond all that exists; people have the capacity for receiving and responding to God's presence; we can learn to be more attentive listeners (and responders) to God, right in the midst of our crazy, wonderful, and sometimes mixed up lives.

The focus of this ministry of spiritual guidance is on the whole person, not on some split-off "spiritual" side. Generally speaking, the "agenda" for our conversations in spiritual companionship surfaces from what is happening in another's life, rather than on some curriculum that we try to impart.

Our goal is to offer support to others in their journey as they seek to become more whole, more Christ-like, God-centered, Kingdom-focused, and Spirit-led, right in the midst of the conflicting demands and challenging circumstances of everyday life. But the ministry of Spiritual Guidance (despite the way the phrase may sound to our ears) is not about having all the "answers." In fact, often our main service is in providing a safe place where another person can find what Nouwen calls a "friendly distance from their own lives so that what they are experiencing can be brought into the light in the form of a question to be lived."

Such a ministry of spiritual accompaniment is ancient, and a body of literature has accumulated that can be very helpful for those of us who sense a call to this kind of ministry to others.

My Philosophy of Teaching

My own approach to teaching has been greatly influenced by Malcolm Knowles' principles of *androgogy*. We are a class of adult learners. You need to know why we are spending time on a particular area, and told how it affects you directly. You have a lifetime of experiences that we will tap as a resource for what we do together. Members of our class will have varied levels of exposure to the themes we will work on in class, and I will try to be attentive to that. You probably learn best by practicing, so we will build in experiential components into almost every class session. You want to apply new knowledge and skills quickly, and not just be preparing yourself for some future ministry, so I will attempt to stay aware of that as I teach. We learn in a relational context, so I hope you will work with me to develop an environment for this kind of connection between us in our class generally, as well as in our small groups. If you have questions, or if you want to talk together, I hope you will feel free to connect with me after class. If we don't have enough time to talk then, we will schedule a time to meet. The last principle of androgogy that I will mention here is about your desire to

“self-direct.” You probably like to set goals for your own learning in the light of your³ present situation and needs. You will notice that in my approach to grading (see below) I attempt to respond to that.

Approach to Grading

Grading is done on the basis of a "contract". That means that you get to decide, in the light of present commitments, which grade will be your goal. You will also have the opportunity to think about what you need to grow, and you will have the opportunity to choose from several options for two of the primary course assignments. I need to make sure you realize that grades are not awarded only on the basis of the contract, but upon the quality of work done at the performance level you have chosen. For the purpose of assessment, there will be graded elements in the course.

I will always try to grade and return your essays within a week of their submission. My feedback will express what I think you've done well and how you might improve, or I might offer suggestions about other resources to check or ideas to consider.

Grade Expectations

For the "C-Level" contract...

- Read course texts (25 points)
- Keep a spiritual journal 4 out of 7 days a week. (25 points)
- Prepare for and participate in the weekly spiritual guidance practicum (10 points)
- Attend class sessions (2 points deducted for unexcused absences)
- Achieve a minimum cumulative total of 50 out of 60 points

For the "B-Level" contract...

- fulfill C-Level expectations
- Write two book notations (10 points each)
- achieve a minimum cumulative total of 70 out of 80 points.

For the "A-Level" contract...

- Fulfill C and B-level expectations
- Participate in preparing and presenting a team project in class (10 points)
- Write final Integrative Paper (10 points)
- Achieve a minimum cumulative total of 95 out of 100 points.

Texts

The seminary standard is to require 1200-1500 pages of text for a three-hour class. You will see that the number of pages in our text list is less than that. I've made this adjustment in order to give you more time for the more formative reading (compared to informative reading) required by this course.

Sacred Companions, David Benner, IVP

Spiritual Direction and Meditation, Thomas Merton, The Liturgical Press

Note: Only the spiritual direction section of this book is required.

The Contemplative Pastor, Eugene Peterson, Eerdmans

Spiritual Direction, Henri Nouwen, Harper, San Francisco

The Deeper Journey, Robert Mulholland, IVP

Wounds That Heal, Stephen Seamands, IVP

The Way of Friendship, Alred of Rievaleux, New City Press

[Early in the semester you may also be asked to purchase a Resource Packet containing articles, exercises and information for the class].

MBTI

You will need to report your MBTI type on 2/14/07. I may use personality type information in forming our spiritual direction groups, as well as in the class session that deals with personality differences and spiritual direction. Here are a couple links to on-line sites where you can take a version of the MBTI:

<http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/JTypes1.htm>

<http://www.kisa.ca/personality/>

Classroom environment

We assume respect for the classroom and our classmates. Drinks are allowed, but not food (unless you've brought enough for everyone!). We don't talk during times that are set aside for quiet. We are considerate when another "has the floor." We bind ourselves to confidentiality about what is shared. It is crucial to arrive on time. Once our "preliminaries" are over, the door is closed for our period of prayer (for approximately ten minutes), because this time for worship and spiritual centering is the base from which our class is taught.

Course Assignments

Guided Reflections. From time to time we may engage in guided reflections during class. Sometimes these may be assigned as homework. You will receive instructions for these creative writing assignments. Any sharing that we do from these exercises in our practicum experiences will be non-manipulative and non-threatening, and is designed to help to help facilitate spiritual companioning.

Spiritual Journal. Journal entries shall be made 4 out of 7 days a week, not including Spring Break. They will be kept in a separate notebook and handed in for review on the days specified in the course calendar. I will review these during the time you are meeting in clusters. I will treat your journal as your own private material and will read selections only if you invite me to do so. Some of our texts have questions for reflection at the end of the chapters. Often those questions will foster helpful journal entries.

Book Notation. A book notation is not a summary of a text, but a four or five-page critical review that demonstrates that you read and understood the book. In the notation you are to indicate the core message of the book, highlight what you perceive to be its value, and express some personal reservation that you had as you read. The conclusion of your notation is a list of questions or statements for discussion that you could use if leading a group discussion on about the book, or if interviewing its author. The book notation is to be handed in on the due date (a hard copy). At the top of your first page please include your name, date of submission, and course number, and SPO Box number. There are 4 parts to a notation.

- (1) The first section includes the title and a brief bio of the author.
- (2) In the second section you will summarize the core message of the book.
- (3) The third portion of your review is the place for your own critical thinking about the book and should include the valuable contributions the book made in your understanding of some aspect of the subject, as well as some reservation that you had about an idea or approach in the book.
- (4) Provide 2-3 questions, or quotes with discussion prompts, that you could use when leading a small group discussion of the book and 2-3 questions for use in interviewing the author.

Team Project. Those who are contracting for the “A” level will work in groups of three or four persons and will culminate in a 35-45 minute presentation to the class and your paper made available on the course icon. You will prepare your material on one of the following themes:

- Depression, or Dark Night?
- Accidia (also spelled “acedia”)—Losing Heart
- Perfectionism
- Shame

Your in-class presentation will be based upon your team-prepared paper on the subject

(or some aspect of it). The paper is to be 8-10 pages in length, and written in proper⁶ form (including footnotes or endnotes and a bibliography). Its' purpose is to provide a clear theoretical perspective on the theme, or some particular aspect of it, and to offer guidelines and insights that are useful for the spiritual guide.

You are encouraged to use PowerPoint slides, exercises, handouts, etc., in order to help your classmates engage with the material. Your team paper and any PPT slides that are used in your presentation are to be posted under our class icon.

Each team will provide the professor with a description of how the project was divided among the members, and each member will submit a time-log of his/her work on the project.

Integrative Paper. This six-eight page paper draws from readings, class discussions and presentations. The paper will have three parts: (1) Describe your understanding of Spiritual Companionship, including some of its essential aspects, characteristics and dynamics. (2) Explain how the practice of this art connects with your understanding of your own vocation. (3) Outline your intentions for further personal development and growth for such ministry, especially in the light of your evaluation of your practicum experience in this class. Use parenthetical notes and furnish a "works cited" page.

Spiritual Accompaniment Practicum

Each week you will meet in a spiritual accompaniment group comprised of three or four other class members. Instructions for this component will be provided in class. This course element is very important. We are not simply "role-playing" but actually engaging with God as he meets with us through one another's presence. Preparation is essential. This is one reason why you are asked to keep a spiritual journal. Your journal is a kind of "lab report" of your own experiences of God in the midst of your daily life. In *Sacred Companions*, page 171, Benner furnishes a helpful list of questions that will become a part of your personal reflection and practicum preparation. In class you will receive a set of appraisal questions that will help you think about the quality of your own presence to your partner(s) in your practicum sessions. You will draw from your weekly appraisal notes when you prepare the third section of your "integrative paper" (see above).

Our Weekly Schedule will include...

Worship, Presentations, Exercises, Discussions, Practicum, and Guest Practitioners.

Class Schedule

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Date	Theme	Exercise	Presenter	Assignments
1. February 7	Reclaiming the Ministry of Spiritual Direction		Peterson Video	Read: Foster transcript,
2. February 14	Following the Way of the Heart		Richard Foster Transcript	Read: Hinson Transcript
3. February 21	Listening to the Heart		Glenn Hinson Transcript	
4. February 28	Sharing from a Story-Shaped Life		Marilyn Elliott	
5. March 7	Appreciating Differences	Spiritual Pathways instrument/PPT	None	Book notation for <i>Wounds that Heal</i> , due next class.
6. March 14	Healing Our Image of God	Pathways to God	Steve Seamands	
7. March 21	Progressing Through Stages of Faith	Faith Stage Inventory and PPT	None	
8. March 28	A look at some of the difficulties encountered in Spiritual Direction		Ruth Rambo	Book notation for <i>The Deeper Journey</i> due next class.
April 4	Reading Week			
9. April 11	TBA		Bob Mulholland	
10. April 18	TBA		Gary Story	
11. April 25	Discerning Spirits		Steve Martyn	Groups 1 & 2 give reports next class.
12. May 2	Depression or Dark Night? Acedia—Losing Heart		Group Presentations	Groups 3 & 4 give reports next class.
13. May 9	Perfectionism Shame		Group Presentations	Integrative paper due by TU, 5/15/07

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