



**PROVIDENCE**  
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
EST. 1972

## **IN 5202 Theology and Practice of Christian Spirituality & Formation**

Instructor: **Rev. Robert MacDonald, MA**

**Online – Fall 2011**

E-mail: [rob.macdonald@prov.ca](mailto:rob.macdonald@prov.ca)

**“God can well hear the sighs of everyone, even the foolish; yet, in reality,  
only those can pray who listen to God”**  
*Christoph Blumhardt*

### **COURSE DESCRIPTIONS**

The course is an in-depth exploration of the biblical-theological foundations and practice of Christian Spirituality and its pivotal role in deepening our awareness of and enlivening our love for God, others, and self. The course will help the student begin to integrate religion, spirituality and meaning into his/her clinical work. The theoretical and experiential approach to the course will include formal instruction, critical reflection on some classics of Christian spirituality, and participation in spiritual habits of the soul such as prayer, lectio divina or reading of scripture, silence and solitude, retreat, spiritual direction, community, corporate worship and service.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

#### ***Spiritual Formation Objectives***

1. The student will be able to integrate knowledge of religion, spirituality, and meaning into his/her counselling practice.
2. The student will be familiar with individual and group “habits of the soul” for the purpose of deepening awareness of God-self relation and facilitating counselling effectiveness.
3. The student will be familiar with the methodology and practice of spiritual direction.

#### ***Personal Formation Objectives***

4. The student will be able to recognize instances where the counsellor’s life experiences may compromise or enhance therapeutic effectiveness.
5. The student will be able to process his/her experiences with God through the practice of receiving spiritual direction.
6. The student will be able to identify early signs of vocational burnout in oneself and those to whom they minister.

#### ***Professional Formation Objectives***

7. The student will be able to identify effective way of facilitating therapeutic change among clients with religious sensibilities.
8. The student will have knowledge of and competence in intervention strategies to respond effectively to vulnerability to vocational burnout.
9. The student will begin to see the vocation of counselling as spiritual in itself, recognizing the presence of God in the client, the counsellor, and the process.

## REQUIRED READING

Barry, William A. & Connolly, William J. (1986). **The practice of spiritual direction**. New York, NY: Harper.

McGrath, Alister. (1999). **Christian spirituality**. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Casey, Michael. (1996). **Toward God: The ancient wisdom of Western prayer**. Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph Publications

Barton, Ruth Hayley. (2006). **Sacred rhythms: Arranging our lives for spiritual transformation**. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Intentional and regular practice of a “new” spiritual habit of the soul: Lectio Divina, Centering Prayer, The Jesus Prayer, Examen, Journaling, Spiritual/Contemplative Reading, Praying in Nature, Retreat, Moments of contemplation, etc.

While not required, students are encouraged if they have the opportunity to try these in a group setting, either a group initiated by the student, or an existing small group. Students could make use of “Journey Together” resources from Barton (2006).

- Turn in a record sheet of practices over the course of finishing the assignments for this course. Record which practice it was, when it was done, and a brief evaluation. Also include thoughts and insights regarding the signs of burnout, how you might incorporate these disciplines as a means of self care.
- **Please submit on Friday of Week 10.**

### 2. Reading Requirements:

- Keep a reading log of all four texts, staying up to date with the Reading Schedule. Submit an indication of when the book was read in entirety. **Please submit on Friday of Week 10.**
- “Classic Text” readings from McGrath: 10 of these 12 readings are listed in the Reading Schedule. You are expected to spend time with the questions at the end of each reading, and submit in writing your answers (where appropriate). **Submissions are to be made each Friday.**

### 3. Online Participation:

- Students are expected to contribute to online discussion forums. These will be **engagements with questions** submitted by the professor every **two weeks**.
- Students are expected to read through the **Slide presentations** and accompanying notes as posted each week.

### 4. Participate in a series of “spiritual encounters” and write a critical and reflective essay on the “experience.” This is a three-part project.

**Step One:** In conjunction with reading Barry & Connolly’s **The practice of spiritual direction**, you are required to find someone who can offer you spiritual direction for at least 3 sessions.

**Step Two:** Participate in a **one-day spiritual retreat**. In a modular class format, the class spends a day at Kingsfold (Cochrane, AB) together. In the online format, I would encourage you to find a place to spend a one day or more self-directed personal retreat. Allow time for space, silence, reflection and prayer. An option could be signing up for a retreat with a church group or some other group where the experience is more directive.

**Step Three:** Write a 10-15 critical and reflective essay on “Spiritual Direction.” Issues to explore in this essay: (*Date Due: Dec. 8, 2011*)

- a. Critical reflection on my experience in receiving spiritual direction along with a reflection on the retreat experience.
- b. Analysis about theory-theology, methodology, and practice of spiritual direction.
- c. Critical competencies a counselor must have to practice spiritual direction.
- d. Ethical issues and other challenges a counselor will face in the practice of spiritual direction.
- e. Convergence and Divergence between Spiritual Direction and Psychotherapy.

### 5. Write an **8-10 page spiritual autobiography**. A spiritual autobiography is more than just a narrative of one’s life journey. It focuses *less* on key people, events, and experiences of one’s life and *more* on what these people, events, and experiences mean for him/her. (*Date Due: Dec. 15, 2011*)

The autobiography should focus on two aspects:

- a. The spiritual autobiography should be about discovery of oneself and God, particularly the perception of God’s presence or absence throughout the evaluation of the events and relationships. Think of significant turning points and decisions in your life, successes and failures, struggles and conflicts and relationships both nourishing and heartbreaking that you perceive to be pivotal in your personal formation.
- b. Be sure to think through your experiences of prayer, gathered worship, solitude, and times of communication with God. Be aware of and compare your

prayer life to this point with Casey's **Toward God**, wrestling with what he is suggesting for a life of prayer.

6. **Christian Spirituality and Popular Culture.** This is project that you will create to conceivably do/present to a real audience or group (such as a church small group). It is not required, but highly encouraged that you actually present the project in some kind of public format. (*Date Due: Oct. 15, 2011*)

The task is to glean from a popular culture medium, such as a TV series, movie, music, etc., the components of spirituality inherent in the medium and draw them out. Discuss the types of spirituality being conveyed or experienced. The goal is to be able to point out the presence of God in almost anything or anyone, to break down the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. This would exclude explicitly Christian formats such as worship music or Billy Graham videos. Refer to the "M.A.S.H" presentation posted by the professor as an example.

## GRADING

Habits of the Soul	15 marks
Reading/Weekly Submissions	20 marks
Spiritual Autobiography	15 marks
Spiritual Direction Encounters and Essay	20 marks
Christian Spirituality and Popular Culture Presentation	20 marks
Online Participation	10 marks

## PLEASE NOTE:

- ❑ All counseling students must use the APA format for citing resources. (<http://www.liu.edu/CWIS/CWP/library/workshop/citapa.htm>).
- ❑ **Papers are due on the DATE they are DUE.** Any paper submitted after the due date will incur a *1 pt deduction* for every single day it is turned in late.
- ❑ All papers must be **e-mailed** as an attachment to [rob.macdonald@prov.ca](mailto:rob.macdonald@prov.ca)