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Spiritual Formation for Ministry: Developing and Evaluation a Seminary Course

“No one even asked me if I prayed!” is a common response from clergy when asked about the spiritual formation they received as part of their seminary training. My personal experience with both seminary education and my denomination’s in-care process was that my spiritual life and growth was assumed, but never directly addressed. In the years since my seminary training, I have been aware of my own and other clergy’s struggles with how to identify and tend to our own spiritual lives while in the ministry of assisting others with their spiritual formation. This paper describes the development and format of a course I designed to address this issue, as well as narrative feedback from graduates as to the course’s helpfulness and their current attempts in caring for their own spiritual lives.

When I joined the faculty at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities in 1991, one of my standing course assignments was the final course in the contextual studies sequence for Master of Divinity students. Following a course in contextual analysis in an urban neighborhood, a year in parish ministry, and another unit (usually Clinical Pastoral Education), seniors took the final, non-field-based course to (as I was told at my hiring) “pull it all together.” The course I inherited, “Professional Ordained Ministry in Context,” focused on ecclesiology and denominational issues. As I looked at other curricular requirements, including denominational courses, listened to recent graduates and current students and talked with clergy colleagues, possible ways to reshape the course emerged.

I began by asking several clergy three questions: “What is one thing you wish you had done your first year in the parish?” “What is one thing you wish you had not done your first year?” “What is one thing you wish you had known before you began parish ministry?” The responses to the first two questions received expected responses, around staff roles, timing of changes, culture, conflict, and boundaries in terms of time and family. In addition to issues around personal boundaries (which I have included along with professional boundaries), it was the responses to the third question that primarily shaped the particular course this paper addresses.

What clergy, those fairly new in ministry as well as seasoned pastors, wished they would have known about before beginning parish ministry involved keeping their own spiritual lives vibrant in the midst of caring for others’, the overwhelming loneliness that comes with the job, the lack of collegiality among clergy, and the struggle to maintain a strong sense of self-esteem in the midst of parish leadership. The more women and men I listened to, the more I wondered what a course might look like that might at least begin to address these issues.

Formation and Ministry

What emerged by 1994 was a revised course, titled “Formation and Ministry.” This paper describes the course, reports on a survey of graduates as to the course’s value in their preparation for ministry and their present spiritual patterning, and suggests how this academic course might be one part of a larger formation for ministry in a seminary’s curriculum. Over 130 graduates in the Masters of Divinity program since 1995 were identified; approximately 126 alums received the survey.¹ Thirty completed surveys were returned.² One student was a transfer, so did not complete the course; another took the course before its revision. Therefore, the following discussion is based on twenty-eight responses to the survey.

Model of the Integrated Spiritual Life

The course goals of “Formation and Ministry” are to assist students in the process of developing pastoral identity by (1) exploring what it is to be a healthy and whole minister, (2) considering how they might develop and maintain a balanced spiritual life, and (3) exploring how to intentionally nurture the spiritual life of the congregation. The course is designed around a three-circle model of a holistic, integrated spiritual life at both the personal and congregational levels.³ At the personal level, one circle is personal spiritual patterns and self-care, another introduces spiritual friendships, and the third considers vocational calling (in this case, ordained ministry). At the congregational level, the three circles address corporate worship, community of faith, and the church’s vocation.

Circle I: Personal Spiritual Patterns and Self-care

The two core aspects of the patterning of the minister’s own spiritual life have been the practice of spiritual disciplines and holistic approaches to clergy self-care. To broaden students’ understanding of various spiritual patterning and ways of approaching the spiritual life, Corinne Ware’s instrument of spiritual types is introduced early in the course.⁴ Students are invited to both reflect on what approaches are more comfortable and more challenging to them personally, as well as hearing their colleagues’ very different experiences and patterning. This begins the course-long emphasis on diversity of spiritual formation within a healthy congregation. The four disciplines assigned have varied slightly over the years, but

¹ Surveys were not sent to graduates residing outside of the United States because of costs to send and return; this process also identified a few graduates for whom current addresses were not available.

² The narrative responses are included in appendix. Although a response of twenty-four percent is not surprising, I am sorry so many did not respond. Graduates had already received two other surveys from United in weeks immediately preceding this one, due to material being compiled for the school’s re-accreditation process. In addition, the survey followed Easter, and many pastors already had very full schedules without another survey to complete. Students who did not find value in the course appear to not have responded; I regret not having specific input as to the lack of value of the course. My real concern is for those who might have chosen not to complete the survey because of present struggles in their lives.

³ This course is focused primarily on the model of the personal spiritual life, although the final part of the course begins the consideration of the congregation’s spiritual life as central to the minister’s life. A second, elective course is primarily focused on the congregation.

⁴ Corinne Ware, Discover Your Spiritual Type: A Guide to Individual and Congregational Growth. Bethesda: Alban Institute, 1995.

each student has been required to practice four disciplines, at least four times in a week, early in the course.⁵ At the completion of each of the four weeks, the student writes a one-page reflection on her or his experience with a particular practice.⁶

The first spiritual pattern is a broad category of “listening for God,” inviting students to spend at least four thirty-minute periods intentionally listening for God in their lives. They are invited to choose a process, such as sitting in silence, walking their dog, or being attentive to nature. Whatever form it takes, my hope is that they will shift their attention enough just to be aware of God’s presence. Students have seemed most surprised by the effects of this assignment, as they report realizing what a gift it was to tell family they were “assigned” thirty-minute walks alone, or sitting at a neighborhood park listening to children play. Others report becoming painfully aware of how “noisy” their lives were, and what a change it was to have segments of silence or solitude.⁷

The second discipline the students learn and practice is *lectio divina*, or holy reading. Two of the texts for the course have chapters on this practice,⁸ and for many students this is a new approach to using Scripture as part of a spiritual pattern. The students who are members of Christian denominations use it to immerse themselves in the Bible; Unitarian Universalists are expected to use sacred scripture from an appropriate tradition. Students are asked to set aside at least four thirty-minute segments to practice this ancient tradition and modern practice.

The third area of spiritual patterning is in prayer. As with the other weeks, they are invited to practice a pattern of praying four times during the week. In the first few years of the course, the assigned discipline was restricted to centering prayer. In the last three years the option has been opened to practice either centering prayer or intercessory prayer. Drawing on the chapter in Marjorie Thompson’s text, *Soul Feast*, students are invited to explore a form of prayer with which they are less familiar or rarely practice.⁹ It is required that they practice the same form of prayer all four times to have a sense of initial patterning of the discipline.

The last week of practicing a personal discipline has changed in the seven years of this course format. Initially the fourth pattern was journaling, which students found less helpful for two reasons. First was that the writing that was already required in the learning process drew them away from focusing on journaling as a spiritual practice. Second was that suggestions involved in the patterning of the other disciplines invites simple journaling as part of each pattern.

⁵ Beginning Autumn 2001, students will be practicing five disciplines in the course: listening for God, *lectio divina*, prayer, *examen*, and embodiment.

⁶ The assignment clearly states that they are to report on the experience, not on the topic of their practice. For example, they do not report on what scripture or insights they had while practicing *lectio divina*, but what their experience of practicing that approach to scripture was.

⁷ Wayne Oates, *Nurturing Silence in a Noisy Heart*, Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1979.

⁸ Ware and Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast: In Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995.

⁹ Drawing on the well-developed chapter on prayer in Thompson’s *Soul Feast*, I have become intentional in encouraging students to take advantage of the opportunity to “practice” what they do not usually do. Class presentations and discussions emphasize that prayer both for self and for others are important; my intention is to help them develop that balance.

What emerged through students' feedback is a week that focuses on the body/spirit connection, and how students might attend to embodied spiritual patterning. Given the opportunity to focus on embodied spiritual patterning, students exercise without distraction (such as radios), take long baths, attend to their eating habits, cook and eat a meal with their families—anything that invites them to consider how attending (or not) to their bodies might embody a spiritual life. Like the first week, they are encouraged but not required to do the same practice four times. This fourth week also concludes with a guest teacher who teaches body-spirit connections, so the students have an opportunity to both reflect on their own patterning as well as experience another approach.

There are three reasons for this approach to teaching disciplines and spiritual patterning. First, students preparing for the practice of ordained ministry need to have some ability to be self-reflective in their own spiritual practices; the one-page reflections facilitate that process. Second, as we change and grow in our spiritual journeys, different practices may be more nurturing at different times. The course is designed to expose them to disciplines with which they lack familiarity, as well as encourage ones they may have already incorporated into their relationships with God. These two initial reasons are for the personal benefit of the person preparing for professional ministry.

The third reason is for the practice of ministry. It is essential for students to realize that often the discipline or spiritual pattern that feeds them and draws them deeper into their relationships with God will not do that for all of the persons they encounter in ministry. These varied practices encourage students to know and experience patterns that they may not practice but may be a very beneficial pattern to recommend to a parishioner.

In addition to experiencing and reflecting on spiritual patterns, the course invites students to consider other aspects of self-care. Drawing on Gary Harbaugh's Pastor as Person and Roy Oswald's Clergy Self-Care, students explore the ways they currently practice holistic self-care, and where the challenges are both in their personal lives and as ministerial professionals.¹⁰ In recent years they have also interviewed a minister whom they perceive to have addressed these issues. Then they integrate this with their reflections on their spiritual practices and write a paper of self-assessment, including what they assess they need to attend to when they begin in ordained ministry. When this paper is returned, I encourage them to hold on to it, and re-read it a year later.

Circle II: Spiritual Friends

When I began designing the course, the feedback I received from clergy was overwhelming in the concerns around clergy loneliness and need for support. Too often when clergy gather they *complain* or *compete*. What would happen if they learned to *companion* each other in intentional ways? A component of the course that was designed to model a way of “clergy companionship” is weekly meeting of

¹⁰ Gary Harbaugh, Pastor as Person: Maintaining Personal Integrity in the Choices and Challenges of Ministry, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984, and Roy Oswald, Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry, Bethesda: Alban Institute, 1991.

spiritual friends groups during class time. During the second class session,¹¹ students are invited to self-select into spiritual friends groups of three. Several of these groups are very successful; often there is one where the group is a mismatch. In this case the learning is sometimes not what is hoped, but even members of these groups are often very articulate in describing what the benefits of spiritual friends might be.

As most courses at United incorporate educational small groups, it is carefully explained that this group is different. The concept of spiritual friends is introduced as relationships that encourage the spiritual life, those who help one connect the inner life with living in the world. These groups are provided as opportunities for reciprocal peer support, encouragement and discernment. The role of professional spiritual directors or guides is also presented in the course, as is the role of the pastor as a spiritual guide.¹² The distinction is made between those who are gifted and equipped to be spiritual directors, pastors who often provide spiritual direction, and peers who are spiritual companions.

The spiritual friends groups are given 30 to 60 minutes of class time most weeks of the course. Although no assignment is ever made, the beginning suggestions include (1) setting some ground rules, such as confidentially, (2) sharing some of one's spiritual story and call to ordained ministry, and (3) perhaps drawing on their experiences of the spiritual practices as a place to begin sharing with each other. Many of the groups establish their own rituals of prayer; several include food and continue their meeting over the lunch hour.¹³

Survey responses to personal spiritual growth and care.

When asked if they had read their personal assessment papers since graduation, approximately one-third respondents had and (when adding comment) found it helpful. Comments included the paper being helpful in spiritual direction; in clergy support groups, to refocus, to jump-start one's spiritual disciplines, to remind one of the importance of self-care, in clinical pastoral education, to help others (including a church council), and to provide a plan for one's own spiritual nurture. Four graduates commented:

- “It is always a great balancing act trying to make sure you are spiritually renewed”
- “The hectic life of a parish pastor often makes me wonder how I will meet the need for personal growth and wonder if I was in touch with reality when I wrote the paper.”
- “Self-care is difficult to balance yet is essential for success in one's personal and professional life. Spiritual disciplines are tools for self-care as it replenishes one's spiritual needs.”

¹¹ Courses at UTS meet once-a-week for 3 hours.

¹² One of the required texts is Howard Rice, *The Pastor as Spiritual Guide*, Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998.

¹³ This course is always taught 8:15 to 11:30 on Friday mornings.

- “Self care is a constant challenge for me and it is something I have to be on top of or my work could devour me. Having the information provides a ‘pumpkin’ for me to check on regularly.”¹⁴

The survey also asked graduates to respond to the ways the course was valuable in their own spiritual journeys and in what ways they currently attend to their spiritual lives and overall self-care. In addressing what had been of value, the responses included awareness of different patterns of the spiritual life and the critical importance of caring for one’s own spiritual life for active clergy, as they minister to others.

- “Bringing awareness to the importance of attending to one’s own spiritual life, and the different ways one addresses their spiritual life.”
- “The need to remain on my spiritual path in ways that feeds me and realize others are fed differently”
- “Quite honestly—nearly everything. Specifically, the learning of spiritual disciplines and the emphasis on on-going self-care. I have shared the ideas with many.”
- “Realization of my own style has helped me seek out those things that help me and not get caught in guilt trips or forced activities that are ‘the right way’ for others”
- “Self-care is difficult to balance yet is essential for success in one’s personal and professional life. Spiritual disciplines are tools for self-care as it replenishes one’s spiritual needs.”

For some in the course, the place of spiritual friends had been implicit; the course brought the need to a conscious level, as well as provided opportunities to try out a specific model. Others had not considered the need for a spiritual companion.

- “The development and maintenance of my spiritual friendships has been of the greatest value to me from seminary forward.”
- “Keep stressing the importance of collegial relationships. Not only for support but also as a way to share ideas, develop ministry, and build ecumenical relationships”

As the understanding of the role of spiritual guides/directors has become more common in Protestant circles, more students are aware of these persons as additional resources for their spiritual journeys. In recent years, spiritual directors have also been available through the seminary chaplain’s office,¹⁵ so students completing this course have been introduced to both the professional guide, as well as the collegial spiritual friend.

It appears from the survey that the graduates who responded have kept the issue of their own spiritual lives in the forefront, as the majority mentioned ways in which they had integrated or extended the suggestions for spiritual patterning from the course. Their responses were also tempered with living in the reality of a minister’s

¹⁴ These comments suggest that the topic is one of importance, but the final course feedback the past few years has suggested that Oswald’s text is perhaps no longer the most helpful approach. Beginning autumn 2001 this will no longer be a required text, and other resources are being considered.

¹⁵ The chaplain is a United Methodist clergywoman and a graduate of the Shalem Institute. In 2000, United received a grant that has allowed the funding of other spiritual directors for students, upon request.

schedule in various contexts of ministry. The struggles for balance is very evident in those serving congregations, which is the primary context of ministry for the majority of the respondents.

The graduates completing the survey also affirmed that the broader issues around self-care are crucial. The responses to the question around care of self addressed physical, emotional, and mental self-care in addition to the spiritual aspects of life. Comments included being attentive to diet, exercise, and sleep. One male rural pastor responded to the question “how do you currently care for yourself?” with the response “Regular exercise and only eating one cookie at visitation stops.” Clearly humor is also a form of self-care!

Time away from work and personal Sabbath were also mentioned in several responses.

- “A weekly Sabbath is most critical. I try to take a morning or afternoon off when I have a very demanding schedule. I vacation with family. Play with my children. Make love often.”
- “Take 2 days off a month for me”
- “I continue to take sabbath time—it’s great!”
- “Trying to limit ‘work’ hours to 40 hours a week, sharing one meal a day with family”
- “Try to have good boundaries”
- “Recognize warning signs of fatigue and frustration and overload”

Circle III: Vocation---Nurturing the Spiritual Lives of Others

The final weeks of the course invite students to begin stepping back from their own lives and consider the ways their ministry can encourage the spiritual lives of those they serve. The purpose of the final project of the course is to draw upon the appropriate course material, as well as other resources, and explore aspects of nurturing spirituality in others. Grounded in the course material and texts, students have the freedom as to the form, such as an adult education course, a youth retreat, a series of worship services, or an art form (hymn writing, art, poetry, etc.) that can be used in awaking and deepening the spiritual lives of others.

Survey responses to nurturing the spiritual lives of others

The surveys reported that a few graduates have used their course projects as developed, more have adapted them for use, and others have not yet found them beneficial. When asked what they are currently doing in their ministry contexts to encourage the spiritual lives of others, the responses were varied. They included Bible study, prayer, mini-worship before meetings, conversation, reflective listening, genuine caring, encouraging others to ‘get quiet’ enough to hear inner voice/voice of God

- “A key learning is that a spiritual leader and guide has little value if they allow themselves/myself to dry up”
- “Hymns, different types of sermons”
- “My own sense of peace, ease, quiet deeply influences others. Every conversation seems to point to people’s spiritual lives”

- “Intergenerational activities and activities that involve the whole family”
- “The family is the most important place for spiritual nurture and development. Parents are very receptive to accepting responsibility of given support. Grandparents, too.
- “We live in a time when we are so ‘busy.’ Emphasizing spiritual disciplines and reflections are really important to teach and encourage. Having people—friends to process with, to get support from is extremely important and valuable.”

Spiritual formation as seminary curriculum

United was chartered by the United Church of Christ as an ecumenical seminary; several denominations are represented in this course each time it is taught. The formation process in representative denominations vary greatly, yet there are expectations that students will examine and address their spiritual lives while in seminary. Implicitly, students are invited to consider their spiritual lives and vocational call throughout the curriculum. But, “it is not enough in seminary for you to learn about God; you must also meet God.”¹⁶ In a context as ecumenical as United, this has been more difficult to explicitly address outside of seminary chapel services.

In the first years this course was offered, the former president of United, Benjamin Griffin, was invited to talk with the class about the spiritual life of the pastor. As a former pastor, he always began by telling them, “Remember, when people call you to be their pastor, they expect you to have a relationship with God as close as theirs, if not better!” Assisting students in addressing this is the purpose of this course. The surveys completed by alums of this course suggest that its design and implementation are hitting its mark.

The results of the survey were encouraging. Of the alums that responded, most were seriously engaged in their spiritual journeys and aware of the need for clergy self-care. There was also additional feedback that will benefit the course immediately. There was a justifiable criticism that the course has been very focused on the minister serving a congregation, to the lack of attention to those serving in other contexts, especially as chaplains. The course will be expanded in ways that will address that. Other feedback suggested aspects of the course that had been received as part of regular course evaluations. Many of those suggestions, such as interviewing practicing clergy and more time for spiritual friends groups, have already been incorporated.

What the surveys, as well as course feedback, suggest is that students are hungry to integrate their academic work, the practice of ministry in contextual study courses, and their own spiritual journeys. They also know that the work of a minister, be it as a pastor or chaplain, can be lonely, challenging work. Although no course can change that, it appears this course design has enabled its graduates to approach ministry more self-aware and attentive to how to maintain a more balanced life in ministry.

What this survey does not address is the students’ experience of formation at United beyond their work in his particular course. The first statement made by several

¹⁶ Virginia Samuel Cetuk, What to Expect in Seminary: Theological Education as Spiritual Formation, Nashville: Abingdon, 1998, page 114.

students each year on course evaluations when they are asked, “What would make this course stronger?” is “Have it (or a course like it) at the beginning of seminary.” Or “I needed this course earlier in my time here; why put it at the end?” In talking with students, I explain the intentional focus as to how this course is designed to complete the contextual studies sequence and assist them as they move into ordained ministry. But I have also been challenged and concerned about this persistent cry for help in nurturing and integrating their spiritual journeys in intentional ways into their ministerial formation.

To address issues around spiritual formation as part of ministerial formation, I have developed two other elective courses, other colleagues explicitly address formation as part of course work they offer,¹⁷ and a team of faculty and staff at United received a grant in 2000 that is providing resources for formation opportunities outside of courses and chapel. In 1994, I began teaching the “companion course” to this required course, focusing on “nurturing the spiritual life of a congregation.” Also, the seminary chaplain and I now team-teach an elective course, open to anyone, on “nurturing your spiritual life as religious leaders,” which students can take at any time in their program.

Most directly addressing the student concerns regarding formation opportunities earlier in their work at United are a two-day spiritual retreat now offered each year during fall break in October, the availability of spiritual directors (in addition to the chaplain), and on-going spiritual growth groups. One of these groups that meets weekly is one I lead in the practice of *lectio divina*; others address other spiritual patterns.

Beginning in 2001, I intend to include an additional question on my course evaluation of “Formation and Ministry,” asking students in what other activities they have chosen to participate, or courses they have taken to intentionally address their spiritual formation while at United. Although this will only provide feedback from the Master of Divinity students,¹⁸ it will provide data for the on-going concern to address the spiritual journey as part of ministerial formation.

The purpose of this paper was to describe the development of a course, document its effectiveness as experienced by graduates, and place it into the larger curricular concerns around the spiritual formation of students as part of their ministerial formation at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. The feedback received from the graduate surveys was both affirming and helpful in suggesting course revisions. I hope this paper will also encourage others in their develop of courses in this curricular area.

¹⁷ Although this paper is addressing a course I teach, I do not want to suggest that I am the only faculty member at United concerned about integrating spiritual formation into the curriculum at United. My colleagues carefully integrate this into their teaching of both required and elective courses. The course described in this paper, however, is the only required course that explicitly addresses this topic.

¹⁸ Who will be missed in this process are students earning the M.A. in Religious Leadership, as they do not take “Formation and Ministry.” United also has students in three other M.A. degrees, but their foci are not ministerial leadership.

CL206 survey April 2001

What is your current context of ministry?

Pastor, interim ministry, working with retreat center, new church start, associate pastor, new church development, yoked rural churches, hospital chaplain, resource center director, nursing home chaplain

Paper on self-care: Have you re-read this paper since graduation?

Yes: 9 No: 17 No, but will read now: 2

Has the topic of this paper been one you have addressed since graduation? In what ways?
In spiritual direction; in clergy support groups, to refocus, to jump-start my spiritual disciplines, importance of self-care, in CPE, used to help others (inc. church council), provide/plan for my own spiritual nurturance,

“It is always a great balancing act trying to make sure you are spiritually renewed”

“The hectic life of a parish pastor often makes me wonder how I will meet the need for personal growth and wonder if I was in touch with reality when I wrote the paper.”

“Self care is a constant challenge for me and it is something I have to be on top of or my work could devour me. Having the information provides a ‘pumpkin’ for me to check on regularly.”

What from this course has been of value for you in your own spiritual journey?

Spiritual friends // Role of spiritual director / Spirituality types

Numerous ways to journey, some brief and others more in depth

Regular retreats Lectio Divina Examen Constant awareness

“the need to remain on my spiritual path in ways that feeds me and realize others are fed differently”

“Quite honestly—nearly everything. Specifically, the learning of spiritual disciplines and the emphasis on on-going self-care. I have shared the ideas with many.”

“Bringing awareness to the importance of attending to one’s own spiritual life, and the different ways one addresses their spiritual life.”

Support groups of clergy only Language of self-care

Affirmation of the ways I am spiritually nurtured

Being aware of the necessity for my own personal reflection time. Setting boundaries so I have that time

Affirmation that this is a lifelong process

“Realization of my own style has helped me seek out those things that help me and not get caught in guilt trips or forced activities that are ‘the right way’ for others”

“Self-care is difficult to balance yet is essential for success in one’s personal and professional life. Spiritual disciplines are tools for self-care as it replenishes one’s spiritual needs.”

“The development and maintenance of my spiritual friendships has been of the greatest value to me from seminary forward. Wesley’s process of ‘examen,’ which I practice in my journaling and regular prayer have also been of value.

Ideas about welcoming people into the spiritual community

Bibliography The course texts

Knowing I need to have time with God each morning and night

In what ways are you currently nurturing your spiritual life?

Meditation, prayer, Bible study, scripture, music, retreats, spiritual direction, fun/reaction, reading and con. Ed, support from other colleagues, walks, nature, prayer, gardening, journaling, worship at church, personal ritual, exercise, days away, yoga, church worship (from chaplain)

Take 2 days off a month for me / I continue to take sabbath time—it's great!
I have learned to love silence. I spent a full week in silence at St. John's Abbey this year.
Meeting with a group of clergy on a weekly basis for study of scripture, prayer, and fellowship

Read quite a bit on various aspects of ministry, theology, and spiritual growth

I wish I had more time to write

“daily exercise, exquisite nutrition, readings, meditation, massage, labyrinth walks, groups, attend retreats: all this is intended to move the body, mind and spirit to quiet, in order to hear the still, small voice.”

Trying to limit “work” hours to 40 hours a week, sharing one meal a day with family

Caller ID to see who is calling before I interrupt my work

“good question: weekly meetings with area clergy; reading.”

“Time alone with quiet is the best formula for me to rejuvenate. I don't get as much as I need but do take advantage of it particularly when it comes unexpectedly.”

“Life seems chaotic right now. . .”

Nature, music / Actively planning my upcoming sabbatical

In a covenant relationship with another clergy woman

How do you regularly care for yourself, in order to stay healthy and whole in ministry?

Exercise, watch diet, e-mail, coffee with friends

Try to have good boundaries

Recognize warning signs of fatigue and frustration and overload

“I monitor what I need to know in the church and what I don't need to know. I do not attend every church meeting. I enjoy and take time with those I love and enjoy being with.”

“A weekly Sabbath is most critical. I try to take a morning or afternoon off when I have a very demanding schedule. I vacation with family. Play with my children. Make love often.”

Pursuing personal passions away from parish

Intimate friendships and colleagues to share work with

“Regular exercise and only eating one cookie at visitation stops ☺”

reminding myself to practice differentiation in times of conflict

having supervision: a place to brainstorm, process and vent monthly

Take regular vacations / Doing karate

Trying to find balance while seeking to live and witness to dynamic living.

Make sure I spend quality time with my family

Ask for help when needed A dog. A sense of humor.

Are you still in touch with your spiritual friends from the course? If yes, in what ways do you stay connected?

Yes: 18 no: 10 (email, phone, recreation)

How has the experience of spiritual friends in the course influenced your building of a support system?

Deep, caring relationships

“support is so important in ministry and my relationship with these 2 people has helped me to reach out to others and well”

“The overall concept opened up to understanding how helpful spiritual friends can be and how helpful they are. Just knowing we have each other has been a comfort.

“I feel the concept of spiritual friends was gift to me. I treasure them. In the various groups of friends with which I interact, my heart knows well my “spiritual friends.”

Sharing joys and concerns that I don’t share publicly with others. Thoughtful gestures.

Honesty. Deep conversations

I have learned how important it is to have spiritual friend(s) close by that you meet with on a regular basis. I can’t say enough in regard to the value of spiritual friends.

I intentionally sought out other clergy to be spiritual friends

“Support system is essential. If not spiritual friends from class, then with other colleagues in the area. Very important!

It is strengthening to know someone is there

Reinforced existing commitment to friendship circle

I have always followed the pattern by meeting regularly with colleagues.

Recognizing the necessity, benefit and fun!! I’ve become more intentional in my valued friendships.

Not really

Have you used the project (or a variation of it) that you designed for this course?

Yes: 14 **Not yet:** 4 **No:** 10

In what ways? (See surveys for details)

What have you found important in your ministry context to nurture the spiritual lives of others?

Bible study, prayer, mini-worship before meetings, conversation, reflective listening, genuine caring, encouraging others to ‘get quiet’ enough to hear inner voice/voice of God

A key learning is that a spiritual leader and guide has little value if they allow themselves/myself to dry up

Preaching, teaching, encouraging others to explore mid-life women’s spiritual growth group

Teach, teach, teach

Hymns, different types of sermons

My own sense of peace, ease, quiet deeply influences others. Every conversation seems to point to people’s spiritual lives

Ritual of worship

Connecting at an authentic level

Intergenerational activities and activities that involve the whole family modeling

taking time for my own spiritual nourishment; interests away from the parish
“The family is the most important place for spiritual nurture and development. Parents are very receptive to accepting responsibility of given support. Grandparents, too.
“We live in a time when we are so ‘busy.’ Emphasizing spiritual disciplines and reflections are really important to teach and encourage. Having people—friends to process with, to get support from is extremely important and valuable.”
Pastoral prayer; informal conversations before/after church

Other reflections:

“Keep stressing the importance of collegial relationships. Not only for support but also as a way to share ideas, develop ministry, and build ecumenical relationships”
need to include non-parish focus (chaplains)

Ideas of other resources?

See surveys