

CONNECTING

Healthy Information from the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center  January / February 2004

What's a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This? *The Role of Spiritual Director in the Mental Health Setting*

Ten years ago, in the midst of some serious soul searching, I found myself being actively led to new ways of integrating what it meant to me to be a nurse with practicing the art of being with and helping others through holistic nursing. At that time in the 1990's, the word "holistic" was just working its way into public awareness. Holistic principles of mind/body/spirit unity had a profound and life-changing impact on me. I had recently experienced a time of intense stress/life crisis, and observed first-hand that my whole being was affected. My body reacted with physical symptoms of various kinds and severity. My mind filled with racing thoughts, or complete numbing, or total confusion. Anxiety, fear, irritability, indifference, characterized my emotional state. Underlying these various physical and emotional responses, I noticed deeper questions of faith emerging, such as, "Why?" "Why me?" "Why am I going through this?" This spiritual anguishing was as painful to experience as any of my other symptoms and often more difficult to acknowledge, much less articulate.

As a nurse, I had been taught to refer people in spiritual distress. Yet, here I was in my own spiritual distress, and to further complicate matters, the clients I was seeing in my practice were asking similar and even tougher questions, sharing from the deepest parts of their being. Many were unwilling to speak to clergy within their own faith communities for fear they could not safely express feelings of anger toward God or alienation from God. Guilt and even shame often accompanied such thoughts or feelings. Some had been harmed by religious traditions that they had experienced as overly moralistic, legalistic, or punitive. They were seeing me because I was a nurse, and nurses are typically perceived as safe and trustworthy professionals. When their pain and questions were raised in the course of our working relationship, I initially felt unprepared and inadequate to respond. The convergence of my own spiritual questioning and that of my clients with our mutual desire for healing and wholeness was the impetus for me to enter a three-year program for the training of spiritual directors.

So, what is spiritual direction and what does a spiritual director do? I see spiritual direction as the art of sacred listening carried out in the context of a one-to-one trusting relationship. The spiritual director is the capable guide who "companions" another person on the spiritual journey, listening to that person's life story with an ear for the movement of God, of the Divine, within his/her life. The word

"director" is somewhat of a misnomer because God, in truth, is the only Director. The spiritual director helps the "directee" to uncover God's direction in that person's life and to learn, own, respond to, and reverence those infinite and varied movements of the Divine.

Spiritual direction has been part of Christian and Buddhist traditions for centuries. Though long forgotten by much of the church, spiritual direction is finding renewed interest in today's world. We live in a society that is fast-paced, noisy, competitive, and driven by consumerism and other false gods. It is filled with competing demands and an exterior focus that makes it difficult to detach from the events of life and remain open to the interior movements of the Spirit.

Spiritual direction as a process involves slowing down, being quiet, and learning to tune into the guidance of a divine presence. It assists a person in making a deeper connection to a divine source, an "inner wisdom" that works within each of us, and in celebrating that connection. A spiritual director helps another to notice, savor, re-live and enjoy our experience of God, as well as to recognize and explore areas of darkness, "unfreedom," or "unforgiveness" that keep us from responding to God's desires for us. People are hungry to make sense of their lives and to find meaning. Many of us benefit from a guide in our efforts, a companion who can serve as a mirror to reflect back the events of our lives and enable us to see their deeper significance. Usually, an individual will meet with a spiritual director (or with a spiritual direction group) every three to four weeks. The subject matter may be anything that has occurred in life that one wants to examine in the light of the Divine. One does not need to have a particular religious orientation or set of religious practices to enter the work of spiritual direction.

With this background, what is the role of spiritual direction in a mental health setting? What is the relationship between spiritual direction and psychotherapy? As a nurse and a healthcare consumer, I know from both sides the limitations of traditional medical and behavioral approaches. When there is too much attention to the physical and not enough to the body/mind/spirit unity that makes each of us unique, we feel disrespected and devalued. In my own life, practitioners of conventional medicine, psychotherapy, bodywork, and a number of complementary and alternative approaches have helped me to varying degrees. But none of these practitioners

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ever addressed directly what was most at my core, and that was, **how might the spiritual dimension of my being be speaking to me in my hardship? How might my problem – my illness, my crisis, my depression, my anxiety, my unhappiness – actually be calling me into the fullest expression of who I am meant to be?**

These are the questions, the uncertainty, and the confusion that spiritual direction can help to address within the mental health setting. And there are more: *How am I not living in honesty and in integrity with my truest self and the Spirit within? How might it be to wait with my problem and pay attention to it with a new heart, rather than focus on eliminating or fixing it? How might it be to trust that, in some as yet unknown way, my dilemma is purposeful, a valuable teacher about myself and the manner in which I had been living? How might it be to open myself to the possibility that there is a real and personal Divine Presence who is with me regardless of what I might be dealing with, and who is actively pursuing my healing? And by the way, just what does healing mean after all?*

Spiritual questioning, spiritual distress, and spiritual crisis can be an intricate part of one's psychological health. Most clergy are not trained to address psychiatric dysfunction, and mental health professionals often feel uncomfortable dealing with spiritual and theological issues. The disciplines of pastoral counseling and spiritual direction help to bridge this split.

An important assumption in spiritual direction is that it is not for everyone, because spiritual direction presumes some degree of psychological health. Psychotherapy typically focuses on problem solving in the context of clients with difficult histories, emotions, and relationships. Pastoral counseling bolsters psychotherapy with compassion and intentional respect for the spiritual values of the client. In spiritual direction, one may come with the same issues; however, the focus will be on how they relate to the Divine and on discerning the leadings of God. Individuals may engage in psychotherapy and spiritual direction simultaneously.

Jeffrey Gaines, a Presbyterian minister and past executive director of Spiritual Directors International, speaks to these distinctions: "Spiritual direction, unlike pastoral counseling, always happens in the context of prayer and spiritual intimacy. This is where intimate engagement happens. Whereas in psychotherapy the clinical distance is crucial to bring about objectivity and healing, in spiritual direction discernment is based upon the intimate engagement of two people walking into the sanctuary of God. Another difference is that people usually enter pastoral counseling because something is wrong in their life, whether it is an area of shame, or guilt, or abuse, or addiction, or poor self-image. They're coming because something is wrong and they want it to be right. Spiritual direction deals with the assumption that the person is already whole, but hasn't yet fully embraced this truth for themselves." As the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center moves into the future with its commitment to comprehensive and holistic care for clients, it makes sense to include the discipline of spiritual direction as a companioning process to support

those who want to embrace in an intentional way the work of the Spirit in their life journey and life circumstances. Many of our clients come with spiritual issues as a part of the psychological care they are seeking. Others may come not because of any acknowledged psychological need, but because they are experiencing a call to new depth or substance in their lives. People want to know how to find this. The answer lies in finding one's own wisdom in the context of life as it is. Spiritual direction can be invaluable in this process.

Kathy Reardon, R.N., M.S.

Kathy Reardon is a spiritual director and holistic nurse at the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center. In addition, she is a somatic body therapist who incorporates Healing Touch, Reiki, craniosacral balancing and other body-mind approaches into her work with clients who are ill or experiencing mental, physical, or spiritual distress.

Group Counseling for Sexual Abuse Survivors

Debbie Reed and Susan Kearney, Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center therapists, will co-lead a group counseling experience for women who are survivors of childhood/adolescent sexual abuse. The primary purpose of the group is the enhancement of each member's capacity for positive, respectful relationships with herself and with others. The group will meet weekly for 90 minutes on Mondays from 6:00 – 7:30 p.m., over a 16-week period, beginning February 2, 2004. The cost per session is \$20 (\$320 total). The location will be Suite 210, 3408 Woodland Avenue, West Des Moines. Each prospective group member will be screened prior to acceptance into the group. Women enrolling in the group must currently be involved in on-going individual counseling and obtain the permission of their therapists. For enrollment and/or further information, please call the Center (274-4006).

Debbie Reed, Ed.D., L.M.H.C., earned her doctoral degree in counselor education from Drake University. She is a licensed mental health counselor and has prior group counseling experience with survivors of incest/sexual abuse and with cancer survivors.

Susan Kearney, M.S.W., earned her master's degree in social work from the University of Iowa. She is a licensed master's social worker and has prior group counseling experience with incest/sexual abuse survivors and with families of clients with addictions.

Spirituality and Psychotherapy – A Ten-Week Course

Dates:	March 12, 2004 – May 21, 2004
Time:	Fridays, 8:15-9:45 a.m.
Location:	Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center
Cost:	\$200 plus optional text
Registration Deadline:	February 27, 2004
Instructor:	Various Center Staff and Guest Faculty

For more information, visit our website www.dmpcc.org. The Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center is an approved provider of continuing education credits. To register, call (515) 274-4006 or e-mail info@dmpcc.org.



A Day With Sylvia Thorson-Smith

What's Justice-Love Got To Do With It? Sexual Ethics and the Practice of Wholeness

Date: Friday, January 23, 2004
Time: 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Location: Plymouth Congregational Church
 New Waveland Hall
 4126 Ingersoll Avenue, Des Moines

Registration Fee: \$40, includes lunch
Registration Deadline: January 21, 2004
 This is a continuing education offering.

The framework for the day will be the new book, *Body and Soul: Rethinking Sexuality as Justice-Love* (Pilgrim Press, 2003), co-edited by Marvin M. Ellison and Sylvia Thorson-Smith. *Body and Soul* is a collection of 22 essays by leading theologians and ethicists on issues relating to human sexuality, including domestic violence, marriage, economic discipleship, adolescent relationships, seminary education, ordination, and clergy sexual misconduct. Using perspectives of race, gender, sexual orientation, age and class, holistic principles are offered for structuring personal and social patterns of sexual behavior. Biblical and theological understandings of human sexuality will be examined in light of historical development and contemporary social change. The entire day will be designed to use a variety of educational methods and maximize group participation.

Sylvia Thorson-Smith has a B.A. in psychology from the University of Dubuque in Iowa and an M.A. in sociology and women's studies from Wichita State University in Kansas. Ms. Thorson-Smith taught at Grinnell College for 15 years in the departments of sociology and religious studies. She has a lengthy history of involvement in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) on issues of gender and sexuality.

New Clinical Director

Beginning November 1, 2003, Susan Ackelson, M.S.W., L.I.S.W., became the Clinical Director for the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center. Regarding her new responsibilities, Executive Director Ellery Duke said, "Susan brings to this position a wealth of experience and a genuine sensitivity to the needs of Center clients and staff. She will continue and build upon the excellent clinical standards of the Center that Jeff Means has so effectively shaped over the past 23 years." Jeff's new part-time responsibilities in the department of behavioral medicine at Des Moines University have led to this administrative transition at the Center. Both Jeff and Susan will continue to see clients at the Center.

Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Annual Meeting

On Friday, January 23, 2004, the Center will hold its Annual Meeting. The event will be held at the Waveland Golf Course clubhouse, 6:30 p.m. reception and 7:00 p.m. dinner. The program will include Sylvia Thorson-Smith speaking on "Possessing Pleasure." Sylvia Thorson-Smith is co-editor of *Body and Soul: Rethinking Sexuality as Justice-Love* (Pilgrim Press, 2003). If you are interested in attending, please contact the Center at (515) 274-4006 or info@dmpcc.org.

An Evening With Anodea Judith Seven Centers of Wholeness: Everything You Wanted to Know about Chakras

Date: Monday, March 22, 2004
Time: 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.
Location: Plymouth Congregational Church, Waveland Hall
 4126 Ingersoll Avenue, Des Moines

Fee: \$15

Spend an evening with Anodea Judith, Ph.D., considered one of the country's foremost experts on the interpretation of the chakra system for the Western lifestyle. Anodea's remarks will include a presentation of her 28-minute DVD on the Illuminated Chakras. Please contact the Center to pre-register for the event (274-4006 or info@dmpcc.org).

Principles of Mind-Body Integration: Therapeutic Techniques for Wholeness A five-day workshop for healers of all types

Date: Tuesday, March 23 – Saturday, March 27, 2004
Presenter: Anodea Judith, Ph.D., Psychologist and Transpersonal Somatic Therapist
Location: Grace United Methodist Church
 3700 Cottage Grove Avenue, Des Moines

Fee: \$600 (on or before January 30) / \$700 (after January 30)

This five-day workshop for healers of all types will present the latest techniques for integrating mind and body within a therapeutic context. The workshop will provide a backbone of theory for practicing somatic therapy. Participants will have an opportunity to explore new techniques through didactic presentation, movement, dyad exercises, self-exploration, as well as in-class demonstrations and practice with each other.

This is a continuing education offering intended for health care professionals, including psychologists, counselors, psychotherapists, nurses, massage therapists and other body workers. Enrollment is limited. If you would like to register, please contact the Center at (515) 274-4006 or info@dmpcc.org.

Sixth Annual Luncheon Women Helping Women

Speaker: Rekha Basu, Des Moines Register columnist
Topic: "Taking Heat and Making Peace With It"
Date: Friday, March 12, 2004
Time: 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Location: Hotel Fort Des Moines, Grand Ballroom
 10th and Walnut, Des Moines

Contact the Center to make your reservations.

Fifty-seven percent of the Center's clients are female. More and more of the women and girls who come to the Center are suffering from trauma related to a current or past experience with abuse. Only through counseling and other support services can these women and girls hope to begin healing and restoring their lives. Since 1999, the Center has sponsored an annual luncheon to raise awareness of these issues and to generate funds to help subsidize our services to low-income women and girls.

Preparing for Marriage

Building a successful marriage is one of the greatest challenges of adult life. Eileen Burtle, M.A., facilitates marriage preparation with couples to increase awareness of their relationship strengths, acknowledge potential areas for growth, and understand important individual and relationship issues identified through their personal life summaries. When there is a second marriage involved, the dynamics of remarriage and stepfamilies are also specifically addressed. The per-session fee is based on a sliding scale and will be determined during the couple's first session. Please call the Center for further information or to make an appointment.

Eileen Burtle, M.A., is a pastoral psychotherapist with a master's degree in human development from St. Mary's University. Eileen also received clinical training at The Menninger Foundation. She is a licensed mental health counselor and a clinical member of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy.



New Staff at the Center

Dr. Jaci Gordon

We are pleased to announce the addition of a licensed mental health counselor to the Center staff. Jaci Gordon, Ph.D., will be working with individuals, couples, and families. Working from a bio-psycho-social-spiritual perspective, she specializes in medical crisis counseling and in helping individuals and their families cope with chronic illness issues. Jaci also has a special interest in helping individuals adjust to grief and loss, and address spiritual issues and concerns.

Dr. Gordon holds a doctoral degree in psychology, with a specialty in health psychology, from Walden University, and master of science degrees in both counseling and health from Drake University. She is a member of the American Association of Christian Counselors and the American Psychological Association.

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is a publication of the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center, an independent, interfaith, not-for-profit organization. For over 30 years, the Center has been providing counseling and educational services to adults, families, adolescents, and children for the purpose of enhancing emotional, spiritual, and relationship health. The Center has satellite offices in West Des Moines, Altoona, Ankeny, and Urbandale.

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