



Masters of Divinity Concentration in Christian Spirituality

Overview: Multi-Semester Course Description and Service/Leadership Component

Description:

The Spirituality Concentration consists in SP-2527 Spiritual Life and Leadership, a service/leadership component, described in #3 below, and 9 additional semester credits of spirituality courses taken at any GTU school. (Integrative Studies and DASD requirements may be used for these additional credits.)

Students in the Spirituality Concentration register for a minimum of three to a maximum of five semesters of SP-2527 Spiritual Life and Leadership. This class meets every semester and is composed of five distinct rotating topics. It serves four purposes: (1) becoming acquainted with a spectrum of classical spiritual disciplines; (2) integrating the students' spiritual life and seminary studies; (3) experiencing in a continuous spiritual guidance group the dynamics and leadership of a group (as opposed to one-to-one) model of spiritual guidance; (4) discussing selected spirituality texts and appropriating them into a contemporary ministry context.

The five course emphases and their primary spiritual practices are:

1. Biblical Prayer (*Lectio Divina*)
2. Silent Prayer in the Company of the Community (Centering Prayer)
3. Introduction to Group Spiritual Companionship (Contemplative Listening)
4. Communal Discernment (Clearness Committee)
5. Integrating Spirituality and Social Structures (Social Discernment Cycle)

Student Expectations:

1. Prior to or concurrent with the student's first semester in SP-2527, meet with the Director of the Program in Christian Spirituality to explore how the course and the Spirituality Concentration can meet the student's needs and interests. Until this interview has occurred, the student will not be considered enrolled in the Spirituality Concentration (though he or she may be enrolled in SP-2527).
2. Each time a student is enrolled in SP-2527, he or she is expected to:

- Actively participate in the group process format for that semester's course, taking leadership roles when appropriate and respecting confidentiality.
 - Read, process and share about the required reading.
 - Honor the covenants established for the group sharing, especially that of confidentiality.
 - Prepare reflection paper(s) based on the readings and the particular course's spiritual practice. (Specific directions given in each course.)
3. During one semester of the student's choosing, he or she completes the service/leadership component. This aspect of the Concentration provides a way to live out the Christian conviction that spirituality is not simply a personal relationship with God, but must ultimately issue in mission. Participants select a substantial service or leadership related to their life and ministry contexts. It may be on or off campus, public or hidden, and stress either leadership or service. Directly ministering with the disadvantaged and/or addressing structural issues which underlie unjust systems are especially encouraged.

Accountability for the service/leadership is as follows:

- Sign up for Action/Reflection group with the Director of the Concentration at the beginning of the semester in which you wish to complete this requirement (it is possible to extend this requirement over more than one semester, but one semester should be selected for the reflection process).
- Participate in an Action/Reflection group with others similarly engaged, which meets three times over a semester. The Action/Reflection group may be taken concurrently with SP-2527, but need not be. It should, however, be done at the same time as the service/leadership. The purposes of the Action/Reflection sessions are:
 1. Communal discernment about selecting an appropriate service/leadership (if desired)
 2. Shared reflection on the relationship of spirituality and service
 3. Communal support for carrying out the chosen leadership/service

Note: Students whose circumstances require (e.g. during a non-local internship) may fulfill the action/reflection group requirement by a 4-6 page reflection paper. Make arrangements with the Director if your circumstances require this adjustment.

Credits and Grading:

The Spiritual Life and Leadership courses carry 1 credit per semester; the service/leadership does not carry credit. Grading is pass/fail only. In order to receive credit for SP-2527, no more than two excused (and NO unexcused) absences may be accumulated per semester. To be considered an excused absence, the student must notify the instructor or small group facilitator in advance of the absence. To complete

the service/leadership component, the action/reflection process must be successfully completed or a reflection paper on the service/leadership be placed in the student's file.

Accommodations:

Students who need special accommodations for reasons of documented disability, please see the instructor at the beginning of the semester so that appropriate adjustments can be made.

The following habits of the SFTS M.Div. program will receive particular attention over the sequence of five semesters:

- Commitment to ongoing spiritual formation and a well-nurtured relationship with God and commitment to fostering that relationship in others. In particular, students commit themselves to each process and to be present to/with each other in a small group context. With entire semesters given to one spiritual practice, students will experience the long term nature of spiritual formation. Through their small group interactions, they will appreciate the variety of responses to the same practice that may arise, and notice how their own responses change over time.

- Knowledge of and respect for the Church of Jesus Christ and its role in God's ecumenical mission; knowledge of, respect for, and intelligent use of its manifold tradition; a sense of how and why theological reasoning has been done in the past, and in the present by others. In particular, students should demonstrate the centrality of spirituality to the life of the Church through the spiritual leadership which they offer both on and off campus. They should articulate with increasing clarity the theological underpinnings of their spirituality and their spiritual leadership. They will become acquainted with several spiritual practices and see the relation to their developing theological perspective.

- Personal integrity, reflecting a healthy sense of self and healthy relations with others, in which one behaves ethically and exercises compassion. In particular, students gradually learn to participate in a spiritual guidance group and to offer appropriate spiritual leadership with respect to sensitive issues which impact the life of the congregation and its members. Students experience the significance of a peer group for spiritual nurture and accountability, and learn and practice pastoral confidentiality.

- Critical awareness of the impact of social, political, economic, and cultural contexts on life and thought; critical awareness in the interpretation of evidence on which historical knowledge is founded. In particular, students will understand the role of structures in maintaining systems of injustice and learn at least one method for assessing these structures and their way of participating in them.

- An ability to ground theology in practical reality; awareness that theoretical reflection builds on practical wisdom and theological propositions must be tested by their consequences for the persons or congregations that hold them. In particular, students learn to offer spiritual

guidance through themselves learning to notice and name their own experience of God and God's activity in the world, and through learning, at a beginning level, the skills of assisting others to notice and name God's activity in their lives. They learn elements of discernment and reflect on criteria from within the Christian tradition for assessing the adequacy of discernment. They practice the skill of articulating the relationship between experience of God (spirituality) and theology.

At the conclusion of this class, students should show concrete development in the following skills:

- **Articulate personal faith and nurture the spiritual life of the congregation.** Students learn a "language" for publicly articulating their spirituality and assist others to do the same.
- **Provide pastoral care and counseling,** in particular through elementary skills in individual and group spiritual guidance.
- **Educate a congregation in the faith,** in particular by competence in spiritual practices and processes that can be used in congregational settings.

Objectives and Forms of Accountability for the Concentration in Christian Spirituality as a Whole:

1. **To become acquainted with a spectrum of classical spiritual disciplines.**
 - a. Participates regularly in at least three of five semesters of SP-2527 Spiritual Life and Leadership, each based in a different spiritual practice.
 - b. Demonstrates the ability to lead these spiritual practices in a group context by assuming a turn at leading the practice under the guidance of a skilled facilitator.
 - c. Begins to transfer the learning beyond the classroom context through using the practices in appropriate settings at seminary, employing them in internships, creating service/leadership projects around them, etc.
 - d. Understands how these practices fit within the Reformed tradition and/or the tradition of the student, through internalizing the required reading and lectures and completing the appropriate reflection papers.
2. **To integrate spiritual life and seminary studies.**
 - a. Situates spiritual formation in the seminary curriculum through completing SP-2527 in the midst of other required and elective seminary courses.
 - b. Balances content-heavy courses with process-oriented formation courses through regular participation in the mid-week spiritual formation group within SP-2527.
 - c. Expands ways of reading texts through learning the spiritual practice called spiritual reading and employing it for the reading assignments in SP-2527.

- d. Offers service and leadership during the time of seminary studies, as an outgrowth of one's spirituality, and reflects on that service/leadership through participating actively in the Action/Reflection group convened for that purpose.
3. **To experience in a continuous spiritual guidance group the dynamics and leadership of a group model of spiritual guidance.**
- a. Participates in three semester-long experiences of small groups with different personalities, styles of leadership and content, reflecting on the dynamics of the group in conversation and reflection papers.
 - b. Receives feedback on group participation and leadership from the group facilitator (comments on papers and orally in group) and from fellow participants (orally in group).
 - c. Experiences leadership of specific practices (*Lectio Divina*, contemplative listening, clearness committee and centering prayer), and receives feedback from facilitator and peers.
 - d. Reflects on service and/or leadership as a part of one's spirituality and supports the service and leadership of others through participating in the
 - e. Reads 1-2 books and/or a selection of articles per class, being accountable for the contents Action/Reflection group.
4. **To discuss selected spirituality texts and appropriate them into a contemporary ministry context.**
- a. through plenary and small group discussion and/or reflection papers. (reading lists vary per class and per year.)