

Words & Spirit Syllabus

This course explores the art of spiritual direction, spiritual discernment through writing. It is designed to support students in a journey of spiritual discernment, and to teach students how they might use this technique in their own ministries. If you enjoy the course I encourage you to pursue further study and opportunities to practice spiritual direction in other forms.

Traditionally, the term spiritual direction has been applied to Christian faith practices, however over the past twenty years or so the term has expanded to include many diverse traditions. In this course we will include world religions and multiple traditions within the rubric of spiritual direction.

The emphasis of the course is on writing, however to help us with learning how to read with an eye to spiritual direction there are four texts, two novels and two collections of essays as well.

The course will have two strands within it:

First, our shared writing and shared reflection upon each other's texts. In general our responses will be based on an adapted gestalt technique, the premise being that spiritual and soul matters are generally interconnected. (I will review more specific guidelines for this reflection within each unit).

Second, our shared reading to trace the place and nature of spirit as conveyed within texts once removed from the class. Unlike our shared writing and reflection on personal texts, the novels and essays are beyond the bounds of our intimate circle. We don't "know" the authors as we will come to know each other. That distance allows this strand of the class to focus more directly on techniques for spiritual discernment within another's text. That is to foster techniques of spiritual direction among us.

Students will be expected to participate in each strand each week. I will provide specific guidelines within the syllabus and within each unit to guide our study.

I am grateful to each one of you for taking the risk of joining this class. Depending upon numbers we will break into small groups for shared writing, and work together as a whole group in the reading strand of the class.

Let us begin to seek the words and way of the spirit together!

Books:

The following are the required texts for the reading portion of the class.

Kate Braestrup *Here If You Need Me*. (New York. Little, Brown and Company, 2007) ISBN 10: 0-316-06630-3

Shusako Endo. *Deep River*. (New York. New Directions Books, 1994) ISBN 0-8112-1289-0

Barbara Kingsolver. *Prodigal Summer*. (New York: Harper/Collins. 2001) ISBN 0-06-095903-7

Syllabus:

This course has two strands within in it. Students are expected to respond 2-3 times within each strand each week.

The first is a writing strand. Each Unit contains different spiritual direction writing exercises, which we will do together each week. Some exercises are stream of consciousness timed writing pieces, others involve a more reflective writing and revision process shared within small groups.

The second is a reading strand. Here the emphasis is on learning read as spiritual directors, finding your inner ear, if you will, and practicing mindful responsiveness in a non-threatening safe setting. We will apply aspects of this strand to our reflections within the writing strand. This strand is designed to help foster skills in spiritual direction.

Unit 1. 2/4/08

Strand 1 Who and what Am I?
Strand 2 Shusaku Endo. Deep River. Chpts. 1-5

Unit 2. 2/11/08

Strand 1 Memory 1
Strand 2 Deep River. Chpts. 6-9

Unit 3 2/25/08

Strand 1 Memory 2
Strand 2 Deep River Chpts. 10-13

Unit 4 3/3/08

Strand 1 Dreams 1
Strand 2 Barbara Kingsolver. Prodigal Summer. 1-6

Unit 5 3/10/08

Strand 1 Dreams 2
Strand 2 Prodigal Summer 7-12

Unit 6 3/17/08

Strand 1 Rebuilding/Renovations
Strand 2 Prodigal Summer 13-18

Unit 7 3/31/08

Strand 1 Love 1
Strand 2 Prodigal Summer 19-24

Unit 8 4/7/08

Strand 1 Love 2
Strand 2 Prodigal Summer 25-31

Unit 9 4/14/08

Strand 1 Encounters with death.
Strand 2 Kate Braestrup. Here If You Need Me. Ch. 1

Unit 10 4/21/08

Strand 1 Encounters with God
Strand 2 Here If You Need Me. Chpts. 2-3

Unit 11 4/28/08

Strand 1 Holding
Strand 2 Here If You Need Me. Chpts. 4-6

Unit 12 5/5/08

Strand 1 Hope and hopelessness
Strand 2 Here If You Need Me. Chpts. 7-8

Unit 13 5/12/08

Strand 1 Fear.
Strand 2 Here If You Need Me. Chpts. 9-12

Unit 14 5/19/08

Strand 1 Where do we go from here
Strand 2 Here If You Need Me. Chpts. 13-18