

SPIR 235: The Art of Spiritual Direction (and Ministries of Accompaniment) Winter Quarter, 2027 William J. Dohar, PhD



COURSE SYLLABUS – Tentative

This course is about spiritual direction as a central ministry in the life of the Church. Spiritual direction is a ‘meeting place’ at many levels: it’s a place for recognizing the mysterious but abiding presence of the Divine; a place of companionship and shared perceptions of God ‘along the way’; a place of prayer, faith-sharing, reconciliation, and a keener awareness of the everyday invitations of God in a person’s life. While spiritual direction is its own ministry, the art of contemplative listening can be practiced in any ministry of accompaniment, making this course a more inclusive one in the practice of presence. While we learn a great deal about this listening presence, SPIR 235 is not a training program for spiritual directors.

Finally, this syllabus is a reliable description of the course, *but it remains tentative and subject to some revision* between now and the start of Winter Quarter, 2027.

GPPM Learning Objectives and SPIR 235:

LO 1: Theological Foundation

Knowledge of the broad intellectual foundation for ministry in the areas of scripture, systematic and contextual theology, and spirituality; and incorporate theological reflection to enrich their ministerial practices across varying contexts.

LO 4 Diversity Fluency

Awareness of and critical engagement with how one's own culture influences ministry, and then to engage in ministries that build the community of Christ and are sensitive to and respectful of all cultures and traditions, and individuals who vary by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and dynamics of wealth, poverty, and power.

All assignments in the course including in-class discussions will be angled toward these learning outcomes.

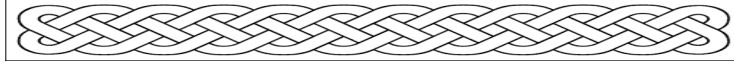
Modules: the course is divided into **four segments or modules**, each with its own set of dates, themes, reading assignments, and written assignments. All modules are 'open' and accessible so that students can anticipate course work or review what's transpired.

Required Texts: Only one book is required for the course: Diane Millis' *Conversation — the Sacred Art: Practicing Presence in an Age of Distraction* (Woodstock, VT, 2013), **ISBN-13:** 978-1594734748. All additional readings and resources will be available in the appropriate module at our Camino course page.

Course Requirements: This course combines the style of a seminar (shared learning) with elements of a practicum. While it's not a how-to in spiritual direction, the course does rely on real experience of *contemplative listening* in order for participants to more fully appreciate the 'artful' aspect of spiritual companionship. To that end, **course participation** is vital for a genuine learning experience. Attendance at all sessions is presumed. This participation will be based, at least in part on **weekly readings** drawn from a variety of theological and spiritual genres. Each student is asked to **facilitate the discussion** of one of the assigned readings ('source leadership'). As a way of giving expression to a developing understanding of contemplative listening, students will write five **reflection papers** (3-page journals) on topics to be determined. A **final project** (to be determined with the class) will encourage a synthesis of major themes and experiences in contemplative listening and ministries of accompaniment.

Course Credit Apportionment

Participation:	25%
Source leadership:	10%
Journals:	40% (8 points each)
Final Project:	25%



Schedule of Meetings

[As this is a draft syllabus, some of the details listed below are subject to change.]

MODULE 1: Learning to Listen

1. Thursday, January 7 – Spiritual Direction as Ministry and Art

Topics: direction and its relationship to ‘ministries of accompaniment’; from hearing to listening; contemplative presence in noisy places.

Assignments:

Donald Mangum, “Hostess” (*The New Yorker*, September 28, 1987)

‘Contemplative Listening’ (*Weavings*)

Susan Phillips, ‘Navigating Depths: Spiritual Direction in a Shallow Culture’ (*Presence*, vol. 21, no. 2): June, 2015.

2. Thursday, January 14 – Conversation as “talking...and waiting to talk.”

Topics: reframing encounters as listening opportunities, to others but also to the self

Assignments:

Diane M. Millis, *Conversation—the Sacred Art* (Parts I, II or pp ix – 61)

Margaret Guenther, ‘Midwife to the Soul’ from *The Art of Spiritual Direction*

MODULE 2: History and Theology of Spiritual Direction

3. Thursday, January 21 – Spiritual Direction and the Christian Tradition

Topics: spiritual direction as natural outgrowth of spiritual companionship; the ‘Anam Cara’ in Irish tradition; models and voices of spiritual direction in Catholic history.

Assignments:

‘Images and Models of the Spiritual Director’ (from *Writings on Spiritual Direction by Great Christian Masters*), ed. Jerome M. Neufelder & Mary Coelho (pp 16-34).

Margaret Guenther, ‘Welcoming the Strangers,’ from *The Art of Spiritual Direction*

4. Thursday, January 28 – The Art & Practice of Spiritual Direction

Topics: spiritual direction as charism; 'who is a spiritual director?' cultivating contemplative awareness; 'stereophonic listening: the other and the self'

Assignments:

Janet Ruffing, 'Panning for Gold: Attending to Theological Themes in Spiritual Direction' (from *Spiritual Direction: Beyond the Beginnings*): 57-94

Diane Millis, 'Gateways for Conversation' (Part 2, *Conversation*, pp 25-62)

Handouts:

Learning to Listen ("Slow, Silent, and Stupid")
Cultivating Contemplative Listening

MODULE 3: The Experience of Spiritual Direction and Accompaniment

5. Thursday, February 4 – Walking with Others, Listening for God

Topics: listening and presence as conscious choices; prayer in accompaniment

Assignments:

View: 'Buck' (available on Prime Video and other streaming services)

Diane Millis, 'Practicing the Sacred Art of Conversation,' (Part III, *Conversation*, pp 63-109).

6. Thursday, February 11 – Discernment and Listening

Topics: 'everything's discernment'; cultivating response more than reaction in listening

Assignments:

Listen to: Tara Brach, 'A Heart that is Ready for Anything' (YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzjW3tJvml&t=36s>)

'Eight Principles of Discernment' (handout)

Thomas Hart, 'Establishing an Orientation' (from *The Art of Christian Listening*): 16-25

MODULE 4: Growth and Transformation in the Listener

7. Thursday, February 18 – Personal Growth in Direction and Accompaniment

-paying attention and the inevitability of revelation

Topics: 'the director directed; a spirituality for spiritual direction and accompaniment'

Assignments:

James Finley, 'The True Self in Religious Searching,' *Merton's Palace of Nowhere*, pp 61-85.

Thomas Hart, 'The Helper as Sacrament' (this article is found with the same author's 'Establishing an Orientation' from last week's assignments)

8. Thursday, February 25 – Prayer and Spiritual Accompaniment

Topics: from words to silent presence; cultivating inner freedom in presence

Assignments:

Joseph Driskill, 'Prayer and Spiritual Direction'

Mary Kate Morse, 'The Art of Asking Spiritual Questions: Noticing the Duck'

9. Thursday, March 4 – Listening and Accompaniment in Group Settings

Topics: intentional sharing and contemplative listening: the opportunities and challenges in parish and other settings

Assignments:

View: Centering Prayer: the Spirituality of Restorative Justice (Ray Leonardini);
YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mf1MtnK7iOg>

Read: Rose Mary Dougherty, 'The Practice of Group Spiritual Direction' (from *Group Spiritual Direction*): 35-55

10. Thursday, March 11 – Spiritual Direction: the Church's Best-Kept Secret

Topics: practicing and sharing skills; creating listening groups in various settings

Assignments:

Matthew Halbach, 'Going Out to the Peripheries: Accompanying the 'Nones'' (US Conference of Catholic Bishops)

Carol Gratton, 'Challenges and Practices for Today's Spiritual Guides'

'Ethical Guidelines in Spiritual Direction'