

## **The Studion School for Spiritual Direction**

Dear friend,

This letter is intended to introduce you to The Studion, a new school for the training of spiritual directors. The Studion launched its first cohort in the fall of 2016 and is preparing to launch a second cohort in October 2018. The intention of this school is to be trans-denominational, serving adult learners from a wide range of Christian backgrounds. We are affiliated with The King's University, Edmonton, Alberta, under its certificate programs.

The Studion is a two-year, part-time course. During the two years, participants will:

- receive spiritual direction (30 hrs)
- complete practicum work in offering spiritual direction (40 hrs)
- receive supervision during their practicum work (10 hours)
- write and discuss 10 theological reflection papers
- write and present reviews on spiritual classics
- participate in sessionals and workshops led by competent, professional instructors
- engage in a series of silent retreats following the themes of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises (10 days)
- keep and maintain a journal for prayer review and reflection on personal experience and spiritual formation

Participants stay on site for a live-in experience throughout the program's eight modules, which are divided into full week sessions (Sunday to Friday) and split modules (Sunday to Tuesday). Our host facility is Star of the North Retreat Centre in St. Albert, Alberta.

Founders and facilitators Heather Cowie and Ron Klok have served in ministry in the Christian Reformed Church in Calgary and Edmonton for almost 40 years, combined, and have been practicing spiritual direction and leading silent retreats since 2005. Currently Heather is completing a D. Min. in spiritual formation and Ron is completing a degree in pastoral psychology and counselling. Shelly King is a trained spiritual director with experience in adult education, who also taught in the Encounter program for spiritual direction training in London, England.

We are humbled, grateful and hopeful about this new venture.

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**Fuel for the Heart - Food for the Soul**

## The Studion School for Spiritual Direction

Following is a brief description of the three main themes of training at The Studion:

### I. Knowing God and Self: the spiritual formation of the spiritual director

We understand “spiritual formation” to be the cultivation of one’s attentiveness and responsiveness to the love and leading of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit).

The spiritual formation of participants includes extensive engagement in silent retreats and receiving spiritual direction and supervision. Participants will be asked to keep a journal or other record as a means of reflection on their prayer life and their points of spiritual growth and insight. They will track their experience through the duration they are enrolled in the school.

Participants will write papers, discuss and reflect together on some of the main theological themes of Christianity: creation, fall, redemption, sin, suffering, forgiveness, grace, God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, community. The point of these papers is to integrate these theological themes into one’s personal experience and to articulate how these themes find their way into the work of spiritual direction.

The point of knowing oneself in the Christian spiritual tradition is to own oneself as a human person who is both sinner and saint. This must become more than a theoretical knowledge but rather an intimate ownership of the scandal of our own humanity which is the gateway to both humility and wisdom. It is out of this wisdom and humility that a spiritual director functions best.

The end goal is that a person will practice spiritual direction with a deep ownership and awareness of their own humanity, how God has been and is with them in their humanity, and how God has shaped them for this particular ministry.

#### **Sessionals and aspects of training that address this category of learning include:**

- Knowing God, Self and the Tradition
- Sharing Sacred Stories
- Introduction to the Enneagram
- Gifts of the Spiritual Director
- Themes in Scripture
- Retreat days following the Ignatian Exercises
- Receiving personal spiritual direction
- Day of Contemplation: Justice
- Day of Contemplation: Creation

A distinctive feature of this training will be the amount of silent retreat time (14 days in total) in which participants engage in specific themes for prayer and meet each day with a spiritual director. We believe that it is this experiential engagement in silence, retreats and prayer that will be the most important element to the formational experience we offer.

## **II. Knowing the practice: development and training in specific skills**

Some of the key skills in spiritual direction are also found in the fields of psychotherapy, counselling and other helping professions; for example, empathic listening, “unconditional positive regard,” and appropriate and fitting questions. These skills, developed and practiced within the Christian spiritual tradition and the gifting of the Holy Spirit, bring to the practice of spiritual direction qualities such as presence, wisdom, discernment, compassion, and guidance.

The work of spiritual direction is focused on matters of the heart and soul, an individual’s life in God, and their life of prayer. The concern of spiritual direction is, as authors William J Connolly and William A Barry describe it, the ‘depth dimension’ of all of life, which is God at work in human hearts and souls--- and how people experience and respond to this. A spiritual director is trained to be attentive to this depth dimension of human experience and to discern what is of God and what is not. Training in discernment will touch on areas such as: the discernment of spirits, discerning God’s work and presence in our daily lives, and how we hear and make choices about vocation or calling.

**Sessionals and aspects of training that address this category of learning include:**

- Introduction to Spiritual Direction
- Topics in Spiritual Direction (cultivating contemplative presence, resistance)
- Skills Training (dyads, triads, observation, supervision, self-reflection)
- Discernment I: Ignatian
- Discernment II: The Quakers and Others
- Group Discernment
- Group Direction
- Thematic Scriptures for Prayer and Spiritual Direction
- Supervision and how to prepare for it, including peer supervision
- Professionalism and Ethics
- Self-Care & Professional Development
- Practicum retreat and practicum

## **III. Knowing the tradition: history, theology & themes of spiritual direction**

This part of the training will provide foundational knowledge in:

- 1) the historical context and practice of Christian spiritual direction and spirituality,
- 2) themes that arise in the work of spiritual direction (discernment, fostering a contemplative attitude, resistance, transference and counter-transference, etc.)
- 3) current themes in the relationship between psychology and Christian spirituality

**Sessionals and aspects of training that address this category of learning include:**

- A Taxonomy of Prayer
- Ways of Prayer, Stages of Prayer
- Guided Imagery and Prayer
- Themes in Scripture
- St. John of the Cross and the Dark Night of the Soul
- Theological perspectives on emotion, affectivity and feeling
- Themes in the History of the Care of Souls

- Overview of Christian Spiritual Traditions – Six Streams
- Reading and reporting on Spiritual Classics
- Stages of Faith Development
- Life Transitions
- Grief and Loss
- The Process of Forgiveness
- Suicide Awareness and Understanding
- Issues in Abuse: Emotional, Physical, Sexual
- Dreams and the Spiritual Life
- Psychology and Spirituality: Depression, desolation, and the Dark Night
- Psychology and Spirituality: How do we grow and change?
- Psychology and Spirituality: The relationship between psychology and Christian spirituality
- Psychology and Spirituality: Sexuality and spirituality
- Psychology and Spirituality: Perspectives on imagination

**Spiritual Direction Texts:**

Five introductory texts are used throughout: *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, Barry and Connolly; *Inner Way*, Joseph J. Allen; *Sacred Companions*, David Benner; *Spiritual Direction: Beyond the Beginnings*, Janet Ruffing; *Spiritual Direction: A Practical Introduction*, Sue Pickering. Other topical readings as assigned.

Heather Cowie, Ron Klok and Shelly King serve as the primary facilitators, inviting qualified instructors to facilitate learning in areas that are beyond our competency. We are fortunate to be able to access a number of The King’s University professors as presenters. Our goal is that presenters, at minimum, have a master’s degree (or equivalent) in their field.