

**Spiritual Direction Training**

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How Counsellor Educators foster trainee counsellors' spirituality awareness and competence: current practices and future possibilities.

**A Research Project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Spiritual Directors' Training Programme of Spiritual Growth Ministries.**

“No talking of God”

“I was excited today was the Lord’s birthday  
and I was going home for dinner.  
I masked my emotions  
otherwise they would keep me.  
I have to behave myself today,  
no talking of God  
and of his plans for me  
and the future of the world.  
My family came for me  
. . . I spoke of God’s kindness  
and his plans for the future.  
All too soon the fun had to stop;  
I had to return to the ward on the hill  
with others of my kind.”

(Extract from “Year 2000 on a Section 3,” from “Twisted Mind,” Sue Holt, 2003).

This poem captures the spirit of our age in regards to the value of spirituality in mental health care. This Zeitgeist especially marginalizes Christian Spirituality. How then do Counsellor Educators foster trainee counsellors’ spirituality awareness and competence in an age of Christian spirituality oppression? This project seeks to explore this question as well as the current practices and future possibilities available in fostering spirituality awareness and competence.

**Why this study?**

As a beginning counsellor the implicit message I heard over and over again was that it was dangerous to bring spirituality into the counselling room. For some reason there seemed to be a fear of the spiritual, especially Christian spirituality. Fostering spirituality, religious values or practices was deemed to be promoting unhelpful practices and also inviting the client to pander to useless spiritual ideologies that were escapist and damaging. These ideas were seen as myths that needed to be busted so that the reality of the natural world could dawn and the clients can then see life as it is: natural, physical and material. It was important for clients to be enlightened about their power to change their feelings, thinking or behaviour and progress in the present as well as determine their future through scientific and empirically tested methods. (This implicit message may have been a reaction against certain expressions of

religious spirituality or spiritualities that promoted belief in a punitive God, extrinsic religiousness, or hyper-rigid religiousness to mention but a few of the excesses).

I encountered this story in lectures, readings and experiences in counselling. However, something within me was resisting, protesting against this dominant story of some forms of Christian spirituality. The world around me seemed to be hungry for more than the material, physical, measurable or quantifiable bounded ways of being in the world. People longed to talk about the spiritual without being judged as pathological or seen as shallow people latching at spirituality as a crutch to lean on. My personal experience was infused with spiritual encounters that did not seem welcome in the counselling room and if they did, they were either psychologized or dismissed or devalued or avoided and left unexplored. As a counsellor I was aware of this emotional and cognitive dissonance. On one hand, I had restricting voices that forbade me to embrace spirituality work in counselling and on the other hand, I found that my world with clients felt sacred, it felt mysterious and sometimes the intangible and unarticulated was present. Clients would express these numinous experiences through tears, joy, words of freedom, insight, new meanings, as seismic or osmotic inner shifts or movements that produced new perspectives and vision for life. Sometimes the room felt heavy with sadness, sorrow, despair, meaninglessness, hopelessness and unrelenting existential questioning. All these seemed to transcend that which is natural but was expressed through the natural. The restlessness of the human soul came to the counselling room searching for meaning, identity, purpose and belonging. I longed to see my clients free and fully alive. The spiritual was in the room.

My journey led me in search of counselling models that were holistic and welcoming of spirituality. I also enrolled in the Spiritual Growth Ministries formation program as I was looking for ways to articulate and make meaning of what seemed to be mysterious in the counselling room and in my life. I desired to expand my possibilities in working with the existential and spiritual realities that emerged. In my search for meaning making on the foster spirituality awareness in practice as a professional counsellor and educator, I discovered I was not the only one restless and in search for meaningful ways of engaging and languaging the sacred encounters in counselling. Informed by an African proverb, "*Wisdom is like a baobab tree; no one individual can embrace it*<sup>1</sup>", I opened up space, through semi structured interviews, to hear voices of other counsellor educators, their stories and experiences with

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<sup>1</sup> Akan and Ewe from Benin, Ghana and Togo Proverb

encountering spirituality and how they foster spirituality awareness as they train professional counsellors. This project has therefore been shaped by “men and women whose arms, hands and fingers are adorned with golden bracelets and diamond rings ...those hands stretch out towards others – to touch, to embrace, to warm, to give support along the path that leads to the Source of life.”<sup>2</sup>

## **Introduction**

Spirituality is an integral part of both the client and counsellor’s personal identities. It is also integral in the counsellors professional identity and ethics. The recent resurgence of interest in spirituality as an important aspect of human well-being has been evidenced in the counselling world by multitudes of research studies and books on counselling and spirituality and as well as books on spirituality in the counselling room. As such counselling education might play an important role in preparing its counselling trainees to be competent and confident in managing spirituality and religious factors in their counselling practice and exploring personal spirituality awareness. Counselling educators (lecturers and supervisors) are therefore charged with the task of training professional counsellors to be spiritually aware competent practitioners. Spirituality in general and Christian spirituality in particular is the main focus of this study.

This study project sought to establish a sense of the current practice of how counselling educators foster and nurture spirituality awareness, spiritual formation and competence development of professional counselling trainees and to generate possibilities for future practice in counselling education.

## **Findings and reflections**

Various ideas and themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews with 13 counsellor educators who identified as Christians and the literature review for this research which will be presented thematically below.

## **Definitions of spirituality**

Christian Spirituality, the focus of this project, had as many definitions as the individuals interviewed. The difficulty of defining spirituality was evident from the onset. However some salient words appeared repeatedly such as spirit, breathe, the animating life force,

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<sup>2</sup> John Mbiti.

transcendence, relational, intangible, religious, sacred, connection, divine words, scriptures, inclusive, gracious, being related to God, others and to creation and practices such as prayer.

Marie McCarthy describes spirituality as the “deepest desire of the human heart for meaning, purpose, and connection.... A deep life lived intentionally in reference for something larger”<sup>3</sup> and David Tacey says it is “an encounter with a source of mystery that transforms us as we come into contact with it,”<sup>4</sup> while Dr Steve Sundborg affirms “Spirituality is one’s lived relationship with mystery.”<sup>5</sup> These very broad and inclusive definitions and descriptions seem to capture the expressions of most of the counsellor educators interviewed. Many experienced humanity as having a hunger for this mystery that was expressed in spiritual quests for meaning, purpose and enduring values to ease the restlessness within. Humanity experiences this restlessness drawing us to connection with ourselves, others, creation, and “...with something larger than, greater, than, beyond our own selves”<sup>6</sup> the mystery I call God. St Augustine aptly stated, “... for You have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in You.”<sup>7</sup>

Spirituality was seen as experiential, practical, informed by values that are evidenced through creativity, growth and development of each fully alive individual as they related with mystery that animates them. To use St. Irenaeus words, the “Glory of God is man fully alive and the life of man is the vision of God. If the revelation of God through creation already brings life to all living beings on the earth, how much more will the manifestation of the Father by the Word bring life to those who see God.”<sup>8</sup> This sums up the Christian spirituality I propose in this research.

The conceptualization of spirituality and religion beg to be distinguished here. In listening to the interviews and reading literature on this area, there was overlap between spirituality and religion and the two concepts seemed to intertwine. For the purpose of this essay, I will therefore borrow David Dollahite’s definition of religion: “a covenant faith community with

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<sup>3</sup> Marie McCarthy, *Spirituality in a Post Modern Era*. P.g 193

<sup>4</sup> David Tracy, *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality*. (2004)

<sup>5</sup> Budd Ellmann, Liz, “Seeking God Everywhere and Always: Ten Trends in Global Spiritual Direction.” *The Way*, 53/2 April 2014: 70–80.

<sup>6</sup> Marie McCarthy, *Spirituality in a post Modern era*, p.194.

<sup>7</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions of St Augustine*, Book 1, Chapter 1. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110101.htm>. (AH IV, 20, 7)

<sup>8</sup> Mons. Philippe Delhaye, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, 9 February 1987, page 6 <https://www.ewtn.com/library/Theology/IRENAEUS.HTM>

teachings and narratives that enhance spirituality and encourage morality.”<sup>9</sup> The concept of spirituality will be used to encompass religion too.

### **A Relational Spirituality**

Spirituality is therefore about existence. Human beings constantly ask existential questions about who they are, what is their purpose, what is the meaning of life, of events, of suffering. The quest for identity and meaning epitomizes the essence of the spiritual quest. Dudley and Helfgott talked of the spiritual dimension as “[encompassing] the need to find satisfactory answers to the meaning of life, illness, and death, as well as seeking a deeper relationship with God, others, and self.”<sup>10</sup> Parker Palmer sees spirituality as a relational way of being which cannot be reduced to objective categories of religion or subjective categories of individual preferences or belief.<sup>11</sup> Thomas D. Carlson, Martin J. Erickson & Angela Seewald-Marquardt suggest that, “all spiritualities center in *relational* experiences with the divine, and/or with humanity, and/or with all of creation. The sacred nature of these relational experiences have the potential to offer us a wealth of hope and understanding as we seek to be genuinely connected with those who seek our help.”<sup>12</sup> They further contend that Spirituality is an ethic or a way of being, that is lived, day by day. It requires continual practice and daily mindfulness that can never be arrived at or gained. Spirituality is seen as “profoundly relational and moral way of being, as the primary purpose centers on our intimate relationship with the Divine (which we take the liberty to call God), and how that relationship invites us into communal relations of respect, mutuality, accountability, compassion, and love with all humanity, and with all creation.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Multi-layered Nature of Spirituality**

From the interviews conducted there seemed to be multi-layered descriptions of Christian spirituality or spiritualities that include firstly the numinous, intangible sense of a divine presence that was inexpressible, secondly experiential descriptions of spirituality that informed the counsellors inner knowing of spirituality, which was seen as implicit and thirdly the articulable ways of explaining spirituality mainly in connection with Christian faith/religious norms, teachings and practices that informed each person’s explicit spirituality.

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<sup>9</sup> (1998, p. 5)

<sup>10</sup> Helfgott (1990, p. 287)

<sup>11</sup> Parker Palmer 1983

<sup>12</sup> Thomas D Carlson, Martin J. Erickson and Angela Seewald-Marquardt, “The Spiritualities of Therapists' Lives.” (2002): 215-236.

<sup>13</sup> Parker Palmer 1983

Fereshteh Ahmadi Lewin also concurs stating that “Spirituality is a multidimensional phenomenon and may be observed or expressed through a variety of behaviors.”<sup>14</sup> Glock and Stark offer a helpful way of seeking to understand the five dimensions of religion, that can be used to explore spirituality and religion awareness<sup>15</sup>. The dimensions are: experiential (spiritual/religious feelings), ritualistic (spiritual/religious practice), ideological (spiritual/religious beliefs), intellectual (spiritual/religious knowledge), and consequential (generalized effects of spirituality/religion in an individual’s life when they observe the experiential, ritualistic, ideological and intellectual dimensions). It is important to note that these dimensions do not capture the mystical dimension of spirituality and there are many who are engaged in spirituality in non-organized ways<sup>16</sup>.

### **Limits to describing spirituality**

Further, in describing spirituality, many writers and some of those interviewed were cautious as they sought to intentionally express what is ineffable in tangible ways. They recognized that mystery cannot be captured in words, for words will always fall short of articulating the mystery that transforms. Solomon is quoted to have said, “Just as you cannot understand the path of the wind or the mystery of a tiny baby growing in its mother’s womb, so you cannot understand the activity of God, who does all things” (Ecclesiastes 11:5). William Stafford an American poet talks about people who seek to find ways of capturing or defining the intuitive as people who “want a wilderness with a map”. In seeking to make meaning of the un-languaged, I hoped through this research that I would not confine the work of God through language or make what can never be captured normative and prescriptive. The purpose in exploring spirituality awareness also joins with psychiatrist and psychotherapist James and Melissa Griffith who appreciate the gift of telling a spiritual story or spiritual stories that are of connection and transcend time and space. When these stories are told and retold, depth is realized, the fullness of the stories significance on clients’ lives becomes an available and sustaining a resource they can draw from.

### **The value of Spirituality in professional counselling practice**

Spiritual stories can inspire hope during hard times, offering a sense of connection and help shape identity<sup>17</sup>. The value of spirituality has been studied and documented. Spirituality is

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<sup>14</sup> Helfgott (1990, p. 287)

<sup>15</sup> Glock and Stark (1965)

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

<sup>17</sup> Griffiths, *Encountering the Sacred in Psychotherapy*

seen to support well-being, health and human development.<sup>18</sup> Interview participants described the value of spirituality in counselling practice and training. They highlighted the transformative power of being present with another, of silent prayers of wisdom, of finding resilience through remembering scriptures to help support them as they worked with difficult client situations. Their personal spirituality values and commitments had been grounding for them. They saw this is valuable too for trainee counsellors' education on spirituality that they sought to foster through discussion, process groups and times of prayer and silence in class exercises.

Robertson outlines the benefits of spirituality as proposed by Everts and Agee,

Spiritual values and beliefs significantly influence all aspects of life, including health, mental health, interpersonal relationships, intrapersonal development, and vocational activities. For example, the authors note that the origin of illness, the pervasive nature of pain, and how healing is accomplished are often attributed to the motivations of a higher power. The sadness, hopelessness and helplessness often present in depression and anxiety may be symptoms of a lack of spirituality in a person's life. Conversely joy, feelings of empowerment, meaning, and hope are the results of spiritual health.<sup>19</sup>

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She continued to note that

“Everts and Agee remind us that relationships can be pervaded by spiritual values that influence attitudes toward birth and child rearing, marriage and divorce, anger and forgiveness, goals and aspirations, and even death. Spirituality profoundly influences self-esteem, locus of control, self-efficacy, identity, sexual orientation, and personality. The authors contend that even vocational pursuits, such as making job decisions, finding purpose in work responsibilities, or the challenges and instability that accompany unemployment have spiritual undertones and motivations. Spirituality contributes to quality of life and life satisfaction ratings, stress and emotional turmoil, and perceptions of life's purpose and meaning. When life is out of balance, the client may turn to counseling. Thus, knowingly or unknowingly, counselors are often working in the realm of the spiritual”.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Stebnicki, 2006; Worthington, 1989.

<sup>19</sup> Everts and Agee (1994) in Robertson,

<sup>20</sup> Robertson, p.29



These sentiments were shared by the counsellor educators interviewed.

### **Challenges of working with Spirituality in Counselling**

- **Dualistic ways of thinking about spirituality**

Many of those interviewed pushed against the dualistic ways of thinking that separated spirituality from the rest of life. Many interviewed expressed that there was a dominant discourse in the counselling world that limited the use of spirituality in the counselling room. It was noted in the interviews that this separation of spirituality from the rest of life was possibly a product of the Enlightenment and modernistic era where ways of knowing that were not rational and empirical were shunned or side-lined. Yet, in post modernism the search of meaning and hunger for spiritual connection was becoming evidenced in counselling as a cry of the heart. The challenge however is, as one American study noted “Approximately 50% of health professionals describe themselves as agnostic or atheist, compared with around 3% of the American public.”<sup>21</sup> In addition, there is a long history of antagonism between psychology and religion, a history that can be traced to fundamental differences between science and religion. It is important, therefore, that health researchers and health service providers not allow such barriers to limit their understanding of the crucial contributory roles of religion and spirituality in physical and mental health.”<sup>22</sup> This scenario is not just exclusive to America but replayed in many other post Christian contexts. Richard Foster observed “the distinction between priest and psychologist and physician is of recent vintage. Before, the physician of the body, the mind and the spirit were the same person. The ancient Hebrews, in particular, saw persons as a unity, and for them it would be unthinkable to minister to the body without ministering to the spirit and vice-versa.”<sup>23</sup> This holistic ways of dealing with spirituality as part of the whole is important in promoting wellbeing.

- **Oppression of clients’ God stories**

Counsellors who have not understood the importance of spirituality as an integral part of holistic wellbeing may unintentionally create oppressive spaces for clients due to their limited ideas on the efficacy of spirituality conversations or fear of dealing with spirituality concerns or matters. Melissa Griffith says, “If we consider this unspoken censoring as a form of professional oppression, though usually inadvertent, then we may see not only how we

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<sup>21</sup> Thoresen 1999

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*

<sup>23</sup> Richard Foster, 1992, p. 217.

participate in oppressing but how we can participate in freeing our conversations. It is therapists' certainty that oppresses and constrains opportunities to hear the story as the client experiences it". She continues to state, "If discourse is, as Bakhtin (1981) says, basically political, if story is made from many voices competing for space, then power is having space in the discourse. Justice, then, is when clients can tell their stories as they experience them, the only just censorship being that of protecting others from harm".<sup>24</sup>

She describes the two constraints that limit clients from sharing their personal God stories experience. These are *proscriptive constraints*—that say 'this God-talk is not to be spoken of here', and by *prescriptive constraints*—that 'God can and should be spoken of here, but only in a certain way'. "The secular psychotherapy culture may influence a therapist to impose proscriptive constraints inadvertently, while the religious counseling culture may influence a therapist to impose prescriptive constraints inadvertently".<sup>25</sup>

Griffith challenges counsellors to resist cultural forces that oppress spirituality dialogues by letting go of a knowing, certainty stance and cultivating curiosity, wonder and creativity. She calls this 'moving from certainty to wonder'. She highlights four areas where this movement would be helpful. These certainty commitments to move away from are, "I know what God is like for you because I know your religious denomination; I know what God is like for you because I know what your language about God means; I know what God is like for you because your image of God is a reflection of your early attachment figures; I know what God is like and you need to know God as I do."<sup>26</sup>

Moving from certainty to wonder helps counsellors increase the possibilities for clients' intimacy with God in the counselling sessions as the clients shares their stories in a space of openness without feeling limited, labelled or imposed on. Space is opened for creativity and mystery in this kind of relational encounter. This space of openness is depicted in the name, character and nature of God. In Exodus 3:13-14 Moses asked God his name. God said to Moses, "I am who I am" also translated "I will be what I will be" symbolizing both mystery and movement.<sup>27</sup> Peter Gubi in agreement asserts that, "all spiritual journeying is existential and phenomenological in the experiencing as the Accompanee attempts 'to discern God's

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<sup>24</sup> Melissa Griffith p.124

<sup>25</sup> Ibid p. 126

<sup>26</sup> Melissa Griffith p.126-135

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

path' (Merton 1960), which makes it a misnomer to consider a leadership role in the other's encounter with sacred mystery."<sup>28</sup> In this I–Thou relationship<sup>29</sup> of openness, curiosity and wonder, the encounter is primarily focused on the client, and the role of the facilitator or counsellor is mostly to offer four attributes. These attributes that help in facilitating an encounter of relational depth are counsellor's psychological contact through presence, empathy, unconditional positive-regard and congruence.<sup>30</sup>

- **Limited Training on how to work with Spirituality in Counselling**

The interview process revealed that most counselling educators had little or no formal training on how to incorporate spirituality in counselling practice and even less on how to educate others on fostering client's spirituality. Many had learnt how to deal with spirituality and religious issues intuitively, experientially and by gleaning information from varied informal sources. As a result most counselling educators foster trainee counsellors' spirituality awareness through their own organic and pragmatic ways shaped by their theories of change and their value of spirituality.

Some of the ways spirituality was fostered was through group processes, contemplation groups, prayer, practical community service through the counselling practicum and placement, journal keeping, observing nature and reflecting on what has been seen, relaxation exercises, creative ways of expressing themselves through art, listening to ambient music, quiet days, reflecting on scripture, conversation on spiritual challenges and question, as well as formal classes on integration of theology for counsellors.

However there were ethical concerns and epistemological challenges that were constantly encountered in their teaching practices. As students came from different faith traditions and spiritualities, they brought to class a myriad of ideas that were strongly held. Some students had experienced spiritual abuse, others were concerned that their kind of spirituality was not promoted enough, other students held a broad spirituality and worried they would be confined and misunderstood, while others students felt like they would be compromising their faith if they could not talk about God or engage in evangelistic conversations as counsellors. With so many competing interests, concerns and worries, the lecturers find themselves in a sensitive

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<sup>28</sup> Peter Gubi p.31

<sup>29</sup> Buber 2004

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.32

context where bridging the differences is an intricate task to be handled careful so as not to introduce power differentials.

Peter Madsen Gubi noting the ethical challenges of working with spirituality stated, "Whatever happens within the encounter has to be underpinned with ethical awareness, based on the principles of fidelity (honouring the trust placed in the relationship), autonomy (honouring the Other's capacity to make decisions that are trustworthy), beneficence (promoting the well-being of the Other), non-maleficence (avoiding harm to the Other), justice (offering a fair service and parity of experience) and self-respect (a commitment to self-care and to maintaining a sufficient level of competence to be with the Other in the most effective way possible)." As counsellors work with spirituality and religious issues it is important they are aware of the power differentials that could impact their work and make commitments not to have an imposing stance or presume to know what is right and best for the other. Training in this area is important in building counsellors' capacity to work effectively with different people and dimensions of life including spirituality. Spiritual direction and formation training can offer some valuable resources and guidance to counsellor educators as they foster trainees' spirituality awareness and competence.

### **Spiritual direction**

Only three counsellor educators interviewed had experienced spiritual direction. Two had a positive experience and the other's experiences left the counselling educator feeling that every spiritual director needs to learn some deep listening skills that facilitate relational depth. The others expressed a desire for further training in spirituality awareness and how to effectively foster it in their counselling and teaching practices. Few of them recommended spiritual direction to the students and sometimes the difference between spiritual direction and counselling was difficult to substantiate in their view. That withstanding they all said Spiritual direction has gifts to offer counselling and vice versa.

While counselling and spiritual direction may be seen to overlap they are distinct professions with certain distinguishing features. Eugene Peterson describes the differences "Spiritual theology has to do with living the Christian life instead of thinking about it.... The counseling movement, even within the church, became heavily psychologized and became almost exclusively therapeutic, so what people were dealing with were problems. If you had a problem you went to a counselor. But spiritual direction in a sense doesn't begin with a

problem. Spiritual direction deals much more out of health and an identity of Christian holiness, so I think it's an obvious response to the failure to transcend."<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, Peter Madsen Gubi argues that “philosophically, all counselling can be regarded as prayer.” This is “particularly so when working at relational depth; that prayer plays an important part in maintaining many mainstream counsellors' well-being and, with considered ethical awareness, prayer can be integrated ethically into counselling when working with people of faith.”<sup>32</sup> He views prayer as a space in the counselling is relationship, that is “characterised by good levels of psychological contact, empathic attunement, acceptance and appropriate, facilitative ‘realness’. This enables aspects of relationship with others, and with God, to unfold, be explored relationally, and to heal...”<sup>33</sup>

Counselling can therefore be seen as a wholistic human activity in which spirituality has an integral place that is expressed through prayer whether implicitly or explicitly. Pritchard sums this aptly, “Counselling is a human activity. Humans are psycho-sexual-spiritual-physical beings so counselling is a psycho-sexual-spiritual-physical activity.”<sup>34</sup>

Spiritual direction and spiritual formation training can help counsellors be sensitive to the movement of God in their own lives and also notice the work of God in their clients' lives. James Keegan says, "Spiritual direction is the contemplative practice of helping another person or group to awaken to the mystery called God in all of life, and to respond to that discovery in a growing relationship of freedom and commitment."<sup>35</sup> This kind of relational engagement can provide “space in which the Client's/Accompanee's experiencing and narrative can be encountered, which may facilitate growth and change; meaning can be made, struggle experienced, discernment elucidated and self-awareness developed.”<sup>36</sup> This encounter is most profound when there is a deep spiritual and psychological meeting at relational depth. Relational depth is described as, “a feeling of profound contact and engagement with another, in which the therapists experienced high levels of empathy, acceptance and transparency towards their clients, and experienced their clients as

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<sup>31</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, Excerpted from a 1995 interview. Evangelical, Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

<sup>32</sup> Peter Gubi, (2008). *Prayer in counselling and psychotherapy: Exploring a hidden meaningful dimension*.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Gubi, (2015). *Spiritual Accompaniment and Counselling: Journeying with psyche and soul* (p. 38).

<sup>34</sup> Andrew Pritchard, Personal communication. (June 15<sup>th</sup> 2016)

<sup>35</sup> James Keegan, SJ, Roman Catholic, USA, on behalf of the 2005 Coordinating Council of Spiritual Directors International

<sup>36</sup> Peter Gubi, (2015, p.7)

acknowledging their empathy and acceptance in a genuine way.”<sup>37</sup> This is the point at which mystery becomes present and tangible in the lives of the client and counsellor. Spiritual direction is a process of accompanying people on a spiritual journey and helping them grow closer to God (or the sacred, the holy, or a higher power). Spiritual direction helps people learn how to live in peace, with compassion, promoting justice, and as humble servants of that which lies beyond all names.

The counsellor educator can help foster trainees spirituality awareness through offering facilitative processes<sup>38</sup> that establish psychological contact with the other through their presence, extend empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence that lead to deepening relational encounter in an I–Thou relationship. This can be done in groups, individually, or in teaching sessions where spiritual disciplines of silence, prayer, solitude, scripture meditation among others help the counsellor educator foster these facilitative conditions. Ultimately six marks authentic spirituality as noted by McCarthy’s are nurtured, these include, contemplative awareness, effective action in the world, community, a disposition of openness, non-dualistic thinking and action and discernment.

## **Conclusion**

This research has been an exploration of the current practices of counsellor educators as they foster spirituality awareness and competence of training counsellors. The research has also discussed future possibilities of training practices that welcome integration of spirituality awareness. The focus has been on a broad Christian spirituality that has been represented by those who have generously and graciously offered their time, rich experiences and reflections.

I hope that the language I uses is not one that is separatist. I found it hard to represent the ideas of spirituality as all of life and explicit narratives that engender life. I desired that both be represented. I see counselling as a sacred process. In fact many times I have described counselling as a prayer process where I engage another in intercessory love.

I want my clients to be able to tell spiritual stories. My hope is that as a counselling educator I can foster this openness when training students and become conscious not to promote a

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<sup>37</sup> Mearns and Cooper and Carl Rogers, Six Necessary and Sufficient Conditions

<sup>38</sup> Carl Rogers, six necessary and sufficient conditions

dualistic split between the sacred and spiritual. With this stance I can welcome all conversations as valuable and meaning making. I hold an emotional posture that is hospitable and welcomes people to bring their pain in lament, pleas, and petitions with the desire to find hope, connection and perspective. I desire that these conversations become life giving, significant movements in their internal landscape and bring hope in the present and for the future. Together with the Griffiths I long that, “Our therapeutic conversations are sacred encounters.”<sup>39</sup> I resonate with the words of Charles Waldegrave of the Family Centre in Lower Hutt who aptly observes, “Ah, Well, life is a prayer, isn’t it? Sometimes, if it is culturally appropriate we speak it together and sometimes not.”

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<sup>39</sup> Griffiths, p. vii

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