



# GPC

## *Gestalt Pastoral Care*

### **Gestalt Pastoral Care: What in the world is it?**

Lots of people who hear of GPC ask me this question! Most want a short answer. I usually say something like, “it’s a combination of Gestalt, spiritual companionship and Christian healing prayer.”

An answer for GPC insiders takes a little longer.

Nearly forty years ago GPC was founded out of a dawning awareness that the Christian tradition of healing ministry could be combined with the wisdom of Gestalt. Starting with a basic commitment to healing prayer, and excitement about the holistic Gestalt approach, we learned together, bit by bit, how a synthesis of the two might work.

Right away it was clear that we were different from most other pastoral ministries in that we were holistic. That is, we knew that when we sit with someone in need of healing we mustn’t simply focus on matters that might be labeled “spiritual.” We knew that spirit is integrally twined with emotions and body awareness and social context. We knew that each person’s growth trajectory is dazzlingly unique, and involves every level of being.

Over the years, it was natural that GPC was embraced by therapists and social workers and others with psychotherapeutic tools. GPC was enriched by their wisdom and training and experience. Equally, pastors and others engaged in healing ministry have brought their theological education, pastoral skills and expertise in spiritual direction to the table.

So something quite new was born: a real collaboration and sharing of skills from both ministers and spiritual directors on the one hand, and psychotherapists and social workers on the other. We are still learning from each other, and we are better for it.



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The way of GPC has always been to weave increasingly skilled Gestalt growth work with a theologically nuanced ministry of healing.

Our present challenge is to hold together this sometimes disconcerting blend of ministry and psychotherapy. It is not simple to define us: we are neither a spiritual technique that employs a little gestalt, nor are we therapists who add a little prayer. GPC is a new hybrid that can't be put into previous categories.

All of this is to say that we in the GPC community are still growing into our identity. In a way we continue to be brand new. But here is what's clear to me: *I believe that our still-in-process hybrid enables a new and holistic and increasingly nuanced expression of the healing ministry of Jesus.*

Whatever our education or training or expertise, we GPC ministers are in ministry. I believe that ministry is our basic identity, the basis of our commitment, and our reason for being.

-Rev. Tilda Norberg  
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