

The Center for Spiritual Formation The Ministry of Spiritual Direction

Year 1 Session The Gift of Suffering

with Rev. Dr. Deborah Heisley-Cato and Rev. Jan Hughes

Saturday, May 9, 2026

How does suffering become an invitation in the work of spiritual direction?

The class will explore how suffering often produces a crisis (theological, existential, relational, etc.) which leads one into a spiritual direction experience. Spiritual practices that are life giving before a crisis can be empty post crisis. Working through one's theology of suffering is critical to the art and practice of spiritual direction. This is important for the spiritual director personally, as well as their guiding of the unfolding of pain experienced by the directee.

In Preparation for the Friday evening Common Reading

As highlighted on your Reading List, there is a Common Reading discussion for the May session, based on the book "Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith" by Henri Nouwen.

Please reflect on the following question and prepare a written response in light of your own reading and experience. Responses should aim to be a couple of paragraphs in length. Bring your response to Friday evening's group session and be prepared to discuss.

"Almost anything that regularly asks us to slow down and order our time, desires, and thoughts to counteract selfishness, impulsiveness, or hurried foggy of mind can be a spiritual discipline" (pp. xv-xvi). According to this definition, what in your life works as spiritual discipline? What doesn't work as well?

In Preparation for the Saturday Class Session

There is no specific work or reading to be done prior to the session.

Simply reflect on times that you may have experienced a period of suffering in your life. How has that experience informed how you might deal with suffering once again or how you can walk alongside someone who is experiencing a time of suffering.