

The Center for Spiritual Formation The Ministry of Spiritual Direction

Year 1

Past, Present, Future:

A History of Spiritual Direction

with Rev. Dr. Russell Hart

Saturday, December 13, 2025

How has Spiritual Direction been a lived experience throughout the centuries?

The class will explore key historical influences in spiritual direction, how they inform contemporary spiritual direction practices, and inform our own ways of being and doing as spiritual directors.

In Preparation for the Class Session

The movie “Dead Man Walking” will be part of a discussion during the session on the History of SD. This movie can be difficult, and perhaps triggering, for some people to watch. Should you feel this may be the case for you, you are not required to watch the movie. The movie is an example of how spiritual directors are sometimes called into uncomfortable places.

Dead Man Walking

1995, starring Susan Sarandon and Sean Penn

This movie is available for streaming and rental online at places such as Amazon Prime and Hulu. It may be available on other sites as well. If you have difficulty finding a way to watch the movie, please contact Chuck Kaufmann.

Looking Through Spiritual Direction “Glasses”

In “Dead Man Walking,” a film based on Sister Helen Prejean’s best-selling book of the same name, Matthew Poncelet is the convicted killer of two teenage lovers, is preparing to end his life on death row. In response to his letter, Sister Helen visits him and finds herself face to face with a heartless killer who still pleads his innocence. After the date is set for his execution, Poncelet asks her to be his Spiritual Director. She agrees, little anticipating the struggle that will follow.

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As you watch, consider the following:

Consider Friedrich Wulf's four main tasks of the Spiritual Director, and watch for clues as Sister Helen seeks to:

1. Help Matthew to find self-knowledge;
2. Help him to find self-acceptance;
3. Help him to find ego-detachment;
4. Help him to discern the actual will of God.