



HANDBOOK FOR
SPIRITUAL FORMATION

2010

During your time at the West Indies School of Theology (WIST), alongside your practical training and your academic studies, we will encourage you to develop and nurture your relationship with God. Here at school, we consider the development of your spiritual character to be a priority, and we want you to make it a priority also.

At a theological training institution such as WIST, it can happen that students place all their emphasis on academic learning and somehow assume that a growing knowledge of the Christian faith will automatically result in a growing intimacy with the Lord. Yet, sadly, it is possible to have extensive knowledge of Christian beliefs and values, to know the theories and the practices and yet not be a spiritual person, encountering God and responding to him with growing intimacy and devotion.

Of course, there is no dispute that academic training is fundamentally important. At WIST, we want to train you to be diligent in your studies, to become theologically competent, and to use your new found knowledge in a mature and wise way. Without knowledge of Christian belief and practice, we cannot progress in our spiritual lives.

At WIST, we aim to attain academic excellence; we provide varied and exceptional opportunities for the identification and honing of spiritual gifts to be used in Christian ministry. But alongside these, we desire that you will encounter God in a way that will transform your life, so that this divine encounter will be expressed in your attitudes, lifestyle and behaviour.

Your time here may well make you a superb theologian, but that is not enough. We want to graduate superb theologians who have learned how to nurture their spirituality and who have a growing and life changing relationship with God. Ultimately, we want to see Christ formed in our graduates, living through them and touching the world. Our purpose is to equip our students to be biblically-based servant leaders.

Spirituality

The question we must now ask is what is spirituality? Spirituality has to do with our life of faith. It concerns our relationship with God and includes the means whereby we nurture and develop that relationship. In thinking about our own spirituality, we could reflect on the things which motivate us to draw near to God and deepen our experience of God. We could consider what sustains our relationship with him and how this relationship transforms our life.

Dettoni defines spiritual formation as “an intentional, multifaceted process which promotes the transformation by which Christ is formed in us so that we can become His continually maturing disciples.” Blaising emphasizes this process is the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer and is possible only through the individual’s cooperation with God. Furthermore, the New Testament word for spiritual (pneumatika) suggests that spirituality is to be defined as a life lived in complete submission to the Spirit of God resulting in a certain lifestyle inclusive of the fruit of the Spirit.

In the context of the Pentecostal tradition, we consider that a student who is being spiritually formed will have had an opportunity to experience the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and prayer and fasting, who would be growing in Christ-likeness, developing spiritual sensitivity, a sense of accountability, and a balanced life.

Opportunities for Spiritual Growth at WIST

Alongside academic studies and practical training, WIST has incorporated into the timetable a range of opportunities designed specifically to encourage spiritual formation among our students. Of course, it is understood that simply attending a weekly service or turning up to a prayer meeting will not automatically result in spiritual maturity. Sadly, it is possible for a student to go through his or her time at school, attending every prayer meeting and all services offered, and yet still that person’s conduct and character are inconsistent with Christ-likeness and Christian maturity. What WIST seeks to do is to provide the conditions in which it is possible for growth and maturity to occur.

The opportunities offered are simply human activities which Christian people down through the centuries have found create a setting for God to work. They are invitations to you to place yourself before God so that you might receive his love and blessing. They are effective avenues which can lead you into a personal and intimate encounter with God. In these human activities you will be able to respond to God and find your life continually transformed as he changes you more and more into the likeness of Christ.

In arranging the following opportunities the Director of Student Affairs works closely with the President, administration, and faculty. The goal is to help each student attain the institution's core values of service, commitment, integrity, missions, teamwork and Biblical Christianity in an atmosphere that emphasizes quality and conservative theology and that contributes to the continuing legacy of the institution.

Chapel Service

This is an occasion each week during the semester when the whole school community meets together to fellowship, worship, encourage one another by sharing personal testimonies and prayer and to read and hear God's word. Special guest speakers may be invited to share God's word with those present.

The final responsibility for participation in and the contents of these services rests with the Director of Student Affairs. This Director is also responsible for arranging a speaker each week. Speakers include full and part time staff members, local ministers and leaders of para-church organisations as well as national and international Christian leaders visiting the country.

Prayer Bands

At the beginning of each semester/year students are divided into groups to pray for specific nations of the earth. These student led prayer bands meet for thirty (30) minutes once each week. Sometimes the students give a monetary gift to a missionary on the field.

Mission Trips

WIST places great emphasis on missions and encourages students to participate in the Great Commission through involvement in short-term missionary activities. At least one trip is planned each year to a foreign field in collaboration with the PAWI World Missions Agency. Students are strongly encouraged to participate in this activity. An individual class may plan a local missions' trip as part of their practical course work.

Prayer & Fasting

There is a room located on campus, for the exclusive use of persons who need a quiet place to pray and meditate. Students are requested to keep this room tidy and to remove their empty mugs and glasses when they leave the room. Students should ensure that any books supplied by the school for use in the prayer room are not removed. Students are encouraged to fast and pray on the last Thursday of each month. Those who are available can join together in the prayer room for corporate prayer prior to the evening's chapel. At least one day is set aside each term for corporate prayer and fasting.

Student chapel

Student chapels are conducted twice each week for thirty (30) minutes. During this chapel, students have the opportunity to conduct the sessions. This includes preaching and leading in worship. Attendance to these services should not be minimized because the Holy Spirit is also present to work on, in and through his people at this time.

Student Evangelism

The student council assigns one of its members to head an evangelism group comprised of students. This group conducts evangelistic outreaches annually in different areas.

Fellowship Groups

Each student is designated to a particular Fellowship Group. The group will have a mix of students from Diploma and Bachelor's classes and school courses. Each group is led by a member of staff and they will be assisted by a designated student leader. The groups meet on the third Monday of every month from 6.00-6:30 p.m.

The aim of the fellowship groups is to provide spiritual and social support for students. Staff leaders will be there to support students in times of personal or academic difficulty; and at times will be involved in disciplinary matters involving a student from their group. Contact between a student and their staff leader occurs formally at the monthly meetings, at the times of Student Reviews (see below) and informally over coffee or lunch. A meeting between students and their staff leader can be arranged as needed at any time.

Student Reviews – (Spiritual Advising)

Each student has a review with their staff leader three times a year as follows:

1. Initial review -In mid-end September, the staff leader will check you have settled into school and address any specific issues arising. This will take the form of a brief informal chat.
2. Mid-year review – Students will have a mid-year review during the second week of the January semester when their academic, practical and spiritual progress would be discussed. Prior to this interview, the staff leader will have looked at the student’s marks; Christian Service forms and the ‘Spiritual Reflection’ (see Appendix). This means the time of review can be as informed as possible, any trouble a student may be having can be quickly identified and a solution put in place.
3. End year review – As students close off the school year a time will be made for students to be seen during the final weeks of the second semester where again academic, practical and spiritual development will be discussed.

Spiritual Disciplines

While it is acknowledged that the spiritual disciplines do not equate to spiritual formation, they can play an important role in helping to create an atmosphere for spiritual formation to take place. Students are thus encouraged to personally practice the spiritual disciplines consistent with their own spiritual goals and aspirations: Some common disciplines include (Foster, R. (1998). *Celebration of Discipline*):

Inward Disciplines

- Meditation
- Prayer
- Fasting
- Study

Outward Disciplines

- Simplicity
- Solitude
- Submission
- Service

Corporate Disciplines

- Confession
- Worship
- Guidance
- Celebration

Home Church

Alongside the opportunities described above, the school expects you to maintain strong links with your home church. It is our view that what we offer you as a means to encourage your

spiritual formation will be supplemented by nurture provided by your own church and the opportunities which exist to serve in that church and the wider community.

Overseas students will need to find a local church for the duration of their stay unless they are already linked with a Scholarship church.

All students are required to report their level of involvement monthly via the Christian Service Report.

Internship

All students are required to complete a period of internship as a part of their training. While internships differ depending on the programme in which the student is enrolled, they provide opportunities for students to become involved in some practical aspect of ministry. Diploma level Internship – each student is assigned to a church or para-church ministry where he/she works under the supervision of the local pastor or leader in ministry for a period of three semesters.

Bachelor's level – the students also work along with a local church as they plan, implement and evaluate a ministry project for a period of twelve months.

Graduation requirements

The award of Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees requires students to actively participate in the community worship and prayer. Specifically students are required to attend Chapel and Fellowship Groups and complete the 'Spiritual reflection' if they are to gain any of these awards (see Student handbook). Furthermore, students are required to meet the following spiritual conditions for graduation:

- The student is expected to give evidence of a consistent Christian testimony, a concern for others, and a sincere commitment to Christ such as to qualify the student for Christian leadership.
- The student's cooperation in Christian service, standard of Christian conduct, and attitudes manifested toward fellow students, instructors, and all working with the student, is expected to be such as would commend the Gospel, strengthen the Church, and honour the Lord Jesus Christ.

- A student not meeting this requirement of Christian faith will need special permission from the President and Faculty Committee to graduate. A student may be requested to participate in counselling or be assigned to a Christian mentor before re-applying for graduation.

Potential Obstacles to Spiritual Growth at WIST

Every Christian may experience periods of spiritual dryness and difficulty at some time. From time to time you may feel that God is distant and remote. It may come as a surprise to you that you feel this way while a student at WIST. You may even feel that coming to school has had a detrimental effect on your spiritual life. This may result in you becoming disappointed with your course, your lecturers and possibly even with God. There are reasons for this, some of which are outlined below.

Theological Study

Some of what you read or hear in lectures and discussions may be very new to you. You may struggle with these new concepts. You may even feel that it contradicts what you have been taught in your own church. You may end up questioning your own faith or that of your lecturers and fellow students. Since you have come from different Christian churches you may encounter worship styles that are new and strange to you at WIST. All of this can leave you feeling as if you don't belong here and you may even take steps to isolate yourself from those who hold a different view.

Busyness

Life at WIST is always busy. There are lectures to attend, assignments to write, library books to read, placements to fill and of course on top of all of these there are social events to enjoy. A very full timetable and many extra-curricular activities can mean that you have less time to spend in private devotions. The tiredness associated with busyness may mean that you are less inclined to find time to read and pray.

Stress At certain times during their stay at WIST, students may encounter stress. Assignments and deadlines, new responsibilities, new culture and new people all can contribute to an increasing stress level.

Fear

Many fears arise during your studies at school. You may be afraid of academic work. It may be some time since you last completed an assignment. Conscious of a lack of academic qualifications you may feel a sense of inadequacy or incompetence. You may be fearful that someone may discover your background or find out about your life prior to coming to school.

Loneliness

It is sometimes difficult to make new friends in your early days at WIST. It may not be easy for you to approach someone at break time or to find someone with whom to share a snack. It might appear to you that everyone else already has made friends and so you feel that you could only be intruding.

All of these, while fairly common, can be distressing, especially during your early weeks at school. However students usually find that as the weeks progress, they become better able to discipline their time, they adapt to their new environment, overcome their fears about academic work and make new friends.

For some though, the problems persist and if you should find yourself struggling with some of these issues, or if you have any questions about your spiritual development in general, then you may find it helpful to talk to someone. You should consider approaching your Spiritual Advisor, the Director of Student Affairs, or any member of staff with whom you would feel comfortable talking in confidence.

Other Aids to Spiritual Development

Besides the school activities and your own personal times of prayer and Bible study, there are other aids which may enhance your spiritual life. You are encouraged to take advantage of any and every opportunity to develop your spiritual life.

We trust that your stay at WIST will be one that is rich not only in theoretical and practical areas but your spiritual life will be greatly enhanced as you continue on the lifelong journey of knowing God.

Appendix A

The 'Spiritual Reflection'

Through generations of church history various disciplines have been adopted towards the end of helping people reflect on their life of faith. These include exercises like journaling, guided retreats, structured prayer and meditation. Importantly the point of this is not to get too caught up on the actual spiritual discipline itself as if that was the aim. Instead the discipline is used as a means to understanding the life of faith, finding a means to give expression to the individual's faith and identifying patterns of life that are conducive to drawing near to God.

As part of the spiritual formation at WIST, we encourage students to complete a 'Spiritual Reflection'. This is something that will be presented to, and discussed with, the Fellowship Group leader. The Reflection will need to be completed by the end of the college year and is an integral part of gaining a Diploma or Degree. A Spiritual Reflection will be completed for each year the student is at WIST. Your progress in this activity will be discussed at the mid-year Review.

The form the 'Spiritual Reflection' takes will very much depend on what is helpful for the individual student. For example, students at WIST may write a 'Spiritual Autobiography' in their first year, then a 'Reflection on their preparedness for ministry' during the second year.

For some students a written piece of work like this may not work and some of the suggested alternatives below may be more helpful. In each case the aim is to convey why the activity considered is influential to the student's life of faith.

Some students may prefer a Spiritual Journal Reflection. Some students may already maintain a journal or may wish to begin the habit. While this may be a very personal piece of writing that they would be unhappy to let someone else read, the Spiritual Reflection may be a brief written account on the use of the practice of journaling and areas of spiritual development the student has identified in his/her life.