

WEST INDIES SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

SPIRITUAL FORMATION HANDBOOK

LEADERS GUIDE

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Serving the World

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INTRODUCTION

At a theological training institution such as the West Indies School of Theology (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.

The students' time here may well make them superb theologians, 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 godly servant leaders who will fulfil the great commission. But before we can do so, as spiritual formation fellowship group leaders, we must ensure that we are growing in our spiritual walk with God and are living examples of the love and servant-hood of Christ.

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." Blasing emphasizes that 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.

As a fellowship group leader, we expect that you would also have experienced the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and prayer and fasting. We also expect that you are growing in Christ-likeness, developing spiritual sensitivity, a sense of accountability, and a balanced life, for these do not only apply to students, but to all believers.

Opportunities for Spiritual Growth at WIST

While WIST has incorporated into the timetable a range of opportunities designed specifically to encourage spiritual formation among our students, it is possible for a student to go through school, and display conduct and character, 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 simple human activities which Christian people down through the centuries have found to create a setting for God to work. They are invitations to you to place yourself before God so that you may 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 Vice President, Student Affairs works closely with the President, administration, and faculty. The goal is to help each student attain the institution's core values of Bible-centeredness, excellence, integrity, life-long learning and team work 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 Vice President, Student Affairs. This individual 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. Students are strongly encouraged to participate in missionary work with churches or PAWI districts. An individual class may plan a local missions' trip as part of their practical course work.

Prayer & Fasting

The Maginley chapel is accessible on a daily basis for students who need a quiet place to pray and meditate. Students are requested to make use of this opportunity while encouraging others to spend time with the Lord. Students are encouraged to fast and pray on the last Thursday of each month, the evening of which the chapel session takes the form of an evangelistic outreach. Those who are available can join together in the chapel for corporate prayer prior to the evening's chapel. At least one day is set aside each term for corporate prayer and fasting, and this is usually a student-led activity.



Student Chapel

Student chapel services are conducted twice each week for twenty (20) minutes. During this time, students have the opportunity to conduct the sessions. This includes preaching and leading in worship. Attendance to these services should not be slighted 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 twice annually in different areas.

Fellowship Groups

Fellowship Groups

Students are designated to Fellowship Groups, one of which, you will be responsible for leading. Each group will have a mix of students from Diploma and Bachelor's classes and school courses. You are chosen because we see you as one of the following, a member of faculty, staff, a mature Christian worker or a senior student. The groups meet once per month from 5.50 - 6.10 p.m., preferably during the first week in the month.

The aim of the fellowship groups is to provide spiritual and social support for students. As a leader you are expected to support students in times of personal or academic difficulty; and may at times be involved in disciplinary matters involving a student from your group. You are required as a leader to meet formally at the monthly meetings and at the times of Student Reviews (see below). You are free to arrange a meeting with your students as needed at any time, as you both would agree upon, and as long as it does not conflict with other school activities.



Who should be a Spiritual Formation Fellowship Group Leader?

Those desirous of functioning as Spiritual Formation Fellowship Group Leaders should:

1. Be saved for at least three (3) years.
2. Have a sound knowledge of the Word of God.
3. Be filled with the Holy Spirit according to Acts 2:4.
4. Know the place of prayer, praise, worship and meditation.
5. Be in good standing with their local church. In the event where the leader is a student, he or she should also be in good standing with the institution and fellow students.
6. Be confidential.
7. Have a sound educational background.

Importantly, being a leader in this regard requires time and effort, as contacting and encouraging students to be present at meetings can be sometimes tedious. In the end of it all, however, we pray that the time and efforts dispensed will convert into more spiritually mature Christians

Student Reviews – (Spiritual Advising)

You are required to conduct an individual review with your group members three times during the academic year as follows:

1. Initial review-In mid-end September, as the leader you will check that the student settled into school and address any specific issues arising. This will take the form of a brief informal chat.
2. Mid-year review – You will be required to do a mid-year review during the second week of the January semester when the students' academic, practical and spiritual progress would be discussed. At this interview, you will discuss the student's last semester performance, Christian service involvement, attendance to chapel services 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 suggested.
3. End of year review – As students close off the school year, you should see the students 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

Apart from the opportunities described above, the school expects you to maintain strong links with a 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 become involved 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 or the internship monthly reports.

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. For the first level (Diploma) internship – students are assigned to a church or para-church ministry where they work under the supervision of the local pastor or leader in ministry for a period of three semesters.

The second level (Bachelor) internship – the students also work with a local church as they plan, implement and evaluate innovative ministry projects 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 to qualify for Christian leadership.
- The student's cooperation in Christian service, standard of Christian conduct, along with his/her attitude towards fellow students, instructors, and all who work 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 they read or hear in lectures and discussions may be very new to them. They may struggle with these new concepts. They may even feel that it contradicts what they have been taught in their own church. Students may end up questioning their own faith or that of their lecturers and fellow students. Since they have come from different Christian churches they may encounter worship styles that are new and strange to them at WIST. All of this can leave them feeling as if they don't belong here and they may even take steps to isolate themselves 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 they have less time to spend in private devotions. The tiredness associated with busyness may mean that they 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 their studies at school. They may be afraid of academic work. It may be some time since they last completed an assignment. Conscious of a lack of academic qualifications they may feel a sense of inadequacy or incompetence. Students may be fearful that someone may discover their background or find out about their life prior to coming to school.

Loneliness

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

All of these, while fairly common, can be distressing, especially during their early weeks at school. However students usually find that as time passes, 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 students should find themselves struggling with some of these issues, or if they have any questions about their spiritual development in general, then they may find it helpful to talk to someone. Students should be able to approach you as their Spiritual Advisor; the Vice President, Student Affairs, or any member of staff with whom they would feel comfortable talking in confidence.

Other Aids to Spiritual Development

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

We trust that your assistance as a Spiritual Advisor or Spiritual Formation, Fellowship Group Leader at WIST will be one that is rewarding both for you and your group members. We also pray that you will become closer drawn to God and more disciplined in your spiritual walk as you continue on the lifelong journey of knowing God and making Him known.



APPENDICES



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. Their 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. They 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.



FORMS

The following is a list of the forms that are to be used during your interaction with students as a Spiritual Formation Leader. These forms are available from the Students Affairs Department.

1. Spiritual Formation Initial Review
2. Spiritual Formation Mid-Year Review





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