



caring for three small children, Rebekah took a season of discernment from local church ministry this past January. Participation in the Tending the Soul program during this time was transformative for Rebekah.

Rebekah said, “This program was a spiritual wellspring for me. It provides a glimmer of hope in our horizon of chaos.”

Rebekah continued, “I believe that the area of spiritual formation and creating depth in and around that is going to be essential as the denomination continues to shift. While there is so much uncertainty and flux, having people who are trained at listening, at knowing who they are, how they are grounded in the world, people who are more comfortable with ambiguity are needed to help guide leaders and to continue to be faithful and continue to be leaders when the whole world is crumbling around us.”

Rebekah will be using what she learned in this training to help develop connectional groups among young clergy in her District.

Pastor Kim Krause will be using what she learned in her congregation,

Grace United Methodist Church. Her church is facing financial decline—she is forming a prayer circle to help figure out how to face difficult decisions ahead. She said, “We need to deeply listen to each other when answering the question, ‘How do we continue to share God’s love in our community; how do we make sure Grace UMC is a place of Grace?’”

Sally Buyea, pastor at Ontario Parish said that this program helped her to be more centered in her spiritual walk. Leading several courses at her church and beyond, Sally said, “This program will help me to be a better minister and a better teacher.”

In total, nine individuals had their lives and ministries transformed for the better.

Are you ready to tend to your soul? If so, scan the QR code to learn more.



If you have any questions or are ready to register for the next program, contact Rev. Nancy Dibelius at nancyd@unyumc.org.

The Bridge is a Conference Communications Ministry tool that delivers to local churches news and stories of ministry from around the Upper New York Conference and the world. For more news and stories visit: www.unyumc.org



the Bridge

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Tending to your soul so you can tend to others' souls

By Shannon Hodson

Are you feeling an inkling to become closer to God? Do you feel like your life is like a hamster wheel or are you riddled with anxiety and yearn to feel God's love deep in your soul? Do you feel a draw to help others feel God's presence whether it be friends, family, your congregation, or people in your workplace or community?

If your answer is yes to any of these questions, then you should consider becoming part of the Tending the Soul program training in spiritual direction.

Tending the Soul Format

Spiritual direction, also called spiritual guidance, spiritual formation, or spiritual companionship is about listening to God's voice and being attentive to the movement of the Holy Spirit in your life.

This powerful training is available to clergy and laity, whether you are Methodist or not—it takes place over two years, consisting of six four-day retreats. During the first year, you will learn how to listen to God and during the second year, you will

learn how to distinguish what is of God and what is of the world. This training consists of worship led by Upper New York Assistant Director of Vital Congregations, the Rev. Nancy Dibelius; large group experiential practices by the Rev. Dibelius and the Rev. Dr. Heidi Miller; small group work led by trained leaders; and one-on-one work.

The Tending the Soul experience

The most recent Tending the Soul program in UNY ended in May 2022. Though the program that started in 2019 had brief interruptions due to the COVID pandemic, it was still a transformative experience for all who participated.

The Rev. Dr. Heidi Miller has been leading trainings in spiritual direction for over 20 years. She is passionate about the topic.

She said, "If we say God Is living and active, how do we notice or learn or listen and how does that is happen? How does that play out into how we listen to each other?"

How do we engage and re-enter God's story in such a day as this?"

Dr. Miller answered these questions, "Spiritual Direction/spiritual companionship provides the space where we honor, listen, and discover that spirit is in us all along. It just takes a lot of uncovering."

Small Groups

The small group leaders, the Rev. Tim Phelps and Cris Kerekes, have both previously taken the Tending the Soul program, and were invited by Rev. Dibelius to become small group trainers.

Rev. Phelps had a calm presence radiating from him. He felt called to participate in Tending the Soul when he was serving as a pastor in a local church and as a hospice chaplain.

Rev. Phelps said, "This program was a transformation for me. It's about learning to listen deeply. Clergy life is so active—it can crowd out space for God. This program helped me to carve out space for God...It helped me slow my life and become more aware of God. The rapid pace of our world and all the noise hampers invitations that God is extending to us. In this program, you become able to center yourself and quiet all those distractions."

There is so much uncertainty in the world and our denomination right now, so much anxiety; this really helps individuals to feel centered and gives them extra resources to navigate the journey we are on."

Cris smiled, "Participating in Tending the Soul is the most wonderful thing I've done. It changed my life." It changed Cris' life so much that it inspired her to go to seminary.

Conversing together, Cris and Dr. Miller both agreed that the work of spiritual direction connection can be used in all settings.

Cris said, "Spiritual direction is hospitality of presence of sitting and listening with another to notice where God is present, at work, and moving—to look at what that means in everyday life and how you want to respond to that."

Dr. Miller chimed in, "I really appreciate Margaret Guenther's metaphor, midwife to the soul...giving birth to the soul...we are midwifing the soul of the person and who the person is. Midwifing the God-given reality that we are created in the image of God. It's a connection that offers the space for a whole person to come forth including the spirit...the life-giving pulse of their life to come forth...and that conversation that God is continuing to have with us verbally and nonverbally."

Participant transformation

Tending the Soul transformed all those who participated and helped them feel God's invitation to use their new skills to help people in all settings.

Rebekah Solar serves in the Northern Flow District. At one point serving two local churches in the middle of a global pandemic and

