

Using Formative Spirituality to Develop Self Awareness and Faith with Incarcerated and Adolescent Populations

Carole Ann Riley, Professor, Duquesne University, Elaine Kay Soper, Director of Faculty Development, West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine, US

ABSTRACT

Using qualitative research as formulated by Adrian Van Kaam in the Science of Formative Spirituality, the researchers studied his reflective methodology's impact on incarcerated women volunteering for a formation group and college adolescents (18-19-year-olds) engaged in service learning activity and subsequent reflection. Reflecting on life's experience can take many forms. Two constructs of van Kaam's Formation Science paradigm are adapted for this project, namely, the formation field and the dimensions of the self.

The formation field represents a type of field theory. The dimensions of the self, describe an anthropology of the person. This study adapted these two constructs to investigate if reflection on life experiences using the Science of Formation Science paradigm facilitates faith development and self-awareness.

INTRODUCTION

This paper documents the development and implementation of a faith formation paradigm developed by Adrian Van Kaam (1920-2007) at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, PA, USA.¹ It has been adapted for freshmen and sophomore undergraduates at Duquesne University in the Mary Pappert Music School's service-learning projects and the program's expansion through the West Virginia Institute for Spirituality in Charleston, WV to prisoners at the Alderson Women's Federal Prison in WV, USA. The primary investigator has a fifteen-year history of community engagement/service-learning data, while the outreach to adults at the Federal Prison began eight years ago and is in its second official season of faith formation programs. This study investigates, "if reflection on life experience using the Formative Spirituality paradigm facilitates faith development and self-awareness."

HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

In 1979, Adrian van Kaam began formalizing what would become the Science of Formative Spirituality. As part of his initial group of trainees, the primary investigator had the honor of working with him and later teaching a method of faith formation using a text for group spiritual direction. This approach monitors how the GROUP is led to deeper self-reflection and self-awareness by sharing their personal experiences in a group, with a facilitator who consistently discerned the common theme that emerged from the group. This method of group spiritual

1. Duquesne University. "DU Community Mourns the Rev. Adrian van Kaam, Founder of Formative Spirituality Studies," Last modified November 19, 2007, <http://www.duq.edu/news/du-community-mourns-the-rev-adrian-van-kaam-founder-of-formative-spirituality-studies>.

direction differs from other models in that the individual is not a focus, but a part of a whole. The faith formation process proposed by the Science of Formative Spirituality affirms the uniqueness of the individual as a significant part of the whole, yet the focus is on the whole or communal dimension, what we share as common. This project utilized two constructs of Formation Science; the formation field, and the dimensions of the self.² While these two constructs are the premise for this research, they have been adapted to better meet the language and experiences of the research subjects (see figure 1).

This formation field lists God as the center of the field of formation, the God of your understanding; with the Self; Significant Others, your Heart Others, those who know you so well that they know what you do not say; Roles, whether you are a mother, father, son, daughter, grandparent, aunt, uncle, if you belong to a group like the PTA or a religious affiliation, all your life roles; and World Cultural, your understanding of your culture and world, through media, people, or other means. These are the poles from which directives for living are given and received for the self in formation. The field is dynamic and co-creative so that at all times the human is both giving and receiving form from each situation in which one experiences life.

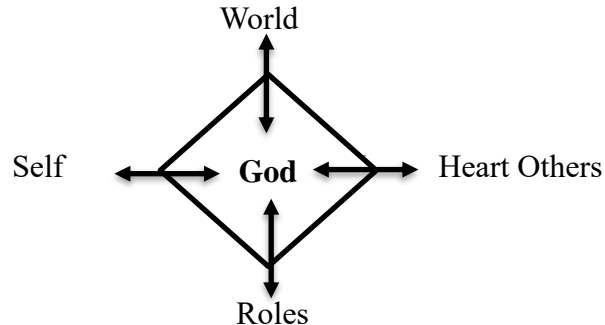


Figure 1 Formation Field

The second construct is the anthropology of the ‘self’ according to Formation Science where the ‘self’ consists of five dimensions. These dimensions invite the person to reflect, using the transcendent mind and will, which are the distinctly human part of us all.³ The functional

2. For further clarification and explanations of the Science of Formative Spirituality consult the series: van Kaam, *Formative Spirituality*. Vol. 1-7. (Pittsburgh, PA: Epiphany Books, 1983-1995); the Series: van Kaam, *Formative Theology*. Vol. 1-4, (Pittsburgh PA: Epiphany Books, 2004-2010); Susan Muto and Adrian van Kaam, *Epiphany Manual on the Art and Discipline of Formation-In-Common*. (Pittsburgh, PA: Epiphany Books, 2004).

3. Adrian van Kaam, “Science of Formation.” In *Fundamental Formation*. Vol. 1. (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 32.

dimension, how we manage our lives, what we are ‘doing’ what can be ‘seen’ is the concrete empirical data of the reflection. It is informed by the vital dimension of our spontaneously bodily reactions (tightened muscles) and our feelings (fear, anger, joy). The socio-historical/cultural dimension is the summation of our unconscious, namely all of the experiences of our life, the ‘givens.’

These dimensions of the self are important for the participants to understand so that they can awaken their transcendent mind and will in reflecting on their roles, cultures, relationships during the service-learning experiences, the ‘life experiences.’ This integration and synthesis informed by experience has the potential to create life-long habits of reflection that are dynamic, imaginative and transformative. These two constructs, which adapted for our research were used to develop the service-learning reflection processes and questions-

SERVICE-LEARNING WITH ADOLESCENTS IN A UNIVERSITY SETTING

The primary investigator used this process with first and second-year university students who were mandated by the university to participate in service-learning. Service-learning is a teaching method in which the students in a community setting use the course content and reflect on their experience as a way to develop citizenship, and further integrate their learning. Now, ‘service-learning’ is named ‘community engagement.’ The students monitored for two decades engaged the community as tutors for children whose parents were incarcerated, as choir members in senior citizen programs, as performers in hospital ‘Live Lobby Music’ programs, as servers in soup kitchens, as assistants in cancer treatment facilities and other supportive and leadership positions. Each student served fifteen hours per semester for a total of thirty hours per academic year. Reflection on each hour of service was an integral part of this method and faith formation; character building and professionalism were expected outcomes of this method of teaching.

In using this process with the undergraduate students, a three-hour orientation to the process is held at the beginning of each semester followed by weekly reflection papers with a specific focus which requires reflection on life experience, synthesizing the work in the field with the children, creative development of the next week’s experience, noting the obstacles and facilitating conditions of the experience. The goal for the undergraduates is the development of an

ongoing habit of reflection informed by social justice principles.⁴

To develop their thoughts, the students had a list of questions from which to choose. Thirteen questions were required reflections (see Table 1). However, they could select any of the other questions for their remaining reflections. A sample of these selective questions is found in Table 2. While reflections varied among students, most of the reflections were very positive. These are a few of the typical comments most often reported. An African American male wrote: “I’ve never experienced spiritual growth through interacting with people. When I saw the residents cry when I sang, I knew I was making a difference in my music.” A 19-year-old female reflected in this way: “Through service-learning reflection, I became aware of the poor person inside myself. I have a lot in common emotionally with some of these kids. I make a difference.” A freshmen male remarked: “I liked service learning because it made me better at living: like sticking to goals, keeping commitments, thinking about other people, plus it was a way to go outside the classroom.” Another student said: “Service-learning is important to me because it helps me to ‘pay my rent’ to the earth. College can be self-serving, and I learned there is more to my teaching career than getting a good grade, people need what I have to offer. I want to pay back.”

SUMMARY OF THE SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAM

As one can see from the thoughtful comments the students made, there was a significant amount of personal growth in the students’ formation and self-awareness. Another outcome of this teaching method was that students often presented with the primary investigator at regional and national professional conferences in their major field of study, namely, music education, education, or biology. The majority of the twelve service-learning courses led by the primary investigator each semester is located in the Mary Pappert School of Music; one course is an Integrated Honors Course, name Piano Seminar, whose enrollment spans all academic majors.

Table 1. Required Service-Learning Questions

Questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Based on your experiences thus far, what does Service Learning mean to you?2. Are the services you perform at your site challenging? Why?3. What are some lessons you learn as a result of performing at your site?
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4. Duquesne University. “Formed by the Spirit: Catholic Social Justice and Peace Initiatives in the Spiritan Tradition.” Accessed January 17, 2016, <http://www.duq.edu/life-at-duquesne/spiritan-campus-ministry/community-engagement>.

4. Why is there a need for service, and what do you perceive as an underlying cause for this need?
5. What were you disappointed about in your service-learning project? What are some things you are happy about?
6. Why do you believe it is important to serve?
7. What is the best part about your service-learning?
8. After participating in service-learning for a while, has anything surprised you?
9. Have you grown since your first visit to your service-learning site? Explain any skills in which you have developed.
10. Have you gained a stronger knowledge of your community through your service?
11. Specifically describe some of the main goals of your service-learning engagement.
12. What was your idea of volunteering before you began participating in service-learning? Has it changed since you started here at Duquesne?
13. Obviously, through service-learning you are giving your service and time to others but have you received anything in return? (tangible or intangible)

Table 2 Sample of Student Choice Service-Learning Questions

- Questions:
1. Describe your first service learning experience: the environment, the population served, the obstacles you encountered and the goals of the organization?
 2. Put yourself in the shoes of the people at your site. What do you experience? Use all of your senses.
 3. Describe what you encountered upon entering your Service Learning site?
 4. How do you think that your time at your site will help you in the future?
 5. What is the most rewarding thing about going to your Service Learning site: emotionally, intellectually, socially, and spiritually?
 6. Describe your preparation for your service learning experience? How do you prepare your mind, your heart, your body?
 7. Are there any people who stick out at to you at your site? Who are they? What do you think your service means to them, both residents and administrators?
 8. What learnings in service-learning provide citizenship growth? (Not just to pass piano.).
 9. Interview one person at your site (administrator or participants). Summarize.
 10. What obstacles have you overcome in your site, and what did you gain from this experience?

THE WEST VIRGINIA INSTITUTE FOR SPIRITUALITY

Another arm of this faith formation outreach is four hours south of the University, in Charleston, WV at the West Virginia Institute for Spirituality. This non-profit organization was founded in 1999 to continue the university outreach begun with van Kaam's students. In the early 90's the university closed the Spirituality Institute in Pittsburgh but the people in the mainline churches in

West Virginia both believed in, needed and supported the outreach work and facilitated the foundation of this spirituality center in downtown Charleston, WV. The principal investigator directs this non-profit organization in a volunteer capacity.

The WV Institute for Spirituality currently serves about 4000 seekers in spiritual direction, group direction, silent retreats, and through prayer guidance training and ministry. Several international spiritual leaders have participated in the residency of the eighteen-month spiritual direction training program. The method of group spiritual direction, taught in the training program, culminates in a supervised practicum for each student.

Because this training program not only integrates individual and group faith formation, but also includes internships on providing more intensive retreat experiences, the program is unique among other programs offered in the United States. It is from this internship that the second focus of our research emerged.

METHOD OF GROUP SPIRITUALITY

As an internship, the second investigator of this process, a student in the associate training program, facilitates this program. There are two groups at Alderson. The current process in both groups at this point consists of three primary elements: Conference, Conversation, and Communion.⁵ These also contain elements of the reflection process described in *The Dimensions of Spiritual Self-Direction*⁶ and *In Search of Spiritual Self Identity*.⁷

This process requires the facilitator, in this instance the investigator, to provide guidance in shaping the sharing of the participants. The investigator does this by having questions or a sharing that is experiential, foundational, incarnational and directional.⁸

GROUP SPIRITUAL DIRECTION WITH INCARCERATED WOMEN

The process of spiritual reflection at the women's prison in Alderson, WV developed over several years. The secondary investigator has been involved in a Catholic Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) ministry program at the women's prison for eight years. The RCIA program serves

5. Susan Muto and Adrian van Kaam, *Epiphany Manual on the Art and Discipline of Formation-in-Common*. (Pittsburgh, PA: Epiphany Books, 2004), 24.

6. Adrian van Kaam, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Self Direction*. (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1976).

7. Adrian van Kaam, *In Search of Spiritual Identify*. (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1975).

8. Muto and van Kaam, *Epiphany Manual*, 24.

people who are not Roman Catholic, but who are interested in learning more about the Catholic faith and possibly becoming Catholic.

At the women's prison, all inmates from a faith community are allowed to participate in all programs related to their faith community. Therefore, women from all Christian denominations are allowed to participate in the RCIA. Each year, there are typically three to five women who are not Catholic but interested in learning more about the Catholic faith. In addition, there are usually around eighteen to twenty-five women who participated in the RCIA program; most of them women who are already Catholic but interested in learning more about their faith from an adult perspective. The RCIA program is a two-hour, weekly program that runs from September to May, with monthly sessions in the summer. Since the purpose of the RCIA program is to review the teachings of the Catholic faith to see if a person would want to join the Catholic Church, the sessions are informational faith formation, rather than a formative faith formation as in the van Kaam model.

After six years of a traditional RCIA program at the women's prison and a concurrent year of training at the WV Institute for Spirituality that taught group spiritual direction, Formative Spirituality was added as part of the RCIA program. During the first year, a full session on Formative Spirituality was added in the first month of the program. During every session thereafter, a half hour of the two-hour program was devoted to Formative Spirituality. The sentiments of the women that first year were so positive that a new 'Spiritual Reflection' program was created the second year. Formative Spirituality would continue to occur in the RCIA program, but this new Spiritual Reflection program was to be devoted entirely to Spiritual Faith Formation.

Like most prisons, Alderson had many religious programs from all faiths. Most of the Christian programs consist of Church Services, Praise and Worship Programs, Prayer Groups, Bible Studies, Book Studies, Religious Singing programs, etc. However, the purpose of the Spiritual Reflection program is not to discuss and determine the content of what the Bible or what the author of a book is trying to tell the group. It is not focused on formal prayers, prayers of thanksgiving, or prayers of requests. Instead, the Spiritual Reflection program fosters a personal relationship with God. Questions such as: how is God touching your heart and inviting you closer to intimacy, to following Christian social principles more closely, to discern God's Will for your unique destiny.

Next, through individual sharing and group discussion, the group questions how God is moving the group. The group is a fundamental component of the Spiritual Reflection program since God sometimes speaks to people through the voices of other people and group members gain new insights and confirmations from others in the group.

Method of Reflection

Much of the method of reflection is based on the van Kaam model of Group Spiritual Direction. The basic method of reflection was very similar for both the RCIA and the Spiritual Reflection programs. Initially, the women learn what Spiritual Reflection is and what it is not. They learn two new prayer forms; Lectio Divina (Holy Reading) and Meditative Writing. Lectio Divina is reading prayerfully, where the reading is more formationally oriented rather than content or informationally oriented. When reading formatively, one opens up to a deeper level, allowing the possibility of meeting God in the passage, becoming more open to hearing what God is revealing, and how one has been touched by what is read.

Lectio Divina is a Benedictine prayer practice and originated in the 6th century by Saint Benedict as part of the monastic rule of reading scripture passages more prayerfully. In more recent times it is used for formative reading of other spiritual writings.

There are four movements in Lectio Divina, namely, Lectio, Read (Eat) Meditatio, Meditate (Chew), Oratio, Pray (swallow) and Contemplatio, Contemplate (rest). Because the RCIA program did not have many resources, Bible passages were used rather than a spiritual book and the model was adapted for a group as follows. After a prayer to invoke the Holy Spirit to be with the person as they pray, an eight to twelve verse passage is read. In this group the passage was read three times; once to get to know what it's about, then reading it as if one is telling a story, and finally by pausing at the words or phrases which God is drawing the person to. Second, the person meditates on the reading by choosing one of the words or phrases to 'repeat,' or by asking questions of oneself about the passage that can help improve life or integrate virtue. Third, the reader is invited to talk to Jesus or the God of their understanding about the passage and meditation. They are encouraged to be free, open and honest by telling God their private thoughts about the word or phrase, asking Him questions they have about the word or phrase, talking until there is nothing more to say or ask. The fourth and final part is Contemplative Prayer. A quiet, silence often referred to as resting with God; no words, just being.

It is through this type of prayer that one often discovers what God is revealing in the prayer, how they are being drawn to follow Christ or the God or their understanding more intimately, what new behaviors or new resolutions they could incorporate in their life, or a confirmation of a thought or behavior they already have or are doing.

The secondary investigator leads the session and times the reflection period. After the prayer time, each person takes a few minutes for Meditative Writing. Meditative Writing is different from keeping a journal. Maintaining a journal involves writing down or keeping a record of what is or has happened. Meditative Writing is recalling significant memories within the prayer, recognizing the affections and feelings that well up when recalling these memories, clarifying beliefs and convictions, and validating these convictions through a discernment process of consolation or desolation.⁹ Meditative Writing also allows one to look back at how thoughts, behaviors, and experiences have moved or stayed the same in one's life over the course of several days, weeks, or even months without forgetting or distorting any of the memories.

Both groups also learned a process for sharing their individual reflections and for participating in group discussions that are specifically relevant to Spiritual Reflection. In Spiritual Reflection, the focus is first on how God is moving the individual through their individual reading and prayers. Then, when the group meets, each person has an opportunity to share what that individual wants or feels compelled to share. The sharing is very personal and based on "I-statements." What did I think? What did I feel? What was touching my heart? How was I being drawn to God or Jesus? What was I being called to do or act on? Did I feel a confirmation about something I already did or was doing? During the individual sharing, there are no questions asked, no comments given. It is not the time for a debate of ideas or a conversation on how the group can solve a person's problem or change their mind about something. Instead, each group member's role is to listen attentively to ascertain if they had similar thoughts and feelings or if the person said something the group member didn't think of, but that touched their heart in some way during the sharing. After everyone has had an opportunity to share, the group discussion begins. During the group discussion, the focus is on "we" or "us." What did we learn from each other? What feelings do we seem to be focusing on? Was there a theme or themes that we seemed to have in common? How is God moving us as a group?

9. Timothy M. Gallagher, *Discernment of Spirits*. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2011), 47.

While Lectio Divina, Contemplative Prayer, Meditative Writing, individual sharing, and group discussions were part of both the RCIA and the Spiritual Reflection programs, this is also where the two groups differed. The RCIA program's Spiritual Reflection was embedded in the larger program, and due to the limited, half hour period, sharing was relatively brief. It consisted of the women volunteering to share their unique individual thoughts and movements during the week. Women with similar thoughts or movements would shake their heads or voice their agreement. When there were no other unique thoughts or movements, a brief discussion began, which addressed the common themes and ideas learned from the other women. Still, the women said they liked the program and that they were getting a lot out of the session. On the other hand, because the Spiritual Reflection program was devoted solely to prayerful reading and group sharing, it had much more depth to the sessions, with everyone participating in each meeting. And since the group met once a month versus once a week, the women had more prayer experiences and more reflections to share and discuss with their group.

Development

As the new Spiritual Reflection program was being developed, several changes were made to fit the characteristics of the new group and the extended timeframe. Each session would still open and end with a prayer. But, since the Spiritual Reflection program would be limited to twenty participants and be open to all Christian inmates at the prison, it was necessary to use a sign-up process that would allow for acceptance on a first come, first in basis. It was also assumed that that group would be much more ecumenical than the RCIA program. Thus, the selection of a spiritual book was critical. It needed to be spiritual but not focused on any particular Christian denomination. With the diversity in the depth of the various women's faith journeys, it also needed to be easy enough for all to understand, but deep enough spiritually that everyone would be able to get meaning from it. It needed to be written so the women would not focus on the facts and content in the book, but in a way that the women could easily see God at work in the content. Given these criteria, the book "Soul Stretching: the Inner Landscape of an Ordinary Life" by Barbara McMullen, CDP was chosen.¹⁰ This book consists of fifteen chapters, each with a standalone theme. Each chapter has six sections: a scripture passage, a quote related to the scripture

10. Barbara McMullen, *Soul Stretching: The Inner Landscape of an Ordinary Life*. (Pittsburgh, PA: Herrmann Printing, 2012).

and chapter theme, a short reflection, a poem, a prayer, and a Soul Stretching Time that had a concept to ponder and a question to answer.

The structure of the program was based on these six sections of each chapter. Two chapters were reviewed each month. The first week of the month, the women would use Lectio Divina prayerfully to read one section of the chapter each day, in the order, it was presented in the book. This was followed by Meditative Writing, which came to be known by the women as their ‘prayer journal.’ On the last day of the week, the women would review their Meditative Writings for the previous six days and write a weekly summary. The purpose of this summary was to see if and how God was moving them in their thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors through the week. In essence, were they being transformed spiritually? The second week of the month was a repetition of the first. A repetition is a prayer form where one repeats a previous prayer to see if God has more to say on their first topic or if there was an additional concept, word, or phrase that God wants to draw the person to beyond the first one. So, during the second week, the six sections were repeated, including a new Meditative Writing for the day. Again, the last day of the week was a weekly summary. This process was repeated with another chapter during the third and fourth week of the month with one exception. The last day of the month, the women were also to review their weekly summaries and meditate on the entire month. Depending on the person, this prayer process could take approximately fifteen to twenty minutes each day. With fifteen chapters in the book, progressing through two chapters a month, and one month for an orientation to the process, the Spiritual Reflection program became a nine-month program with the last month focusing on one chapter and a wrap up of the year.

In addition to the daily prayer process above, the women would be introduced to St. Ignatius’ Examen Prayer.¹¹ St. Ignatius believed that God was in all things, every moment of every day. The purpose of the Examen Prayer is to stop and pause once or twice a day, to review the day, to remember what had happened throughout the day, to see where God had been in one’s life, and to see how one had responded. Then, looking forward, to be proactive in what a Christian response might be in the upcoming events of tomorrow. The Examen Prayer consists of five parts. Part One: Pray for God’s Help; invite God to be with you during this time of prayer and to see one’s life as God sees it. Part Two: Give Thanks for the Gifts God has Given You This Day. Review the day in

11. Kevin O’Brian. 2011. *The Ignatian Adventure*. (Chicago: Loyola Press).

gratitude for all the gifts and blessings God has given, the significant ones that easily stand out as well as the common, ordinary ones that tend to get overlooked. Part Three: Pay Attention to Your Feelings and Pray Over the Significant Ones That Surface. St. Ignatius also believed that God communicates to people not only through mental insights but through movements in our emotions; through our feelings, desires, resentments, hopes, compassion, regrets, etc. By praying over these significant emotions of the day, one can often see where they are leading you; Closer to God? Away from God? To a particular behavior or thought that should be stopped or started? Part Four: Rejoice and Seek Forgiveness. Rejoice and give praise for the things that lead you toward God and ask forgiveness for those times when you fell short. Allow this to become a spontaneous prayer of intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude, letting it rise from the heart. Finally, Part Five: Look to Tomorrow. Again, pay attention to the feelings that surface as you consider the events of tomorrow. Ask for God's grace and guidance to help you through the day with positive Christian responses. End the Examen with a conversation with God that surfaces through the prayer and then by praying the Our Father prayer. The Examen Prayer could take ten to fifteen minutes a day. Since daily prayer is such a big part of the Spiritual Reflection process, it was felt that if someone didn't feel compelled to do all the Repetition Prayers, he or she could at least do a daily Examen. Plus, the more one does the Examen Prayer, the more one perceives how God is working through them, moment by moment, which would lead to additional insights for all the women.

Finally, a small but significant change from the RCIA program was to change the group setting. Since sharing is a fundamental component of the Spiritual Reflection program, the setting was turned into a circle of chairs so that all group members could not only hear better but could also consider the body language of their group members during the individual sharing and discussion.

Implementation

Getting the program up and running was much easier than anticipated. The prison Chaplain created a flyer, as she does with all faith programs, and then sent it through the intranet to all Christian inmates at the prison, giving them a week to respond by email or by signing up in the chapel. Several hundred women responded. Through the date stamp of the responses, the first twenty women were selected to participate.

During the first month, the women learned about the process that would be used during the

following months. The majority of time was spent learning and practicing Lectio Divina, Meditative Writing, and the Examen. The women were given handouts on each prayer form and a composition tablet to use for their Meditative Writing. Practice on Lectio Divina was done through a series of scripture passages. Meditative Writing and voluntary sharing followed each Lectio Divina. In that way, women who were not used to this type of writing not only had an opportunity to practice but also could learn from the sharing of others in the group. Practice for the Examen was based on the previous day and was also followed by Meditative Writing. Taking time to practice proved to be very beneficial. During subsequent months, the women brought their composition books and often read directly from them to begin their sharing. Reading from the book would become an excellent support and help in building self-confidence for many of the women. The session ended with a brief overview of the overall structure that would be used for the remaining eight sessions.

The structure for the subsequent sessions would start with an opening prayer, provide an overview of the process of going around the circle for individual sharing of “I-statements,” with the option for passing on the individual sharing if one chose to do so, the need to listen attentively to what each woman is sharing and how it fits in with their and the group’s sharing, moving to the discussion after all individual sharing is done with no questions or comments at any time and why, and the need for the group to maintain confidentiality, except for things that might be harmful to self or others. This structure was repeated briefly at the beginning of each monthly session. At the end of session one, and every session after that, the women were given a hard copy (with permission) of the two chapters for the next month. It was felt that if the books were handed out, upfront, the women would probably read the entire book, or most of it, during the first month or two and participation would be poor or missing altogether. Therefore, instead of passing out the books, copies of the chapters would be handed out each month, and a book would be given to each woman at the end of the final session.

The second month of the Spiritual Reflection program was pretty amazing. The first two chapter themes were: Doorways and Delight. You’re never quite sure how a group will interact, especially this one, when only a few of the women knew each other from being in the same unit or the same work area. But, imagine twenty women, sitting in a circle, openly and eagerly sharing their life stories about doors they have not walked through and should have, but know now they will. They delight in almost everything in their lives and how God has opened their hearts to realize

it through their prayers. The process made them take time, think, pray, and listen to God. The group shared non-stop for an hour and a half but could have easily gone on another hour and a half. They went around the circle once, with everyone participating, and then, as a group discussed how God was moving the group, and how the women were learning from each other's sharing. There was not a dry eye in the place. These are a few of the stories that the women shared. One woman said: "I always thought I wasn't worthy enough to be loved by God, but after reading the part about, 'I know your deeds, and I have left an open door which no one can close,'¹² and listening to the group, I am worthy enough, he does love me." Another woman said: "I need to give God my child, and know that she will be ok while I'm here." Another said: "I have done some things I shouldn't have done, but he is delighted in me, he claps for me and the changes I'm making in my life." Woman after woman read from their prayer journal (their term for their Meditative Writing) and talked back and forth to each other with comments like: "when you said... it relates to me too because... now I will..." After an hour and a half, they all left in joy. Even the woman who drove me to the chapel and was sitting outside the room waiting for us to be done, said "you should have seen their faces when they left. They must have had a wonderful experience!"

The third month focused on Living One Day at a Time [without worry] and Delight. The second sharing session is always a concern. By then, the group has learned the process, participated in daily prayerful reading and meditative writing for a month, wrote summaries, and had taken part in the group process. One always wonders how many found the process beneficial and will continue. But, all the women came back and couldn't wait to get started. This continued month after month with stronger responses from the women each month.

During this third month of worry and trust, many of the comments focused on how grateful the women were to God for all He has given to them. One woman said: "I've had a relationship with God for a long time, but I'm pretty controlling. This has helped me let go and let God. Instead of worrying about things I don't have control over, I'm looking at the gifts God has given me and I'm aware of how grateful I am for His gifts." Another woman said: "My prayer has changed since I've started this program. I used to ask God for the same things over and over. Now I see what all God has given me and my prayer now is about how grateful I am for what I have." Another woman said: "I liked the part in Chapter 3, 'Yesterday is but a dream and every tomorrow a hopeful vision.

12. McMullen, *Soul Stretching*, 3.

Attend to this very day; it is life.’¹³ My past is behind me. I was in another ministry here, and I didn’t want to tell people about my past. But, saying it helped me let it go, and it’s done, and I don’t know what the future will be or even if there is a future. So what I have is today, and I have to make every moment count.” Other comments included: “Before I took life for granted. But, now I’m seeing the gifts God is giving me.” “I focused on Chapter 3 because when I read Chapter 4, I didn’t think it was about me, I couldn’t find anything in it. But as I listened to the group, there’s a lot that relates to me. I started highlighting things I heard that related to me, and I’ve highlighted almost half the chapter! [Looking joyful, she held up her book to show everyone.]” “I like the soul stretching questions. They make you think about your life! And these two chapters seemed to go hand in hand.” “I have depression, and I’m always anxious and want to control things. [She read the entire poem in chapter 4 about trusting the Eternal Catcher.] This chapter has shown me to slow down. [She read a quote] ‘Simply Let Openness Win–SLOW. Let go of the trapeze bar and see where God takes you. In my experience, it’s quite a ride!’¹⁴ I did that. I’m slowing down and trusting God, and I’m not as anxious and controlling.”

The fourth month was about: Bringing Hope to Others and Sorrow Through the Death of a Loved One. Most of the women focused on bringing hope to others, whether that meant bringing hope to someone feeling lonely or depressed, or using your gifts and talents to brighten a little corner of your world, or lightening the footprint on the earth for the next generations. The comments were very scattered, but most focused on doing for others or what others were doing for them in a time of loneliness or hopelessness. One woman said: “I never thought of it before, but I want to be a ‘Rainbow Catcher,’ I will start looking for things I can do to bring people hope.” Another said: “someone I didn’t know asked me at dinner this week if I knew anything about the Soul Stretching program. I was reluctant to say anything because we are of different cultures. But I started telling her, and she said, ‘Maybe I’ll do the program the next time it’s offered.’ So, maybe I brought a little hope to her.”

The chapter on sorrow was scanned or avoided all together by many of the women. The reflection was about the death of a mother, and the women either hadn’t had that experience yet, or they did have the experience and didn’t want to bring it up again. But, one woman started by

13. McMullen, *Soul Stretching*, 16.

14. McMullen, *Soul Stretching*, 26.

talking about the death of her grandchild, and how through the grief, God had pulled her through. Then, several other women talked about the death of their mother's. This conversation sums up the heart of the discussion. One woman said: "My mother was dying of an aneurysm. She always told me she wanted me clean [of drugs] before she died. I was clean then, but she didn't know it. The day before she died, I went to the hospital and told her I was clean, and I would stay that way. The next day she died. I didn't have time to talk to her about how I came to be clean, life in general, or our lives. It's been three years, and I'm still sad and feel guilty. Maybe if I had been clean earlier, she wouldn't have been so stressed and wouldn't have gotten an aneurysm." Another woman said: "My mom died of cancer. I didn't get along with my mom. I knew my mom prayed, but I never knew what she was praying. Someone said she was praying for me and it gave me hope." Another said: "My mom died in 1991, so it's been a while. I wrote the letter. [The Soul Stretching Time activity was to write a letter to your mother.] We didn't always get along, but there were good times too." The discussion moved back to hope and being and receiving 'Rainbow Catchers.' But as we left that day, I overheard the women whose mother has died of an aneurysm tell the women who wrote the letter: "Thank you for sharing your story, it meant a lot to me."

While the first year of the Spiritual Reflection program at Alderson prison is not yet over, it is refreshing to hear what the women are saying about the program. Comments like: "It's too bad we're such a small group; I know a lot of women here who would like this program." The inmate who runs the chapel said: "the women seem to like this program." Or other comments like: "I need this group, the sharing is the best part" and "I've only been here a short time, and when I got here I was planning not to get to know anyone, just be by myself, but I love you guys!" and "I am grateful for this group, it gives me time to focus away from the world out there."

SUMMARY OF THE ALDERSON PROGRAM

It seems the Spiritual Reflection program has been very beneficial to everyone in the group. It has provided an opportunity for the women to take the time to read, pray, reflect on their life, to share their thoughts and feelings with others, and to listen and learn from others. But most importantly, to be open to moving their lives in a better direction, even within the walls of a prison. And if within the walls of a prison, maybe in the greater society when they are released. Given the number of women in this prison and women's prisons all over the country, it seems it would be worthwhile to continue this program at Alderson prison and share it with others in ministry at other prisons,

including both women's and men's prisons. This investigator will continue the program here and continue to monitor the aftercare.

CONCLUSION

Based on the student evaluations and final reflection papers, the service-learning process increases self-awareness and forms a habit of reflection conducive to professional development, social justice awareness and networking with other professionals. Reviewing the feedback from the Alderson women's group, we recognized that the reflection process increased self-awareness and conclude that the use of the formation paradigm and spiritual formation reflection process described by Adrian van Kaam has the potential to develop a reflective lifestyle.

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