

**SACRED ART OF DYING  
NATIONAL TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION PROGRAM  
COMPREHENSIVE SYLLABUS**

The following syllabus is a general description of the Sacred Art of Dying Program which is applicable for each of the four units of study. Following this abstract is a specific syllabus for each of the particular units.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

*Sacred Art of Dying* is a comprehensive program designed to educate caregivers who deal with death and dying in their professional and personal lives. As human beings face the journey towards final release, there are common patterns of emotional and spiritual distress and demonstrated ways of alleviating this pain. Each of the four study units is grounded in the contemporary health care sciences and inspired by the great spiritual traditions and collective wisdom learned from the dying. The premise of the program is that all spiritual pain is ultimately related to the values of forgiveness, meaning, relatedness and hope

The goal of each Sacred Art of Dying unit is to better recognize the unique opportunities presented at the end of life that can lead to inner healing and peace. In addition to practical, clinical skills, each unit incorporates a personal retreat dimension that encourages reflection on the belief that the dying become our teachers that we may live with enhanced spirit, meaning and purpose.

**PRE-REQUISITES**

The following professional background and/or personal experience would be an advantage to the student but are not strictly necessary for admission to the class.

- Professional training and experience in any related health care field dedicated to end-of-life care
- Involvement with a hospice program
- Caregiver for a family member dealing with terminal illness

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

1. UNDERSTAND

- The distinction between religious, psychosocial and spiritual caregiving issue
- The particular manifestations of spiritual pain through the elements of forgiveness, hope, meaning and relatedness
- The essential elements in a healthy pastoral relationship
- Charting outcomes as a means of measuring spiritual progress

2. IDENTIFY

- Practical tools for ‘taking a spiritual pulse
- Creative spiritual tools that ease existential pain and enhance one’s most treasured values and relationships
- Ways of connecting body and spirit through the appropriate use of ritual
- Support systems for spiritual caregivers to care for their own emotional needs

## **METHODOLOGY**

In general, course units will include the following didactic methodologies:

Lecture	25%
Video/film case studies	25%
Small group and personal reflection processes	25%
Demonstration of caregiving techniques	15%
Inspirational ritual as a means of demonstrating various pastoral tools	10%

Students will be required to participate in a dynamic, interactive process throughout the course of each program. Questions will be identified both through the Socratic method and various methods of reflection [e.g. journals, hands-on involvement with practical skills and theological reflection with various case studies].

Participants will learn to identify their own strengths and weaknesses in implementing various models of spiritual caregiving paying close attention to counseling skills and the traditional tools for spiritual discernment. Role playing in the art of guided visualization will be experienced and professionally critiqued.

## **EVALUATION**

1. The student will enhance his/her empathetic, listening and analytical skills by participating fully in class activities, role-playing, reflection exercises and case analysis. 25%
2. The student will be expected to complete a theological reflection journal [cf. Diploma of Mastery requirements] thereby engaging with a variety of perspectives through periodical literature and selected monographs. 25%
3. The student will create a practicum project between the second and third units in order to study and apply the specific tools that are presented in the course. 25%
4. The student agrees to meet personally with a program director for an evaluative interview on his/her progress in the program. 25%

## **RESOURCES**

- Sacred Art of Dying Participant Manual which includes copies of all relevant teaching materials [course overheads are provided for students] and an extensive selection of periodical literature on relevant topics.
- Selected bibliography provided for each course unit
- The personal gifts and life experiences of the program directors
- The life and death experiences of real case studies which have either been filmed, dramatized or described in print from which all participants will learn the maxim 'the dying are our teachers.'

**SACRED ART OF DYING**  
**UNIT I**  
**“UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUAL PAIN”**

**UNIT DESCRIPTION**

Participants learn about the rich cultural history of the hospice movement with particular emphasis on how early medieval monastic infirmary practices influenced European models. The contemporary focus of this unit is on clinically sound practices which are being used to detect and alleviate spiritual and emotional distress at the end of life. Caregivers learn valuable tools for addressing ‘death anxiety’ which is often the most critical issue for the dying person; current research regarding the testimonies of near death experiences will be particularly scrutinized. Fundamental bereavement practices are presented which include the five myths of grief and distinctions between normal grief, complicated grief and clinical depression.

**LEARNING AND BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES**

Students will have:

- Reflected on three case studies as a means of distinguishing between psychosocial, religious and spiritual caregiving issues
- Practiced a technique to take their own ‘spiritual pulse’ in preparation for a clinical-pastoral Encounter
- Journalled about the personal impact of a guided visualization process designed to diagnose their own spiritual pain
- Articulated questions regarding the effect of caregiving at the end of life on the caregiver
- Experimented with a unique ‘matrix model’ for designing a plan of spiritual care
- Considered basic bereavement issues for the extended family before and after the death of a loved one

**METHODOLOGIES UNIQUE TO THIS UNIT OF STUDY**

Due to a special emphasis on the historical research that is presented in this unit, a variety of appropriate interfaith, intercultural ritual reflections will be incorporated both as a didactic tool and opportunity to appreciate the rich human heritage of spiritual caregiving at the end of life.

A volunteer from the class will be chosen to participate in a guided visualization practice with all students expected to observe. Harp therapy will be integrated into the experience with ample time for de-briefing and critique on the part of all concerned.

**SPECIAL RESEARCH SOURCES FOR THIS UNIT**

Dying Well, Ira Byock, MD

Rites of Passage, Arnold Van Gennep

Medieval Death, Paul Binski

Christianizing Death, Fredrick Paxton

**SACRED ART OF DYING**  
**UNIT II**  
**“DIAGNOSING SPIRITUAL PAIN”**

**UNIT DESCRIPTION**

Participants study in depth the time-tested primary diagnoses of spiritual pain: forgiveness, relatedness, meaning and hope. Through a series of case studies as well as by reflecting on personal experience with death and loss, traditional and contemporary models of inner healing are applied to pastoral practice. The result is an enhanced ability to recognize and celebrate the final gifts of growth and transformation, which are available at the end of life.

**LEARNING AND BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES**

Students will have:

- Experimented with the each of the four spiritual pain scales which are proposed in the course of studies
- Examined the inter-relationship between ethical and religious-based decision making
- Studied the latest understanding of ‘religious abuse’ as a critical factor for some patients in coming to peace at the end-of-life
- Reflected on the correlation between the traditional stages of human development and the stages of faith development especially as it impacts end of life care and bereavement issues
- Begun to define, compare and contrast their own mode of pastoral practice with alternative modes of therapeutic presence

**METHODOLOGIES UNIQUE TO THIS UNIT**

Students will have an opportunity to evaluate several case studies using the each of the four spiritual pain indices presented in this unit of study. A combination of traditional charting practice will be combined with theological reflection to produce a more thorough analysis of each case.

As part of the ‘personal retreat’ dimension of this unit, a first-run film will be screened with a contemporary theme of death and dying followed by small group discussion and social analysis.

A clinical guided visualization experience will include traditional Reiki, Therapeutic Touch, Radix Breathing and Music Therapy modalities.

**SPECIAL RESOURCES FOR THIS UNIT**

Stages of Faith, James Fowler

Close to the Bone: Life Threatening Illness and the Search for Meaning, Jean Shinoda Bolen,  
MD

**SACRED ART OF DYING**  
**UNIT III**  
**“HEALING SPIRITUAL PAIN”**

**UNIT DESCRIPTION**

Participants experience a wide range of creative psycho-spiritual tools for end-of-life care, particularly during the final days and moments of life. Two additional faculty members with an international reputation as Coma Therapists will join the regular faculty to present a day’s workshop on techniques for communication with patients who have a limited ability to communicate due to altered states of consciousness [e.g. coma and end stage Alzheimer patients]. Another special emphasis of Unit III is the study of visualization and guided imagery as a process for the alleviation of spiritual pain. Participants have a ‘hands-on’ opportunity to experience both the roles of ‘spiritual mentor’ and patient. A full spectrum of other practices includes art and music therapies and the study of prescriptive ritual tailored to the spiritual belief of each patient. Holistic therapies are drawn from the world’s great spiritual traditions and applied with measurable, scientific skill. A replica of the labyrinth from Chartes Cathedral will be available on site throughout the course as an experience and teaching metaphor for the classical stages of the soul’s journey during life and death transitions.

**LEARNING AND BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES**

Students will have:

- Experienced three different styles of guided imagery which have a proven clinical track record for alleviating spiritual pain
- Practiced the principles of Coma Therapy for use with patients in states of altered consciousness
- Experimented with one of several art therapy projects which can be applied for bed bound patients
- Studied the acclaimed science-based research of Drs. Larry Dossey and Joan Borysenko on the effectiveness of ‘non-local’ prayer on healing
- Developed a practical ritual to be used in end-of-life care based on traditional and contemporary models
- Reflected on a Bereavement Model for ‘reconciling grief’ based on the work of Dr. Alan Wolfelt’s Center for Loss and Transition in Boulder, Colorado
- Walked the labyrinth and reflected on its unique history as a symbol of spiritual pilgrimage

**METHODOLOGIES UNIQUE TO THIS UNIT OF STUDY**

Each student will have the opportunity to apply the principles of Coma Therapy as taught by Dr. Stan Tomandl and his associate, Ann Jacob, R.N. By taking turns and observing each other’s breathing, eye movements and other physiological indicators, participants will have the opportunity to learn the importance of ‘blank access’ communication with persons who are in an altered state of consciousness.

By working in pairs throughout the workshops, students will experience and reflect on the Celtic tradition of anam cara, or soulful presence. The basic tools for guided imagery will be experienced in a variety of exercises designed to give each participant a personal encounter with this important end-of-life tool.

**SPECIAL RESOURCES FOR THIS UNIT**

Coma Work and Palliative Care, Dr. Stan Tomandl

The Enneagram as a Spiritual Tool at the End of Life, Richard Groves

Guided Imagery and Healing, Elizabeth Anne Vanek

**SACRED ART OF DYING**  
**UNIT IV**  
**“TRANSFORMING SPIRITUAL PAIN”**

**UNIT DESCRIPTION**

Participants focus on practices surrounding the death vigil process and how to apply the lessons learned from classical tools in a contemporary clinical setting. A variety of psycho-social-spiritual models are presented that reflect data collected by the Sacred Art of Living Center from hospices and hospitals throughout the English-speaking world. The historical context for this final unit of study draws from many of the world’s great spiritual traditions as found in their ancient ‘books of the dead.’ Finally, this unit develops the essential characteristics of healthy self-care for caregivers. Ethical issues regarding the personal and professional dimensions of caregiving are considered along with presentations and hands-on experiences from a variety of allopathic and alternative modalities that engage the healing of body, mind and spirit.

**LEARNING AND BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES**

Students will have:

- Studied and experienced personally some of the basic principles and techniques of ‘energy work’ by using bio-feedback mechanisms as a means of assisting a patient’s state of physical and emotional well-being
- Experimented with two guided visualization formats for the ‘healing of memories
- Explored the ethical dimensions of end-of-life caregiving as they impact the long-term emotional and spiritual lives of professional caregivers
- Examined the distinction between caregiver burnout and fatigue as well as other practical antidotes to stress
- Been exposed to basic theory and techniques related to Jungian dream analysis particularly as it relates to emotional and spiritual pain at the end of life
- Discussed basic rights and obligations [including legal prescriptions] regarding body ‘aftercare,’ burial, memorial services and grief support for extended family systems

**METHODOLOGIES UNIQUE TO THIS UNIT OF STUDY**

Because this unit focuses on the relationship between caregiver and terminal illness, each class participant will have an opportunity to experience and consider the effectiveness often [10] different healing modalities as they relate to stress reduction and the management of physical distress. Professional and volunteer therapists will describe and offer a range of hands-on experiences to participants for their evaluation and as a prescriptive aid for patients.

Data related to the effectiveness of selected body-mind-spirit therapies will be compared as well as statistics related to 12 million Americans who have reported a Near Death Experiences. Participants will also work with the content of their own dreams throughout this unit of study.

**SPECIAL RESEARCH SOURCES FOR THIS UNIT**

Death Dreams: A Clinical Study, Dr. Kenneth Kramer

True Work of Dying: Comparing the birthing and deathing processes, M. Schneider, RN

Troubled Dream of Life: Ekhics of End of Life Care, Dr. Daniel Callahan

The Grace in Dying: Transformations at the End of Life, Kathleen Dowling Singh