

ANAMCARA TRACKS 2025-26 Study Tracks & Mentors



1) LIVING INTO THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES OF ST. IGNATIUS:

The Art of Discernment in Everyday Life

Mentors: Richard Groves, Martina Breen & Jack Kennedy

Honorary Mentors: Gerald May, Richard Rohr & Eileen Heaton

"The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius are one of the great treasures of practical-mystical Spirituality. It is remarkable that a tradition created 500 years ago brought together one of the earliest forms of Western psychology with a masterful tradition of spiritual guidance that still speaks to seekers of all traditions."

— Gerald May, MD, PhD, Care of Mind, Care of Spirit

We are delighted to offer Anamcara Apprentices a first-of-its-kind blend of two previous tracks: building on the ancient wisdom from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius with highlights from the Art of Discernment course originally developed as North America's first inter-spiritual certification program for spiritual companions. Rooted in universal values, this track also integrates essential qualities of Celtic Spirituality for the modern *anamcara*.

The course draws from the wisdom of the ages in terms of learning how to discern life's most challenging issues through the skills of 'holy listening' and the daily 'examen of consciousness.' While respecting differences in belief and culture, participants discover access to a variety of creative ways to engage with daily practices. Whether you are walking alongside others in a helping profession or simply seeking clarity and purpose in your own life, this course offers a meaningful structure for growth, insight, and compassionate action.

In the recent past, few persons had access to a formal 30-Day Discernment Retreat; this track creates a practical, user-friendly way to experience the profound gift of spiritual companionship. For the modern 'anamcara,' this relationship is the heart of the soul's journey.

PRIMARY LESSONS

- Experience the acclaimed 30-day Retreat "in slow motion"—over the course of a year
- Reclaim ancient tools for navigating complexity and choice in everyday life
- Explore parallels between depth psychology, forgiveness and spiritual practice
- Notice how the exercises lead to a renewed sense of purpose and direction in life
- Deepen in a mature relationship with the Divine by trusting our deepest longings and desires

PRACTICES/SKILLS

- Experience the transformative power of Ignatian 'colloquy' (heart-to-heart) meditation
- Discover the wisdom of the Enneagram as a tool for recognizing what helps or blocks spiritual growth
- Apply daily insights into every aspect of life and relationship
- Integrate forgiveness as a healing pathway
- Apply the skills of spiritual discernment for family and group life

Many persons from diverse faith traditions for centuries have described the Spiritual Exercises as profoundly life altering, leading to a stronger relationship with our Creator and a deeper compassion towards ourselves and the world around us. Pope Francis to the Parliament of World Religions, 2024

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES OF ST. IGNATIUS

IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA was born in 1491 into a noble Basque family in northern Spain. He became a soldier in the service of the Spanish king. During the defense of the fortress at Pamplona in 1521, a cannonball shattered his leg. During a long and painful convalescence, Ignatius experienced a life-changing conversion. He went from dreaming of knightly glory to wanting to serve his Creator. After months of reflection the notes of his experiences in prayer became the basis of a small book called The Spiritual Exercises. For the past five hundred years, this book has become one of the most popular guides for the spiritual life. Because Ignatius lived at during the early years of the Inquisition and at the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, his insights capture a unique time in the world's history. Drawing from the great Iberian mystical traditions of Judaism, Islam and Christianity, The Spiritual Exercises are a treasure chest of a time in history called the Ornament of the World when spiritual mentors created an inclusive approach to the art of discernment. Today, these same exercises form the foundation of one of the oldest traditions of spiritual direction—available to seekers from all and no particular religion tradition.

TRACK MENTORS

RICHARD GROVES

Co-founder of Sacred Art of Living and Becoming Anamcara Apprenticeship, Richard and his wife, Mary developed North America's first interfaith program for spiritual director formation. Weaving The Spiritual Exercises into their programs has enriched hundreds of seekers from all faith traditions around the world. Richard is an author, certified Enneagram instructor, University professor, hospice chaplain and active spiritual director for more than thirty years. He is most proud of his three sons, four grandchildren and seven great grandchildren.

MARTINA BREEN

A gestalt therapist, spiritual director and soul wisdom teacher, Martina brings over twenty years of experience in psychotherapy, supervision, and soul-centered guidance. As a facilitator, she has offered online programs across Ireland and beyond in the fields of Celtic wisdom, life writing and conscious eldering. Martina co-led The Spiritual Exercises as a track previously and feels the power of weaving the Spiritual Exercises with the Enneagram, forgiveness practices, and Celtic spirituality.

JACK KENNEDY

Jack is an acclaimed teacher of the Ignatian method of spiritual direction. A former Jesuit priest, Jack's life work has been to practically translate the art of discernment from The Spiritual Exercises for hundreds of spiritual directors. Since 1996 Jack and Richard have collaborated in training hundreds of spiritual directors through the Sacred Art of Living. Jack's teachings on the Spiritual Exercises are a creative blend of embodied spiritual practices with humor and real-life story telling.

2) HEALING PRACTICES AT THE END OF LIFE: *Honoring Life's Sacred Transitions*

Primary Mentors: Kevin Dieter with Stan Tomandl & Ann Jacob

Honorary Mentors: Joan Halifax, Ira Byock and Dame Cicely Saunders

"I once asked a man who knew he was dying what he needed above all in those who were caring for him. He said, 'For someone to look as if they are trying to understand me.'" Indeed, It is impossible to understand fully another person, but I never forgot that he did not ask for success but only that someone should care enough to try." Dame Cicely Saunders 1918-2005. Founder of the Modern Hospice movement

HEALING PRACTICES AT THE END OF LIFE will translate Anamcara principles into practice. We offer sacred skills and awareness tools for use during end of body life and other transitions. Participants will have an opportunity to explore coma communication, story and metaphor, and creating sacred space. We will guide through lecture and group discussions, consultations, journal writing, and experiential exercises, and enriching our ability to be attentive to diverse ways of connecting to others' natures and needs.

Our ten months together will expand your abilities for deeply meaningful and relieving care as an Anamcara, whether you are a professional, volunteer, and/or family caregiver.

PRIMARY LESSONS:

- Weaving together the medical, psycho-social and spiritual dimensions of care
- In-depth mentorship for communicating with people in altered states of consciousness
- Developing our anamcara presence with persons during all major life transitions

PRACTICAL SKILLS:

- Facilitating conversations about death and other essential life situations
- On medications: Learning when enough is 'enough' and when 'more' is better.
- Skills for working more effectively with family systems and cultural diversity
- Enhancing communication using non-verbal signals. How to engage with positive and negative feedback, find insight in delirium and coma
- Interact usefully during communication dilemmas by learning to use your personal reactions, intuitions and serendipity in service of the spirit in the moment.
- Specific practices using 'nature to connect with human nature.'
- Utilize narrative as medicine to facilitate end of life healing as well as selfcare for caregivers
- Recognizing and creating sacred space when attending the dying
- Honoring the mystery, wonder and awe in the dying process

KEVIN DIETER is brilliant with end of life care as a retired medical director in hospice who lived with death daily. He is a wise and kind soul who shares openly the complex realities of dying including the beauty in death.

ANN JACOB and STAN TOMANDL love finding and following the natures of people with verbal, non-verbal and somatic communication signals, which are especially useful when people are in remote states of consciousness that include times of illness, accident, memory loss, and approaching end of body life.

Kevin, Ann and Stan have loved working together for over a decade in the Anamcara Project. We welcome you to join us in this learning experience to enhance your life and the lives of those you love and care for.

3) **SEASONS OF OUR LIVES: *Nature is Our Teacher***

Primary Mentors: Debbie Doornbos and Patricia Hallahan

Special Presenter: Michael Kearney

The *Seasons of Our Lives* track will delve into the seasons of nature as a metaphor for our lives. As we explore the seasons from different perspectives, we will see that each season has something to teach us about ourselves and our interior life when we pay attention, develop curiosity, observe, and listen more means to *“Die before you die so that when you die you will not die.”*

In this track participants will develop a deeper understanding and awareness of the rhythm of the ‘seasons’ of our own lives, enabling us to accompany ourselves and others more soulfully and skillfully during times of transition – both our many life transitions and the end-of-life transition.

This track will invite the cycles of the seasons of nature to open us to a greater awareness of our inner teacher. It will encourage our soul speak to us through nature, art, poetry, reflection and community with others. As we reflect on what the seasons of nature are teaching us, we open ourselves to the transformation that this can bring. Then we can take this out into the world and be part of the change for which the world continues to yearn.

This deeply contemplative track will challenge and invite us to take seriously the invitation to spend regular, quality time in nature. We will learn much from other cultures and traditions about the wisdom of nature such as Celtic, First Nations, Christian, and Buddhist perspectives. We look forward to journeying with you on this adventure of the soul.

PRIMARY TEACHINGS:

- The seasons in nature are a metaphor for our own lives.
- Nature is both healer and our teacher.
- We can nurture awareness and develop grace to move through the many transitions we experience in our lives.

PRACTICES:

In addition to inspiring readings, participants will be invited to spend meaningful time outdoors each month to listen, observe, become curious and allow themselves to be affected by their time in nature. Reflections on this time will be captured through a variety of creative exercises: a poem, writing a psalm, embodying experience in a ritual or creating something artistic with paint, crayons, clay, mandalas, etc. Each month’s experience will invite participants to ask an honest, open, courageous question which will be shared with their mentor. Small group gatherings once a month will offer time to share reflections and experiences.

DEBBIE DOORNBOS is a trained and experienced retreat leader, facilitator and spiritual director with a special interest in journeying with people through life’s many transitions. Debbie has extensive experience leading small groups, creating and facilitating retreats and leading group process. She was the first Canadian Director for Sacred Art of Living (2019-2023). Prior to this, Debbie was Program Director for Providence Renewal Centre in Edmonton, Alberta (2008-2019). Her early work experience included coordinating special projects, master trainer for the tourism industry and regional manager for a children’s book company. Debbie has completed several programs with Sacred Art of Living Community where she serves as a mentor. She has a certificate in spiritual direction from the Haden Institute. Debbie has a degree from Newman Theological College, and she completed a practicum in

palliative care through St. Paul's University in Ottawa. Debbie has travelled extensively with her husband, John, to whom she has been married for 50 years. She loves spending time with her children and grandchildren who teach her many life lessons!

PATRICIA (PÁDRAIGÍN) HALLAHAN is a Dublin based coach, mentor, group facilitator and educator in personal development, spirituality, health care and development. Most of her career has been in international development, working and living in Asia and Africa. Patricia has 30 years' experience in senior management positions in public and not-for-profit organizations such as Concern, Trócaire, the Alzheimer's Society of Ireland and St. James's Hospital, Dublin.

She retired as Director of Education, Research and Training at Our Lady's Hospice, Dublin, and now divides her work time between the Centre for Courage and Renewal, where she is a qualified facilitator, and the Sacred Art of Living Community where she is on the leadership team for the International Anamcara Apprenticeship Programme. Patricia is one of seven sisters, a grandmother, and enjoys singing with The People's College Choir and hill walking with Ne Cnocadóirí.

4) **LIVING CELTIC MYTHOLOGY: *The Wisdom of Story, Symbol and Archetype***

Primary Mentors: Margaret Brady and Giliosa Kiernan

Special Mentor: Phil Larkin

“Myths are public dreams, dreams are private myths.” – Joseph Campbell

From the earliest times, we have learned wisdom from stories. Our stories help us to understand who we are, and this is just as true of the stories that have survived for thousands of years in our oral traditions as it is for depictions of our contemporary lives. In this track we will dive deep into the world of Celtic myth, exploring the wisdom encoded in these ancient stories to show how working with myth can bring healing and wisdom.

Myth brings into the luminal space between our everyday rational world and deeper, more intuitive, ways of knowing. During the year, we will be engaging with myths from the Celtic tradition, exploring their mythic themes or archetypes and inviting you to consider how these patterns might show up for you in your own life. We will be inviting you to consider your own life as a mythic journey and to explore what your own mythic task might be.

Dream listening will form a consistent part of the course, as you increase your fluency in the language of symbol and intuitive knowing. Ritual and nature connection practices will provide touchstones for self-care. You will also work closely with an Anam Cara partner to offer deep listening to each other's ongoing journey throughout the year. Creative engagement and expression will be encouraged. Your mentors will act as guides on this journey and support you in your exploration in a safe and respectful environment.

Primary lessons:

- Recognizing the strengths and challenges, wounds and healing of your own ancestral paths
- Developing the mythic imagination in everyday life
- Engaging creatively with myth/symbol/dream/archetype as a means of spiritual growth
- Engaging with the earth as a source of wisdom and healing

Practical skills:

- Learning to locate yourself within a lineage, (symbolic) ecosystem or cultural myth
- Learning to look beneath the surface of myth and story to engage with language of metaphor
- Exploring symbol, nature and creative expression as a spiritual path
- Working with dreams as a readily available source of wisdom and growth

TRACK MENTORS

MARGARET BRADY

Margaret is a psychotherapist and spiritual director from Dublin, Ireland. She has a lifelong passion for myth and storytelling, and loves to work with dreams her therapy practice to help her clients uncover their own inner wisdom. Margaret first encountered the Sacred Art of Living teachings in Dublin in 2014 and has been on an Anam Cara path ever since.

GILIOSA KIERNAN

Giliosa lives in Ireland and has worked as the Holistic Facilitator in a care/nursing home since 2005. She began the Sacred Art of Living programs in 2008 and found that they transformed her life. She continues to use tools learnt there to support her ritual work in the Anam Cara program, as well as with residents and staff of the care home and other clients.

PHIL LARKIN

A nurse academic and palliative care practitioner for nearly 40 years, Phil has worked with the Sacred Art of Living Centre since its original programs in Ireland and has a particular interest in early Irish history, language and culture and its relationship to the Anam Cara tradition.