

## Session 1: Outline:

### **What is a Spiritual Autobiography?**

*When I was preparing for seminary, going through the ordination process, chaplaincy, and my jobs as a minister, I had a recurring assignment, which I had never before experienced in my life before those times. It was the assignment to write and present and share and talk about something that I call a spiritual autobiography.*

#### ***Definition: What is a Spiritual Autobiography?***

*When I talk about a Spiritual Autobiography, what am I talking about? Specifically, I am thinking about a written and shared story of someone's life, with a particular interest in God's involvement in your life. The purpose of the reflection is to explain a preset situation.*

*It is like an answer to a question:*

*For me the questions were:*

*"Why are you applying to seminary?"*

*"Why are you applying to chaplaincy?"*

*"Why are seeking to become a minister?"*

*The answers were a variety of responses that said:*

*"Here is a testimony of how God has directed me to this moment"*

## **My Experience:**

### **Applying to and interviewing at Seminary – the Admission Office**

- Writing a SA because it was assigned
- And then meeting with the Dean of Admissions and being asked about me and God.

### **Ordination Process:**

Consistory, Classes, Denomination, Internships, Chaplaincy, applying to and interviewing for jobs as a minister.

Over and over again, I had to write and verbally share something of my story and it was required and expected that I include God in the story.

## **What I learned for these experiences:**

- All of these assignments:
  - Forced me/Gave me a reason to inquire about God's involvement in my life.
    - I went back and through writing and editing, I reflected on different chapters of my life and my history. I was looking for answers to the question, "Why are you here?"
  - That practice and process was beneficial to my faith. God's Spirit illumined in my thinking and reflecting and helped to reveal how God had been involved in my life in ways that I previously hadn't realized or articulated before.
  - I grew in my relationship with God, my sense of God's involvement in my life, my sense of God's presence and activity in my life.

- I learned a new way to talk because of the practice:
  - In writing and then sharing my Spiritual Autobiography, I had to learn to talk about God as an active part of my life.
  - Why are you in seminary?
    - “I studied religion in college and was good at it”
    - “God gave me a passion for this, so I’m pursuing it.”
  - Before Doing this, I couldn’t really talk about God and my life, but now, if I choose to, I can talk about God.

### **Why Do I think it is worthwhile?**

- I found it a blessing to have a reason to go through my life and prayerfully ask God to help to reveal the ways that God had been active in my life, or influenced me, or how Religion and faith played a part in my life and formation. *I want to offer that to you as well.*
- I want you to grow in your ability to talk about your relationship with God and potentially be able to share that story with others!

## What am I offering?

### 1. A Reason To Do It:

- a. It's Lent
- b. We want to grow in our faith
- c. The minister thinks this is a good idea

### 2. Some guidance:

- a. A Question to Answer: *Why are you Here? How Did You Get Here?*
- b. Some of my thoughts on how to do it
- c. An example to learn from

### 3. A Friendly Audience to Listen and Receive:

Me... But also if you want it:

A Partner from this group, This whole Group, An Open Mic Night, Maybe more...

### 4. A Limit/Deadline – I want something from you by the end – April 20<sup>th</sup>

- a. It can't be your complete life story, but a focus on significant faith/God related milestones within your life that answer the question of – “why are you here?”
- b. It can't be a novel or a whole script for a Broadway play. I want it to be something that you can share in a reasonable period of time.
- c. It won't be perfect – so don't get caught up on making it perfect – just make it what it can be in the time we have between now and April 20<sup>th</sup>.

In preparing for this work, I realize that for all of us – to some degree, doing this kind of work might be very difficult because the assignment will ask you examine and dig up difficult memories and experiences in the past.

- Abusive relationships, Deep wounds inflicted by those associated with Religion, Church, community, or family,
- Dark and difficult periods in your life.

*What should I say about this?*

- *You are not a failure or less than, for having trauma in your background.*
- *If you have caused others pain and trouble with your words and actions in the past – welcome to the club!*
- *If taking on this assignment means that you also want to do some work towards healing some of those wounds, wounds you've received or wounds you've inflicted, and you would like my support, I am here for you. I am not the only support that you may need, but I am ready to play a part.*
- *If not, that is fine too, each of us need to heal as is right for us. I will respect if you have things that you don't want to share, or can't share with me or others as well.*

*What to expect moving forward:*

*Next Week – March 9<sup>th</sup> – 7:30pm*

- 1. Next week I am going to model this for you all. I will share a version of my spiritual autobiography.*
- 2. I will give some more thoughts on how to do this work.*
- 3. We can talk more about your experience as well. If you have tips and tricks for others.*

*Week 3 – March 16<sup>th</sup> – no meeting – you'll be writing*

*Week 4 – March 23 - Optional Check in – we will have a meeting where you can talk about how things are going, ask question, share together.*

*Week 5 – March 30<sup>th</sup> - No meeting – Writing time*

*Week 6 –April 6<sup>th</sup> – Partner or Small Group Sharing – we will get together in Cook Hall or the sanctuary and folks can in small groups share a draft or section of what they have written so far.*

*Week 7 – Easter Time – No meeting – Write*

*Week 8 – April 20<sup>th</sup> - Open Mic Night – Those who wish are invited to share with the group.*

*All along the way, I am happy to meet with people one on one, via phone, email, in my office. I am here!*