

Orientation to Formation:

The Paradox of Formation: Who Is Being Formed?



The sacred process of formation entails many relationships that include the formator, the new member, the leadership team, and the community. Two things will provide the context for the day: a brief look at the New Cosmology and the metaphor “middle space” used by women religious to describe their current reality. Through a process of input, reflection, and conversation participants will explore the intersection of these relationships. The focus will be on how to be with people in a way that honors the sacredness of their process and the process of formation.

We will also look at the process of peer supervision as a means of support for the formator.



Helen Cahill, D.Min. is a Dominican Sister of Peace who serves on the staff at the Claret Center Resources for Counseling and Spiritual Direction in Chicago, IL. In addition to giving spiritual direction Helen gives directed retreats, supervises formation personnel and offers workshops on a variety of topics. She is an adjunct faculty member at Catholic Theological Union (CTU) in Chicago. Prior to joining the staff at Claret Center, Helen spent a number of years in leadership in her community. She holds a Masters in Theological Studies and a Doctor of Ministry from CTU.

The Practice of Contemplative Dialogue: a path to personal and communal transformation

Religious Life, a decade into the 21st century, is on a journey accompanied by profound challenge and unparalleled opportunity. In this *Year of Consecrated Life*, God’s call is to more intimately embrace the needs and longings of a church and world engaged in the chaos of evolving consciousness.

Amidst rapid change, we are gifted with diversity, awakened to our interdependence, and challenged to seek common understanding in the face of differences. This workshop will offer tools to effectively communicate and engage these contemporary changes and challenges in a manner that embodies the teachings and lived example of Jesus.

The Practice of Contemplative Dialogue melds contemplative practice from the great spiritual and mystical traditions with theory and dialogical engagement skills of learning organizations. It awakens a pro



found 'common ground' or 'collective mind' within a group generating a capacity to work cooperatively for the common good in a spirit of understanding and trust. Individuals and members of a group grow in their capacity to be present to one another in ways that are deeply authentic, trustworthy and compassionate. From this stance participants experience a safety in which they can be their real and best selves opening doors to address demanding issues and situations in new and unimagined ways.



Steven Wirth is Executive Director of the nonprofit Centre for Contemplative Dialogue. Its mission is to advance the practice of Contemplative Dialogue/Active Engagement through training, certification, and support of individuals, organizations and communities practicing this transformative work.

Over the course of the last 5 years, diverse leaders from many parts of the globe have participated in this work, and thousands have experienced its benefits in meetings, retreats, and the lives of organizations.

Steven originated the practice of Contemplative Dialogue in 1993 during his work with the training of Spiritual Directors, and has deepened and grown the work over the last two decades.

Steven has a distinctive ability to assist groups in finding trustworthy common ground from which to overcome conflict and allow the best in group members to emerge. His work has effectively spanned groups with ethnically, religiously, professionally and economically diverse members. He has worked with corporate and government leadership teams, boards, union members, law firms, as well as denominational and congregational leaders. His approach to organizational engagement produces new frameworks for understanding, and an increased ability to work effectively together for the common good.

His related practice of facilitating contemplative dialogue, notably as lead facilitator for the International Thomas Merton Retreats 2000, 2002 & 2008, has involved him in large, small, and multi-lingual group situations.

He has further been involved with diverse women's communities in North America, the Caribbean, Australia and via his work with colleagues, other portions of the globe.

He holds a BA from Bellarmine University (1980) and a MA from Catholic Univ. of America (1983).



Connie Schoen, OP, is a member of the Dominican Sisters of Peace, and Associate Director of the Centre for Contemplative Dialogue. She has extensive leadership and organizational experience having served in leadership for her religious congregation and as Executive Director of Parable Conference for Dominican Life and Mission, working with the Dominican Order in the USA and internationally.

Connie has extensive experience facilitating diverse groups as a retreat and parish mission presenter. Trained as an educator and licensed attorney, Connie focused her teaching and legal careers on advocating for the rights of children and adults with special needs. She chose to train as a facilitator of the practice of Contemplative Dialogue/Active Engagement in order to advance the work of co-creating communities of compassion and peace.

Connie's commitment to this practice springs from her belief that the essence of Religious Life is to be a prophetic voice from the margins. Life on the periphery in the 21st century requires the ability to engage in authentic dialogue to bridge differences, navigate polarities, and cultivate peace. Members of Religious Institutes cross borders on a daily basis – whether it is life in the Formation community or ministry in the world community. The art of dialogue lies at the heart of bridge-building and peacemaking.