

Press Release
August 1, 2018



FAITH & SCIENCE BRIDGE THE GAP IN NEW RESEARCH FUNDING

New York, NY – Gestalt Pastoral Care, a transformative form of ministry created by the Rev. Tilda Norberg, has been awarded a coveted research grant focused on “Grace Examined: Evaluating Gestalt Pastoral Care Spiritually Integrated Strategies for Clinical Effectiveness.” The grant, administered by Brigham Young University, is funded through the Templeton Foundation.

Dr. Scott Richards, BYU Professor of Counseling Psychology, in congratulating the 22 international recipients of this highly competitive award, stated that the study “has the potential impact of laying the empirical groundwork for the era of spiritually integrated psychotherapies.” He compared the potential import to the impact of the groundbreaking work of the eminent Carl Rogers, an American psychologist who founded client-centered therapy.

Combining spiritual companionship, healing prayer and gestalt experiments, Gestalt Pastoral Care (GPC) employs the following strategies which are the core of the research: foundational belief that God is always urging clients towards greater wholeness; discernment; faith imagination; gathered church; prayer, laying on of hands, & anointing; and personal faith liturgies. Clients engage with these strategies in both individual and retreat settings.

Participation in the Study

When research is launched in August 2018, the general public is invited to participate through individual sessions or retreats in a variety of locations around the country. To find the name and contact information of a practitioner in your area, contact Lyn Barrett at lyn.barrett@gestaltpastoralcare.org. The study will continue through 2018-2019.

History of Gestalt Pastoral Care

Following her seminary education, Rev. Norberg engaged with a Gestalt therapist and subsequently trained in the modality. As a practicing Gestalt therapist, she also remained active in church ministries yet intentionally kept both parts of her vocation separate. At the time, psychotherapeutic and theological worlds held a wary opinion of each other. Nonetheless, dreams and other experiences nudged her towards bringing the two together and in her words, “I knew I was being called to get involved in healing ministry, despite the fact that it was the last thing I wanted to do.”

As the new integration became more clear and finely-tuned, Rev. Norberg noticed that people were growing more quickly and holistically than before. She also saw that many persons were hungry to integrate their emotional and spiritual growth. Soon she began offering weekend retreats in a format called “Opening to Grace.” These retreats continue with various leaders in various locations.

In 1984, a small group of clergy and therapists who had experience the healing benefits of the new synthesis (which did not yet have a name) asked Rev. Norberg to teach them this approach. From this initial class evolved the Gestalt Pastoral Care Foundational Training Course, which has been offered every year since. Along the way, other courses were added, included an internship program that leads to certification in Gestalt Pastoral Care ministry.

By 1990, a group of women who were using GPC as the focus of their work with clients began to work together to expand the training program and to plan for the future of GPC. They called themselves Gestalt Pastoral Care Associates.

The growth of the training program revealed a need for printed material about Gestalt Pastoral Care. Among other books, Rev. Norberg wrote the basic text called Consenting to Grace: An Introduction to Gestalt Pastoral Care, published in 2006.

Over 300 people have completed the GPC Foundational Training, and many draw on it in their various ministries.

Research Team & Practitioners

In fulfillment of the grant, the research team will be led by Michael Crabtree, Ph.D. and Professor in the Department of Psychology at Washington and Jefferson College in Washington, PA. Other multidisciplinary team members include: Benjamin Seltzer, Ph.D, Assistant Professor, Washington and Jefferson College; Michelle Zechner, Ph.D., L.S.W., C.P.R.P., Assistant Professor at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey; Wanda D. Craner, M.Div., President of Board, Gestalt Pastoral Care Associates, Inc., Gestalt Pastoral Care Minister and Trainer; Sylvia Crocker, Ph.D., Gestalt Psychotherapist and Author; Mary T. O’Neill, BCC-S, D. Min., President of National Association of Catholic Chaplains; and David Janvier, M.A., L.P.C.,C.S.T., Gestalt Pastoral Care Minister (Site Manager).

The practitioners for the study include pastors, coaches and licensed therapists, trained in Gestalt Pastoral Care, practicing in numerous locations in the United States: Rev. Tilda Norberg, M.Div. GPCM; Rev. Sara Goold, M.Div., GPCM; Rev. Wanda Craner, M.Div., GPCM; Rev. Betty Voigt, M.Div., GPCM; Rev. Linda Thomas, M.A.; Rev. Clarejean Haury, M.Div., GPCM; Alexandra MacCracken, ICF-ACC, GPCM; David Janvier, MA, LPC, CST, GPCM; and Tom Nowak, LPC, NCC, CAADC.

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