

Curriculum of Spiritual Friendship:  
Learning for Mutual Witness within and across Borders of Religious and Spiritual Traditions

**Abstract**

This study presents a preliminary sketch, an academic experiment through a portrait of one religious leader based on studying her friendship with her select spiritual friend, to illustrate how spiritual friendship functions as a learning scheme for participants with religious and spiritual convictions continue to deepen their rootedness in their spiritual commitment, meanwhile learn from their spiritual friends from different traditions. By so doing, mutually witness and tap into the differences as a source for learning, adults' befriending lead to learning to balance and appreciate identity and diversity in daily life.

**Introduction**

In a post-modern world with increasing religious and cultural diversity, one critical opportunity for religious education to take on is to creatively find ways to orient adult learners towards continual learning and growth in everyday life, that enables them to balance and appreciate identity and diversity. A key learning task is to learn and practice mutual witness.

Adults continue to learn and further develop (Kegan, 1982), and there is an established link between learning, growth and human connection in adult learning and development literature. but how learning occurs in relationships in daily life and how it leads to growth is often implicit. Yet in this realm lies in huge potentials. In adult learning and development literature, there is a solid recognition of the crucial role of community in a person's development in both secular and religious settings (Bonhoeffer, 1934; Wenger, 1998; Getz, 2002; Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990), but there isn't much attention and understanding of the role of friendship, a more fundamental human association, on a person's developmental path. This study aims to investigate how spiritual friendship brings about learning and growth for people in their mature adulthood.

The first question that needs to be addressed here is: What is spiritual friendship? For people with spiritual convictions, spiritual friendship involves a transcendental being in the midst of the participants in addition to the general elements of friendship such as knowing each other to some extent and sharing joys and challenges of life. To start the exploration, I draw on the classical literature on Christian spiritual friendship by Aelred of Rievaulx, the Abbot of Cistercian monastery in England in 12th Century. For Aelred, the essence of spiritual friendship is: "Here we are, you and I, and... a third, Christ, is in our midst" (p. 51). Spiritual friendship functions to cultivate the participants towards deeper connections with the transcendental being. The maturity of the participants develops in proportion to their connection to the transcendental being. In Aelred's account, the only type of friendship that brings participants closer to God is spiritual friendship. He therefore names such friendship as "true friendship." As the participants of

spiritual friendship grow in their connection with the transcendental being, their spiritual potentials mature continually as a result.

If it is true human beings learn better in relationships, it is reasonable to expect friendship, as a fundamental and universal human relationship, can be utilized for cultivating learning. Spiritual friendship, as friendship with a particular nature can be envisioned to foster learning and development for folks who practice it or would like to.

There are different kinds of learning, such as experiential and transformational, etc. It is reasonable to perceive optimal learning as the kind that forms and transforms the learning person. As a result of integrating of learning into being, the learner lives it out in his relationships with others and the world. For adults who have a spiritual conviction, one expression of integration of life is to explore and live out their vocation or calling. Theodore Stylianopoulos in his essay titled *A Life Worthy of God: Vocation According to St. Paul* summaries Eastern Orthodox' understanding of vocation is to do with the questions of "who, what, and how." Stylianopoulos contends "the question of 'who' is about identity, character, personhood, true humanity in relation to others and the whole of life." The question of "the what" is related to the discovery of one's specific calling in a particular profession; and the question of "the how" pertains to the principles, attitudes and ways of conduct involved in the exercise of chosen vocation (Stylianopoulos, p. 72-73).

This study aims to present a preliminary sketch, an academic experiment on how spiritual friendship functions as a learning scheme for participants, how participants with strong religious and spiritual convictions continue to deepen their rootedness in their commitment, meanwhile learn from the differences lived by their spiritual friends; therefore, live to mutually witness with friends day to day.

In this sketch, I will focus attention on how people in mature adulthood learn, grow and develop through spiritual friendship. One concentration is on investigating how the research subjects in the study, Eva, the main subject, and Anna, her select spiritual friend, two practicing Christians in their middle age, from different Christian traditions learn to develop spiritual friendship, how spiritual friendship further their learning and growth, deepen their connection to their own "spiritual home" (Eva) – and meanwhile "enlarge their territory", widen their openness, and grow in their capacity to learn from other religious and spiritual traditions.

## **Portraiture**

I have employed portraiture, a method of qualitative research in education for this study. Portraiture is fit for creating "a narrative that is at once complex, provocative, and inviting, that attempts to be holistic, revealing the dynamic interaction of values, personality, structure, and history" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 11) to delineate the pilgrimage of a pair of spiritual friends, to portray their engagement, development and learning from their spiritual friendship and Eva's developmental path towards a fully living out the "who, what, and how" of her vocation.

The following portrait of Eva, a committed Christian believer who serves in leadership function in both her home country and the US, was the result of four interviews I conducted with Eva, and

Anna, Eva's select spiritual friend. I have conducted three semi-structured interviews with Eva, and one interview with Eva and Anna.

My goal is to scrutinize Eva's spiritual friendship in relationship to learning and growth, to find out (1) how a spiritual friendship is initiated and developed, (2) what is involved in the learning through spiritual friendship, (3) how what they learn from the friendship contributes to their spiritual identity development; and (4) how their spiritual friendship influences their openness to others who hold different religious and spiritual convictions, and mutual witness to one another.

### **Meeting Eva**

*Upbringing.* Eva, in her early fifties at the time of our interview, was born and raised to a loving family in the Philippines as one of the six children. Being raised in the tradition of Catholicism, she "came to value prayer, reverence in attending church service especially in partaking the holy communion, and its opposition to divorce." She saw herself as a religious person but did not have a personal relationship with Jesus yet, cultivated in a Catholic educational institution whose school motto is 'Ora et Labora' (prayer and work) "inculcated in her the discipline of praying and working hard as well as the consciousness of entrust all things to God while valuing human agency and the pursuit for excellence." Her Catholic upbringing has trained her to place a high value in piety and learning. Eva excels in her educational efforts. She went to the very top university in Philippines for undergraduate.

*Deepening of faith.* In her freshman year in college, after attending a series of renewal church services, Bible studies, and personal readings of the Scripture, she intensely experienced God's love and grace in Christ and surrendered her life to Jesus. She was no longer a religious person, but one with an intimate relationship with God. She learned to read the Scripture, pray, and worship daily. She was baptized in water and in the Holy Spirit. Since then she saw significant transformations in her life, seeing the fruit of the Spirit in her life: walking in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

From there, Eva considers herself as "a hybrid woman minority with Catholic, Evangelical, and Pentecostal background, but one committed to a multi-ethnic church, whose top core values are seeking God through prayer, worship, and meditation of scriptures; and in living a life of love and service to others as a reflection of her love for God."

*Exploration of Vocation.* Eva recalled an earliest desire for vocation as one time, in her senior year in high school, she approached their mother superior and informed her she wanted to become a nun because she felt a desire to be closer to God and a sense of calling to service. She remembered very clearly that Mother responded that she should complete her university studies so that she would not be simply cleaning the convent.

*Radical Change of Life to Pursue Vocation.* Eva, with wholehearted support from her husband and their three children, pursued her passion to go to seminary in the US. They uprooted themselves from an established and comfortable life in their hometown, that they had built for more than 14 years, where she had her own business centers and their home in the finest village,

to travel all the way to a seminary in a foreign land, where they found a complete change of life style. They faced big difficulties and challenges in their new way of living. Both Eva and her husband pursue graduate studies with no income, while raising three children. Eva said she had no regrets as she knows she is pursuing God's given passion even though the experience of living in America includes as someone unknown, marginalized, and at times overlooked as a minority.

It is during this new phase of pursuing theological education Eva went through a radically deepening encounter with God, herself, and others. She reflected:

“This is most meaningful to me because I felt strongly God's grace and mercies and mighty provision and faithfulness. In addition, the incarnation of Christ has been most impactful to me: Christ who left his place of glory in heaven so that he may be able to identify with humanity's suffering and pain. Further, most meaningful to me is Christ coming to be among the common people, spending his energies in caring for the vulnerable, showing God's unconditional love, being among them, emptying himself, and offering grace, mercy and God's presence through his genuine love, care, and acts of compassion.... I came to relate with the pain, difficulties, and hardships of those living in vulnerable situations and learned to offer pathways in providing care for those in vulnerable positions. In my own vulnerability, I learned to share my life and identify with the hardships of the common people.”

Living behind a super comfortable life and “being replaced in a much more lowly living situation” opened up new pathways for Eva for further spiritual growth.

### **The Thread of Spiritual Friendship**

Through Eva's Christian walk, there is a thread of spiritual friendship. For Eva, spiritual friendship is characterized by (1) spiritual connection, (2) mutually empowering, (3) commitment to care, (4) authentic and transparent, (5) living life together but don't have to do so regularly, and (6) inter-changeability of knowing the work of the Spirit and know and be known by a spiritual friend.

#### **Initiation and development of spiritual friendship.**

In response to what first led her to develop spiritual friendship, Eva recalled the time when “a friendship beyond flesh and blood” helped her to commit her life to Christ. From the experience Eva learned “the model of ministry”. Eva recalled:

...my family was breaking apart. My brothers are going to college, they have their own lives. [My sisters] They have their own boyfriends, my mom and dad were having a hard life together and it's just messed up. So I found, Christ in me...and my friends started inviting me to attend a Bible study. And for me, as in different ways and how people teach the Bible and I said when I became a Christian, I embrace a new family. And yet, after I became a Christian, God used me to win my family to Christ. But what I'm saying is that the reason why I emphasize on the friendship is that because my friend would care

enough to invite me and she and her mom would always make time to invite me for dinner or lunch. It's such a friendship. That is, ... they're invested in me and they really care for me and I've embraced a family. That is beyond flesh and blood, but you know... they just care because they know Christ would want people to be brought to them to His kingdom.

So for me that model of ministry is very impactful for me because I was having a hard time with my family falling apart. And then here I am experiencing the love of [God] in the church. After church she would invite me for dinner or just to have conversation with the family.

### *Spiritual connection*

For Eva, spiritual friendship is more focused on *spiritual connection*. This distinguishes spiritual friendship from other types of friendships. Spiritual connection requires and incubates authenticity and transparency that “differs from acquaintances, or surface friendship.” Further, it advocates for and believes in you; meanwhile it’s authentic and transparent that affirms and corrects. Eva described:

Because I've been in the theological side for so long, I tend to define it in such a way that it's when you talk more about vocation and relationship, it's all about basically for me spiritual friendship. When you're able to bear your soul to another. And there's something sacred about it. And it's a spirit connecting to spirit...So...it's something that's really what describes the Holy Spirit for me, it's a breath of life, its life giving.

If I think about the Holy Spirit, it's the advocate. So it's a spiritual friendship that coaches. I don't use the word coaches, but it advocates for you, it fights for you and believes in you and helps you make it through life, and the Holy Spirit is gentle, confirming, comforting. And yet at the same time there's a conviction. So even in spiritual friendship, it's being upfront and being real and being authentic and transparent that you're able to tell and rebuke at the same time without offending because love overlooks matter. So it's all encompassing.

...There's a transparency and authenticity that differs from acquaintances, or for me surface friendship. So that's why, for me, some could be some friendship, some could really be spiritual friendship... It's not just a friendship. But there's a spiritual friendship. So that's why it focuses more on the description of the spirit of the spiritual connection. It's beyond just your playmate in playing sports or watching TV or watching movies together or eating together. But for us, even as Asian eating together something that’s sacred or even in the Bible. Because eating itself is a way of showing that you care. It's a real hospitality.

[The] Connection is not just mere friendship like playing basketball together, but it's more focus on the spiritual connection. This is most ideal I feel I mean... because some

friendship doesn't want to go to the spiritual level. What I mean they don't want to speak about God. So I think that's why I tend to say spiritual level goes to a level where...you talk about life meaning and purpose and of God, of values.

Eva stresses spiritual friendship entails that “people live life together,” that creates “sense of belonging.” In a Bible study group, members “live life together” makes it distinguishable from “a typical classroom setting.”:

I don't agree with people studying the Bible and they don't become friends and they don't live together and the people tend to not attend regularly leave, if you don't make the group friendship, because there's no sense of belonging, as our sense of family. It becomes something like a typical classroom setting. That you don't live life together. But I think spiritual friendship is still about not just talking about life, but also living life together. But you don't have to live it regularly together. I would say we have spiritual friendship Julia, even though we don't talk regularly, but there are moments that we share life together.

#### *Commitment to care*

What makes spiritual friendship occur, Eva believes friendship happens when one is *willing to care*. She shared when there is an initiation of connection either reaching out for a need, or initiate willingness to help. Then a mutual support and edification gets developed when one responds to the “olive branch” sent by a potential friend:

...for me it's always initiating to reach out and at the same time initiating to be willing to help because for me, I would always say friendship always starts when you're willing to care. I would always tell that to my son who says mom, why don't I have friends. I said, you have to be a friend yourself to have friends, very good friend. Your plant is what you will reap. What you will so is what he will reap. It's the same thing, whether it's money or love or time.

#### **Barrier for friendship**

It was revealed that a barrier for a friendship to develop lies in the area of connection and communication due to the fact people live in a stance of being so independent and self-reliant despite the fact there is a need for a friendship. Eva pinpointed:

There are people like that because we do not want to call people when we need help, unless we're forced to just like education. If you don't need anything, even though we are connected well. Julia, we connect so well. But because we are so independent. The two of us are so self-reliant and so independent, we would not bother to reach out, even though we're feeling lonely or we're not feeling well, because we're so used to taking care of ourselves.

In Eva's experience, she would connect with a friend if "the Spiritual tells her to." She experiences such a call as "spirit calling to spirit:

So I would only do that when the Spirit would tell me to do it. So, or if there's an occasion like our time before, it's Christmas. Now I will tell you it's Thanksgiving to the professor [I reached out] that we've built a spiritual friendship, but I don't dare communicate with them regularly. So it depends upon the moment the need. I don't want to exclude, I realize it, but it's spirit calling to spirit.

It's indicated in the interview with Eva and Anna it is a challenge for them to connect with one another when there isn't a task requirement for them to or the Spirit moves one to. It is a situation shared by adults to manage multiple demands simultaneously, which may make it challenging for regular contact with friends. For Eva, a spiritual friendship remains regardless of the frequency of contact.

I think there could be, it depends upon the person because there would be some people who would have a steady phone conversation or email conversation, but I'm not that type, but if you want to communicate with me in that way it happens. And then life goes on because there would be time [for different things]. Like if I would remember my spiritual friends like my friends in the Philippines. They're both pastors, for two years, we would be talking once a month, like we're coaching together, but we've gone a long way from college from our ministry together. But now we stop, but it doesn't mean we're not spiritual friends.

### **Levels of spiritual friendship**

One theme from Eva's experience of spiritual friendship is that spiritual friendship to Eva can take place in any moment, a mutual spiritual edification and empowerment can occur in an instant encounter. Therefore, there are different levels of spiritual friendship depending on the depths it gets to mature. It can be decided by the fact the period of time the connection remains and how active it is. Eva stresses spiritual friendship does not have to be held in regular contact, or long term. As life can be shared in moments.

That characterizes the friendship between Eva and I. We met at a women's leadership meeting at an academic conference over two years ago. Things clicked when I shared assisting three professors was one main financial source for living as an international student, as Eva shared this experience through her Seminary years. This sharing brought our conversation towards deeper communication around life, value and meaning. Then I joined the leadership team which was led by Eva. She *absolutely struck me as a leader of a kind that stewards superb capability in her leadership and knowledge, and character of humbleness, softness and warmth at the same time. She has a big and able heart to embrace my thorny uniqueness.* Most amazingly, I experience in our interaction and collaboration within her a "honed program" as part of her being, that she responds to those who approach her with inquiry and seeking for certain things "automatically" for the seekers' best. I mean for me often I need to have a

reflective moment and land on this decision and then try to act on it. But she has grown that maturity as part her to be spontaneously functioning this way.

Martin Buber delineates “the between” or “between-human” spontaneously created when two persons get together. That makes it possible “a turn” - “turning with one’s whole being to meet the other” – which leads to “turning towards the other” followed by “turning away from a self-reflexive monologue consumed in self-enjoyment”, by this series of “turning” a person shifts from “I-it” to “I-thou.” When in “I-it” phase the person treats fellow humans as objects, in “I-thou” stage a person turns away from “self-indulgence” toward another person metaphorically and thus embarks on opening to fully acknowledge and acceptance of the other. Buber (2002) classifies interactions between individual persons as either “monologue” when in “I-it” relation, or “dialogue” provided by “I-thou” relationships. In the latter, “each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them” (Buber, 2002, p. 19). As such, spiritual friendship appears to be at different levels. One decisive factor of the levels goes to the levels of *sharing*.

One distinction of adults is they possess rich life experiences that a human person with full agency would engage in – professional, personal, political etc. These experiences constitute source of learning and teaching. Sharing decides the level that unleash the resource for utilization. Therefore there holds great potential for learning and teaching to occur if sharing is facilitated when two or more adults gather together. Spiritual friendship, as an in-depth “between-human” space paves way for sharing in depth and breadth.

Different depth and breadth of sharing can lead to different levels of spiritual friendship. For Eva, while “sharing life” is a condition for spiritual friendship, she perceives that people do not “have to live it regularly together.” She believes between she and I we have spiritual friendship, even though we don't talk regularly, “there are moments that we share life together.”

### **Seek Presence of God in Spiritual Friendship**

Spiritual friendship is a sign of God’s favor to Eva, as she experiences the presence of God in spiritual friendship especially in a time or place where she’s removed from abundance in many ways, when she moved from a very comfortable life at home to a foreign land to pursue her passion to study theology.

I asked Eva how her spiritual friendship affect her connection to God, she says:

...as I reflect on being taken away from a place of having many friendships to a place where totally without one. When I started here, I knew it helped me to continually to know the presence of God's favor and goodness. And I know it. I could not quantify it, but I know it's continually helping me. When I first became a Christian, I was taught well to have my daily devotions to read my Bible, to pray and to do my praise and worship. That I thought that the only means that's a way that I'm experiencing spiritual growth, but I think having spiritual friendship add spice.



To my relationship with God in such a way that I could easily see God's goodness in favor I because I come alive, not just in God's presence alone. I've come to a place of feeling somehow isolated. Now you know what it means when your spiritual friendship is a sign for me of God's favor and goodness. Just like what the Psalter would say that surely God's mercy and goodness will follow me all the days of my life, whatever journey. I would be whether in the deepest darkness of my life, there will always be a friend that God will bring to me or bring before me, that will make me realize that. And he's real and alive because sometimes we need more than just simply reading the Bible and pray and worshiping or even beyond being in church.

It's coming to know another human being. A few you know [and] you have known. It's just like it's our friendship with God. Only then that we shall be fully known, when the time we come to know God. And yet, when we come to have love relationships with people here, you may not be fully known. But, you know, there's a continuous disclosure of yourself. You come to know your strengths, your weaknesses.

Therefore, in addition to providing an arena to seek and experience the presence of God, spiritual friendship furthermore offers an “between-human” space for the participants to allow “continuous disclosure” of the self to a “significant other” – a trusty and loving friend that welcomes and invites such disclosure. One outcome of this continuous disclosure is a growing self-knowledge.

### **Learning Through Spiritual Friendship Across Traditions**

Continuing learning about oneself and become the best self is part of the result of having spiritual friendship for Eva, as well as for her spiritual friend Anna.

Anna, also comes from the Philippines over a decade ago, in her late forties, full-time housewife and mother to two children. Ana and Eva met at a mutual friend's place. Ana is a devout Catholic believer, claimed by Eva. Ana shared in our interview it took her forty years to come to actively seek to become close to God. Eva says what bonds them is their common love towards Christ even if Eva left Catholicism.

Witnessing the spiritual friendship between Eva and Anna through our two-hour interview was a nurturing and beautiful experience. It displayed before my eyes a documentary “fantasy episode.” Two beings deeply appreciate, respect, uplift and nurture each other. Despite their different belonging in terms of their Christian beliefs, they are committed to respect each other, and continue to learn how to relate to one another. As they do so, Eva sees greater spectrum of color of God.

They share a core commonality in their spiritual commitment. Both Eva and Anna believe the primary vocation for a Christian believer is to “get closer to God”, while it is termed differently. For Anna, her primary vocation is sainthood, and it is a daily struggle to get closer to God. For Eva, it is minister God's love to people.

The cross-tradition spiritual friendship between Eva and Anna is perceived as “work of the Spirit” by Eva, of whom she claimed “knows no boundary.” :

When you come into good friendship with different people with different doctrines you come to embrace God and not put that in a box.... You fully understand the work of the Spirit that has no boundaries and you don't know where it's coming from and what it means to be gentle comforting. To be providing conviction and at the same time encouragement I think you see those manifestation to other people. And when it comes to no boundaries. He doesn't just relate with people have the same faith or even the same tradition you relate with other people, whether I am a Pentecostal might relate with Catholics, or even I would not just be exclusive to talking with Christians, but even to Muslims and Hindus and other faith traditions. It knows no boundaries and you don't know where it's coming from. For me, it's just being open to friendship.

Eva’s claim that the Spirit knows no boundary is demonstrated by how Eva and Anna learn from each other despite their “education gap.” Eva has advanced theological degrees (M Div and M Thil.) from one of the best seminaries known to offer most qualitative theological education in the States, in addition to going to the very top university in Philippines for undergraduate study, whereas Anna did not finish her college. Eva continues to learn from Anna of her “child-like faith,” her openness and transparency encourages Eva as she treasures authenticity. Eva shared she undertook a “style change” in her leadership as she grows older. She changes to be more authentic and vulnerable with the people she leads. Inevitably, I trust, the friendship with Anna must be a strengthening force that continue to support and invite such transformation.

As it’s exemplified by Eva and Anna’s friendship, spiritual friendship creates space at intra-personal and inter-personal level to bring together dialogue and praxis for the concrete form of the mission - witness – martyria, the sum of the three dimensions of Christian church mission: be - koinonia, community, presence, etc., do - diakonia, care, service, and say – kerygma, proclamation of the gospel, dialogue (Guder, 2000). Eva and Anna’s friendship testifies that their friendship helps them to become better selves. Anna shared it took her forty years to come to the point pursuing after sainthood. It is a daily struggle for her and that entails her going to educational programs at church beyond Sunday services, etc. But devotion and efforts as such are not fully understood and supported all the time by the people around. But, Eva, always encourages her to engage in further learning. Despite the fact there is limited shared common knowledge from theological training nor higher education, they help each other to live out the primary Christian vocation, to become closer to God, and to minister God’s love to people. This works towards maturation of the person, in becoming “the who” dimension of their vocation. As such, even if “the what” and “the how” might be constrained by existential conditions like knowledge and professional experiences, there remains opportunities for “the who” to be edified and cultivated through mutual witness in an in-depth “between-human” – spiritual friendship through the spiritual connection.

Eva’s experience that her spiritual friendships manifest different communication focus and style depend on the needs and possibility. For example, with her seminary professor with whom a spiritual friendship had been developed, their topic of dialogue often centers around knowledge

in theological realms. The “what” and the “how” are complimented well in other spiritual friendships Eva has.

### **Contemporary Ruth and A Missionary in A Foreign Land**

What emerged to me around Eva, character wise, is a contemporary Ruth, who grows resilience out of vulnerability and lowliness in a foreign land. Walking the path creates in Eva deepening encounters with God, herself and others. It unleashes her spiritual potentials, and becomes a source of strength for her to live out her vocation to become more able to “love people and help them and to empower people.” In one of Eva’s writings, she reflects that: Ruth’s exemplar resilience is rooted in Ruth’s identity and loving kindness under cultural and spiritual frameworks...As a minority foreign woman, Ruth offers pathways towards resilience by caring for others, identifying with a particular faith community, and taking initiatives while maintaining integrity. So does Eva. She always seeks to serve in a leadership role wherever she finds herself at. In our interaction, either in addressing my personal quests or our collaboration as part of the women’s leadership team colleagues, Eva always imparts a generosity beyond the call of duty. I witness and experience how such a “generosity, loving kindness” is a powerful force that serves effectively those in privileged positions and in vulnerable situations. Eva, lives an illuminating, humble and powerful life to bring those who she interacts with closer to God, as I experience, and her friend Anna testifies. Eva’s life models a missionary in a foreign land to me.

### **Spiritual Friendship and Adult Religious Education**

In an essay entitled "The Marks of a Christian College," D. Elton Trueblood, a known philosopher and theologian noted Christian convictions, an interest in wholeness, a passion for truth, and the role of fellowship as the chief characteristics of the institution devoted to Christ. Harris claims “curriculum is about the mobilizing of creative, educative powers in such a way as to fashion a people.” Religious education is called to explore in creative ways to facilitate learning in the religious and cultural diversity in the pluralistic context of the modern world. I see a great potential lies with a curriculum of spiritual friendship. I argue, for learners in mature adulthood, there might not be an environment set as a Christian college functioning as a arranged learning environment, adults have capacity of free human agency at their disposal to create such environment for themselves to aid their further learning and growth. Spiritual friendship, appears to be such soil by nature: spiritual conviction, an invitation and demand for wholeness as an in-depth, heart-to-heart or soul-to-soul relationship entails by nature, a passion and need for continual pursuit after truth, and the role of fellowship, i.e. a fundamental and in-depth fellowship - spiritual friendship, is inevitably a rich, under-utilized source for such learning and growth. By intentionally developing and practicing spiritual friendship, adults can create for themselves incubators for learning and holistic growth as human persons. Spiritually held by and accounted to spiritual friends, they set on a path for incarnation of “becoming human” increasingly reflecting image of God and growth towards likeness of God.

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