P.A.C.E.: Foundations, Philosophy & Development

Dr. Judith C. Holder, PhD, MS, PCC, BCC

A background resource for ministers and spiritual leaders
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P.A.C.E. Coaching Skills Institute™ is a virtual, nondenominational institute that supports ministers and spiritual leaders in developing and refining coaching skills to enhance the roles they already hold.

This resource preserves the deeper background and spiritual perspective shared on the Institute's original website. It explains how the approach developed, why coaching skills matter in ministry, and how ongoing learning can enrich service. Current offerings and registration details are available on the website.



An Invitation to Deeper Engagement

Ministry often calls for teaching, guiding, advising, caring, and responding to immediate needs. Coaching adds another way of engaging: listening beyond the presenting concern, asking questions that invite reflection, and supporting people as they discern their own meaningful next steps.

The intention is to expand the leader's range of responses while honoring the dignity, spiritual life, and responsibility of the person seeking support. Ministers and spiritual leaders bring expertise in their own religious and spiritual affiliations. P.A.C.E. focuses on coaching skills, discernment, and engagement that can strengthen their service.

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01 | DEVELOPMENT

How the Institute Took Shape



Dr. Holder's exploration of coaching skills included work with physicians, educators, and researchers in demanding healthcare environments. In settings shaped by problem-solving, time pressure, and complex responsibilities, she recognized the value of also approaching a conversation as an opportunity for growth.

In 2018, she designed a coaching workshop for selected Duke University Medical Center faculty. The work encouraged participants to notice their approach to helping, ask open-ended questions, and use what she developed, known as P.A.C.E. coaching skills to support greater understanding and constructive outcomes within their spheres of influence.

Building on years of facilitating these workshops, Dr. Holder brought together her knowledge of human behavior, coaching practice, and applied spirituality to develop the P.A.C.E. Coaching Skills Institute. Its purpose is to support ministers and spiritual leaders whose work combines spiritual guidance with practical leadership and care.

Coaching Through a Spiritual Lens

The original website connected coaching with a longstanding human practice: helping another person reflect, discover meaning, and take responsibility for a way forward. Thoughtful questioning and dialogue have appeared in philosophy, education, and spiritual guidance across different periods and traditions.

These parallels offer a useful lens for reflection. Although they do not necessarily make ancient spiritual direction identical to modern professional coaching, or establish a single historical origin for coaching, they do offer a perspective in relational to contemporary coaching having its approaches to partnership, goals, learning, and action.

Within ministry, this perspective invites leaders to consider how a structured coaching conversation can complement their existing practice. It creates room to explore what a person understands, values, and feels called to do, without presuming that the leader must supply every answer.

Dr. Holder's work in healthcare provides part of the Institute's developmental background. The Institute is a program of Unique Pathways; this background does not imply Duke sponsorship or endorsement.

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02 | MINISTRY AND LEADERSHIP

Why Coaching Skills Matter





Ministers and spiritual leaders accompany people through change, uncertainty, strained relationships, and questions of purpose. Sincere care can sometimes become a repeated cycle of offering solutions while the other person's own understanding and responsibility receive less attention.

Learning coaching skills creates an opportunity to notice that pattern. The leader can slow down, explore what is needed, and help the person identify a next step they are prepared to take. Advice, teaching, and direct intervention still have their place; discernment includes recognizing when a coaching approach is appropriate.

Self-awareness. Reflection helps leaders recognize their assumptions, emotional reactions, strengths, and habits of rescuing or moving too quickly toward a solution. This awareness supports more deliberate choices in conversation.

Communication and leadership. Attentive listening and thoughtful questions can clarify concerns, surface differing perspectives, and support constructive feedback. These skills can be applied to team dynamics, conflict, leadership development, and everyday relationships.

Ownership and responsible action. When individuals articulate their own priorities and possibilities, the conversation can move toward choices they understand and can act on. The leader remains engaged without assuming responsibility for another person's decisions.

Spiritual nourishment and sustainable service. Leaders also need space for their own reflection and spiritual practices. Awareness of boundaries and the impulse to carry every burden may support a more sustainable way of serving; coaching does not guarantee relief from stress or fatigue.

Applications Within Ministry

Coaching conversations may be useful in discipleship, spiritual growth and soul-care, life transitions, leadership refinement, communication, and conflict resolution. The approach is selected according to the person, context, and needs of the conversation.

Training develops coaching skills. It does not provide therapy, mental health treatment, or training in counseling. Leaders retain responsibility for working within their role and referring people for appropriate professional support when needed.

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03 | SPIRITUAL PHILOSOPHY

Principles that Inform the Approach



The Institute's philosophy connects coaching practice with compassionate listening, inner wisdom, personal responsibility, and service. These themes can resonate across religious and spiritual traditions, while their meanings and expressions remain particular to each community.

Empowerment and self-responsibility. Support people in recognizing their strengths, resources, and choices. A coaching conversation invites participation in their own growth, rather than dependence on the leader for every solution.

Compassionate understanding. Listen with kindness and discernment. Curiosity can help a leader understand the person's experience without prematurely judging it or projecting the leader's own experiences onto it.

Divine guidance and intuition. Make room for prayerful reflection and attention to the Divine, as understood within the person's tradition. Leaders can remain open to insight while also examining assumptions and the practical implications of a possible next step.

Inner growth and transformation. Explore beliefs and patterns that may limit constructive action. Within its educational scope, coaching supports awareness and forward movement; it does not substitute for psychological treatment or promise inner healing.

Openness beyond a closed mindset. Consider perspectives that challenge habitual explanations. Flexibility makes room for learning, a broader understanding of others, and possibilities that may be missed when a conversation is rushed.

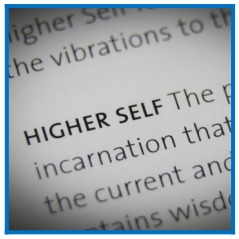
Service to others. Bring humility, grace, compassion, and generosity to leadership. Coaching offers an additional way to serve by helping others develop their capacity to reflect, decide, and participate responsibly in community life.

These principles describe the Institute's spiritual orientation. Participants are not asked to replace their religious or spiritual expertise but reflect on them as you understand how coaching skills can support yours and another's growth. The shared learning centers on the quality of listening, discernment, and engagement.

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04 | LEARNING AND PRACTICE

From Understanding to Integration



The Institute approaches learning as a progressive journey. Participants develop skills through interactive workshops, guided practice, peer reflection, and feedback. Learning includes noticing one's own responses as well as understanding a coaching framework.

Level 0 — Discover. A complimentary Information Session introduces the approach and offers an opportunity to explore how coaching skills can complement ministry and spiritual leadership.

Level I — Empowerment. Participants begin learning and practicing the core approach, with attention to listening, thoughtful questions, self-awareness, and the difference between coaching and other helping roles.

Level II — Refinement. Learning deepens through attention to more layered conversations, emotional and relational awareness, perspective-taking, and the leader's ability to remain present and curious.

Level III — Fellowship Circle. A small peer setting supports continued practice, reflection, feedback, and integration into ministry and leadership conversations.

The Book and Live Learning

Learn to P.A.C.E.: Coaching Skills for Ministers and Spiritual Leaders provides a reading companion to this work. The book introduces the approach and invites further reflection; live training provides opportunities to experience, practice, and receive feedback. Reading the book is not required to begin training.

The aim is not simply to gather more information. Participants are invited to bring a skill into daily conversations, notice what happens, and return with observations and questions. Over time, practice can help a new approach become more natural and responsive to context.

This document explains the learning philosophy. Current eligibility, prerequisites, schedules, prices, participation requirements, and completion conditions should always be checked on the website. Continuing education here describes ongoing learning; recognition of credit by any external body should be confirmed separately.

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05 | CONTINUING DEVELOPMENT

A Continuing Path of Growth



The original website envisioned continuing opportunities beyond the core training. Areas of interest included understanding personal styles, the neuroscience of communication, giving clear and constructive feedback, and managing conflict with greater awareness. These are developmental directions, rather than a promise that each course is currently available.

Ongoing learning invites ministers and spiritual leaders to revisit familiar challenges with fresh understanding. Personal development and service inform one another: greater awareness of one's own patterns can enrich relationships, while the needs of a community can reveal where further learning is needed.

"By broadening your understanding through continuing education, you nurture your soul and the souls of those you minister, allowing for a greater attunement with mind, heart and what truly matters." — Dr. Holder

Briefly About Dr. Judith

Dr. Judith C. Holder, PhD, MS, PCC, BCC, is the founder of the Institute and executive director of Unique Pathways Coaching and Consulting Services, PLLC. A psychologist and executive and leadership coach, she brings psychological and behavioral health insight, practical coaching skills, and spiritually grounded leadership to her work.

Her background includes 24 years at Duke University Medical Center, continuing adjunct faculty providing services in a Master's program as an Associate Director of Team Development, Advisor and member of the Executive Team. She is an author of several books and host of Mastering Life's Adventures: Being Your Best Self Through Soul Evolution. Her books and podcast welcome people seeking spiritual understanding and practical ways to grow in everyday living.

Explore Further

P.A.C.E. Institute • training, books, workshops, and current information

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