



Spiritual Direction

RELATIONSHIP • EVANGELISM • RELATIONSHIP

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

THE MINISTRY OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Along with Group Reunion and Ultreya, Spiritual Direction is offered as part of the Fourth Day experience. It is a means to grow in one's faith journey and to realize God is at the center of life. Spiritual Direction helps Cursillistas to explore, develop and cultivate their relationships with God. Like Cursillo, spiritual direction is a unique experience for each person and is not easily defined. This booklet is offered as a resource for Cursillistas and anyone interested in developing their spiritual life.

A basic premise of Spiritual Direction is that God is love. His love is personal, is communicated, can be experienced, and is a gift. Spiritual Direction is about increasing one's awareness of God's presence, about seeing God in the ordinary things of life, about recognizing God at work in one's life and in the world, and about then responding to God. Through spiritual direction, an individual how better to rely on God in everyday life, how better to integrate faith with all of life, and how to be more trusting and open with God. In other words, spiritual direction encourages our union with Christ.

This booklet seeks to provide a sense of the importance of Spiritual Direction as a tool for a focused, intentional, and enriched journey in faith. It will offer insight into what Spiritual Direction is and is not, along with guidelines for Spiritual Direction for Directors and Directees.

THE BENEFITS OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Entering into Spiritual Direction presupposes that God communicates directly with each of us and that we can listen and respond both to God's call and action in our life. Another basic premise is that God is always with us, inviting us into a personal relationship and growing intimacy. In spiritual direction, we listen for God and notice our response to God's call and action.

Many individuals find it extremely difficult to listen to God. We resist God's intrusion into our lives. We find it hard to take time to be with God due to preoccupation with life's activities. We fear silence, vulnerability, loss of control, and intimacy with God. We resist prayer, study of the Bible, or use of other spiritual aids. We move away from spiritual experiences.

Spiritual Direction offers a remedy, a disciplined way to pay attention to our spiritual experiences. In spiritual direction, we are invited to put our experiences of God into concrete words. The classic Spiritual Direction

A DEFINITION

"Help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God's personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship."

*William A. Barry and William J. Connolly
The Practice of Spiritual Direction*

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question asked of our daily life experience is this: “Where is God in this experience?” Direction helps us to focus our attention on God’s call and action in our daily lives. As we grow in our ability to notice God’s presence and action in our life, we also grow in our ability to notice our response to God. Our responses to God’s call and action give us a sense of the direction our life is taking. We are either moving toward God, we are moving away from God, or our spiritual life is stagnant. Two of the three are not positives.

All of us have spiritual experiences every day, these experiences too often pass unnoticed because we don’t know how to articulate them or explore them with another person. Spiritual Direction focuses our attention on these spiritual experiences and forces us to put “flesh” on them by using specific words to illuminate the experience. Spiritual Direction is a gift we give to ourselves to help us know where God is in our life in a significant and specific way. Spiritual Direction is focused on our actual experience of God and not on our ideas about God.

ASPECTS OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

A MINISTRY WITHIN THE CHURCH

As a ministry of the Church, Spiritual Direction enables people to understand the goals of divine union and a life oriented towards that goal. The ministry of Spiritual Direction within the Church is meant to help people understand that the goal of their life is divine union, becoming recreated in the image and likeness of God and then moving toward that goal.

The essential ministry of Spiritual Direction occurs through a guided relationship under the direction of the Holy Spirit, thereby leading an individual Christian to union with God. It is one facet of the sanctification process that enables the character of Christ to be formed in each of us who commits his/her life to God.

FACILITATES CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Jesus said that He would give us life and give us life abundantly (John 10:10). The exercise of spiritual direction is intended to aid us in receiving that promise. Spiritual Direction makes possible the true growth of individuals into what God created them to be. Spiritual Direction is intended to aid growth in holiness and the abundant life. It is more important than physical development or mental acumen. Spiritual Direction and growth are eminently practical.

Spiritual growth is a process or unfolding. The details of who we are created to be are largely unknown to us. Only God knows all the details. Such a realization can be unsettling. However, the Gospel tells us that our identity is already established through our relationship with Jesus Christ. The process of spiritual growth that unfolds is the individual’s response to the free gift of God’s grace. Such a response frees us to give ourselves back to God as we submit to His will.

GOD COMMUNICATES TO INDIVIDUALS

God communicates with individuals for their Christian growth. He guides us in this process of transforming by three means: revelation, human experience, and prayer. Each one is a way in which God speaks to us.

1. Divine revelation is mediated through the Holy Spirit by means of sacred Scripture and sacred tradition. Holy Scripture is the revelation of God to us, documented in the written word and expressed through a living community called the Church. Sacred tradition is passed on through the apostolic life of the Church through the power and witness of the saints. Both Holy Scripture and sacred tradition reveal God’s word to us.
2. God is also revealed through the human experiences of our lives—the ups and downs. Many Christians feel more of God’s presence and direction during a difficult time because of a greater reliance on God. Many times God communicates to us through other people (e.g. comments by our friends and family) and through various circumstances with which we find ourselves (e.g. not getting that job that we really wanted).
3. God reveals Himself to us through prayer, the activity of making ourselves available to God. This involves communication with God and a willingness to listen to what He wants to say to us. Some Christians have heard God audibly speak to them, just as with some people in the Bible. God speaks to us by other means during times of prayer, perhaps by presenting new ideas in order to solve a problem or by providing a sense of joy and security as we praise Him.

All three ways in which God communicates with His children are integral elements in the spiritual direction experience. A Spiritual Director helps individuals see how God communicates to them through these three ways.

THERE ARE RISKS

To be vulnerable is to let someone into our sacred space. To meet with a Spiritual Director is often a vulnerable experience because we are opening to another our prayers, our longings, our hope, our dreams, our vision of God, and giving voice to God's presence in our daily life experience. Those serious about spiritual direction must be willing to give up some control and secrecy.

CHOOSING AND USING A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

REASONS TO MEET WITH A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

Generally, people meet with a Director out of a desire to grow in their relationship with God. Some are interested in spiritual growth over a long period of time, some for a shorter period. A few are seeking discernment around a call to ministry. Some people want help during times that challenge their faith. Others feel a desire, even a need, to be accountable to someone for their spiritual growth and progress. Still others seek new ways to pray, and there are those who need help putting their spiritual experiences into words. Frequently, individuals have a question or conflict that makes them feel separated from God. Some people want to experience God's healing touch in their life. In some instances, people seek a Spiritual Director when they really want a pastoral counselor or a psychotherapist.

PSYCHOTHERAPY, PASTORAL COUNSELING, AND SPIRITUAL DIRECTION ARE DIFFERENT¹

One way to distinguish between psychotherapy, pastoral counseling and spiritual direction is to define them.

- **Psychotherapy** is a relationship in which a therapist helps a counselee to make fundamental changes in his or her personality. Psychotherapy focuses on underlying conflicts that block a person's ability to function freely. It usually involves a discussion of the problem that acted as the stimulus to bring a patient to therapy, but moves beyond that problem to uncovering and working through early memories, hidden feelings, and conflicts behind the problem. Psychotherapy is a long-term process and should be undertaken under the care of a licensed psychotherapist/psychiatrist.
- **Pastoral counseling** is a relationship in which a theologically trained person uses counseling methods to help another handle a specific problem. In pastoral counseling, the focus is on the particular problem that caused the person to seek help. It usually involves forming goals and developing a strategy to carry out those goals within a Christian value structure. Pastoral counseling is a short-term relationship.
- **Spiritual Direction** is a relationship in which one person helps another to be aware of and respond to God in his or her life. In Spiritual Direction the focus is on growth as a Christian. It may include discussion of one's prayer life, help in probing one's ulterior motivation, guidance in discerning how one is being led, and support in developing one's Rule of Life.

The differences in these helping ministries are also found in the overall focus of the meeting. The psychotherapist helps troubled persons develop insight into their responses by free association and focusing on early memories. Pastoral counselors help counselees develop goals by helping them express their feelings and assess their strengths. Spiritual direction helps people discern the presence of God and their response to God.

The differences, however, are not always that clear in these three helping ministries. It helps to remember the focus of each ministry and to realize that each type of helping often touches on the other two in an attempt to meet an individual's complex needs. Many people use psychotherapy for growth rather than for healing, thus using it in a way similar to spiritual direction. Conversely, deep conflicts, dreams, and repressed memories are sometimes worked through in Spiritual Direction. Pastoral counselors often help persons to reflect on God's presence in the problem-solving situation.

FINDING A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

Finding a spiritual director is often a very personal and intuitive experience. Several resources exist for aiding the process. Spiritual Director's International (www.sdiworld.org) has a *seek and find* guide that will give you names and numbers for Spiritual Directors. Other resources include retreat centers, schools of theology, and clergy. Parish clergy may have other resources available that will enable you to locate a Spiritual Director. Before you begin, you may want to clarify some of your choices. Is it important to have a male or female director? Would you want an ordained or lay director? Would you want someone whose theology is similar to yours?

When you have found some names and telephone number of potential spiritual directors, call them to tell them you wish to discuss the possibility of Spiritual Direction. The director will want to know your spiritual autobiography, why you are seeking direction, and what you are looking for in a Spiritual Director.

You will want to know about the director's spiritual formation and training, their habits of prayer and study, Spiritual Direction, and supervision. Some questions that can help you discern if there is a good match include: Are you comfortable with this person? Is this someone with whom you can share openly and trust completely? Is this a prayerful time? When meeting with a potential director, both of you are discerning if this is a good match.

If you decide to enter into a Spiritual Direction relationship, you will need to decide how often you want to meet. Most people meet with their directors once a month. However, some people seldom meet — only when on retreat or once or twice a year. Some meet only for a specific time, such as when going through a life transition. You and your director can determine what is best for you. You can evaluate how Spiritual Direction is working for you with your director after you have met a few times. You will also want to agree upon ethical guidelines, confidentiality requirements, and any fee structure charged by the director. It is very important that the director and directee are clear about what each expects from the other.

THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTION MEETING

Common elements of any Spiritual Direction meeting are:

- The confidential nature of the meeting,
- Prayer as an integral part of meeting; and
- Recognition that the Holy Spirit is the real Director.

The session could include prayer, silence, conversation, study, and an examination of one's Rule of Life, but are not limited to these. Other elements might include rituals, music, art or movement to create a prayerful and inviting environment that opens and invites one more deeply into God's presence.

THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR'S ROLE:

- Listens and helps the directee to listen
- Gives support and encouragement
- Explains different ways to pray
- Suggests topics for prayer and personal reflection
- Suggests resources for study when applicable
- Recommends practical disciplines
- Confronts and challenges when necessary
- Helps one notice movements toward and away from God
- Helps clarify motives in decision-making
- Assists in matching one's story to a biblical story/teaching
- Prays with and for the directee.

THE DIRECTEE SHARES:

- The nature of his/her prayer and study —is it regular, is it exciting or dry/boring, is it connected to life, is there resistance to doing it?
- Ways in which prayer and study are connected or disconnected from life
- Ways in which God seems to be at work in his/her life
- Things that he/she would like from God
- The desire, hopes, dreams, struggles, and conflict in his/her life and where God is in any of these
- Requests that God seems to be making of him/her
- Confusions, struggles, and conflicts in the faith journey.

BLESSINGS OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Those who have made Spiritual Direction a part of their spiritual discipline report that they are open to a fuller and deeper relationship with God, are more aware of God's presence in all aspects of life, and are more able to savor the richness of God's touch. They benefit from the objective perspective of the Spiritual Director. Insights, patterns, and connections often emerge to give new meaning to everyday events. They also feel more attuned and responsive to God's stirrings within; find greater clarity around issues, feelings, and decisions that face them; and grow in their ability to walk contemplatively through each day

ENDNOTES

- 1 Taylor, Charles Rev. "Interview with Rev. Charles W. Taylor," **Crossings**, Special Issue 11, The Church Divinity School of the Pacific

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