

METANOIA

A Soul-Tending Resource for Character Formation

by Ann Starrette

Spiritual Direction

It was the early 90s. I thought I was doing all the right things—church, prayer, Bible study, small group, service—but I wasn't getting the right results. I cannot say for sure what results I was looking for but I knew I was unable to "live the promises" of peace, joy and stability of soul. I was desperate for them. As a last resort, I sought the advice of a respected counselor. However, after three visits she said, "Ann, you don't need a counselor. The last thing you need is a therapist. What you need is a spiritual director." and I said, "What's *that* and where do I get it?"

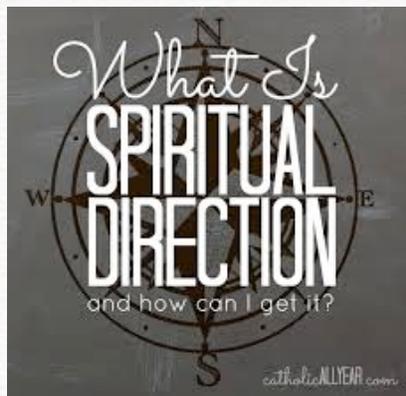
Many people long to "live the promises," to grow closer to God, to others, and into their true self. But sometimes it's hard to know where to start. God honored my desperate longing by introducing me to the ancient practice of Spiritual Direction—a practice whereby one person helps another pay attention to God (the real Spiritual Director) and to God's presence, voice, and soul-shaping work in the midst of his or her life. The Spirit is always present. However, sometimes we need a flesh-and-blood someone to come alongside to help us recognize and respond to that presence.

Spiritual direction provides a sacred space to discuss our relationship with this *Power from Above* and confirm that we are seeking Him along the right path. One of my colleagues, Marjorie Donnelly, explains how a spiritual director can help.

WHAT IS SPIRITUAL DIRECTION?

"Spiritual direction has been part of the Judeo-Christian tradition for centuries. It is a covenant relationship with a spiritual companion occurring in a confidential atmosphere of trust and loving presence. The goal is to lead you into a deeper awareness of God's presence and movement in both the interior and the exterior circumstances of your daily life.

God speaks to you not only through worship, scripture and prayer, but also in your life experiences, human relationships, dreams and creative expression. Spiritual direction is a process of deep listening that embraces both your desire for God and your desire for a transformed world through a call to both contemplation and action.



A kind of "holy listening" takes place during spiritual direction. Your spiritual director listens carefully to what you are saying, but at the same time listens to what God might be saying in and through you.

WHO IS IT FOR?

Spiritual direction is the next step in your spiritual journey if you long to grow in the spiritual life, to find meaning in the moment, to discover your true self, and to grow closer to God and to others. A spiritual director can help you satisfy those longings. Spiritual direction provides a safe place to explore your spiritual questions and helps you become more accountable for your prayer life and spiritual practices. It is an opportunity to discern God's call for your life as you grow in relationship with God, self, others, and creation.

WHAT IS A SESSION LIKE?

Spiritual direction is an on-going, one-to-one, trusting relationship between you and your director which typically consists of monthly, hour-long sessions.

In spiritual direction, you will talk about both the high points and the challenges of your life, but for the most part you will not dwell in "emergencies."

Spiritual direction is a slow and gentle process of listening for the still small voice of God over time that helps you recognize the everyday miracles which are occurring in your life.

Spiritual direction is really not about being "directed;"

*“Learning to discern God’s voice, His direction, is one of the greatest gifts we can give ourselves.
Participation in a Trust Circle (for Group Spiritual Direction) supports this very gift.”*
– Tammy Jenkins

rather, it is about sitting with another person in God’s presence and observing the manner in which grace is given. It is an invitation to be present to the Holy Spirit and connect to the sacred in your life.

Spiritual direction gives you the opportunity once a month to look at how God is moving you toward growth. Whatever specific topic or situation you focus on in any given session, your spiritual director will give you honest responses and pray with and for you. It is a deep privilege and responsibility as a spiritual director to journey with you as you deepen your relationship with God.

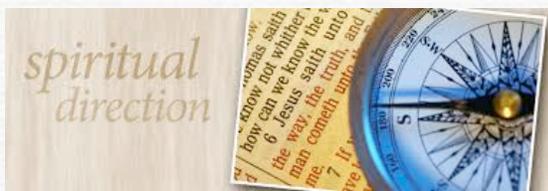
Essentially, all that happens in your life is potential material for spiritual direction, including your images of God, discernment of call, prayer life and spiritual practices, your relationships and how to find balance in your life. However, it is essential to understand that spiritual direction is not the same as psychotherapy; a spiritual director is not trained to attend to therapeutic needs.

The focus of spiritual direction is your relationship with the Divine. Tending this relationship within spiritual direction includes conversation, deep listening, time for silence, prayer, dream work, and guided imagery/visualization. Spiritual direction sessions are always confidential.

The process of spiritual direction unfolds gradually. To enjoy its benefits requires time and consistency. Every part of your life reveals your work in spiritual direction. Your whole life is your spiritual life; God is in every part of it.”

— Marjorie Donnelly

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HOW DO I FIND A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR?

- Begin by praying. God, who is stirring this desire in you, is also working to meet that desire.

-Prayerfully make contact with several potential directors by email and/or by phone. Ask them about their theology of spiritual direction—how do they understand what happens in the direction session? How do they try to pay attention to God's presence? What might regular times with them look like?

-As you listen to their answers, *notice what goes on in your own internal reactions*. Is there a particular director with whom you feel a desire and ease to share more deeply? Do you sense this as a relationship where already, in your back-and-forth conversation, there's an awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence and leading?

-Once you identify a potential director, set up a time to meet. [Although in-person direction is preferable, some directors do offer direction by phone or Skype.] Unless it's clear right away that this isn't the spiritual director you want to journey with, you'll want to meet at least one or two more times before together discerning if this is a direction relationship that the Lord is inviting you into.

-Then you'll commit to a period of time together, usually a year, before further evaluation. Clarify with the director where you will meet, how often, and how you will offer financial compensation for his or her ministry.

I was with my first spiritual director, Betty White, for thirteen years. After Betty, I visited with several good directors for varying lengths of time. Then, through God’s quiet working, I came upon a perfect fit for my current season of life with God.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

Some directors request a particular amount, others suggest a scale based on your ability and freedom to give, others are covered already by their ministry organization. Do be prepared to offer something, either to them or to their ministry organization, for this is a ministry for which people have invested time and money in training, and your contribution enables them to give time and energy to it.

“Growing in faith requires a growing attentiveness to perceive where God is active and to where we are being led. One of the key questions in overcoming spiritual deafness and blindness is:
Where is God active in my life or community right now? – Henri Nouwen

A PAUSE FOR ILLUMINATION



The Third Chair

You are a Spiritual Director.
I sit in my chair
you in yours.
I have come to see you
with a longing
that mystifies me.
You draw my attention
to the third chair
in the room:
You invite me to see
with the eye of my heart
the Source
of my longing:
the Eternal,
invisible, loving, guiding,
challenging, insistent
Mystery
in the third chair.

—Jennifer (Jinks) Hoffmann
Visit <http://www.sdiworld.org>

SOUL-SHAPING EXPERIMENT

Reflect

Consider allowing thirty minutes to explore the following.
Don't rush. Allow the Spirit time and space to speak.

- What is the one thing in your life that is standing on tiptoe crying, “May I have your attention please?”

- Where is God active in your life or community right now? Do you sense an invitation from the Spirit?
- Imagine yourself as a beautiful but unformed block of marble. What would God need to chip away to more fully reveal the truth, beauty, and goodness of God inside you?
- Ask yourself, “Am I longing for more but find it difficult to put into words? Am I being nudged to investigate one-on-one or group spiritual direction?”

SUGGESTED FORMATION RESOURCES

- *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith* by Henri Nouwen with Michael J. Christensen and Rebecca J. Laird. An excellent read! Nouwen tells us: “The goal of spiritual direction is spiritual formation—the ever-increasing capacity to live a spiritual life from the heart. A spiritual life cannot be formed without discipline, practice, and accountability.”
- *The Art of Christian Listening* by Thomas N. Hart. Hart demonstrates how this listening role is different from that of the psychological counselor.
- *Listing of Spiritual Directors*: As a service to those seeking spiritual direction, The Lydia Group, LLC provides an extensive listing of N. C. spiritual directors who have received a training Certificate of Completion. Contact Rev. Dianne Lawhorn at dianne.lawhorn@yahoo.com. In addition, Davidson United Methodist Church has a listing. Go here: www.DavidsonUMC.org/SpiritualFormation and scroll down to the bottom. You'll find a descriptive brochure and a list of area directors.
- *Trust Circles for Group Spiritual Direction*. If you are longing to expand your capacity to listen to God in your heart and in the hearts of others, we invite you to learn more about the Trust Circle for group spiritual direction experience [2nd Mondays monthly September - May]. Training workshops offered. Detailed brochure at www.DavidsonUMC.org/SpiritualFormation or contact Mary Beth Huskey at mbHuskey7@gmail.com.