

Fees and Contributions

Usually there is no set “fee for service” for spiritual direction. However, some directors need financial support in order to be able to offer this ministry. It is best to check this out at the beginning. From time to time, you may find it appropriate to give a material gift expressive of appreciation (e.g., a plant, candle, food, or something else). Also, you may be drawn to contribute to some charitable cause. Again, this should be discussed with the director.

Additional Reading

Edwards, Tilden. *Spiritual Director, Spiritual Companion*. NY: Paulist Press, 2001.

Gratton, Carolyn. *The Art of Spiritual Guidance*. NY: Crossroad, 1992.

Guenther, M. *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction*. MA: Cowley Publications, 1992.

May, Gerald. *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit*. NY: HarperCollins, 1992.

If Not Direction, Then What?

Spiritual direction is not appropriate for every person. While you may feel the nudge of something needing attention around human/spiritual growth, direction may not be what is called for now. Or something in addition to direction may be called for. You might test out your need through the following questions and suggestions:

Am I looking for some “how to’s” in developing a prayer life? Or a group with whom I can pray and share? Or support for my practice of intentional prayer and meditation? Consider local meditation groups/church prayer groups/spiritual institutions like Shalem, which offers a number of in-person and online opportunities.

Are there areas of my life calling for focused healing prayer that might be supported and directed in a group setting? Consider local church healing services and/or prayer groups.

Do I want moral, biblical, or theological guidance for my life? Some person or group to explore questions around life issues? Consider local church leadership and groups.

Are there specific problem areas of my life or troubling emotions siphoning off energy? Blockage issues that I want to talk about with another in hopes that I can find some ways of overcoming the difficulties? Consider counseling/12-step groups.

Do I feel the need for a more informal, mutual relationship of prayer, sharing and support with another person? Perhaps look at the groups you are in and ask someone to whom you feel drawn and feel you can trust.

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CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

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WHAT IS CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUAL DIRECTION?

The Process of Direction

Spiritual direction is sometimes referred to as spiritual guidance, spiritual friendship or spiritual companionship. It is an ongoing relationship in which you (the directee) seek to be attentive to your spiritual life by meeting with another person (the director) on a regular basis (approximately once a month), specifically for the purpose of becoming more attuned to God's Presence in all of life. Thus the primary focus of each meeting time is your relationship with God as it is reflected and challenged by all aspects of your life.

You, the directee, assume responsibility for your life with God. This means that you are trying to be serious about some form of intentional prayer and reflection on the God-currents of everyday life and prayer. During the meeting of about one hour, both you and the director seek to enter a prayerful atmosphere where together you can be attentive to the Holy Spirit who is in fact the Real Director.

The director may question, challenge, suggest, support, as seems called for by the Spirit, but it is you who determine if the insights and actions prayerfully pondered fit with your sense of your true self and the movement of the Spirit in your life. It is assumed that you have begun a journey with God long before you come into direction. Also, this intentional journey will continue long after leaving a particular director. The director is only a facilitator in the process. You, the directee, must claim the journey.

Direction & Therapy: Differences

There are distinctions between spiritual direction and therapeutic relationships. In general, therapy and counseling deal primarily with problem areas of one's life and attempt to bring healthy resolution to issues. Spiritual direction is concerned with finding and responding to God (in the midst of pain or disorder as

well as in the rest of life). Problem/issue solving is not the primary focus of direction. Surprising new perspectives may arise in contemplative spiritual direction as both director and directee listen deeply for the whispers and nudges of God, but the focus in spiritual direction is on prayerful listening rather than practical problem solving.

Finding a Director

Prayer is the first step in finding a contemplative spiritual director—asking God to guide your search and to open your eyes to the possibilities available to you. Accompanying this prayer should be the exploration of avenues already known to you for people whose spirituality speaks to you though they may not name themselves or be recognized as “qualified” spiritual directors. Such individuals may be found among parish staff, people with whom you have shared in small groups, or others who seem to attract you for reasons unclear to you. In addition to these more natural settings, you might check nearby retreat centers, religious communities, or centers that offer programs for spiritual directors.

It will probably take some time to find the right person for you. If God is in the felt need for a director, however, then it is safe to assume that the Spirit will eventually provide the resources you need. The key is to remain patient yet diligent in the waiting, to trust God in the process, remaining attentive to the direction of the Spirit in all of life.

Choosing a Director

In a direction relationship, it is important for a mutual sense of the potential for open, honest, clear communication and a reverence for the unique way God is working in the individuals involved. Coupled with this is a mutual dependence upon the Spirit at work in the relationship. Human specifics of age, sex, denomination,

and so forth, may assume more importance at one time in a person's life than at another. Basically, however, it is only necessary that the two persons experience the kind of “fitness” that allows them to be free for their common purpose together without undue attention to their relationship. After an initial appointment to get acquainted and if it seems right to continue, it is helpful to set up three meetings and then evaluate how things are going. Following that, periodic evaluations are encouraged so that what was begun as a right thing does not continue past its time.

The Director

Spiritual directors may be laity, clergy and those in religious communities and are found in many denominations. They may be married or single and have a variety of occupations. What is paramount is that the director is responding to an invitation from God to participate in this ministry; that the gift of direction has been called forth by others; and that the director has sought to enhance the gift and sharpen skills through means appropriate to her or his particular needs.

The primary responsibilities of the director are prayer for the directee and openness to God for what is truly called for on behalf of the directee during the sessions. This assumes that the director is taking seriously her or his relationship with God through intentional prayer, attention to solitude time and regular spiritual direction.

As a means of accountability and growth, spiritual directors avail themselves of prayerful support through a one-to-one or peer group setting with other directors. Whatever way this happens, confidentiality must be observed and anonymity of directees needs to be preserved.