

Spiritual Direction – Seeking a Spiritual Companion

What is Spiritual Direction?

Spiritual direction is the process of accompanying people on a spiritual journey. Spiritual direction exists in a context that emphasizes growing closer to God. Spiritual direction is a time-honored term for a conversation, ordinarily between two persons, in which one person consults another, more spiritually experienced person about the ways in which God may be touching her or his life, directly or indirectly. In our postmodern age, many people dislike the term "spiritual direction" because it sounds like one person giving directions, or orders, to another. They prefer "spiritual companionship," "tending the holy," or some other nomenclature.

Although spiritual direction has had a burst of new life, it is really quite ancient. Across both the Hebrew and the Christian Scriptures, we find people seeking spiritual counsel. The Queen of Sheba sought out the wisdom of Solomon. Jesus gave us examples in his conversations with Nicodemus, with the woman at the well, in the ongoing formation of Peter and the other disciples. In the early church, people flocked to hermits in the desert for spiritual counsel. Across the centuries we find striking examples in some Irish monks, in some German Benedictine nuns, in Charles de Foucault, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Francis de Sales, and others. Today, spiritual directors come from many traditions.... (Marian Cowan, CSJ)

Spiritual direction explores a deeper relationship with the spiritual aspect of being human. Simply put, spiritual direction is helping people tell their sacred stories every day. Spiritual direction has emerged in many contexts using language specific to particular cultural and spiritual traditions. Describing spiritual direction requires putting words to a process of fostering a transcendent experience that lies beyond all names and yet the experience longs to be articulated and made concrete in everyday living. It is easier to describe what spiritual direction does than what spiritual direction is. Spiritual direction helps us learn how to live in peace, with compassion, promoting justice, as humble servants of that which lies beyond all names. (*Liz Budd Ellmann, MDiv, Executive Director, Spiritual Directors International*)

What are some common misconceptions about Spiritual Direction?

Some think that Spiritual companionship is only for nuns, priests, pastors or the pious few who may be full time in church ministry – church ministry is their life vocation. That truth is that all of us are seeking a deeper connection with the Holy in our lives. The process of spiritual direction is for everyone who feels a longing for a more peaceful and hope-filled life. Spiritual direction helps us explore the spiritual aspect of being human.

Others sometime think that Spiritual direction is 'new age'. The origins of spiritual direction actually date back thousands of years. The process of spiritual direction is an ancient and venerable tradition in every culture and region of the globe (see above).

Lastly, some think that Spiritual Directors somehow have a found a deeper connection to God and can guide others to that same kind of relationship. Spiritual Directors are like all of humankind. They also are on a journey toward a deeper relationship with God. A more appropriate description of 'spiritual direction' might be 'spiritual companionship'. Together we are present to one another, we are attentive to God's Spirit in our midst, and together the director and the directee come to know God in deeper and more profound ways.

How do I find a Spiritual Director?

Spiritual Directors International can provide you a list of spiritual directors in your area. See their website - <http://maps.sdiworld.org/seekandfind.php>. You might also ask your pastor or inquire at retreat centers or seminaries in your area.

For more information, contact Carol DeSchepper, ELPNA Member, Parish Nurse and Spiritual Director Thegardener11@svtv.com