

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

Many of God's people are rediscovering the usefulness of meeting monthly with a "Spiritual Director," companion, or guide. Spiritual Directors help us discern the activity of God in our lives. They ask us, 'How is God present in your life and what is God saying to you?' It can be both challenging and exciting to enter into such a relationship. This is an opportunity to explore our inner life, deal with our "issues," be held accountable for our spiritual journey, and learn to be more honest with ourselves, others, and God.

Spiritual direction is not psychotherapy, nor is it pastoral counseling. We do not come as patients in need of a psychological cure, but as souls searching to be with God. While at times it may feel like a counseling session, the goal of spiritual direction is to relate more consciously and respond more fully to God, who is always calling us into His presence and to newness of life. This is done through spiritual reflection and encouraging the practice of spiritual disciplines.

How do you find such a "companion"? Begin by praying that God would lead you to the person He has in mind for you. While Spiritual Directors are found in many Christian denominations, the tradition and training has been most carefully preserved in the Roman Catholic (e.g. Jesuit, Benedictine, Franciscan Orders) and the Episcopalian Churches. Therefore, the search for a spiritual director may begin at a diocese office or retreat center.

Discipleship deals with the practice of a way of life focusing on answers; spiritual direction deals with reflection on God's way in life and deals with questions. Spiritual direction focuses on who God is and how one can be more present to and with God. Discipleship focuses more on how to know and do God's will. Both are helpful.

Questions you may want to ask as you search for your Spiritual Director include:

- Do I prefer a Catholic, Protestant, or Lutheran? Is this important to me?
- Would a male or female director be best at this point in my spiritual journey?
- Do I prefer an ordained or a layperson?
- What training and experience do those that I am considering have?

Then interview those you are considering, asking them about their own prayer lives. Are they in spiritual direction themselves? People cannot give to others what they are not doing for themselves. It is important to find someone you can trust and respect, who will keep confidentiality, who will encourage and affirm you and yet can ask the hard questions. In short, take your time to find a "good match." Make your selection prayerfully.

Once you feel comfortable that God has led you to your Spiritual Director, then contract with him or her:

- How often will you meet? Normally this involves an hour meeting each month.
- Is there a fee? Typically, this is in the form of a contribution to their ministry (\$30-50 per session).
- How long will the relationships continue? It is useful to begin with a commitment of two or three months to "test the relationship" and then to make a longer-term commitment. Remember that we aren't coming to solve our problems and then leave. Discerning God's call and paying attention to our spiritual journey is a life-long process. In other words, the

relationship will continue as long as both people want it to. It is helpful to reevaluate the relationship on an annual basis.

Spiritual direction is a “covenantal” relationship. The director commits to be fully “present” for the other person during their sessions, to pray regularly for them, and to be faithful to their own spiritual journey. The one seeking direction commits to a faithful prayer life, to an awareness of God’s presence in their lives and the issues that need to be brought to the sessions, and to trust that God is at work in the process of direction. Direction is best begun in a time of peace and stability, rather than when our lives are falling apart.

Through the gift of spiritual direction a person can become more centered in God, energized for service, and more attentive to God’s working in and through their lives.

At times, it is also helpful to consider a “directed” retreat. A directed retreat is a special time of prayer and solitude. The goal is to focus attention on one’s relationship with God without distraction. It is a time for “being with God” in quiet reflection, in scripture reading, in nature, and within the mystery of one’s life. It calls for an open and generous heart, which is receptive and sensitive to God’s presence. It is helpful for the retreatant to meet at the beginning and end of the retreat with a Spiritual Director to reflect on his/her prayer experience and discern the movement of the Spirit.

RETREAT CENTERS

- General listing: www.sdiworld.org (Spiritual Directors International).
- Billy Graham Training Center at the Cove, 1 Porters Cove Road, Asheville, NC 28805, 828.298.2092, 800.950.2092. A place for healing rest and personal growth.
- **Doxology**, www.doxology.us, Lutheran Center for Spiritual Care and Counsel.
- **Shepherds Canyon**, www.shepherdscanyonretreat.org P.O. Box 51510, Phoenix, AZ 85076, 800.783.3079. This is a weeklong retreat for Lutheran Church Workers and spouses. It includes four couples or singles. Facilitators include two professional counselors and a chaplain. Scholarships are available.
- **Holy Cross Abbey**, 901 Cool Spring Lane, Berryville, VA 22611, 540.855.4383. A place for quiet and prayerful retreat with spiritual direction available. There are no conferences, but simple schedule around meals and prayer times.
- **Grace Place**, www.GracePlaceWellness.org, 8460 Watson Road, suite 136., St. Louis, MO. 314.842.3077. Held at various places around the country. This includes at workshops, conferences, and congregation. Formats may include a day, weekend or longer.
- **Richmond Hill**, 2209 E. Grace Street, Richmond, VA. 23223, 804.783.7957. Overlooking the city of Richmond, this is a place for individual and group retreats. \$65/day for lodging and meals.
- **Shelem Institute** for Spiritual Formation, 5430 Grosvenor Lane, #100, Bethesda, MD, 20814, 301.897.7334
- **Hollifield Leadership Center**, www.Hollifield.org, 6692 Valwood Road, Conover, NC 28613, 828.256.2126. This ministry is owned and operated by the Baptist State Convention of NC.
- **Roslyn**, www.roslyncenter.org, 8727 River Road, Richmond, VA. 23229, 804.288.6045, 800.477.6296. An Episcopal retreat and conference center.

Rev. Arthur Umbach

804/512-0723, art.umbach@gmail.com