

What spiritual direction is not...

Spiritual direction is not wrapping the directee in cotton wool; it is not avoiding risks; it is not avoiding the deepest issues; it is not taking away the directee's independence, nor crowding, nor demanding, nor judging, nor setting an agenda for the directee.

It is not categorizing, misinterpreting, dominating or manipulating; it is not simply sharing knowledge about God.

Spiritual direction is not putting words into the mouth of the directee, nor jumping ahead; it is not limiting communication to any one method, nor eliciting unnecessary information.

The role of director is not confined to clergy, or to older people.

The term 'spiritual director'

Is a Spiritual Director a Spiritual Companion? Spiritual Friend? Soul Friend? Spiritual Direction is an historical term. Both Spiritual Companion or Friend, and Soul Friend, are explicit and express the personal nature of the deep trust in the relationship. They imply a mutuality of relationship and may be unclear so far boundaries are concerned. But spiritual direction implies some sort of formality and directiveness. All titles have some limitations.

Spiritual direction describes **"the companionship given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God's personal communication 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."** (Barry and Connolly)

The term 'spiritual director' still gives an understanding of the essence of the relationship, the aim of which is to seek the presence and guidance of the Holy One.

Spiritual Direction

*... is like panning for gold.
[A seeker] comes and together we dip into the stream of their life
and pull up all kinds of things: rocks of all sizes
– I can never guess what is coming next –
all kinds of conflicts and problems.
Then all of a sudden
some fleck or nugget of pure gold
emerges into view in the bottom of the pan
as we swirl the water around,
emptying out the gravel.*



What spiritual direction is ...

The relationship of Spiritual Direction is to walk alongside another, alerting them to the Spirit's direction. It is holding sacred space, that enables, illuminates and invites awareness of the movement and the action of God in the directee's life.

Spiritual direction is undertaken with great care on the part of the director and the pilgrim. The primary focus and purpose of the relationship between the two is the directee's relationship with God.

Spiritual companionship that happens on a one-off occasion, or intermittently, may have profoundly helpful and deep results. However, spiritual direction is more intentional, on a regular basis, for instance monthly or two monthly - or more frequently if desirable.

Mutual trust and honesty is foundational. The effectiveness of the relationship requires considerable transparency of the directee in the sharing of his or her cares and concerns, and stirring of emotions at the deepest level.

The director, through a prayerful openness to the presence of God, listens with great care and respect; whatever is shared is honoured and held confidential.

From time to time, there is a place in spiritual direction for the director to share from their own learning or insight or wide experience of accompaniment. So a session together can include teaching, coaching and pastoral counseling. However, the focus always remains on the other's relationship with God.



A wide variety of forms of communication can be helpful in the process of spiritual direction. For example, working with dreams; art work and sketching; question and invitation; journalling and bible reading; reflective listening, and silences; humour, and stories; the engagement of mind, body and spirit.

The aim of the direction relationship is to help a person grow in inner freedom to respond to God's call and invitation. God's Spirit is the actual director.

Finding your own spiritual director

Here are a few questions that you might consider asking yourself:

1. What brings me to spiritual direction at this time in my life?
2. Would I like the person to be a man or woman, my own church tradition or another, living nearby or more distant?
3. What questions do I want to ask her or him? Their training, experience, their approach, are they supervised in their work?
4. How often will we meet and how much will it cost me?

Ask to have a review after 3-4 sessions and be prepared to find someone else if need be.

Each person seeking a spiritual director needs to take reasonable steps to verify the competency of any potential spiritual director. As a ministry across many nations and many faiths, spiritual direction does not have a centralized certifying body that verifies qualifications of spiritual directors since each faith tradition has different understandings of the task.

Listen carefully for the way the Spirit is guiding you in your selection process.