

## A Sense of the Holy in Every Day Life

*What exactly do spiritual directors do? The simple and most direct answer I can give is that they help others attend to God's presence and revelation and prepare to respond to him. In other words, they help people attune themselves to God.*

*David Benner, Sacred Companions, p.106*

Practiced since the dawn of the Christian faith, and, indeed, in all of the Abrahamic traditions, spiritual direction provides a focused means for growing in one's relationship with God. Despite its ancient roots, spiritual direction has been largely absent in the day-to-day life of the church of the last century. The discipline is now undergoing a renaissance in the church worldwide, having been rediscovered as an invaluable means for enriching and deepening the spiritual journey.

"Something broken in me keeps telling me if I just work harder, read more Scripture, and become a better pray-er, God will be pleased and perhaps my life will be easier. This misconception and the myriad of other false beliefs that not-so-occasionally reek havoc in my body and brain are called out into the light when I seek spiritual direction. I notice God at work in places I hadn't considered and in ways I hadn't imagined....What started as curiosity, then pure discipline, has become a tender resting place in my journey through this world. [Meeting with a spiritual director] has become like a wayside chapel on a pilgrimage route where the weary pilgrim seeks sustenance and rest for body and soul."

Beth Slevcove, quoted in Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way*, p. 108

In individual and group settings, director and directee meet in the presence of the One who transforms. According to spiritual director Elizabeth de Smaele, who practices in the Netherlands, "[spiritual direction] offers a voice of guidance and grace to those who are intent on growth, with special emphasis given to recognizing and responding to the presence of God in one's life." Eugene Peterson, in his course at Regent College in Vancouver, B.C., "Tell It Slant: The Parables As Spiritual Direction," suggested that spiritual direction is "listening truth into being." The language around spiritual direction may seem vague and mystical to those unfamiliar with the practice and with the contemplative aspects of Christian spirituality. It can be frustratingly difficult to understand what actually happens in a spiritual direction session, especially for those used to programs and other structured and guided curriculum for spiritual growth. In fact, spiritual direction is simply what it appears to be: an intentional time of listening to and following the voice of God in the life of the directee.

While neither discipleship nor counseling, spiritual direction can and often does involve:

- being exposed to and learning new prayer practices,
- understanding the vital nature of the spiritual disciplines,
- experiencing silence in the context of spiritual growth,
- exploring the false self and moving toward the true self designed by God,
- interior reflection and healing prompted by the movement of the Spirit.

The direction relationship is one that is meant to be entered into with prayerful and careful attention. In general, a direction relationship lasts for at minimum two years, but deep and growing direction relationships can last for a lifetime. Unlike counseling, the focus is not on problem-solving or dealing with specific life issues, although sometimes they will be addressed. In direction, the focus is on the individual's relationship with God, which is constantly in motion, even when it feels like everything has stopped.

There are many metaphors for spiritual direction. Companionship, guidance, hospitality and listening are but a few. At Anam Cara, I am guided most strongly by the concept of a 'soul friend,' a term coined by the ancient Celts. A soul friend is one who journeys alongside in a deeper way than a friend might, stepping into the story of the other in a manner that acknowledges the holy and nurtures its growth. The second image that guides me is that of midwifery. I operate with the assumption that everyone who contacts Anam Cara Ministries for possible guidance, whether they are male or female, is in some way pregnant with the life of God. My role is to come alongside as a midwife might, to nurture that life within them, to assist them in the birthing process and to walk with them as they journey with the new life that God has brought to fruition within them.

#### **When might you seek out a spiritual director?**

- ~ when heading out on a path of growth ~
- ~ when seeking God in the complexity of life ~
- ~ when needing objective wisdom ~
- ~ when making decisions on life direction ~
- ~ when desiring accountability ~
- ~ discernment in decision making ~

#### **Some topics spiritual direction explores:**

- ~ image of God and one's identity in Christ ~
- ~ deepening one's life of prayer ~
- ~ practicing the presence of God ~
- ~ maturing in Christlikeness ~
- ~ increased self-awareness and insight ~
- ~ strengthening human relationships ~

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