

Spiritual Direction

Spiritual direction has a long history as a Christian ministry dating back centuries, to the respected desert mothers and fathers in the Christian Church. They were summoned by seekers of God to listen for God's voice or share a word of wisdom. They often assisted others in developing a deeper relationship with God. The mission of spiritual direction continues today as it did with our desert parents: it embraces one's *being* as a child of God, rather than having an expectation for *doing*; and it encourages the process of becoming Christlike, rather than working toward the product or result of achievement of Christlikeness.

The ministry of spiritual direction is not counseling, problem solving, advice giving, tutoring in the faith, or teaching theology. It is the companionship given to another person to offer assistance in developing a consistent prayer life and to discern how God is leading one throughout life's transitions. Jesus Christ lives and breathes in the believer in very real and profound ways, but as we move throughout our busy lives, we don't often take the time to notice and recognize what God is doing. Spiritual direction is the art of contemplative listening, which is listening with one's heart. This holy listening is usually carried out in the context of a one-to-one trusting relationship or within a small group setting.

The spiritual director facilitates a deepening relationship with God and fosters the growth and transformation of spiritual life through prayer. A spiritual director is, perhaps, like a compassionate midwife, bringing forth the spiritual life and faith residing deep inside another believer. As the director and directee individually experience this spiritual birthing procedure, they increase the joyfulness of the event as they share the encounter through communicating and relating with each other during the process. The borning cry of the Spirit becomes a means of grace to the spiritual formation of the directee and the director. Surrendering to God and abandoning hindrances to the working of God in one's life, fosters an intimate relationship with God.

The goal of spiritual direction is to journey with the Lord in ever more freedom, to more fully become the persons God created us to be in this life, to be authentic and whole persons. Confidential appointments are normally scheduled once every month. One competent spiritual director journeys with another person or group, listening to the life stories and waiting on the Lord with an ear to hear the movement of the Holy Spirit. As they journey together, the person or group is enabled to pay attention and notice God's personal communication, to then respond to God, which fosters intimacy with the Lord, and then to live out the consequences of the relationship with Christ. Contemplation and personal reflection bring the awareness of this holy relationship between the directee and the Lord. The spiritual director assists the directee to articulate and clarify the experiences of life's journey with an accepting, gracious, and a nonjudgmental manner, to notice and relish more of a personal and conscious relationship with God. --Written by *Bette J. Shellhorn, Ph.D.*

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Website/Prayer Resources
<http://archive.elca.org/prayer/resources/direction.html>