



**MINISTRY
OF
SPIRITUAL
DIRECTION**

2025-2026
Orientation
Handbook

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The Center for Spiritual Formation, Inc.

The Center for Spiritual Formation was set in motion in 1993 at the request of the Bishop of the Central PA Conference of the United Methodist Church (now known as the Susquehanna Conference), concerned that the clergy and laity were drifting away from the denomination's foundational principles of prayer, study and social engagement. He convened a taskforce of sixteen clergy and laity which met monthly for approximately a year and a half to discern what a ministry of prayer, study and social engagement would look like. The taskforce proposed an ecumenical community that would make no distinction between clergy and laity, and that would be governed by a "rule" that advocated and demonstrated its principles. The Center for Spiritual Formation was founded in 1995 at the recommendation of this taskforce and began to offer weekend retreats and seminars that espoused prayer, study and social engagement.

The Ministry of Spiritual Direction Program

The MSD program began in 1996 as a response to the larger spiritual formation movement spreading among "mainline" and Evangelical Churches. Church hierarchy hoped that "spiritual direction" would be an alternative to the psychological counseling that it required for its clergy in crisis. Over time, it has grown and developed in many ways as the needs of our students have shifted and changed and has led us to where we currently find ourselves in the present-day Ministry of Spiritual Direction program.

Orchard Hill Retreat Center

Located high on a mountaintop near Millerstown, PA, sits Orchard Hill Retreat Center, the 'home' of The Center for Spiritual Formation. Surrounded by more than two hundred acres of woodland, it is hard to imagine that a US highway is scarcely two miles away. Road noise disappears and one can see the hawks riding on the thermals. It is a truly beautiful place—a space for grace. Orchard Hill also served as the home of The Ministry of Spiritual Direction, as program participants gathered each month to disconnect from daily activities and responsibilities so that they could focus on their spiritual journey of becoming a Spiritual Director. In 2015, the MSD program expanded to include a group in Lexington, KY, who joined those on the mountain virtually via Skype.

Online Experience

Following the success of the Kentucky cohort that began in 2015, an additional cohort was added in 2019 located in Orlando, FL. When the pandemic arrived in the spring of 2020, the MSD program transitioned to a fully online program. It was amazing to discover that this was also a space for grace, where class participants found a new way to bond with one another and nurture their spiritual journey. Video conferencing has allowed the MSD program to grow as we are now able to reach and connect with a greater and more diverse audience of presenters and participants.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Ministry of Spiritual Direction is a two-year training course which assists laity and clergy to sharpen their listening skills, clarify their graces, and acquire the disciplines essential for soul care.

Year One

Year One focuses on our inner life as spiritual directors, where we are growing in our awareness of ourselves and working out what it looks like to engage this work of spiritual direction as a way of life, rather than just something we are training to “do” or “be”. During Year One, the curriculum focus is on foundations: the history, traditions and models, Biblical roots and theological foundations of Spiritual Direction; consideration of the differences between psychological counseling and Spiritual Direction; exploration of the spiritual disciplines and spiritual discernment; and the development of listening skills as we grow as individuals through deep learning and practice of a contemplative approach to God.

Year Two

In Year Two, we continue that inner life focus and now add a more outward focus with the actual practice of Spiritual Direction. During this year, the curriculum focuses on the development of assessment skills; acquiring a working knowledge of the life stages of faith development; cultivating an increased awareness of the power of prayer and healing; the practice of retreat design; exploring trauma-informed spiritual direction; consider the call and role of social justice; work toward a better understanding of multi-cultural needs in spiritual direction; and learning the importance of supervision and integrity of practice.

The Ministry of Spiritual Direction Program creates space to:

- Gain or deepen one’s understanding, sensitivity, and insight into the workings of the Holy Spirit.
- Create awareness of the need for an ever-growing connection between the inner life of the Spirit and the outer life of faithfulness to the Spirit’s direction.
- Facilitate a deepening prayer life and a greater contentment with silence and solitude.
- Develop a greater ability to relate to persons with theological, experiential, and cultural differences.
- Equip those participating to deal with strong emotions and maintain relationships over time.
- Establish and maintain appropriate boundaries within the Spiritual Direction relationship.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of The Ministry of Spiritual Direction is to strengthen the Church by providing a setting where Christians may clarify their call to Spiritual Direction and to offer this ministry to all who seek it.

Foundational Assumptions

- Spiritual Direction as a way that Christians may seek and respond to the will of God, is rooted in Biblical tradition and the historical practice of the Church.
- Spiritual Direction presupposes that the Holy Spirit is present within the relationship to call the Director and Directee alike to respond outwardly to the interior movements of God's grace.
- Spiritual Direction seeks to enable persons to consciously notice how God is addressing and relating to them; to help them to relate more fully to God, and to live out an authentic response to this call.
- The primary concern of the Spiritual Direction relationship is not the relationship between the Director and the Directee, but the relationship between the Directee and his or her Lord.
- The role of the Spiritual Director is to notice and name the movement of the Holy Spirit of God in the life of the Directee, and not to solve problems, offer therapeutic counsel or give moral instruction and exhortation.
- The focus of the Spiritual Direction relationship is to attend to the presence of God and the movement of the Holy Spirit in the Directee's life and to assist him or her to faithfully respond to this present and this movement.
- Although Spiritual Direction may not be essential to salvation; it may provide assistance to those seeking personal spiritual advancement and growth; greater sensitivity in their relationships, and more effective service to God in this world.

Pastoral Approach

One of the unique aspects of The Ministry of Spiritual Direction with The Center for Spiritual Formation is the pastoral approach to Spiritual Direction training, rather than an academic instruction. It is pastoral in that it is a gentle approach based on the integrity of the student's work with the guide of the curriculum, encourages life-long learning and integrity within a community of care and encouragement, and focuses on the movement of the Holy Spirit in the life of the class participants.

MSD Agreement to Abide by Ethical Guidelines

The Ministry of Spiritual Direction (MSD) training is offered by the Center for Spiritual Formation. Ethical conduct is an integral aspect of the MSD program. The Center for Spiritual Formation encourages ethical behavior for both students and graduates of MSD as we keep the sacred trust of soul work and holy listening.

The Center for Spiritual Formation is asking MSD students to agree to:

- 1) Participate fully in all of the monthly classes. If a Saturday class is missed we ask that you watch the video, do the reading, connect with a classmate to discuss the content and report to your facilitator that you have completed the work. If a Friday evening group is missed, we ask that you contact a fellow student and practice centering and sacred listening as soon as feasible.
- 2) Complete course readings and incorporate continuous learning practices as you build your spiritual direction library and do due diligence with the recommended reading list.
- 3) During year one and two, meet regularly with a spiritual director. This practice is also critical as you enter the vocational work of spiritual direction after graduation.
- 4) During year two, begin meeting with a spiritual director. During this time, you would be a spiritual director in training. While in training, it would not be appropriate to accept any payment or gifts.
- 5) As you begin meeting with directors, also begin participating in supervision, which is part of the MSD program. You may also participate in group supervision programs offered by the Center. You can also search for an individual supervisor or other group supervision programs through Spiritual Directors International.
- 6) Abide by the ethical guidelines set forth by Spiritual Directors International (SDI).

A link to and a PDF copy of the Guidelines for Ethical Conduct from Spiritual Directors International can be found on the MSD website. It is helpful to review this guide on a regular basis during your participation in MSD training and after completion of the program.

A Prayer for Ethical Practice For Students and Graduates of the Ministry of Spiritual Direction with the Center for Spiritual Formation

God of love and light, I ask for your illumination on my path as a spiritual director. Help me to co-labor with Your Spirit honestly and with integrity. When I resist, give me a willing heart to yield my will to yours. When I stumble, give me the humility to confess and receive your grace. Christ, your life rhythms of community and solitude are the model I long to follow. Help me to model my life after yours until the yoke is easy and the burden is truly light. I commit my journey to you in prayer, wise counsel through meeting with my spiritual director and by submitting to supervision. Help me be curious rather than arrogant; compassionate rather than judgmental; and open to Your love when I am prone to be afraid. May all of my life weave together in wholeness. Always in the name of Christ. Amen.