

# What Is Spiritual Direction? *Time to listen to you. Time to listen to God with you. Time to explore spiritual growth with you.*

We all need help in our journey of faith, and one real source of encouragement and stimulus can be working with a spiritual director: someone who walks with us in the journey, and especially supports us in our life of prayer, which, of course, should spill over to all departments of our life.

More and more people are finding that meeting a spiritual director or soul friend every few weeks, is a spiritual discipline which brings great blessing, and helps us to attend more closely to the movements of God's Spirit in our lives.

A spiritual director helps you to lead a more meaningful life by helping you to discover a deeper and more lasting relationship with God.

Spiritual direction is the opportunity for an accompanied reflection (to reflect with a trained or experienced spiritual director) about your life, its events, relationships with God and others. A spiritual director is a companion on life's journey, asking reflective questions and pointing out resources.



A spiritual director may be especially helpful to you when you are seeking to develop a deeper relationship with God in the following situations:

- when you feel the need for a companion on the spiritual journey to walk with you and to listen
- when the search for God seems to be at a crossroads
- when you want to explore new methods of prayer
- when prayer becomes difficult
- when you feel the need for help in discerning the call of the Spirit

Spiritual direction is useful and available for people of all Christian traditions and those seeking a deeper understanding of spirituality. The frequency of sessions can be discussed with the director and decided upon according to your individual needs. Commonly, sessions are every 4 to 6 weeks.

It may be helpful to think about some or all of the following in relation to a possible director/accompanier:

## a) The Person

Do you have any preferences regarding gender, age, role (e.g. clergy/ religious/lay), denomination and possibly tradition (evangelical/ catholic etc.) ?

## b) The Relationship

Are you looking for:

- formality or informality?
- a particular spiritual tradition (e.g. Ignatian) or a broad approach? someone with a shared interest (music, painting etc.)?
- someone near or far from your own context?

## Working with a Spiritual Director

### Practicalities

How often do you hope to meet (e.g. monthly, every two months, every three months, by arrangement)?

Are you able to travel to meet the Director, or do you need to be visited at home? How far are you willing to travel?

Might it be important (e.g. because of recurrent illness) that the relationship could be conducted by Skype, correspondence or telephone at some stage?

Would this relationship affect, or be affected by, any other one-to-one meetings you are having (e.g. counselling, therapy, discernment)?

How do you view the question of payment? In the Chichester Diocese it is not usual to pay for spiritual direction.

### The first meeting

The first meeting is usually exploratory – a chance for you to get to know one another, to compare what you hope for with what the Director can offer.

Your Director may suggest that you meet a few times and then review the relationship together.

Throughout, do say honestly what you think and feel about your meetings.

### Preparing for a meeting

Your meetings will be most fruitful if you prepare for them. Pray that the Holy Spirit will illuminate your reflection.

Looking back over the time since the last meeting, what has been going on in your life? How have you been feeling? What have been your prevailing moods during this period? Have there been moments when you have been particularly aware of God's presence or activity in your life? How did you feel at those times? Have there been any surprises? What are your current preoccupations? In your heart, what do you most hope for?

### What happens during spiritual direction?

A director and directee usually meet for 45 minutes to an hour. The director listens and asks reflective questions to help you notice God's nudges, invitations, challenges and confirmations. Life circumstances are discussed confidentially, however giving advice, counselling and theological debate are not usually part of the process. It is expected that all spiritual directors are trained and regularly receive supervision.



### Reviewing the relationship

For the relationship to be fruitful, there must be commitment and it may take time for you to get to know each other and for confidence to grow. Nevertheless, it is good from time to time to reflect on the relationship.

How do you feel as you prepare for a meeting?

How do you feel during meetings?

Are you confident that what you say is heard?

Do you feel accepted and respected or insecure and judged?

Do you feel supported or alone?

Do you feel accompanied or pressured?

Can you say what you want to say? Are you able to be completely honest, or are you aware of reserve?

Are any periods of silence comfortable or uncomfortable?

Is humour a part of your meetings?

Do you feel at ease?

Do you feel challenged? If so, how do you respond to this?

When guidance has been offered or an activity suggested, was this helpful? Did you feel free to follow it or to lay it aside?

Do you think that the relationship still has something to offer? How might you help it to continue to be fruitful?

Do you feel that the relationship may have become stuck? Might it be time for a change? Is this something you feel called to talk over with your Director?

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