



# **SPIRITUAL DIRECTION 101**

A GUIDE FOR SEEKERS

by Teresa Blythe



## About the Author

**Teresa Blythe** has been working as a spiritual director with individuals, groups and organizations since 1997. Teresa works with people from multi-faith (and no faith) backgrounds. In addition to running the Phoenix Center for Spiritual Direction, she trains spiritual directors in her work as Director of the Hesychia School of Spiritual Direction at the Redemptorist Renewal Center at Picture Rocks in Tucson. She is a published author, blogger, frequent public speaker and a full-time advocate for the practice of spiritual direction.

An ordained minister in the United Church of Christ (UCC), Teresa received her Master of Divinity and Diploma in the Art of Spiritual Direction from San Francisco Theological Seminary in 2000. She is a member of First UCC Phoenix and Spiritual Directors International.

Everything we do at the Phoenix Center for Spiritual Direction celebrates diversity and proudly, openly affirms LGBTQ persons.



# Introduction

I'm delighted that you downloaded this guide about the practice of spiritual direction.

I've prepared this for you as you consider spiritual direction hoping it might answer a few of your questions and give you a sense of comfort about entering this wonderful practice. There are many excellent books about spiritual direction however most are written for people who are considering becoming a spiritual director. This booklet is designed to be easy to understand, as descriptive as possible and devoid of too much jargon that we spiritual directors sometimes fall into!

Feel free to pass this e-book along to a friend or fellow seeker. It's an educational tool and a gift from the [Phoenix Center for Spiritual Direction](#), the place where I promote and practice spiritual direction.

Welcome to the inner sacred adventure that is spiritual direction!

# What is Spiritual Direction?

Spiritual direction is a contemplative practice of examining and exploring one's spiritual path with a person trained in listening, discernment and deep reflection. It's an ancient practice within the Christian tradition finding its way into the mainstream of postmodern life. Hundreds of years ago only Catholic priests, nuns and monks received spiritual direction—and usually it was from their superiors within their community. Today you are likely to find a person who is spiritual-but-not-religious seeing a Jewish director or perhaps a Catholic sister visiting a Protestant layperson for spiritual direction. Most directors today are quite ecumenical (working across Christian denominational lines) and interfaith or inter-spiritual (working with persons from a variety of spiritual traditions and practices).

Since it's a revived practice in our multi-faith world, there are, as you may imagine, many understandings of spiritual direction—all quite good and descriptive. Here are a few of the ways various formation and training programs that prepare people to be spiritual directors define the practice:

Spiritual direction is the process of accompanying people on a spiritual journey. Spiritual direction exists in a context that emphasizes growing closer to God (or the sacred, the holy or a higher power). – *Spiritual Directors International*

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Spiritual direction is the practice of being attentive to God's life and movement in our human quest for meaning, love and our true identity. –*The Hesychia School of Spiritual Direction*

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A Ministry of holy listening. -*Shalem Institute*

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Spiritual Direction is a covenant relationship in which one Christian assists another or others in the discernment of God's presence and the contemplative living out of God's call. -*SFTS Diploma in the Art of spiritual direction*

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At its very core, spiritual direction is about paying attention to where the presence of God (as the directee understands God) is most deeply felt. Spiritual directors, then, pursue the art of walking with a person as he or she becomes more attentive to God in their life. We are, in a sense, a “field guide” along life’s walk, pointing out interesting highlights and asking you to think more deeply about certain questions.

We help you make connections and become aware of what you are seeing. We don’t walk the walk *for* you, but we observe the walk *with you* aware that God is leading and is in relationship with you all the time. The field guide is somewhat familiar with the walk with God because he or she is on their own path, and has walked with others like you. At the same time, the field guide knows that no two walks are ever the same and approaches your experience of the walk with God with humility and wonder.

# A Word about Contemplation

Spiritual Direction is often described as a contemplative practice—something we do on a regular basis that draws us into the stillness where we experience the mystery we call God. Jesuit writer and spiritual director Walter Burghart defines contemplation as, “a long, loving look at the real.” Once you get to what is real in your life, then you are at a place where God is actively inviting you to a closer relationship through awareness, prayer, discernment and action.

In the early years of Christianity, devout men and women seeking this peace would trek to the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, Arabia and Persia for solitude and prayer. Many sequestered themselves in small cells or caves to reduce distractions. Amazingly, other city dwellers made pilgrimages to visit these desert fathers and mothers, traveling long distances to spend a few moments with them, asking for a word of wisdom from God.

This practice of seeking out prayerful guides who encourage “inner stillness” and help us discern God’s activity in our life is just as important today as it was in the time of the desert fathers and mothers. Maybe more so. Our lives have become so hectic and we are so bombarded constantly with persuasive messages about how to live “the good life” that we forget all about contemplation. Spiritual directors exist to remind us to connect with the inner stillness and silence and wait for the inner prompting or insight from God.

Spiritual direction provides us with a practice to help us recover that all important quest for meaning, love and our true identity.

# What Spiritual Direction Can Do

Spiritual direction can help you become more aware of where God is active and moving in your life; savor and remember God's goodness; and discern how it is you are being invited to follow God into a broken and hurting world. Spiritual direction is also helpful for people moving through tough spiritual questions that arise when one's image of God is malformed or arrested in time, or when someone is recovering from past religious abuse. Questions about a powerful religious experience are welcomed and nurtured in spiritual direction.

One of the most helpful aspects of spiritual direction is assistance with discernment. Spiritual discernment is best described as "making faithful choices." It involves listening—in prayer and reflection—to insight from God, insight from our intellect and insight from our bodies about a choice we are facing. Listening in silence for clarity around a question is a key component of discernment. Spiritual directors, especially those trained in discernment processes, make excellent sounding boards for people facing important crossroads in life.

Finally, spiritual direction can be a wonderful complement to psychological counseling. Although some psychologists are attuned to the spiritual aspects of life, most are not trained as spiritual directors. Some counseling patients find they want to take certain insights from counseling into spiritual direction for exploration. This works well as long as it is understood that spiritual direction is a complement to therapy, not a replacement for it.

# What Spiritual Direction Cannot Do

Spiritual direction is not professional counseling, even though there may, at times, seem to be some overlapping practices (such as active listening). There is a vast difference between therapy and spiritual direction. Spiritual direction is a wellness practice, not a problem-solving practice. First and foremost, spiritual directors do not diagnose or treat any disorder of any kind. For example, if a person seems to be suffering from depression, a good spiritual director will inquire about what we notice (lethargy, flat affect, lasting sadness) and gently refer the person to a mental health professional. As the depression is being treated on a physical and emotional level, the depressed person may of course be in spiritual direction to reflect upon how God is present to them in the midst of this situation. But a good spiritual director will not expect spiritual direction to solve the psychological problem.

Spiritual direction is not about “fixing” anyone or anything. People bring their whole life to spiritual direction, and since life is full of problems, spiritual directors do hear about problems--a lot. But we are not looking to problem solve. Problems are like storms on the sea—to be expected now and then. The spiritual director may *help* the person navigate their life boat in the storm but cannot and will not steer the boat for the person. Spiritual directors expect God and the individual to weather the storm together. We are there to help the individual notice how God is in the midst of the situation. What might be the invitation from God in this situation?

Spiritual direction is never about telling people what to do. A good spiritual director invites a person to look inside themselves, to their own God-given wisdom, for answers.



# Three Functions of Spiritual Direction

## Enhanced Awareness of God

One of the prime functions of spiritual direction is to increase a person's awareness of God. This is accomplished primarily through:

- ☞ Dedication to a daily prayer practice that fits your personality.
- ☞ Spending time in silence, meditation or centering prayer.
- ☞ Noticing daily where you experience life, energy, joy, peace, wisdom and other indicators that Spirit is present.
- ☞ Journaling about your relationship with God.
- ☞ Talking with a trusted guide, such as a spiritual director, about your experiences in life that transcend “business as usual” and seem to shimmer with holiness.

Take a moment to ponder the times in your life when you were acutely aware of the presence of the Holy.

What did it feel like? Where were you? Who were you with?

Noticing these times of awareness will deepen your relationship with God.

## **Remembering and Savoring God's presence**

A second function of spiritual direction is reflecting on your spiritual path. Many people come to spiritual direction because of an experience of God that they want to understand better. Or they want to see their life's journey in perspective and notice God's movement in their life.

A good spiritual director will help you remember times when you felt close to God or felt "at one with the universe." If we stay with the memory and allow God to reveal something new in it, we can experience the blessing again. Better yet, we learn a new thing about ourselves or about God. Sitting with that memory—in silence and gratitude---helps us savor the fullness of God. When people bring experiences, both joyful and sad, spiritual directors can help them amplify the experience in order to allow them to move forward and grow from the experience.

Remember a time in your life when you felt the presence of the holy.

Sit in silence as you relive that moment.

Let yourself feel as if you were in that moment once again.

Ask God if there is an invitation for you in this time of savoring. What does this experience call forth in you?

## Spiritual Growth

Another function—perhaps the only goal—in spiritual direction is your spiritual growth. Which brings up the question: How does one assess how spiritual direction is contributing to a person’s life?

The value of spiritual direction is really only observed over a period of time. The longer a person sees a spiritual director who gets to know them quite well the easier it is for both director and directee to evaluate spiritual growth. Usually, the directee is the one who names what they have seen happening in them as a result of spending time in spiritual direction. It is helpful, however, for directors to mention—from time to time—what they notice in the way of personal transformation of the directee.

Some benchmarks indicating spiritual growth might include:

- ☞ Evidence of “fruit of the Spirit.” Paul named a few of these in his letter to the Galatians (5:22, 23): love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. When a person becomes more attentive to the Spirit, they experience spiritual growth.
- ☞ A warm and loving relationship with God.
- ☞ Warm and loving relationships cultivated with others.
- ☞ Compassion for the needs of those who are poor, oppressed and outcast. Reaching out to them in hospitality. A passion for justice and peace.
- ☞ Balance between the inner, introspective life and the outer, other-focused life.

- ☞ An image of God that is in line with the Psalmist's naming of God as "merciful, kind, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."
- ☞ Continued discernment around important life choices.

Some people mistakenly assume that spiritual direction is something we can add on to make a rich and comfortable life even more so. They are then surprised or even dismayed when they find that getting closer to God sometimes causes discomfort, at least for a while. It is not easy to take that "long, loving look at the real," so for some people, spiritual direction is too difficult.

The spiritual life is in some ways like the physical—there are growing pains. The good news of spiritual direction is that the pain is not endless and the healing that comes from having an honest relationship with God leads to *real* comfort and *real* richness in life.

How do you evaluate your own spiritual growth?

What are your goals for spiritual growth?

If you don't have any goals (which is OK—not everything in life has to be goal oriented!) then what are you hoping for as you enter spiritual direction?

These are the kinds of questions that are helpful to ponder before you enter a spiritual direction session.

# Who Comes to Spiritual Direction?

You may be thinking that only deeply devout people in religious professions go to spiritual direction. But that is not the case. There is no one type of person who seeks out spiritual direction.

Directees are lay people and clergy. They come from all classes of society. They are male, female, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender, questioning, intersexual, asexual and straight.

Some are very religious and use a lot of religious language and imagery from their tradition. Others are in the spiritual-but-not-religious category. Some are non-theists and understand God as more of a force in the universe than a person. Many are seekers who aren't sure what they believe, and some are lifelong believers.

Directees come from a variety of religious traditions. Although spiritual direction as discussed in this booklet grew out of Christianity, not all people who visit spiritual directors are Christian, nor is there any expectation that they might become one as a result of being in spiritual direction with a Christian. You can also find spiritual directors who are Jewish, Sufi-Muslim, Buddhist and Inter-faith.

What we can safely say about people who come to spiritual direction is that they are seeking greater awareness of the mystery we sometimes call God. Some are people wondering “where is God in this situation in my life?” Some find their relationship with God is growing and they want to savor and celebrate that. Others feel their relationship with God is stale and they want to understand and work on that. Some have had a profound or even disturbing religious experience and need help “unpacking” what it means for their life.

Many come to spiritual direction because they need to make a crucial decision in their life and want help in discerning which way to go.

Groups or organizations may request spiritual direction because they want to be about God's work, but aren't sure exactly what that means for them. Countless people seek spiritual direction because they have lost sight of God's desire for their life in the "busy-ness" of life, and they believe a trained and experienced holy listener such as a spiritual director would help them see more clearly again. And others want a spiritual director simply because they crave time with someone who will listen to them and support them as they talk about things that really matter—God, prayer, their values and ethical choices.

## **What you need to know about Spiritual Directors**

Anyone, at any time can call themselves a spiritual director. They can hang out a shingle and begin meeting with people on a regular basis.

There is, at present, no standard certification for spiritual directors and there may never be. Spiritual direction has traditionally been considered a *charism*, which means gift from God. Like other spiritual gifts, some people have it and some don't. And certification, even if there were a standard set by a worldwide certifying organization, wouldn't really verify whether you had the gift or not. At least that is the philosophy of many in the spiritual direction field.

Can a person without the gift be taught the skills to be a spiritual director? Many say no. But with all the spiritual direction training and formation programs available now, unless the director is very old and has been practicing for many

years with an excellent reputation, I prefer someone with some training--gift or no gift. Even if the person clearly has the gift, I'd prefer it be honed and matured by the wisdom of a teacher or mentor. Ideally, a gifted and trained director is your best bet. But no one can tell you who has the gift and who doesn't. That will be up to you to determine after meeting with them a few times.

A person usually becomes a spiritual director after years of being in spiritual direction and feeling a nudge or inspiration to "listen with the ear of the heart" to other people's sacred stories. Training (some programs prefer the term formation) ordinarily consists of classes in prayer, contemplation, contemplative listening, discernment and some theology along with ample time in "practicum," a class where participants do spiritual direction sessions with one another while supervised by a teacher.

Many programs require participants to do an internship in which they take on at least one directee for a specified period of time. Visits with a supervisor who reports back to the program may also be part of the process to receive the certificate. Some programs are quite academic, with graded papers and steps to achieve in order to receive a certificate. Others are more experiential, mixing presentations and lectures with times of prayer, retreat-style activities and silence. Some programs last up to three years and some are a few weeks long. The Hesychia School of Spiritual Direction (where I serve as Director) as well as a few others in the U.S. includes instruction on spiritual guidance from a variety of religious traditions in order to prepare directors to work in the multi-faith culture we live in.

A good training program always includes an emphasis on prayer and contemplation, training in practical skills of contemplative listening, encourages a high level of self-care and self-esteem in the director, and recommends resources for the future continuing education of the director.

# Types of Spiritual Direction Available

There are as many styles of spiritual direction as there are directors. But two models seem to predominate. Keep in mind that some spiritual directors may blend these models and that they may not use any particular name for the model. You find these styles out by interviewing the individual directors.

## The Evocative Model

It may seem odd to find out that many spiritual directors, despite the name “director” prefer a “non-directive,” which I call evocative style of direction. This is the model that most formation programs promote.

It is non-directive because the spiritual director is not giving out homework, directives or advice. It is evocative because what he or she will do with a directee is work to evoke *from the directee* their own wisdom, whether it is a case of noticing God’s presence, savoring and remembering the presence, or discerning God’s leading in a choice to be made. In this case, the only thing the director is directing is the person’s attention to where God may be present and moving. We use the term “may” because the director cannot know—without a shadow of a doubt—where God is leading in any particular situation. The director merely assists the directee in discerning where *they, the directee*, feel led by God.

It’s all very subjective and it’s owned by the directee, who has their own relationship with God. The director tries to “listen in on” this relationship, but cannot fully know it. It is for this reason that spiritual directors using the evocative model maintain a certain humility. We know that we don’t know very



much about what is going on between the directee and God but we will offer our gifts and services in the exploration.

The evocative model uses contemplative listening, reflective responses and gentle offerings of suggestions for ways to enhance the spiritual journey. Spiritual directors using this model will generally talk no more than 10% of the time while their directees will talk 90% of the time. If a director does more than observe, reflect and ask important questions, he or she is either off-track in their “non-directive” model or are moving into a more directive style.

It is important for prospective directees to know that this model puts the focus primarily on God and them, and that the director will speak only when necessary. If you go to direction hoping for a lesson in some aspect of spirituality and find the director is only talking 10% of the time, you might be confused. It is good to ask about style prior to beginning the session. And it’s good for directors to explain a bit about their style so that confusion is lessened.

This model of spiritual direction is considered by many to be the safest for both director and directee. If practiced faithfully, the director is in no way unduly influencing a directee in one way or another. That way, the directee never feels pressured, judged or pushed. The director is not giving advice or counsel and is therefore less likely to come under fire for having an undue influence in someone’s life.

## **The Directive Model**

If you want to be taught, need or want homework and exercises that you will be responsible for doing and reporting back on, then you should look for a director who will give you all that. Perhaps you want to explore your path in the context of

the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. This is a program you can do with a specially trained director over the course of a 30-day retreat (at a retreat center) or you can find a director who will offer these exercises in daily life.

If such a specific program is what you are going for, be prepared to spend time searching for this person and program. Do an internet search for “Ignatian Exercises” and when you find a program you want to be part of, ask if you can interview the person who will be directing. From what I have heard from many people who have done these exercises, the director can make it or break it for you, so you want to find someone you have a good rapport with. Most of these will be either Jesuit priests or spiritual directors with extensive training in the Ignatian method.

If a lot of guidance and teaching is what you think you need, you might consider a discipleship program or a class in spiritual practices. Another option is to find a spiritual director who may be trained in the non-directive method but is willing to try a more directive style for a period of time (that I have done with directees, and it has worked well). The two of you could together craft a program that has you trying a number of spiritual practices until you find one you can do on a regular basis.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Since there is no standard certification or oversight board governing spiritual directors, seekers are on their own determining who is the right spiritual director for them. Two affordable and highly informative publications for spiritual directors, aspiring spiritual directors and those considering entering spiritual direction are [\*Guidelines for Ethical Conduct\*](#) from Spiritual Directors International and [\*A Code of Ethics for Spiritual Directors\*](#) by Thomas Hedberg

and Betsy Caprio and the staff of the Center for Sacred Psychology (1992, Dove Publications).

The *Guidelines for Ethical Conduct* is written primarily from the point of view of the spiritual director, instructing and inspiring the director on matters of self-care, formation, supervision and personal responsibility. It gives a thumbnail sketch of the kind of covenant spiritual directors need to initiate with directees regarding the nature of the relationship, roles, length and frequency of meetings, compensation and the process for evaluating and terminating the relationship. It also addresses the importance of confidentiality, the limits of confidentiality (when there are legal requirements on reporting abuse and physical harm to authorities), and ways the director is to honor the dignity of the directee's spirituality, life choices and boundaries. The *Guidelines* cover the basics, but for more in-depth explanation with examples to illustrate, *A Code of Ethics for Spiritual Directors* is a must-read for all directors and helpful for those seeking direction.

*A Code of Ethics for Spiritual Directors* outlines the nature of spiritual direction, much of its terminology and addresses why such a code is necessary. It outlines the qualities and training of spiritual directors, the boundaries they are to uphold, and the unique nature of the spiritual direction relationship. There are also guidelines for spiritual directors working with other professionals in the community. This book is valuable in that its writers researched "norms" in the current practice of hundreds of spiritual directors and has presented their findings in a short booklet for those engaged in the ministry of spiritual direction and for those who seek this help from others. As much as is possible, this booklet addresses the kind of accountability needed in an unregulated field. Good spiritual directors should live by the code and people seeking direction are wise to require that the person they seek direction from knows and upholds this non-binding code.

# Basic Indicators of a Healthy Spiritual Director

Culled from the *Ethical Guidelines, A Code of Ethics for Spiritual Directors* and the lived experience of many spiritual directors, here are some signs of a healthy spiritual director:

- ☞ Listens for the directee's sacred truth and respects it.
- ☞ Does not try to push the directee in one direction or another.
- ☞ Honors the directee's spiritual or religious background.
- ☞ Maintains confidentiality.
- ☞ Respects physical, emotional and spiritual boundaries.
- ☞ Prays as a way of life.
- ☞ Pursues continuing education in the field of spiritual direction.
- ☞ Maintains good relationship with other spiritual directors.
- ☞ Wants the directee to discover, for himself or herself, how God is present in their life.
- ☞ Makes sure the meeting space is private and safe.
- ☞ Offers referrals when the directee needs assistance that goes beyond spiritual direction.
- ☞ Ensures that the direction session is always about the directee—not about the director.
- ☞ Begins on time and ends on time, respecting the schedule.
- ☞ Is careful to avoid developing a “dual” relationship with the directee. In other words, makes sure that the only role he or she plays in the life of the directee is that of spiritual director.

# Basic Indicators of an Unhealthy Spiritual Director

- ☞ Doesn't listen.
- ☞ Makes judgmental comments.
- ☞ Pushes the directee in one direction or another.
- ☞ Does not respect the directee's spiritual or religious background.
- ☞ Breaks confidentiality.
- ☞ Violates boundaries with inappropriate comments or touch.
- ☞ Has abandoned his or her own spiritual practices and path.
- ☞ Talks about himself or herself too much.
- ☞ Allows the session to get into a mode where he or she is "fixing" the directee's "problems."
- ☞ Allows interruptions—by phone or people "dropping in" while the session is going on.
- ☞ Misses appointments without advance notice, starts late and does not end on time.
- ☞ Initiates a relationship outside of the direction session. Examples include trying to sell you something, advocating on the directee's behalf without being asked for such support, becoming their special friend.
- ☞ Displays a callous, rude or indifferent attitude toward what is shared.
- ☞ Falls asleep (believe it or not, people tell me this has happened to them!)

# **What to do if you find yourself in an unhealthy spiritual direction relationship**

Get out immediately.

No need to give a lengthy explanation. You may want to talk to another spiritual director about the experience *after you have ended the initial relationship*. If the spiritual director did something highly inappropriate, refer him or her to the *Code of Ethics* so that they might learn something from the experience.

If the spiritual director is ordained by a denomination or on staff at a particular place, bring up the situation with those who may be able to hold them accountable. Since there is no certification of spiritual directors, there is, at present, no way to “de-certify” those who are unethical. Finding the right spiritual director for you is pretty much an ongoing discernment on your part.

The good news is that there are not many reports of horrible behavior on the part of spiritual directors. There have been reports of ones who fell asleep during a session and or who held strong opinions about a certain path directees should follow. Most of the people who found directors like that were able to move on and quickly find excellent directors after those experiences.

# Is Spiritual Direction Right for You?

Formal spiritual direction is not for everyone. If you find spiritual guidance in your daily devotional practice and do not feel a need to be accompanied along your path, you probably don't need to invest time, energy and money in a spiritual direction relationship. However, if you are a ministry professional, a long-time spiritual seeker, a person riddled with questions and struggles around spirituality, or someone who feels drawn to talk deeply about your spiritual path, spiritual direction is probably right for you.

Many times people considering religious life, ordination, or a life devoted to ministering to others simply need someone to talk to on a regular basis. They need to process the twists and turns of their spiritual journey with a trusted "field guide." Similarly, people who are always seeking new spiritual experiences and adventures could benefit from the stability of having a nonjudgmental presence and guide who listens to their sacred story and helps them find what they are looking for.

Many people come to spiritual direction at a crossroads in life, seeking to explore a question or understand a struggle they are in the midst of. In addition, there are a lot of people who simply want someone with training and experience in spiritual direction to talk to about their relationship with God.

Occasionally, people enter spiritual direction because they think they should or because an authority figure in their life or profession has required it. Sometimes the direction relationship flourishes in these situations, but many times it does not. It is best that the person seeking direction truly desire to work with a spiritual guide.

# How to find a spiritual director

First, pray about it. Think seriously about what you are looking for in a spiritual director.

Does training matter to you? If so, how will you determine if a person's training is adequate? You will need to do some research about the different programs and their philosophies. Also, are you looking for a director of a particular gender? Someone ordained to ministry? Someone with a dual emphasis such as psychologist-spiritual director or a director who practices energy healing as well? Someone who is open and affirming of gay, lesbian bisexual and transgendered persons? They are all out there.

Do you want to meet with this director face-to-face, or would phone consultations work for you? (If you live in rural areas where there are few spiritual directors, you may have to consider distance direction). Do you mind driving a distance to meet with this director?

How much are you willing to pay for spiritual direction sessions? Most directors have fees, some incorporate a sliding scale, some will work out barter arrangements and a few offer their services at no charge. Take some time to think about the practical issues that matter to you. Make your own personal checklist to use when interviewing potential directors.

Then, begin the search using the Internet, phone and your network of friends. Spiritual Directors International, the premiere organization of spiritual directors worldwide, has a "Seek and Find" feature on their website at [www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org) that can provide you with a list of spiritual directors in your region. Many of them will list their phone numbers so you can start by interviewing them on the phone. Contact your friends to see if they know of any spiritual directors. Local clergy



may be able to give you names. If there are retreat centers in your area, there are usually spiritual directors that use those centers for gatherings. They may have a list. Gather up your list and start calling.

Interview prospective directors on the phone or in person. Some directors may offer the initial session at no charge since they want you to be sure it's a good fit before you begin regular paying sessions. Even if you pay, it's worth it to shop around. Don't stop the search until you are certain you have found a spiritual director that is a good fit for you. Don't be discouraged if it takes a few attempts to find the right director. In fact, some spiritual direction formation programs ask their participants (those who are in-between and in need of a spiritual director) to interview three directors before choosing one.

Don't be surprised if the first visit feels a bit awkward. It is difficult to pour your heart out to someone you just met, but in spiritual direction it frequently happens. Notice how you feel a few hours after the session. You don't have to commit to the next session right away. Take some time to think it over and pray about it. Were the director's responses to what you shared welcoming? Did he make you feel comfortable? Did she let you do most of the talking? When the director did say something, did it connect with your heart in any way? Could you feel the director's compassion for you?

If you think this director is a good fit for you, let him or her know and discuss the possibility of setting up regular monthly sessions. Ordinarily, spiritual direction runs one hour once a month. But some people need less so they set up meetings "as needed." And others feel they need more spiritual direction during especially tumultuous times in their life, so they might meet with a director every 2 weeks. Spiritual direction, however, is not problem solving or crisis intervention, so most directors will encourage you to stick to a "once a month" schedule and will not encourage more frequent meetings on a regular basis.

# Developing a relationship with your director

The director-directee relationship is unique. You are not buddies, but you have a caring, deep relationship.

The director is not your counselor, but he or she does maintain a similar sort of professional distance outside the doors of the direction room. It is both a professional and personal relationship with strict boundaries of confidentiality and respect. A good spiritual director abides by the *Code of Ethics* developed by a task group out of San Jose, CA, and this code stipulates that the relationship is sacred ground and your safety is of prime importance. You may want to be closer to your spiritual director than he or she will allow. Recognize the uniqueness of the relationship and respect that your director has good boundaries.

When you need to end your spiritual direction relationship, all you need do is tell your director that you are moving on. If you want to explain why, you may do so. But the direction relationship is always at the service of the directee and not the director. Do what you need to do and say as much or as little as you need to. A good director will not be invested in anything but your best interest and the development of your spiritual journey. He or she may even give you referrals for other spiritual directors, if you would like to continue spiritual direction with another person.

# Conclusion

## **Blessings on your discernment!**

If spiritual direction is right for you, it is my fervent hope that you will find the director who is a good fit for you---and soon. Spiritual direction has been an incredible blessing in my life, which is why I am now a spiritual director and why I talk about this ministry and its benefits to so many people.

I also hope this booklet about spiritual direction is helpful to you. Perhaps it brought up questions for you. I would be honored to talk with you more about spiritual direction and I welcome inquiries. You can find me at:

[The Phoenix Center for Spiritual Direction](#)

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[teresa@teresablythe.net](mailto:teresa@teresablythe.net)

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