

LOCAL VOICES ON FAITH

A spiritual director may help a person on their faith journey



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Over my lifetime, I have been amazed at how we are never finished growing. There is always another invitation – to love more, to learn more, to grow in sensitivity to those around us, to let go of some place or job, person, habit, or desire and embrace a new way of being. Often it is outer things in life that prompt change and growth. Other times something interior awakens and invites us to pay attention – a desire for deeper communion with others and with God, a yearning for “more” in life or a holy restlessness.

At times like these, when we sense an invitation to something new, something deeper, and the road map to get there is not clear, many people find the practice of spiritual direction to be an invaluable resource for their spiritual growth. They value the accompaniment of someone familiar with the spiritual landscape who can help illuminate the path’s twists and turns and darker places.

The longstanding term “spiritual director” is problematic since the real director is the Holy Spirit. A spiritual director does not give answers. Indeed, s/he does not have answers for another person, but helps that person explore possibilities and discover what leads to an authentic life in faith for that person. In spiritual direction one learns to listen deeply to God present in the relationships, events, yearnings and sufferings of life and to discern which movements, choices and longings lead to God and which do not.

Spiritual direction is an ongoing conversation between the spiritual director and the person coming for spiritual direction (the directee), typically occurring monthly for about an hour. The directee brings to the conversation aspects of his or her life that s/he wants to explore to see how God is present and what God might be inviting in this situation. Relationships, events, prayer and inner stirrings are often the starting place.

The director and directee listen deeply together to the directee’s story and discover ways that God is moving in his or her life. Over time, the patterns of God’s presence and the directee’s response and resistance to God become more easily apparent, helping the directee become more attentive and responsive to God.

A spiritual director is a prayerful person attuned to



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the inner life, familiar with and dedicated to spiritual growth, trained to accompany individuals so as to help each person discover the ways that God works in his or her life.

Our lives as mature Christians have become more complex over the past 40+ years, and the ministry of spiritual direction has evolved to meet that complexity. Today, spiritual directors receive extensive training to listen well and to accompany others objectively. We might think of this specialized training as similar to therapists who train to do marriage counseling, or medical doctors who study to specialize in orthopedics or cardiac issues.

Besides formal course work in theology, spirituality, human development, and listening skills, along with extensive practicum experience, spiritual directors engage in ongoing supervision of their work,

either with an individual supervisor or in peer groups with other spiritual directors, who meet regularly. Supervision helps directors maintain professionalism, recognize their own blind spots which hinder listening freely and well to another, and be attuned to how God is at work in the spiritual direction session, both in the directee and in the director.

In the past, people seeking answers and guidance often turned to priests, monks and nuns. Today, most parish priests lead faith communities with a wide breadth of skills, concerns and responsibilities. They are the front-line spirituality resource for parishioners, but the multifaceted demands of parish life do not allow space and time for individual spiritual direction.

Some individual priests have discerned the call to become spiritual directors and have availed them-

selves of specialized training. In the wider Catholic Church, some deacons and a number of women religious have also discerned that call and have trained to offer spiritual direction. A significant number of laity today are serving as spiritual directors, well trained and well qualified for this role. One of the rich blessings of our present day is evidence of how holiness is a gift for the whole Church.

How does one find a spiritual director? Word of mouth is one way. Spiritual Directors International has a Seek and Find Guide at sdi-world.org to help locate spiritual directors geographically. Upon request, I can share a list of local spiritual directors. One of our realities in the Diocese of Gary is that there is not an abundance of trained spiritual directors, but our proximity to Chicago, South Bend and Donaldson

provides a larger pool of available directors.

Individuals who sense they have gifts for being a spiritual director can discern that call with their own spiritual director and then enroll in a recognized training program to further develop their gifts and hone skills to offer the ministry of spiritual direction.

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