

What is Spiritual Direction?

A person who seeks spiritual direction is going somewhere and wants to talk with someone on the way. A spiritual director is a person who is also going somewhere on the spiritual journey, has some training, life experience and maturity to offer.

The focus of a spiritual direction session is usually a person's experience of God or something that points to God. These experiences often occur in prayer but are not limited to formal prayer.

The New Testament is a product of much thought about Jesus Christ who became fully human like us except actual sin. The basis for that thought was the experience of relationship with Jesus by many people during his life and after his resurrection. A relationship with Jesus today is available to us through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

As human beings, we generally seek to understand the meaning of our experiences. The search for meaning about our most significant experiences is usually a religious search. We believe each person can meet God in his or her own experience and therefore any experience in life might become the focus of a spiritual direction session.

Spiritual direction has been around for well over a thousand years. We offer it in the way developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola. He created a logical method about how to respond to certain experiences. This method is called Ignatian discernment. The word *discernment* simply means to discover what action God wants you to take.

The flow of feelings and thoughts arising out of an experience is a particular focus of Ignatian discernment. A spiritual director can help another person identify the cause and meaning of some of these flows. The phrase 'spiritual direction' reflects a vital interest in where the flow of thoughts and feelings of a specific experience is headed.

The director's job is to support you to discern what God is doing. The director cannot and should not do the work that only you alone can do. It is not the role of a spiritual director to tell you what to do, or relieve you of decisions that are properly yours to make.

St. Ignatius once said that very few people realise what God will make of them in this life. It's a question of becoming who you are meant to be, and the God given meaning and purpose of your life. It's a question of your Personal Vocation. (To read more about Personal Vocation, see the document below). Your potential in Christ becomes actual through fully giving yourself to God in love whatever your circumstances in life. It is the goal of both your earthly and spiritual existence.

For those who are interested in the possibility of participating in spiritual direction, some common questions are answered in the following.

Some Practical Questions and Answers about Spiritual Direction

Q: I am interested in exploring if spiritual direction is for me. What do I do?

Ans: You can contact Adrian Wellspring (adrianw.stbenedicts@hotmail.com or 0421 451 412). Generally there would be three or four 1 hour spiritual conversations. This is not spiritual direction as such but enables each party to explore if a spiritual direction relationship is likely to work. The 3 or 4 sessions occur on a no commitment basis. That is, at the end of the 3 or 4 sessions, you can simply decide that spiritual direction is not for you and cease contact. The director is also free to decline further contact.

Q: What happens in a spiritual direction session?

Ans: You would share with the director what has been happening in your prayer and/or life according to what you feel your need is at the time. The director listens attentively and compassionately to what you say. You are invited to explore the movement of God in your story.

During a session the director may pose questions, be silent or make suggestions or refer to spiritual knowledge from the saints or other holy men and women; whatever seems to be the invitation of the Holy Spirit at that time. Ultimately you must take responsibility for whatever insights are revealed in your prayer/life or a course of action that you feel should be taken.

Q: What about confidentiality?

Ans: The content of spiritual direction sessions are confidential and is not disclosed to anyone else. In specific and infrequent circumstances, Australian law might compel the disclosure of certain personal information. You would be advised if this situation arose. Before any disclosure, consideration would also be given as to whether or not there was any conflict between the relevant Australian law and Catholic moral teaching.

Q: Is there a fee for this?

Ans: We do not want money to be a barrier to receiving spiritual direction and so there is no fixed fee. On the other hand, the time reserved for you is also something of value. You are invited to show that you value the time spent receiving spiritual direction by making a donation to the Missionaries of God's Love Priests and Brothers.

You should consider your situation and donate according to your financial circumstances. As a very general guideline, a donation of \$40 per session

would be appropriate for a full time worker on average wages. Low income earners are not asked to make a donation.

PERSONAL VOCATION:

What is it? and Who has one?

The word 'vocation' is often used to refer to priests and religious brothers and sisters. But the word simply means 'to call'. God invites each of us into a lifelong friendship with Jesus Christ. In this relationship we are called to love and serve God and others.

God is love and a mutual relationship among three persons. The end goal of my life is to be fully received into this mutual union of love. The path to this union occurs through faithfully following my Personal Vocation.

At the beginning of his time as Pope, Saint John Paul II said that for the whole Church, and each member of it, a Personal Vocation is essential. Why?

Because Personal Vocation is about the particular way I become the person God has called me to be in Jesus Christ. It unfolds in the events of my life and confers a unique God given meaning and purpose to my life. The Holy Spirit can illuminate this meaning for me in light of the all-embracing story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Who has a Personal Vocation? We all do. John Paul II called it a gift which serves others, and builds the Church and friendly communities in the various areas of human life. But what does this mean in practice?

Most members of the Church are called to live in the world and, from that place, receive their call to follow Jesus. This call is marked by being involved in earthly activities and working with Christ to shape them according to the plan of God.

The ultimate goal of my life is union with God. Following Christ in the world is a broad overarching commitment to a particular life style. It will shape me as a person through countless choices, decisions and actions.

Personal Vocation puts flesh on the bones of general Christian discipleship. The choices that exist for me are the means to my ultimate goal. These choices include things like the decision to marry or remain single, decisions about study and employment, volunteer work, who I choose as friends, and where I will live and worship. Smaller decisions are also a part of my Personal Vocation. This is because my faith in Jesus Christ should be the basis that draws all elements of my life together in a unified whole. Whatever I do should be for the glory of God. (See 1 Corinthians 10:31)

Who I become in Christ will be a result of what I do. As my Personal Vocation emerges over time, it will consist of a unique combination of relationship commitments, personal strengths and weaknesses, and spiritual gifts through which

the common Christian vocation is expressed uniquely in me through my baptismal grace.

Jesus invites me to let my faith be real at the level of practical choice in my life. He invites me to talk with Him about every aspect of my life and let him influence it.

Is it possible to know what God wants for my life? Does He have preferences? The simple answer is yes. But those preferences are not given in the same way that a builder takes plans to build a house. In this regard, Spiritual Direction can be very helpful for discerning Personal Vocation. (To read more about Spiritual Direction, see the document above.)

If the idea of Personal Vocation is new to me, any day is a good day to start consciously living it and let God write a different ending for my life.

The following two books are recommended for those who might enjoy reading some more on this topic.

Discovering Your Personal Vocation: The Search for Meaning through the Spiritual Exercises by Herbert Alphonso, S.J.

Personal Vocation: God Calls Everyone by Name by Germain Grisez and Russell Shaw.

