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**Introducing Spiritual Direction**

**• WHAT IS SPIRITUAL DIRECTION?**

**Spiritual Direction** is an ancient form of pastoral care with a very tight focus: it examines the substance, nature, and actual experience of the God-human relationship. In spiritual direction, the director and the directee come together for the primary purpose of focusing on the presence and activity of God in the directee’s life. In a word, spiritual direction is co-discernment. We learn to “see what the Father is doing (John 5:19),” not just in that moment, but over the months and seasons of a person’s life. The goal is to deepen the relationship with God by growing in attentiveness. Here are a few other contemporary definitions:

*“We define Christian spiritual direction, then, as help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God’s personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with God, and to live out the consequences of that relationship.”* William A. Barry and William J. Connolly

*“(Spiritual direction) is the pastoral work that is historically termed the cure (or care) of souls…The cure of souls, then, is the Scripture-directed, prayer-shaped care that is devoted to persons singly or in groups…(it) is cultivated awareness that God has already seized the initiative. God has been working diligently, redemptively, and strategically before I appeared on the scene, before I was aware there was something here for me to do.”* Eugene Peterson

*“(Spiritual direction) is recognizing God’s amazing work in us and among us in the ordinariness of human existence.”* Margaret Guenther

*“As a spiritual director, I see myself as a companion to people on their journeys. As a companion, I accompany others who become more fully who they have been created to be, sinking their roots deep into the living waters of God’s grace and bearing fruit in the world.”* Susan S. Phillips

**• WHAT IS THE WORK OF THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR?**

Let's say first what it's not: It's not “being told what to do in my spiritual life by an expert.” It is not an accountability partnership, focusing on avoiding sin. Spiritual direction is not counseling or inner healing. The director's job is not to fix something that's broken or make something happen. We insist that something is already happening, and that God is already doing is a good, beautiful, and holy (even if hard) work in the lives of those who come for direction. Consequently, the director's role is simply to help the directee to notice God's work accurately and respond to it vigorously, joyfully, and habitually over the months of a person’s journey. The director comes alongside the directee to dust for the fingerprints of God. While spiritual direction is journey–centered and not healing–centered, the growing awareness has healing and sanctifying affects in the directee’s life. Under the pastoral care umbrella, spiritual direction is a focused ministry of accompaniment and discernment.

**• WHAT ARE THE TOOLS OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION?**

The director does her/his work through a combination of means: silence, prayer, reverent listening, excellent questions, keen observations, attention to the mind, affect, and body of the directee, self–awareness, and knowledge of both human personality and spiritual dynamics.

**• SOME BACKGROUND ON SUSTAINABLE FAITH AND THE SCHOOL OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION**

For over a decade, Sustainable Faith (www.sustainablefaith.com) has been working toward a culture of sustainability in the vocational work of pastors and leaders. Originally based in a Convent in Norwood, Ohio (Cincinnati area) and under the leadership of Dave & Jody Nixon, Sustainable Faith hosts retreats, nurtures conversations, educates leaders, trains spiritual directors, and helps faith communities pursue an active life from a deep place.

The School of Spiritual Direction (SSD) serves one part of the larger mission of Sustainable Faith: to cultivate excellent pastoral care and deeper spiritual formation within the local church. We look forward to the day when spiritual direction is regarded as a normal and vital ministry of the local church, not something that’s hard to find or outsourced to more contemplative groups.

SSD began small. In the fall of 2007 we cast our bread on the water, hoping to start in January 2008 with 6–7 people. When 20 people signed up, we were caught completely off guard and quickly formed three smaller cohorts, meeting on successive weeks. Even so, we never intended to move beyond Cincinnati. But invitations to go elsewhere trickled in, so we stepped outside the birthing room of our Convent.

Since 2008, the Schools of Sustainable Faith have established first and second year spiritual direction training groups (cohorts) in twenty-four American cities and internationally as well: Winnipeg, Toronto, Budapest, Amsterdam, and Birmingham (UK), all host thriving schools now. SSD cohorts are open to pastors, church leaders and laypeople, alike, and are geared to serve not just one denomination or church tradition, but the larger body of Christ. The training is Christocentric and guides people to embrace the contemplative life, helps us honor sabbath and observe life-giving rhythms, draws us toward healthy, embodied spiritual practices, nurtures self-awareness and vocational clarity, and ultimately, launches Kingdom enterprises.

**• THE COURSE: AN OVERVIEW**

Year 1 offers participants an immersive, integrated and robust introduction to the ministry of spiritual direction. Through the combined experience of reading superb literature, engaging in individual and group exercises, paying close attention to one's life, practicing spiritual disciplines, receiving spiritual direction, and offering direction - all in a communal setting - students move toward competency as spiritual directors.

**Objectives**

* grow in your own love for and devotion to God
* grow in your experience of God's love for you
* grow in discerning the movement of the Holy Spirit
* develop superb listening skills at the cognitive, affective, and non-verbal levels
* understand basics of body language/non-verbal communication
* become acquainted with the art & practice of spiritual direction through great literature
* cultivate a personalized definition and practice of spiritual direction
* become familiar with the enneagram as a tool for personal self–understanding and spiritual growth
* develop a set of basic questions for framing & guiding spiritually-directed conversations
* become a spiritual director who is confident in God and growing in competency with people

**• REQUIREMENTS**

1. **Cohort/Module Participation**

It's assumed that you make your best effort to be present at all intensives. We make allowances, of course, for emergency and sickness. In the event of an absence, a plan will need to be established for “catching up.”

1. **Develop a Personal Plan for Practicing Spiritual Disciplines**

We practice spiritual disciplines together, but you're also invited to practice a discipline to engage in at a deeper and more consistent level. Thus we will encourage you to engage in a few spiritual exercises over the course of training. In your general reports, you'll have an opportunity to share how God is using the discipline to shape you.

1. **Receive Regular Spiritual Direction**

Each participant in the training agrees to be in spiritual direction for your own self-care. Allowing a compassionate and wise person to companion you as you reflect on your life is a mark of humility. Yet it is also a part of your training. You get to experience how another person offers direction. Plan to receive at least one hour of direction per month for the duration of the training, with a minimum of 7 sessions. If you need help finding a director in your area, we’ll do our best to assist you. There are wonderful Directors in the Nashville area or beyond at a distance through Sustainable Faith.

1. **Offer Spiritual Direction**

Participants agree to offer spiritual direction to two people, meeting a minimum goal of having at least 10 sessions. We don't believe this is premature. Yes, it may feel like being thrown into the deep end of the pool, but you won't die, you won't kill your directees (who will likely be grateful for a listening ear), and it will accelerate your learning. Furthermore, it helps you integrate practice with theory, keeps it real rather than abstract, and some of your best questions about the nature of spiritual direction will come from this time. You'll also learn a lot about yourself as you offer spiritual direction to others.

1. **Submit Recordings and Supervision Reflection Forms**

You'll record and submit sessions with your directees, along with our Supervision Contemplative Reflection Forms, throughout our nine-month training. Recording maximizes learning as you go back and listen for self-evaluation. You are asked to type out (word-for-word) a more detailed transcript of excerpts from spiritual direction sessions with your directees. It's a learning experience in itself to write out and evaluate a session. After you submit your recording and verbatims (via our folders at box.com), your instructor will contact you and schedule a phone call or video conference, giving you helpful feedback on your work. You will also experience group Spiritual Direction in your cohort modules.

**6. Submit General Reflections**

In order to stay connected and abreast of each other's journey, you are asked to submit (1-2 weeks prior to our next module) regular general reflections to the entire group (via our folders at box.com). These are 1-2 pages with a short paragraph for each of the following:

* Comment on your readings: Share what resonates and challenges, how you're being shaped in your understanding of spiritual direction
* Comment on both your receiving and offering spiritual direction: How’s receiving spiritual direction going? What's it like? In offering spiritual direction, what are you learning and noticing about self?
* Comment on your current life circumstances: What can the rest of us be praying about for you?
* Comment in your experience of the Spiritual Practices you are engaging in between cohort modules.
* Comment on your conundrums, complexities, consternations, befuddlements, enigmas: From your experience, what questions would you like for us to address at the next gathering?

**7. Required Reading**

In our present culture, we have a nasty habit of confusing information with wisdom. We mix up the intellectual comprehension of a spiritual fact with the embodied practice. In this training, we read for formation, not information. Reading, of course, will never substitute for real-time experience, but the combination of reading with practice is a valuable and integral part of your growth as a spiritual director. This reading list (10 books over 9 months) comprises only a fraction of the good literature that has emerged in this field over the last three decades or so, but it's a start and is critical to your own growth. We have ten assigned books.

**Frequently asked questions**

**• HOW MUCH TIME WILL THIS TAKE?**

Beyond the time spent in the face-to-face meetings for the entire cohort, the time requirement depends largely on two variables: (1) how quickly you read, and (2) how far you have to drive to receive spiritual direction or offer it. Each month you'll be doing the following:

* Reading one book (4-8 hours)
* writing a report (1 hour max)
* receiving direction (1 hour plus driving time)
* offering direction (2 hours plus driving time)

Not counting driving time, this comes to 8-12 hours per month, or 2-3 hours per week.

**• HOW MUCH DOES THIS COST?**

Tuition for Year 1 training is $2400. After your application is approved, you can reserve your spot in the cohort with a $400 deposit, refundable until August 1, due to Covid. Afterward, you can pay the entire tuition, or if you desire monthly you may pay the balance in 8 equal automatic (electronic) payments of $250.00 You can begin your registration on-line by filling out an application on the SSD page <https://www.sustainablefaith.com/ssd> if you haven’t already applied. The cost of books and your own spiritual director’s cost are not included in your fees.

**• IS THIS FOR MY CHURCH?**

Honestly, how can it not be? Rightly practiced, this focused type of pastoral ministry is the essence of what we routinely preach: that apart from the Vine, we (the branches) have no life of our own. (John 15) We are fruitful only to the degree that we are attached to Jesus, our True Vine. Spiritual direction trains us to pay attention to that attachment. The inner life is the requisite underpinning of any sustainable, outward-focused life. Spiritual direction focuses upon the inner life and our connection to the Vine more personally and directly than other ministries.

**• IS THIS FOR ME?**

This training is open to anyone who wants to learn how to be better companions to others in their spiritual growth, and has the blessing of their local church pastor. It's especially appropriate for those entrusted with pastoral care/oversight in local churches or those who feel called vocationally to this particular form of ministry. It is often helpful in training to come with a broader experience of life, to have a depth of spiritual experience, to have been (at least partially!) deconstructed, and to have suffered, but the most important things are a desire to learn and the requisite humility. If this ministry fits with your desires, gifts, and sense of vocation, we welcome your participation.

**• NEXT STEPS**

-watch for email w/ info sheet

-register <https://www.sustainablefaith.com/ssd-year1-registration/>

-'interview'

-confirmation

-deposit

**• DATES**

Our School of Spiritual Direction (Year One) cohort will meet for five 2-day sessions online over the course of nine months beginning in the fall of 2020, meeting all day **Friday and Saturday**. Actual start time may be adjusted for cross time zone flexibility. Cohorts average eight students, but that number can be adjusted slightly, depending on demand.

**FRIDAY/SATURDAY**

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**CONTACT INFORMATION for further questions?**

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