

Archdiocese of Indianapolis  
The Ministry of Spiritual Direction for Adult (18 & Older) Catholics  
*"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20)*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

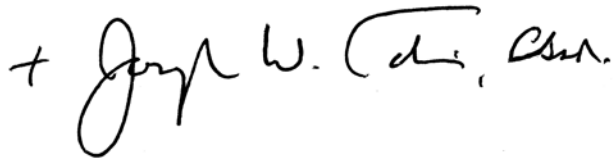
Spiritual direction is one of many ministries in the Church which supports the members of the Mystical Body of Christ in their life of discipleship. From the Congregation for the Clergy: *"The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy, an Aid for Confessors and Spiritual Directors,"* we read:

The Christian life is a "journey." It is a living in the Spirit (cf. Gal 5: 25) in harmony, relation, imitation and configuration to Christ by sharing in his divine sonship ... Spiritual direction assists us to distinguish the spirit of truth from the spirit of error (cf. 1 Jn 4:6) and to clothe ourselves in the new man created in true holiness according to the justice of God (cf. Eph 4:24). Spiritual direction is of special assistance in discerning the path of holiness and perfection.

In considering the ministry of spiritual direction, you begin from where you are in your quest to live the Gospel message of Jesus Christ through your Catholic faith. For someone just beginning the spiritual journey, spiritual direction offers insight and reflection into the fundamentals of committed prayer and what it means to live a sacramental and communal life of faith. For those a little more advanced, spiritual direction focuses on a deepening life of prayer and a more serious discernment of one's gifts in service to God and His Church.

If you are curious as to whether or not you are ready or called to begin spiritual direction or even if you are already engaged in spiritual direction, we hope the following information will be helpful to you.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R." The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.  
Archbishop of Indianapolis

## Respecting the difference between spiritual direction and psychological counseling

*“Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12:2)*

It is important to understand that spiritual direction is not psychological counseling. Father Albert Haase, O.F.M. offers the following caution relating to the ministry of spiritual direction (November, 2007, issue of *St. Anthony Messenger*)

People in need of psychological counseling because of some emotional pain or trauma are ill-advised to seek out spiritual direction, at least initially. Counseling deals with coping mechanisms and making the necessary changes in life so the client can function on a daily basis. It is only then that the person has the self-possession and stillness to listen to the Spirit. With those two qualities, one can begin to work on the awareness and articulation of near occasions of grace.

It is also possible that in the course of spiritual direction, some emotional trauma or pain may be brought to the surface. Within the course of ongoing spiritual direction, counseling may be needed and suggested. It is important to respect your spiritual director's guidance and/or recommendation for the need for professional counseling.

## What spiritual direction is and is not

*“What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What should I do for Christ?”  
(Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola 53)*

Fathers William Barry and William Connolly, in their book *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, define spiritual direction 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 this God, and to live out the consequences of that relationship.

Echoing this thought, it is good to keep in mind that the real director in the spiritual direction relationship is the Holy Spirit. Given this, the primary relationship is between the Holy Spirit and the directee, the secondary relationship between the director and directee.

To further understand the ministry, below are some general thoughts as to what spiritual direction is (or can be) and what it is not.

### Spiritual direction is (can be):

- An experience that over time, helps you become more attentive to God's presence and action in your life
- Facilitates the growth of your relationship with God and can lead to a greater appreciation for the role of the sacraments in your life.
- A contemplative approach rather than a psychological approach
- Facilitates the formation of your growth (and/or development) in both the human and divine likeness of Christ
- A process of seeking to understand and follow God's will in all aspects of your life

- Most particularly relating to your life of prayer and service, but not exclusively
- Something that flows from and enriches your religious experience
- A discernment of the movement of the Holy Spirit working in your life
- A relationship of trust that involves a commitment to be open and candid.

**Spiritual direction is not:**

- Directive in terms of telling a person what to do
- Psychological counseling (as noted above)
- Pastoral or crisis counseling
- Life coaching
- The sacrament of penance. However, if your spiritual director is a priest, you may discuss with him how the sacrament of reconciliation may fit into the direction setting.
- Primarily advisory (although some suggestions might be offered)
- Primarily informative (although there can be “teachable moments”)
- Relinquishing of personal responsibility
- Always comfortable

**What is expected of me if I am in spiritual direction?**

*“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself”.*

*Matthew 22:37-39*

In striving to live your Christian faith more fully through the ministry of spiritual direction, the primary responsibility is on you, not the director, as you work to become more aware of God’s presence and action in your life. Spiritual direction is a practice wherein the repetition or frequency and the seriousness of intent are what help the practice bear fruit. A normal rhythm for spiritual direction is an hourly meeting once a month. It is up to you to schedule and plan for the sessions. It should also be noted that spiritual direction is not a replacement for other essential spiritual practices, namely participation in the sacraments and parish life. The dialogue with your spiritual director arises from your prayer, awareness of God in your life and other life experiences.

As you begin spiritual direction, here are some questions a spiritual director is likely to ask you:

- Have you had spiritual direction in the past? If yes, what would you say was the benefit of spiritual direction for you?
- Why are you interested in spiritual direction at this time?
- Tell me a little of your spiritual autobiography. How has your spirituality changed from childhood to now?
- Can you describe a particular experience of God’s love and presence in your life?
- What is your current level of involvement in your parish? In the sacraments?
- How would you describe your prayer life? Are there particular prayer practices that you are attracted to right now? Are there some prayer practices that are difficult for you right now?
- Are you spending time with scripture? Are you doing any spiritual reading?
- Have you ever attended a retreat(s) and can you describe the experience?
- How do you see God working in the relationships in your life?
- Are you engaged in any service or social justice activities? Are there any that particularly interest you?

- Is there an invitation from God in your life right now? How are you responding?

### **What is expected of the spiritual director?**

*“Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way; the love of Christ must come before all else”  
Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 4:20-21*

While the primary responsibility of the direction experience is on the directee, there are certain expectations and ethical behaviors that are appropriate to expect of a spiritual director, which include, but may not be limited to:

- Is engaged in the sacramental life of the Church
- Participates in his/her own spiritual direction
- Has appropriate theological and spiritual training
- Is engaged in ongoing formation for spiritual directors
- Is part of an ongoing supervision group which meets regularly
- Is balanced and mature; has a sense of joy
- Has sufficient life experience and the capacity to reflect on their life experience
- Is aware of one’s own vulnerability, strengths and weaknesses
- Is able to respect other’s struggles with Catholic teachings and practices, yet is comfortable and knowledgeable in offering the truths of the Catholic faith with freedom and clarity
- Respects the dignity of all persons
- Communicates to directees the expectations of the directee/director relationship, including evaluation practices and the process for terminating the relationship
- Asks directees who are in counseling to inform their therapist that they are receiving spiritual direction
- Respects the directee’s privacy and maintains confidentiality as required by law and ethical codes
- Is competent and professional about meeting times and meeting space

### **Choosing a spiritual director**

*“Where two or more are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt. 18:20)*

The process of choosing a spiritual director is important and should involve careful consideration and prayerful reflection. Interviewing potential directors can offer you confidence in selecting someone you are comfortable with both in who they are as an individual and as someone acting as a minister of the Catholic faith. The thought of asking questions of a spiritual director may be intimidating but a good director will welcome your questions.

The following are possible topics that might be part of an initial conversation with a potential spiritual director. These are not intended to be a checklist and the discussion would vary depending on the person and what you may or may not already know about them. They can serve as a reflection of what is important to you in working with someone in a spiritual direction relationship. Prayerfully reflect on the questions and pray before and after the interview. Ask and trust the Holy Spirit to guide you in this discernment.

You might consider:

- The director's own experience of receiving and offering spiritual direction
- The director's own experience of prayer, celebration of the Sacraments and works of charity
- The director's theological education and spiritual training
- The director's continuing education and enrichment
- The director's participation in a supervision group
- The director's sense of their role as a minister of the Church
- The director's knowledge, familiarity and faithfulness to Church teaching, particularly the Catechism of the Catholic Church
- The director's practical experience as a spiritual director
- The director's ability to listen attentively and ask insightful questions while avoiding monopolizing the discussion

Some individuals prefer to have a spiritual director similar to themselves in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, etc., while for other individuals this is not an important consideration. You should feel free to talk with several potential directors during the discernment process. It may take two or three sessions to determine if the director is a good fit for you at this time.

### **How do I enter into the experience of spiritual direction?**

*"With all my heart I seek you." Psalm 119: 10*

Following are some general thoughts to consider as you enter into the ministry of spiritual direction:

- Spiritual direction is a practice and repetition or frequency helps it bear fruit. A normal rhythm for spiritual direction is once a month. Another way to receive direction is on a yearly retreat that includes spiritual direction. This can give you a sense of what spiritual direction is and can help in your discernment in entering ongoing spiritual direction.
- About a week before the session you should begin to pray about what you would like to bring to the session. On the day of the session, it is preferable to have some quiet time both before and after the direction session. If you enter the session from a hurried or hectic day, you may not as easily be able to focus and listen for God's desire for your life. It is good to set aside 30 minutes to quiet down and pray before a session. This time can be spent sitting quietly in the church or even walking outside. It is also ideal to have 30 minutes after a session to ask God to help you understand the truth revealed during the session. You can express your gratitude to God and express your desire to love God faithfully and to live the life that God desires for you.
- Spiritual direction is not meant to be a replacement for the sacraments or a replacement for active participation in a parish. Spiritual direction by its very nature is integrated into our full, active participation in the life of the Church.

### **Where will I meet with the spiritual director?**

*"Come to me...and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28)*

Following are some general thoughts when considering where you meet for spiritual direction:

- Spiritual directors provide direction in a variety of locations that include parishes, retreat centers and at times, home-based offices. It is important to meet the potential spiritual director in the actual location to make sure it will be comfortable for you. If the location is uncomfortable for you, you may want to discuss other options or choose a different spiritual director. The environment should be conducive to

prayer and listening for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is also essential that privacy would be maintained in this environment.

- If you have special needs or special circumstances, rest assured that a spiritual director can work with you to meet your needs.

## **Financial Matters**

*The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him. (Psalm 28:7)*

Thoughts and opinions about charging for spiritual direction run the gamut. Daniel Burke, in his recent book, *Navigating the Interior Life*, pg. 52, offers insight on the subject to consider:

St. Paul in his first letter to Timothy indicates that those who lead well, with respect to the souls in their care, are worthy of “double honor” (1 Tim5:17). This honor Paul speaks of is no less than material honor. Yes, our priests and religious are often called to vows of poverty. However, this does not mean that they always have all they need to live and carry out their respective apostolic work. Lay people as well give of their time. Regardless of where the money goes, our generosity is a reflection of the health of our souls, and for the health of souls we should be particularly generous with anyone willing to invest their time in our spiritual well-being. What I am not speaking about here is whether or not directors should charge a fee. My emphasis here is that regardless of whether or not they charge a fee, our disposition should be one of generosity.

That said, financial matters should never, never, never be a barrier to your spiritual growth. There are creative ways to generously respond...If there is no material way to support them, then it is always prudent to offer a specific commitment of spiritual sacrifice on their behalf.

In the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, a typical offering is in the range of \$25 to \$50 per direction session. Be sure to thank the spiritual director for their time and pray for your spiritual director.

## **Further assistance and places to start in finding a spiritual director**

*"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Mt 7:7)*

We hope that this information on spiritual direction has been helpful to you. Suggested places to begin your search for a spiritual director, or a referral to one, would be your parish Priest or Parish Life Coordinator, Deacon, Pastoral Associate, Director of Adult Faith Formation or Catholic retreat houses in your area.

## **Catholic Retreat Centers in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis**

Benedict Inn Retreat and Conference Center

1402 Southern Ave.

Beech Grove, IN 46107

317 788-7581

[www.benedictinn.org](http://www.benedictinn.org)

Mother of the Redeemer Retreat Center

8220 West State Road 48

Bloomington IN 47404

812-825-4642

Mount St. Francis Center for Spirituality

101 St. Anthony Drive

Mount St. Francis, IN 47146

812-923-8817

[www.mountsaintfrancis.org](http://www.mountsaintfrancis.org)

Oldenburg Franciscan Center

PO Box 100, Oldenburg, IN 47036

812-933-6437

[www.oldenburgfranciscancenter.org](http://www.oldenburgfranciscancenter.org)

Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House

5353 E. 56<sup>th</sup> St.

Indianapolis, IN 46226

317 545-7681

[www.archindy.org/fatima](http://www.archindy.org/fatima)

Providence Spirituality and Conference Center

3850 U.S. 150

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, IN 47876.

812-535-4531

[spsmw.org/providence-center](http://spsmw.org/providence-center)

St. Meinrad Archabbey Guest House and Retreat Center

200 Hill Drive

Saint Meinrad, IN 47577

(800) 581-6905 or (812) 357-6585

[www.saintmeinrad.org/retreats](http://www.saintmeinrad.org/retreats)