Spiritual Direction: Responding to God’s Invitation to Intimacy
October 24, 2013

Facilitator Introduction

Agenda

Learn
the basic meaning and elements of spiritual direction

Discover
ways to creatively engage resistance to spiritual direction

Identify
strategies for engaging effectively in a spiritual direction relationship
Foundation

“Women and men are created to praise, reverence, and serve God and by this means prepare for ultimate union with God. All other things are created by God and help us attain the end for which we are created. Our one desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we are created.”

—The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola

Definitions

“Spiritual direction is a continuous process of formation and guidance in which a Christian is led and encouraged in his (her) own special vocation, so that by faithful correspondence to the graces of the Holy Spirit, he (she) may attain to the particular end of his (her) vocation and to union with God.”

—Merton, Spiritual Direction and Meditation, p. 5

Definitions

- The help that one man gives to another to enable him to become himself in his faith.
- What takes place in the dialogue of direction:
  - Respect for freedom
  - The life of the Spirit
  - The sense of individual vocation
  - Personal relationships
  - The variety of the grace of God

—LaPlace, Preparing for Spiritual Direction
Definitions

“We define Christian spiritual direction then, as help given by one Christian to another which enables the 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 the relationship.”

— Barry & Connolly, The Practice of Spiritual Direction

Definitions

• Spiritual direction is concerned with helping a person directly with his or her relationship to God.
• If focuses on what happens when a person listens to and responds to a self-communicating God.

— Barry & Connolly, The Practice of Spiritual Direction

The Conversation

• Religious experience is based on the belief that God communicates with his people corporately and individually.
• We believe each person meets God in his or her own experience.
• Religious experience is any experience of the mysterious Other whom we call God – most often occurring in prayer.
Elements of Spiritual Direction

- A life lived contemplatively
- A prayer life, communal and personal
- Established relationship with a qualified spiritual director
- Commitment to regular meetings

Spiritual?

- Different from counseling, psychotherapy
- Concerned with the whole person
- The spiritual life is the life of the whole person

“For the spiritual man is the one whose whole life, in all its aspects and all its activities, has been spiritualized by the actions of the Holy Spirit.”
—Merton, Spiritual Direction and Meditation, p. 6

Direction?

- The director is the Holy Spirit
- The spiritual director is a servant of God’s relationship with the person
- Direction implies the person is going somewhere and wants to talk with someone on the way
Personal Freedom

• The freedom of the person is the condition of the life in the Spirit.
• The object of spiritual direction is docility to the Holy Spirit.

“...The service of God requires free hearts, and the spiritual life cannot flourish unless account be taken of the inmost forces that move each one of us so that they become responsive to the action of the Holy Spirit. It is for us to dispose ourselves, by developing our freedom and purifying our hearts, to receive the always unforeseeable gifts of grace.”
— LaPlace, pp. 28–29

Personal Responsibility

• Spiritual direction is help with the development of one’s relationship with the Lord.
• Our assumption is that God wants to relate to his people both as a community and as individuals.
• We remain free, however, to listen to God’s communication or not—free to respond or not to what we hear.
Resistance to Spiritual Direction

• “All your dissatisfaction with the Church seems to me to come from an incomplete understanding of sin…”
• “…All human nature vigorously resists grace because grace changes us and the change is painful.”

– Letters of Flannery O’Connor, The Habit of Being, p. 307

Internal Causes of Resistance

• Lack of readiness for ongoing conversion of life
• Unbalanced lifestyle (work, prayer, leisure)
• Past experiences of spiritual direction that were negative or unfulfilling

External Causes of Resistance

• Fast pace of modern world
• Noisy world
• Distracted existence
• Lack of availability of spiritual directors
Resistance is a movement gaining steam.

Spiritual Warfare

- In the spiritual life, like Christ, we are led into the desert to be tempted
- The two standards: Christ and Satan
  - The work of the Holy Spirit is to draw us to Christ
  - The work of the evil one is to draw us away from Christ
- This battle happens in the subtleties of everyday life

Spiritual Warfare

- “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...So it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me....I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.”

  – Romans 7: 13-25
Spiritual Discernment

• The work of the Spirit vs. the works of the flesh (the evil one, that which is not of God).
• When we discern the movement of God’s Spirit, the invitation is to say “yes.”
• When we discern the movement of the Evil One, the invitation is to reject him. (Ignatius)
• Through prayer, experience and direction, we grow in wisdom, age.

– Galatians 5:16-24

A Countercultural Activity

• Slow is fast
• Less is more
• Depth is not instant
• Growth is patient
• Prayer bears fruit, but not instantly
• Relationships are primary
• Growth is holistic
• Transcendence can be experienced in the ordinary

“Contemplation is a long, loving look at the real.”

– Walter J. Burghardt, Church magazine, Winter, 1989
Contemplative Living

- Honest inquiry instead of hasty judgment
- Value in existence instead of value based on utility & profit
- Intimacy with the real instead of denial of the real
- Informed, prayerful choice instead of reaction
- Reverence & love in addition to analysis

Personal Testimony

- A crucible: called to learn ministry of spiritual direction while having an inner spiritual life that was immature and inadequate

Strategies for Spiritual Direction

- Weigh the advantages of spiritual direction against the cost
- Choose the optimum, rather than the minimum means of growth in holiness and maturity of life
- Get a taste of the depth. Make a short term (3-5 days) silent directed retreat.
Strategies for Spiritual Direction

- Inquire about qualified directors
  - Retreat centers, monasteries, religious communities, dioceses
- Spiritual Directors International
  - www.sdiworld.org
- Get personal references from directees
- Interview with two or three directors

Resources


Resources
