

Meeting with a Spiritual Director

During your Novitiate, your Novice Guardian will encourage you to meet regularly with a Spiritual Director. This may already be part of your normal discipline. If not, now is a good time to make enquiries, as it is expected that all Tertiaries will have a Spiritual Director by the time of their Profession and for the rest of their lives.

What is spiritual direction for?

As a rudder influences the direction of a sailing boat, so a Spiritual Director can influence the direction of your journey through life. The terminology is not intended to infer dictatorial control. Even so, some prefer to be known as a Soul Friend, a Spiritual Guide or Spiritual Companion. If you know of the Eastern Orthodox tradition, perhaps through the popular *Way of a Pilgrim*, then the term Starez will be familiar to you; but in the Western tradition, the relationship is usually less hierarchical. Your director is not there to judge you or to lay down rules, but to help you see the direction in which God is calling you, and to help you move in that direction. A good Spiritual Director will recognize your feelings and help you to clarify your thoughts, so that you can make decisions more effectively, guided by the breath of God's Holy Spirit.



As we attempt to follow the example of Saint Francis, you will probably know how difficult it can be at times to live in a Christ-like way. We do not always know why we behave as we do. Our awareness of the hidden causes behind our desires, needs and emotions is often limited. Our director is there to help us understand ourselves better, and to let God into these secret areas of our being, so that his Spirit can enter every aspect of our life and enable us to grow in self-awareness, compassion for others, and consciousness of God's grace. The humility, love and joy that we see in the character of Saint Francis - and which we try to emulate - are gifts of the Holy Spirit. Your director will keep you in their prayers, and seek to help you discern where the Holy Spirit is prompting you to go next in your Franciscan pilgrimage.

Your relationship with your director is one of partnership, with both partners being attentive to the work of the Holy Spirit. Your director will be able

- to listen to whatever you have to say without being shocked,
- but remain loving and clear-eyed;
- to ask questions which help you look more deeply, or in a different way, at what you have shared together;
- to maintain confidentiality on all that has passed between you.

How do I find the right person?

A Spiritual Director will have tested their vocation to this work, and should be someone who knows that they are on a pilgrimage themselves, falling, learning, and beginning again time after time. They will have spent time developing self-awareness, above all by praying, thinking and studying, to remain alert to the work of the Spirit in themselves, in the Church and in the world.

Before you choose a suitable Director for yourself, it is a wise precaution to ask if they have undertaken an accredited course. It is also sensible to avoid anyone who might have other relationships with you that could cause a conflict of interests, such as family members, your incumbent or a local archdeacon/bishop. Outside those limitations, however, there are good reasons to choose a suitable member of the Franciscan family (First, Second or Third Order), as it is expected that you will make an annual review of your Personal Rule of Life – and a Franciscan Spiritual Director will be in a good position to help you with that review.

Traditionally, Spiritual Directors have been members of the clergy or of religious communities, who have offered this service free. However, you should be aware that some members of religious communities and some lay directors may be earning a living in part through offering Spiritual Direction, so before you choose a Director, you might like to check whether a charge will be made.

Organisations able to offer advice about Spiritual Directors are listed below.

Once you have asked someone to be your Spiritual Director

You will normally meet initially for one session, in order to find out if you both feel you can work together. You may then decide to continue together for one year, and review how things have progressed in your relationship from time to time. It is important that you should feel secure in this relationship, and that you both feel it is fruitful. At first, sessions with your Spiritual Director may take place every six weeks or so – but in an established relationship, it is normal to meet 2-4 times a year. There may come a time when it is right to move on to another Director, and you should be able to part without necessarily having to give reasons, and without recrimination.

Organisations that can help

To find a Spiritual Director

- Your Area Formation Guardian should be able to advise
- The Retreat Association keeps a list of accredited Spiritual Directors.

See <http://www.retreats.org.uk/spiritualdirection.php>. They also publish the annual *Retreats* magazine for members of its affiliated groups, which includes details of many religious houses, some of whom will offer spiritual direction (take note particularly of the Franciscan houses, such as Glasshampton and Hilfield)

- Your diocese should have a Spiritual Adviser, or similar, who can direct you towards a suitable person.

Spiritual direction courses

- There are many courses for people who have a vocation to be directors. These courses are intended to assist the individual to develop the necessary skills and awareness to engage helpfully with others. Most directors will have supervision to help them do their work without letting their own needs or attitudes interfere with the task of accompaniment. This will not involve any loss of confidentiality, regarding matters you discuss together.

If you feel called to offer Spiritual Direction, most dioceses will be able to direct you to a suitable course. You may also approach The Retreat Association <http://www.retreats.org.uk>.

Note: your application will normally require references and interviews before you are accepted onto a course.