

# *Just* Faith NETWORK



This document is for members of the JustFaith Network.

Do not copy, share, or forward without permission.



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

(502) 429-0865

In partnership with:



**bread**fortheworld  
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

March 2019



March 6 marks the **beginning of Lent** for our Christian community. For many, Lent represents an opportunity to reconnect with his/her spiritual life and integrate some different practices in one's life.

“In Lent, many Christians commit to fasting, as well as giving up certain luxuries in order to replicate the sacrifice of Jesus Christ's journey into the desert for 40 days. Many Christians also add a Lenten spiritual discipline, such as reading a daily devotional or praying through a Lenten calendar, to draw themselves near to God.” [*Wikipedia*]

As a way to enter Lent, this resource helps us reflect on our spiritual practice. Written by Kathy Reardon, a spiritual director and holistically oriented nurse at the [Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center](#) in Des Moines, Iowa, this short introduction to spiritual direction provides a support to think about our own spiritual practice.

The work of justice needs spiritual grounding. This resource can be used individually or in a small group setting. There are questions that help you guide your reflection.

“Deeply Listening” by John Fox

*When someone deeply listens to you,  
it is like holding out a dented cup you have had since childhood  
and watching it fill up with cold fresh water.*

*When it balances on the top of the rim, you are understood  
When it overflows and touches you skin, you are loved.*

*When someone deeply listens to you,  
the room where you stay starts a new life  
and the place where you wrote your first poem,  
begins to glow in your mind's eye.*

*It is as if gold has been discovered.  
When someone deeply listens to you,  
your bare feet are on the earth  
and the beloved land that seemed distant  
is now at home within you.*

Read further:

-Wikipedia [article](#) on Lent.

-Wikipedia [article](#) on Spiritual Direction

If you are interested in reflecting further on the wisdom of contemplation, consider signing up for our program, **EngagingSpirituality**. Nurtured by the spiritual practices of centering, prayerful listening, spiritual reading, and outreach, participants seek to apply the teaching of Jesus to the struggles of our world. Visit our [page](#) and consider enrolling your community for the journey!

Over thirty years ago, I had my first experience of spiritual direction. Maggie was a Methodist pastor whose demeanor was so loving, embracing, and trustworthy that I was often reduced to weeping, held as I was in such safety, valuing, and presence. At that time, I was awakening to my own spiritual nature and to longings for God so deep within me that they could not be articulated. Yet this gracious woman sat quietly, and often silently, with me listening in ways I had never been listened to before and helping to teach me to wait for God desires for me, for God's movements within me, to be made known. So impactful was this experience upon me, that ten years later yearning to give to others as Maggie had to me, I entered a program to become trained as a spiritual director.

Having been privileged to offer spiritual direction for many years now, these are seven significant things the process has taught me.

- Spiritual direction is, first and foremost, about “**holy listening.**” It engages a form of listening, that while it may come naturally to some, most of us living in our culture of discussion and debate, have to be taught. This kind of listening is known by many names including deep listening, contemplative listening, and soul listening.
  - **Reflection:**
    - When do you practice deep listening? With whom?
    - What is the most difficult aspect of deep listening for you?
- Spiritual direction is always about **relationship**, the first and foremost relationship being the one with have with the God of Our Knowing. It involves every other possible kind of relationship – with the whole self (body, spirit, soul, emotions, psyche, intellect, mind, consciousness), all human beings, the earth itself, our very universe. It acknowledges the sacred nature of everything that is created and the interconnection of all aspects of creation.
  - **Reflection:**
    - How would you describe your relationship with God?
    - How do you feel connected to yourself?
- Spiritual direction is about **discernment**, the work of coming to know the difference between what is the guidance, the voice, the nudge/push of the Divine and what is coming from the will of the egoic self. The “still small voice within” can be over-whelmed by the demands of other voices that override our knowing of the very well presence of the One who is Indwelling. Discernment involves time, deep prayer, re-flection, and the involvement of trusted companions. We do not come to decisions on our own. We rely on the wisdom of others.
  - **Reflection:**
    - When was the last time you had to make a difficult decision? What helped you in your discernment process?
    - Whose wisdom guides you?

- Spiritual direction is about **conversion**, the willingness to allow ourselves to be changed as a result of our life experiences, our holy listening, our growing maturity that comes chronologically, personally, and spiritually. We recognize life itself as a wise and grand teacher and therapist, coming to see belief systems, people, life, even God, in new and expanding ways. Everything grows and changes. And “everything belongs,” as Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr states.
  - **Reflection:**
    - What are the main conversion moments of your life? Can you identify important turning points?
    - How would you define “spiritual maturity?” What are the signs?
- Spiritual direction is about **accountability**. Human beings have been given the gift of free choice. To many of us, this is both a blessing and a curse. Discernment doesn’t mean that we will always make “the right choice,” whatever we might deem that to be. It means we will make the best possible choice given the circumstances and the counsel of others and will accept whatever outcomes emerge. It is immaterial whether one “succeeds” or “fails,” as these are human constructs. What matters is that we learn, grow, and become more humble, compassionate, surrendered, and wise as persons.
  - **Reflection:**
    - How do you relate to success and failure? Do you judge your decisions on the basis of success and failure?
    - How often do you feel pressured by the need to make the “right choice?”
- Spiritual direction usually involves some focus on **spiritual practice**, those regular prayerful approaches that keep us intentional about and anchored to the presence and action of the Holy One in our daily lives and in the world as well. More than ever, the times in which we live require people who are deeply rooted and centered in their spiritual natures, people who can be present to others when the winds of chaos, dis-ruption, and turmoil unmoor so many.
  - **Reflection:**
    - What is your spiritual practice?
    - Is there something new you are willing to practice during Lent?
- Spiritual direction is ultimately about the transformation of **consciousness**. “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth. And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.” (Isaiah 65:17) We have been learning amazing things about our universe and cosmos that were beyond our knowing not that long ago. The works of Teilhard de Chardin, Ilia Delio, Brian Swimme and Mary Alice Tucker, Judy Cannato, and Diarmud O’Murchu among many others are helping us understand new concepts arising from emerging science and its intersection with faith and spirituality. Our traditional ways of thinking dualistically (divisively) are no longer sustaining. It is imperative for the life of the world that we open to the non-binary third way that is not yet known but is unfolding. Spiritual direction can be supportive of entering into the flow of the third way.

- **Reflection:**

- What ways can you find to avoid thinking in terms of “black” and “white”/ “right” and “wrong?”

- What do you think is the most divisive element in your life today? How do resist division? How do you promote unity?

Spiritual direction can come in different forms, formal and informal, individual and group. Trained spiritual directors know that the only Spiritual Director is the Divine Presence. The spiritual director’s primary purpose is to accompany the “directee” as he or she develops and deepens their awareness of the language of God’s interior move-ments. Many spiritual directors have gone through some process of education, whether that be at the college or university level or through one of the many programs available that lead to a certificate in spiritual direction. Informal spiritual direction can happen between friends, colleagues, and others who are intentional about creating space for truth, depth, and authenticity and who support and encourage one another in their sacred journeying.

Family and friends can be important presences on the life journey of transformation into ever deepening layers of authentic being. But spiritual directors play a unique role by holding sacred space through holy listening. Through the process, we share, become vulnerable, unburden, let go, trust, risk. We learn what is ego, what is true self. We explore our motivations, examine patterns, and learn the truth that grace and mercy are flowing into our daily, very ordinary lives. We begin to understand the ways in which God’s Spirit is calling us, individually and collectively, into greater ways of being, living, engaging, and serving. We are, indeed, all in this business of life together.

How does one find a spiritual director? Ask around – friends, family, pastors, or church workers. Does your community have a spiritual direction training program or a college or university with a religious studies program? Spiritual Directors International ([www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org)) has a Seek and Find Guide on line which lists spiritual directors throughout the US and inter-nationally as well. They also have excellent information on what to look for in a potential spiritual director.

I have come to see spiritual direction as a gift I give myself. Sitting monthly with my spiritual director offers the opportunity to be with myself and another in a soulful, cherished way. I slow down, breathe, go inward, reflect on my life, my prayer, my thinking, my activities, my longings, my challenges and growing edges - and always on the Holy One’s presence in the whole of my life. One of the many gifts of spiritual direction is deep growth in the experience of gratitude, gratitude for everything, even the things that at one time for which I could not possibly have been grateful. Another gift has been living into incarnated truth, a deep inner knowing of what is true for me. Such as Abraham Joshua Heschel said, “Just to be is a blessing; just to live is holy.”

*Lectio Divina (give 10-15 minutes to this experience):*

- Read the following statement by David Augsburg, read it slowly to allow the sense of the words to flow and begin forming:

*Being heard is so close to being loved  
that for the average person,  
they are almost indistinguishable.*

- Read it again – slowly.
- Giving yourself a couple of minutes to reflect on the question: “How might God be speaking to me through these words?”
- Then read them again.
- Now reflect on the question: “What response does God ask of me through these words?”
- After a few minutes, read the statement a final time and simply sit in quiet for a while longer, allowing the message and spirit of the words to find their places within you.

*Kathy Reardon can be contacted at [kreardon@dmpcc.org](mailto:kreardon@dmpcc.org) or 515-251-6660.*