

The Church of England Diocese of Leeds

Spiritual Direction Guidelines

February 2022



These brief Guidelines are issued by the Diocesan Prayer and Spirituality Team of the Church of England Diocese of Leeds. They are based on the Spiritual Direction Guidelines issued by the Retreat Association in 2016 which can be found here: <https://www.retreats.org.uk/spiritualdirectionguidelines>

1. Who these guidelines are for

These Guidelines are intended primarily for spiritual directors. They may also be useful for those involved in:

- training spiritual directors;
- the referral of directees to spiritual directors;
- the provision and oversight of spiritual direction training;
- safeguarding

These Guidelines may be read in conjunction with two other leaflets also produced by the Prayer and Spirituality Team. *A Companion for your Spiritual Journey* is intended primarily for those seeking a spiritual director and is readily available from the Diocesan website. *Spiritual Directors: Contact Details and Background Information* is intended for those seeking a director and those supporting them. It is available from your parish priest, Diocesan and Area Prayer and Spirituality Co-ordinators, other spiritual directors and a password-protected page on the diocesan website.

2. What is spiritual direction?

The ministry of Christian spiritual direction involves relationships between God, the person offering this ministry and the person receiving this ministry. (In these Guidelines '**director**' is used to describe the one offering the ministry and '**directee**' for the person receiving. Some people prefer other terms such as 'accompanier', 'pilgrim', 'companion' and 'soul friend'.)

The role of the director is to help the directee focus on their relationship with God and so enable their personal vocation to grow and be better lived out through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit.

The directee's life is lived in relationship to God, creation, the world, local and faith communities. Spiritual direction seeks to enable the directee to reflect on the interaction between their experiences of prayer, life, theology and spirituality.

It is advised that a director, as far as possible, does not relate to the directee in a separate context (for example as a friend, colleague or supervisor). This enables the directee to be free in sharing whatever they wish and the director to respond with objectivity and balance; it also avoids any confusion of roles.

The director has significant potential power, which should be exercised with great care to ensure the intention of the relationship and the autonomy of the directee are not undermined. This involves care in the use of language, in the expression of moral judgements and in the handling of decision-making.

The relationship is based upon trust and mutual respect within the awareness that both director and directee are within the gracious love of God.

3. The nature of spiritual direction

The focus of the director is primarily on the inner life (emotional and spiritual) of the directee. The director will attend to this in the context of the experience of life and spiritual activities rather than as a moral guardian, work consultant or confessor.

The director will seek to:

- listen discerningly to what is shared;
- respond in ways that enable the directee to become more aware of the leading of the Holy Spirit;
- offer insights and perspectives that help the directee in their communication with and response to God and living this out in their life;
- encourage practices of prayer and the ongoing development of spiritual life including sources of further insights and perspectives and other ways in which the directee's journey might be explored and supported.

4. The nature of the relationship of the director and directee

This relationship is based upon trust and mutual respect within the awareness that both director and directee are within the gracious love of God.

Common and significant areas of exploration in the relationship will include:

- personal experience and inner (emotional and spiritual) reactions to that experience
- discerning reflection on that experience, seeking to enable in the directee growing discernment of the movements and leading of God's Spirit in their life
- the practice of prayer and the ongoing development of spiritual life, sources of further insights and perspectives, other ways in which their journey might be explored and supported.

5. Core skills and qualities of a spiritual director

A spiritual director is committed to developing the core skills and qualities listed below.

- **a relationship with God** and a commitment to deepening it.
- **listening** on many levels to pick up deeper resonances ('holy listening'), and to foster the directee's skills of articulating their own thoughts and feelings.
- **self-restraint** to hold the hospitable space in which the spiritual direction conversation can develop. This affects listening, holding boundaries and handling the power balance in the direction conversation with integrity.
- **self-awareness and humility** and a recognition of their own strengths, worth and limitations. An awareness that God is at the heart of the conversation between director and directee.
- **keeping of boundaries.** An ability to distinguish between being a 'soul friend' and a friend and an awareness that the closeness and mutuality of friendship endangers the objectivity necessary for the directee's spiritual growth.
- **good discernment with regard to their own spiritual life** so as to enable the directee to have full ownership and regard for their own spiritual life; an ability to wait on the Holy Spirit and to sharpen awareness of the moral and spiritual significance of the directee's inner processes.

- **awareness** that the spiritual direction relationship is in service of the wider church and wider world.
- **an ease with difference**, otherness, variety, uniqueness and difference – e.g. gender, age, race, culture, sexuality, theology – including the recognition that to get to know another involves acknowledging ignorance, and preparedness to work at understanding another's life and experience.
- **openness** to the surprise of God, the freedom of the Spirit.

6. Good practice in a spiritual director

It is expected that all spiritual directors:

- have their own spiritual director.
- receive regular supervision or are part of a peer supervision group to help them reflect on and develop their practice.
- take part in training and development, especially with regard to a knowledge of the spiritual traditions, theology, psychology and good practice.
- have knowledge of local and national legal and ethical guidelines – for example in relation to safeguarding – and abide by them.
- establish agreement with the directee on the length and frequency of sessions and the process for evaluating and/or ending the spiritual direction relationship.
- keep matters shared between the director and directee confidential except by agreement or when a legal obligation is involved and ensure there is clarity about the extent of confidentiality.
- reflect on ongoing practice and vocation.
- act in a way that respects the personal and spiritual integrity and wellbeing of the directee.
- manage their own workload to avoid over commitment
- be aware of the possible need to refer a directee to another professional such as a counselor or another spiritual director.

7. Resources

There are many resources available to help spiritual directors develop and deepen their ministry. A few examples are:

- **Websites and online learning**
<https://www.retreats.org.uk>
<https://www.lcsd.org.uk>
- **Books**
 Pickering, Sue, *Spiritual Direction, A Practical Introduction*, Canterbury Press Norwich, 2008
 Smith, Gordon T., *Spiritual Direction, A Guide to Giving and Receiving Direction*, Intervarsity Press, 2014

8. Conclusion

The implementation of these guidelines is a work in progress. Any questions and suggestions can be directed to the Diocesan Prayer and Spirituality Co-ordinator, [Henriette Howarth](#).