

# Spiritual Direction/Soul Friendship

A Vital Tool for Resourcing Mission

RUN 2008

# Outline...

- ▶ Spiritual direction/soul friendship - a vital tool for resourcing mission.
- ▶ What is spiritual direction/soul friendship?
  - reflection
- ▶ What should I consider in seeking out a spiritual director/soul friend?
  - reflection
- ▶ How does the relationship work?
  - reflection
- ▶ How can I find a spiritual director/soul friend?

# A vital tool for mission...

- ▶ Mission is about responding to an invitation to participate in God's action in the world.
- ▶ To act in harmony with God at work in us, in those we minister to and the wider world, it is vital that we take time to *listen*.
- ▶ The Christian spiritual tradition contains a wealth of riches that can help us to do that.
- ▶ Spiritual direction is a tool that can put us in touch with those riches.

# What is spiritual direction?

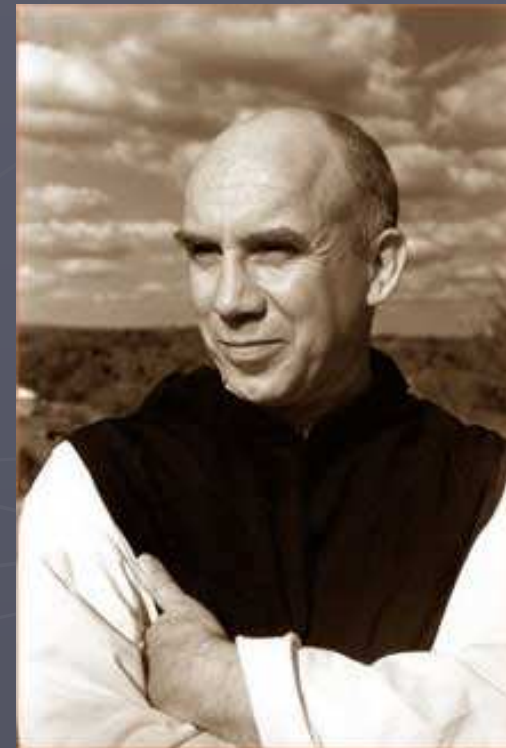
▶ In essence...



...fostering capacity to listen with the ear of the heart and to respond to what is heard.

# Thomas Merton...

- ▶ “Spiritual direction is, in reality, nothing more than a way of leading us to see and obey the real Director – the Holy Spirit hidden in the depths of our soul”



# William Barry SJ...

- ▶ “Christian spiritual direction is 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 the relationship”.



# Historical roots...

- ▶ Biblical examples:
  - Samuel & Eli
  - Emmaus road
  - Paul & Timothy
- ▶ Roots in the tradition:
  - Desert Fathers
  - John Cassian
  - Ignatius Loyola



# What is spiritual direction?

- ▶ Other ways of describing spiritual direction:
  - Holy listening
  - Spiritual/soul friendship (anam cara)
  - Faith accompaniment
  - Sacred journeying
- ▶ Two core threads - helping the other to:
  - attend to God's love and communication
  - respond to and live out of that love and communication

# What is spiritual direction?

- ▶ Spiritual direction differs from other kinds of supportive relationships.
- ▶ It has a different role to counselling, mentoring and ordinary friendship.
- ▶ The focus is primarily on the relationship between the directee and God...and how that impacts on the totality of life.

# Reflection...

- ▶ Can you recall an encounter, conversation or relationship that has helped foster your relationship with Jesus, with God?
- ▶ What was it about that relationship that was good, that was helpful?
- ▶ Did it result in any change?



# What do I need to consider in choosing a director?

- ▶ Qualities that you hope for:
  - age/sex/denomination?
  - lay/ordained/member of religious order?
  - formal or informal conversation?
  - rooted in a particular tradition e.g. Ignatian/Benedictine/Evangelical?
  - a shared interest e.g. poetry/art/music?
  - someone you will not meet in another context?

# What do I need to consider in choosing a director?

- ▶ Things you might want to know about the director's preparation:
  - is this someone that distinguishes direction from counselling/psychotherapy or sees overlaps?
  - has this person been specifically trained in spiritual direction?
  - is he/she practised in personality indicators?
  - does the person have their own director/go on annual retreat/have access to supervision?

# What do I need to consider in choosing a director?

- ▶ Some practical points:
  - how often do you hope to meet?
  - are you able to travel or do you need to be visited at home?
  - would this relationship be affected by any other one-to-one meetings you are having e.g. counselling?
  - how do you view the question of payment?
  - can you discuss a potential director with someone who knows the person?

# What do I need to consider in choosing a director?

- ▶ One size doesn't fit all!
- ▶ There are different traditions, styles and approaches.
- ▶ It is important that a direction relationship feels comfortable and authentically nurtures an individual's unique journey of faith.

Images that can symbolise the relationship: panning for gold...



Images that can symbolise the relationship: looking into the well...



Images that can symbolise the relationship: midwifery...



# Reflection...

- ▶ Are you particularly drawn to one of these images...what is it about it that resonates?



- ▶ Do you have a sense of the type of direction relationship that might suit you?

# How does the relationship work?

- ▶ In the first instance, an initial meeting to get to know each other and explore hopes, expectations and practical matters.
- ▶ You meet a few times and then review the relationship together.
- ▶ If you continue, it is typical to meet on a monthly basis.
- ▶ The focus is on what has gone on in prayer, what has been standing out in everyday life and any prevailing moods or feelings.
- ▶ You only share what feels comfortable and this will be held in confidence.
- ▶ Flowing out of what is shared, you may be introduced to different ways of praying and offered specific material to reflect on or pray with.
- ▶ You may be encouraged to keep a journal.

# How does the relationship work?

## ► Some personal reflections:

- an oasis, a pausing place to reflect and gather the threads.
- a space where I am helped to notice and listen to what is going on at a deeper level.
- a relationship that helps me to know myself and God better.
- a place that fosters God's desire to draw me on to greater freedom, wholeness and fullness of life.
- a context where I am supported in discerning how God is calling me to participate in His ongoing work of creation.

# Reflection...

- ▶ Is there anything that has particularly stood out for you in this seminar?
- ▶ Would some kind of 'spiritual conversation' or direction relationship be helpful to you at the moment:
  - on a personal level?
  - in a ministry context?



# How can I find a director?

- ▶ Retreat Association : [www.retreats.org.uk](http://www.retreats.org.uk)
- ▶ Diocesan lists
- ▶ Religious orders/communities (e.g. Jesuits)
- ▶ Retreat centres/houses
- ▶ Regional networks (e.g. Epiphany Group/SPIDIR)
- ▶ Google “spiritual direction (*your area*)”
- ▶ Word of mouth

# Questions...



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