

The School of Spiritual Direction

The School of Spiritual Direction is a 2-year certificate programme that prepares you to offer spiritual direction. This deeply formative training offers participants an immersive, integrated and robust introduction to the ministry of spiritual direction.

**New locations for
2024 - 2025**

**Northern Ireland
Scotland
England
the Netherlands
France**

sustainablefaith.co.uk

What is Spiritual Direction?

Spiritual direction is an ancient form of pastoral care that provides a prayerful space for people to encounter themselves and God in their lived experience. In spiritual direction, the director and the directee come together for the primary purpose of focusing on the presence and activity of God in the directee's life. Put most simply, spiritual direction is co-discernment. We learn to 'see what the Father is doing' (John 5:19), not just in that moment, but over the months and seasons of a person's life. The goal is to deepen the relationship with God by growing in attentiveness.

What is the Work of the Spiritual Director?

Let's say first what it's not: It's not 'being told what to do in my spiritual life by an expert.' It is not an accountability partnership, focusing on avoiding sin. Spiritual direction is not counselling or inner healing. The director's job is not to fix something that's broken or make something happen.

Spiritual directors work with the assumption that something is already happening, and that God is already doing a good, beautiful, and holy (even if hard) work in the lives of those who come for direction. Consequently, the director's role is simply to help the directee to notice God's work accurately and respond to it vigorously, joyfully, and habitually over the months of a person's journey. The director comes alongside the directee to dust for the fingerprints of God. While spiritual direction is journey-centred and not healing-centred, the growing awareness has healing and sanctifying effects in the directee's life. Under the pastoral care umbrella, spiritual direction is a focused ministry of accompaniment and discernment.

'[Spiritual direction] is the pastoral work that is historically termed the cure (or care) of souls...The cure of souls, then, is the Scripture-directed, prayer-shaped care that is devoted to persons singly or in groups... (it) is cultivated awareness that God has already seized the initiative. God has been working diligently, redemptively, and strategically before I appeared on the scene, before I was aware there was something here for me to do.' — **Eugene Peterson, The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction**

The director does their work through a combination of means: silence, prayer, reverent listening, excellent questions, keen observations, attention to the mind, affect, and body of the directee, self-awareness, and knowledge of both human personality and spiritual dynamics.

'What is the purpose of a spiritual director? His [or her] direction is simply and clearly to lead us to our real director. [The director] is a means of God to open the path to the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit.'
— **Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline**

For over a dozen years, Sustainable Faith (sustainablefaith.com) has been working toward a culture of sustainability in the vocational work of pastors and leaders. Originally based in a Convent in Norwood, Ohio, USA and under the leadership of Dave & Jody Nixon, Sustainable Faith hosts retreats, nurtures conversations, educates leaders, trains spiritual directors, and helps faith communities pursue an active life from a deep place.

Background on Sustainable Faith

The School of Spiritual Direction (SSD) serves one part of the larger mission of Sustainable Faith: to cultivate excellent pastoral care and deeper spiritual formation within the local church and beyond. We look forward to the day when spiritual direction is regarded as a normal and vital ministry of the church, not something that's hard to find or outsourced to more contemplative groups.

SSD began small. In the autumn of 2007 we cast our bread on the water, hoping to start in January 2008 with 6–7 people. When 20 people signed up, we were caught completely off guard and quickly formed three smaller cohorts, meeting on successive weeks. Even so, we never intended to move beyond Cincinnati. But invitations to go elsewhere trickled in, so we stepped outside the birthing room of our convent.

Since 2008, the Schools of Sustainable Faith have established first and second year spiritual direction training groups (cohorts) in twenty-four American cities, Canada, the UK, and other parts of Europe. SSD cohorts are open to pastors, church leaders, global workers, and laypeople, alike, and are geared to serve not just one denomination or church tradition, but the larger body of Christ. The training is Christo-centric and guides people to embrace the contemplative life, helps us honour sabbath and observe life-giving rhythms, draws us toward healthy, embodied spiritual practices, nurtures self-awareness and vocational clarity, and ultimately, launches Kingdom enterprises.

'[Spiritual direction] is recognizing God's amazing work in us and among us in the ordinariness of human existence.'

— Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening*

Year 1 Overview

Year 1 offers participants an immersive, integrated and robust introduction to the ministry of spiritual direction. Through the combined experience of reading superb literature, engaging in individual and group exercises, paying close attention to one's life, practising spiritual disciplines, receiving spiritual direction, and offering direction - all in a communal setting - students move toward competency as spiritual directors.

Objectives

- Grow in your love for and devotion to God.
- Grow in your experience of God's love for you.
- Grow in discerning the movement of the Holy Spirit.
- Develop excellent listening skills at the cognitive, affective, and non-verbal levels
- Understand basics of body language/non-verbal communication.
- Become acquainted with the art & practice of spiritual direction through great literature
- Cultivate a personalised definition and practice of spiritual direction.
- Become familiar with the enneagram as a tool for personal self-understanding and spiritual growth.
- Develop a set of basic questions for framing & guiding spiritually-directed conversations
- Become a spiritual director who is confident in God and growing in competency with people.

Requirements

Module Participation

It's expected that you will be present at all intensives. We understand that emergencies and sickness do happen and, if that is the case, we will seek to create a plan where catching up on a module's training is required.

Practising Spiritual Practices

We practise spiritual disciplines together, and we will encourage you to engage in 4 spiritual exercises over the course of training, some of which may be new to you. In your reflections, you'll have an opportunity to share how God is using the practice to shape you.

Receive Regular Spiritual Direction

Each participant in the training agrees to be in spiritual direction for their own self-care. Allowing a compassionate and wise person to companion you as you reflect on your life is a mark of humility. Yet it is also a part of your training. You get to experience how another person offers direction. Plan to receive at least one hour of direction per month for the duration of the training, with a minimum of 8-9 sessions. If you need help finding a director in your area or online, we'll do our best to assist you. There are wonderful directors at a distance through Sustainable Faith.

'As a spiritual director, I see myself as a companion to people on their journeys. As a companion, I accompany others who become more fully who they have been created to be, sinking their roots deep into the living waters of God's grace and bearing fruit in the world.'

— Susan Phillips, *Candlelight: Illuminating the Art of Spiritual Direction*

Offer Spiritual Direction

Participants agree to offer spiritual direction to two people, meeting a minimum goal of having at least 10 sessions. We don't believe this is premature. Yes, it may feel like being thrown into the deep end of the pool, but you won't die, you won't kill your directees (who will likely be grateful for a listening ear), and it will accelerate your learning and formation. Furthermore, it helps you integrate practice with theory, keeps it real rather than abstract, and some of your best questions about the nature of spiritual direction will come from this time. You'll also learn a lot about yourself as you offer spiritual direction to others.

Receive Supervision

You'll record and submit sessions with your directees, along with our Supervision Contemplative Reflection Forms, throughout our nine-month training. Recording maximizes learning as you go back and listen for self-evaluation. You are asked to type out (word-for-word) a more detailed transcript of excerpts from spiritual direction sessions with your directees. It's a learning experience in itself to write out and evaluate a session. After this, you will receive helpful feedback for your work.

Required Reading

In our present culture, we have a nasty habit of confusing information with wisdom. We mix up the intellectual comprehension of a spiritual fact with the embodied practice. In this training, we read for formation, not information. Reading, of course, will never substitute for real-time experience, but the combination of reading with practice is a valuable and integral part of your growth as a spiritual director. This reading list (~10 books over 9 months) comprises only a fraction of the good literature that has emerged in this field over the last three decades or so, but it's a start and is critical to your own growth.

'We define Christian spiritual direction, then, as 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 God, and to live out the consequences of that relationship.'

— W. A. Barry & W. J. Connolly,
The Practice of Spiritual Direction

Submit Summary Reflections

In order to stay connected and abreast of each other's journey, you are asked to submit (1-2 weeks prior to our next module) regular summary reflections to the entire group (via our folders at box.com). These are simple 1-2 page reflections with a short paragraph for each of the following:

- Comment on your readings: Share what resonates and challenges, how you're being shaped in your understanding of spiritual direction.
- Comment on both your receiving and offering spiritual direction: How's receiving spiritual direction going? What's it like? In offering spiritual direction, what are you learning and noticing about self?
- Comment on your current life circumstances that keep us connected to your ongoing story after we initially share our stories with each other.
- Comment on your experience of the spiritual practices you are engaging in between cohort modules.
- Comment on your conundrums, complexities, consternations, befuddlements, enigmas regarding Spiritual Direction: From your experience, what questions would you like for us to address at the next gathering?

How Much Time Will This Take?

Beyond the time spent in the face-to-face meetings for the entire cohort, the time requirement depends largely on two variables: how quickly you read/write, and any travel time you will need.

Each month you'll be doing the following (in addition to the bi-monthly module weekends):

- Reading the a book (4–8 hours)
- Writing a book & summary reflection (2 x 1 hour)
- Receiving direction (1 hour)
- Offering direction each month (2 hours)
- Supervision in the 2nd half of year (1-2 hours to write up contemplative reflection dialogue forms + 1 hour supervision session)

Not counting travel, this is likely to add up to around 10-12 hours per month.

How Much Does This Cost?

For the for Year 1 in our EU & UK schools the cost is **£2000**. After your application is approved, you can reserve your spot in the cohort with a £400 non-refundable deposit. The remaining fees can be paid monthly through the year or as a lump sum.

Begin your registration on-line by filling out an application on the SSD page: sustainablefaith.co.uk There is no obligation by applying, but it allows us to see you are strongly interested and gives us the chance to meet with you, get to know you, and answer any questions you might have. The cost of books, or any needed transportation and lodging are not included in the fees.

When & Where?

We have various schools running around the world. The following details are for the upcoming cohort.

Locations:

Northern Ireland, Scotland, England, the Netherlands, and France (for Member Care Workers)

Dates: To be posted on our website soon!

We expect the cohort to be 8-10 (numbers will be capped at 12)

Is This For Me?

This training is open to anyone who wants to learn how to be better companions to others in their spiritual growth, and has the blessing of their local church pastor or regional leader. This particular cohort is geared towards those who provide pastoral care for global workers or global workers who feel called to this particular form of ministry. It is often helpful in training to come with a broader experience of life, to have a depth of spiritual experience, to have had some experience of being de-constructed, and to have suffered, but the most important things are a desire to learn and the requisite humility. If this ministry fits with your desires, gifts, and sense of vocation, we welcome your participation.

Further Questions?

Visit — www.sustainablefaith.co.uk to sign up!

Contact

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