

What is spiritual  
direction?



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## What is spiritual direction?

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*This booklet has been prepared by Kardia Formation Pty Ltd to serve members of the community who wish to know more about the practice and experience of spiritual direction. We recognise that there will be other ways of approaching the questions and answers, just as there are many different spiritual directors, spiritual direction formation programs and spiritualities. The booklet content has been developed as a conversation between seekers: a prospective spiritual directee and a practising spiritual director. We are grateful to Kazuend<sup>1</sup> for the photo on page five, and to Annette, Steve and Colleen for their definitions of spiritual direction on the same page.*

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1. <https://images.unsplash.com/photo-1437482078695-73f5ca6c96e2?ixlib=rb-4.0.3&ixid=MnwxMjA3fDB8MHxwaG90by1wYWdlfHx8fGVuZD88fHx8&auto=format&fit=crop&w=1470&q=80>

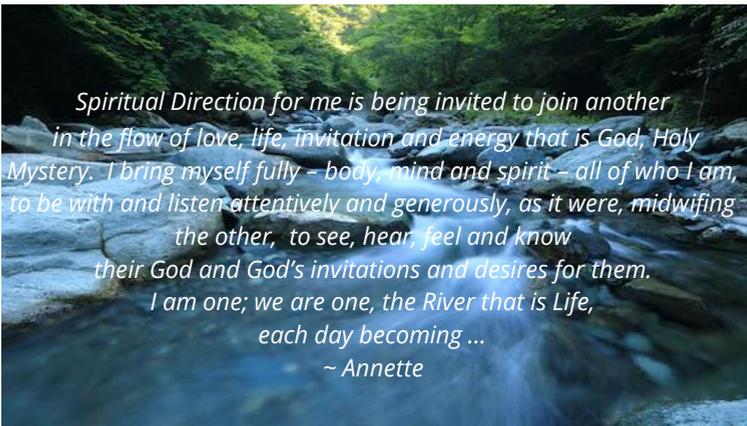


# What is spiritual direction?

Each person in Kardia's Heart Wisdom Program is encouraged to become a unique spiritual director consonant with their authentic selves. Participants are challenged to come up with their own definitions of spiritual direction. Here are the definitions from Colleen, Steve and Annette.

*Spiritual Direction is a companioning of heart to heart;  
a space that is inclusive, expansive and infused with radical hope;  
bearing witness to Divinity's song  
as it emerges, takes form and flight.*  
~ Colleen

*I see spiritual direction as opening up people  
to notice the world around them.  
It is a dialogue that enables people to look at the world  
in such a way as they notice what is in their world  
and the divine that wants to connect with them.*  
Simply – deep listening ...  
~ Steve



## The conversation

### What is spiritual direction?

Spiritual direction is a practice where (usually) two people, one spiritual director and one spiritual directee, meet to focus contemplatively on the spiritual experience of the directee.

### So that's it?

Basically yes.

### What is spiritual experience?

This is the experience of your life-story understood in the context of a cosmos which emanates from a larger dynamic mysterious source which many name as God. If you do not use the word 'God', you might have your own word. You might also notice that as your experience changes, so will your chosen word. If your God is not large, not mysterious, not dynamic, then that will be the spiritual experience you share with your director.

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### What does the director direct?

The director is a listening discerner. The use of 'director' can be confusing if we think of 'director' as a business director. In spiritual direction, it means that the director discerns along with the directee, the direction where 'God' is most fully active in their life. The director will need your input to this rather large assignment as nobody knows better than you what brings you to life, what activities and experiences help you to be fully engaged.

*I am not sure that I have ever been fully engaged in anything.*

That is certainly something to share with your spiritual director. It is something that counsellors might address also, but perhaps their focus would not be so much on spiritual matters.

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*Can you give an example of what might be shared with a spiritual director?*

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### What then is the difference between counselling life matters and discerning spiritual matters?

For a person who is consciously spiritual, all of life is spiritual. For a person who does not believe in the spiritual life, life concerns are for the individual person to address rather than to be consciously aware that God is cooperating with them to bring them to the fullness of who they can be.

*If I have a life concern, should I go to a counsellor or a spiritual director?*

If you are a person who acknowledges the underpinning and overarching spiritual mystery and who wants to be in relationship with this mystery and all of life, you would do well to go to a spiritual director who is trained to listen and discern with you.

Having said that, if you present with a crisis, a spiritual director will refer you to a counsellor who works within a framework compatible with yours. Sometimes people go to see both a spiritual director and a counsellor.

Can you give me an example of what I might share with a spiritual director?

Yes ... You might share with a spiritual director some intellectual matters and affective experiences which relate to whether there is a God and who that God might be for you. It might be helpful to you if the director guides you to think about your own experience; desires; hopes, and to think seriously if there are differences between your experience and what you were taught in religion classes.

That would be helpful to me as I am searching for something more meaningful to me now than what I was taught when I was a child.

This search is common and is likely indicative of a maturing faith. It is a movement to a more responsible way of believing and living, one which is personal, practical, relational and meaningful.

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*I am not sure if I have ever been fully engaged in anything.*

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I am becoming more interested in this practice of spiritual direction. How would I go about finding a spiritual director?

A person can look online for a spiritual director, or look for spirituality centres and see if any of them jump out at you as being compatible with you. The ones that come up first (ranked at the top) are not necessarily the best ones, so look down the list and check out which ones appeal to you. Contact these centres to ask what the next step is in finding a suitable spiritual director. Some

centres will send you an application form. This is a helpful step in your decision, as often there are questions which assist you to clarify your own desires. Apart from asking your contact details and those of any current medical/psychological practitioners you are seeing, you might be asked such things as: What kind of person would you prefer to have as your director? Does their religion, age, gender ... matter to you? What is your experience of spiritual direction? What is your current image of 'God'? Would you write a page or two on your life story in relation to God/Divine Mystery/Source of life? Do you have any heroes or role models and if so, who are they? What is happening in your life that has inspired your desire for spiritual direction?

### What will it be like when I meet a spiritual director for the first time?

If you are asking what the experience will be like, there is really no single answer. Generally the first conversation will be about getting to know you. The spiritual director will keep your conversation confidential and, as they are in a professional role, it is unlikely that the spiritual director will tell you much about themselves. Your director is there to help you hear yourself, so they will ask questions with that purpose in mind. They might also want to help you to identify what things help you to feel more alive and what things do the opposite of that.

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*The spiritual director will ... want to help you to identify what things help you to feel more alive and what things do the opposite.*

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What about practical considerations? What can I expect?

Spiritual direction is mostly two people, one director and one directee who meet face to face either using video technology or in person. Spirituality centres might have a receptionist and a waiting space for you. It is likely that you will not need to give your name to the receptionist, as the spiritual director will come at the agreed appointment time to meet you in the waiting space. Small spirituality centres do not usually have a receptionist, and some spiritual directors see their directees in an office or at home. The room in which spiritual direction takes place should afford confidentiality for both parties, so it is best to make the appointment at a place and time when and where there is no interference by other parties. If the meeting is in person, there will be two preferably identical chairs enabling straight face to face conversation in a quiet room large enough to allow a mutually agreeable distance between the chairs. If a person has special needs it would be good for the directee to state that upfront, for example, if a person carries an epi-pen, it is good to inform the spiritual director. Some things which a spiritual directee might need to ask about are: building access; bathroom facilities; supportive chairs; allergies to plants, animals, candles and fragrances. If using zoom, the technology needs to work well and have good image quality. The use of virtual backgrounds is avoided to enable personal transparency and a sense of safety for both parties. If after a few sessions, either party finds the liaison incompatible, it is good to discuss it, end well, and move on to another spiritual director.

**Other practicalities: How much time should I allow? How often are the sessions? What is the cost?**

Most spiritual direction sessions are between 45 minutes and one hour. Monthly sessions are the norm. If the directee is praying a retreat in daily life, such as the full Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola, the visits are weekly and continue for 30 to 35 weeks. If a person is doing a short or long live-in retreat, the visits will be daily for the duration of the retreat. The cost per session is negotiated between the spiritual director and the spiritual directee.

In 2023, the expected cost will be about AUS\$75 per 45 minute session. There is usually no contact from director and directee between appointments.

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*When we are in relationship with divine mystery, we can know the joy of experiencing full humanity.*

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30 – 35 weeks is a long retreat! What happens in the Spiritual Exercises?

The Spiritual Exercises have a history of 500 years going back to Spaniard Ignatius of Loyola (1491 – 1556) who had a conversion experience following a serious battle injury. In response, he penned the Spiritual Exercises to help people to grow in their relationship with the divine and to avail them of particular graces which would enable them to live meaningful and flourishing lives. Since then and particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, there have been many adaptations to his Exercises, all with the same intention, to be available to people who wish to know, love and follow their deepest interior divine calling. The retreat experience follows the creative dynamics of the life, death and resurrection cycle.

When I was young, I was told that grace was a holy gift. Now I am not sure what that means.

In spiritual direction, I would ask you what it might mean to you now at this stage of your life. But for the sake of the booklet, I will offer my ideas on what grace is. Grace is an awareness of a deepening desire and capacity to be fully human, that is, fully the person we intrinsically are. When we are in a relationship with divine mystery we can know the joy of experiencing that full humanity. In Christianity, this could be expressed as a relationship

with Christ. For people from other world religions, there are other designations for this reality.

### What are the graces that a person might receive in this retreat?

There are four major graces specific to the retreat. These graces are

- knowledge and experience of divine love, benevolence, and acceptance of a person and their life story,
- know, love, and be in awe of the divine presence with us in all things,
- compassion and loving presence with those who suffer
- transformation and joyful desire to respond to one's interior calling.

These four graces are consistent with the life, death, resurrection cycle that we recognise as the pattern we live in our everyday lives, but they are graces which enhance the experience of this life cycle and which release a person to live their unique, flourishing life.

### How can I find out more about the Spiritual Exercises?

There are many online resources to help a person discern when or if the Exercises might be right for you. One of the best resources will be your spiritual director especially if they are Ignatian trained to give the Spiritual Exercises.

### Is there a difference between monthly spiritual direction and spiritual direction in the course of the Spiritual Exercises?

Spiritual direction in the course of the Spiritual Exercises will be focussed more clearly on the dynamics and graces typical of those received during the various parts of the retreat. The person giving the Exercises (spiritual director) is the keeper of the process. The receiver of the Exercises prays with the specific material given to them, and shares with the director their experience of their prayer and how their life and their prayer are connected. Spiritual

direction is always focussed on the directee's relationship with the divine which is embodied in their lives.

# Who we are

Kardia Formation Pty Ltd was formed in 2015 after a spiritual discernment process by Dr Bernadette Miles PhD and Dr Marlene Marburg PhD in conjunction with the Loreto sisters in Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia. Since that time co-directors Marlene and Bernie have offered spiritual direction, professional and academic supervision, retreats, the full Spiritual Exercises and other transformational programs for those wishing to become spiritual directors and givers of the Spiritual Exercises.

# What is important to us?

- Strengthening spirit and releasing potential,
- Offering contemplative and inclusive spaces in which people can ponder the experience and meaning of the presence of divine life in themselves and all things,
- Believing each person holds an innate capacity to live a meaningful and flourishing life.

# Contact Us

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