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SUPPORTING AND LOVING our Priests

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Our priests are people like us: with imperfections, weaknesses and prone to temptations. Together we – the People of God must journey and encourage and pray for our priests so that they can make available to us (by the grace of their ordination) the Sacraments that will give us strength on our pilgrimage on earth.



A spiritual direction session at Life Direction Singapore.

The ministry that helps those longing for a closer COMMITMENT WITH GOD

More people are seeking spiritual direction but what is the ministry all about?

Jared Ng

The journey to Christ is not meant to be a lonely one. As we walk this path, we are meant to walk in communion with others. Often God's desires for us are made known through the guidance, support and loving care of another person. It is precisely this communion with this person that allows us to examine our relationship with God.

This is where spiritual di-

rection comes in. The ministry has grown in popularity among Catholics of all vocations in their journey to holiness.

But what exactly is spiritual direction? Is it important? Is it for everybody? Catholic News spoke to four organisations to gain deeper insights into the ministry: Kingsmead Centre for Ignatian Spirituality & Counselling; The Cenacle Sisters; LifeSprings Canossian Spiritualty Centre; and Life Direction Singapore.

What is spiritual direction and what is it not?

"Spiritual Direction is the accompaniment given to a person who is seeking to deepen his or her relationship with God and to better able to understand the communication that takes place between them in the course of one's life journey," said Canossian Sister Marilyn Lim, a spiritual director at LifeSprings Canossian Spirituality Centre.

It is "a journey of one Christian accompanying another Christian in his or her spiritual life," similar to "Jesus accompanying the two disciples on the road to Emmaus; a living encounter with the Lord," according to Life Direction Singapore, an ecumenical community of trained spiritual directors offering spiritual support and accompaniment to all persons in their faith journey.

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Jesuit Father Agustinus Tanudja, the Centre Director at Kingsmead Centre, said that spiritual direction "is a sacred conversation on one's life experiences, and how one can grow in relationship with God, self and others. It focuses on one's prayer life, spiritual questions, deep longings and sacred experiences."

All four organisations stressed that spiritual direction is not counselling. Counselling "deals with problem areas in one's life and attempts to bring a healthy solution to those issues ... spiritual direction helps one to grow in faith by being aware of God's presence in the midst of joy, pain or disorder," said Fr Agustinus.

In his time as a spiritual director, he has seen and felt how people have grown spiritually in encountering the Lord.

"In my experience, at the beginning we [director and director-ee] mostly converse about faith-questions. With more sessions, deeper sharings about their life and prayer experiences emerge, as well as making major life-decisions."

What happens during spiritual direction?

"It is mainly a conversation between the seeker and companion. The seeker shares prayer experiences and/or significant life events in order to draw meaning from these experiences. The companion usually listens and at times will ask the seeker appropriate questions that would hopefully help the seeker come to insight," said Cenacle Sr Amy.

Life Direction Singapore said, "In a safe, confidential and contemplative environment, the director listens to the director-ee's story. A lot of reflective

listening happens in spiritual direction [to God and to the director-ee] and, with prayer and meditation on Scripture to help the director-ee notice significant experiences, oneself and God."

Fr Agustinus said that a spiritual director is supposed to listen "in a non-judgemental way and guide a person to discover and pay attention to how God might be speaking through his/her life-experiences and prayer reflections."

A spiritual direction session usually takes place once a month and could last one hour. However these details are usually discussed further between the director and director-ee.

Who needs spiritual direction? Is it for everyone?

"All of us need spiritual direction as we appreciate the value of a travelling companion, someone who probably is more experienced and able to help in the discernment of God's will," said Sr Marilyn.

Fr Agustinus said that spiritual direction is for "anyone who desires to grow and deepen their relationship with God, especially those who are discerning about their life-vocation and life-transition, those who are in formation in Religious life and the priesthood, and leaders within the Church."

However, "it will only benefit those, who have a deep longing and commitment to grow in their spiritual development and relationship with God, self and others, and who are generously giving their time to personal prayer and discernment to love and serve God in all things," he said.

Sometimes, there are those who come to speak to us without even knowing they are seeking spiritual direction because there is "a desire to grow in relationship with God", said Sr Amy.

Spiritual direction available in the Archdiocese

1. Catholic Spirituality Centre, <http://www.cscctr.net/>
2. House of Prayer and Formation, <http://www.fmm-mysg.org/house-of-prayer.html>
3. Kingsmead Centre for Ignatian Spirituality and Counselling, <https://www.kingsmeadcentre.sg/>
4. Life Direction Singapore, <http://www.lifedirectionsingapore.sg>
5. LifeSprings Canossian Spirituality Centre, <http://www.lifespringscanossian.com/>
6. Montfort Centre, <http://www.montfortcentre.org/>
7. Redemptorist Mission Team, <https://www.rmt.novenachurch.com/>
8. San Damiano Spirituality Centre, <http://sandamiano.sg/>
9. Singapore Archdiocesan
10. Sojourners' Companions, Renewal, <http://www.sacre.org/>
11. The Cenacle Sisters, <http://www.cenaclemission.com/>
12. The World Community For Christian Meditation, <https://www.wccmsingapore.org/>
13. Worldwide Marriage Encounter, <http://wwwmesg.org/>

How does spiritual direction help a person?

Acknowledging there are points in life where a person can lose his or her sense of direction and purpose, Sr Marilyn said a spiritual director can assist "by asking questions or proposing biblical texts that can help the person reach a state of inner freedom. From this place, one can make a more informed and life-giving decision keeping in mind one's religious beliefs or spirituality."

Spiritual direction "can help the person see one's reality more clearly and how he or she is being invited to grow as a person. One can learn to listen better to God and to self in order to make good choices in response to God's invitations. It allows the person to make connections in different areas of life in the light of faith," said Sr Amy.

Both Fr Agustinus and Life Direction Singapore said that the ministry can help deepen and grow a person's relationship with God and self, and in doing so, one can develop an active and discerning prayer life, and grow to be a more Christ-like person.

Ms Geraldine Sze to, a member of Life Direction Singapore, said of spiritual direction, "One can never predict how a particular conversation might unfold itself. So far my experience tells me that I can trust the spirit

to be present, stirring in that sacred space."

There are different types of conversation that take place in a session. "Some may talk non-stop, some sit in silence for the most part of the session. Others would cry, others take a few minutes to figure out what they might like to talk about," she said. Whatever the case, Ms Sze to said the sessions always seem to provide solace and help.

Is there a notion that spiritual direction is only for those seeking a Religious vocation?

"There are still some people who have this notion," said Life Direction Singapore. "However, spiritual direction fundamentally is for anyone who desires to enrich his or her prayer life, and grow in relationship with God, irrespective of their state of life."

"Today, the laity are more informed and appreciate that spiritual direction is not limited to making a life option. Instead it is critical that we keep our ongoing relationship with God something alive and having a spiritual director assures us that we do not risk allowing our weak human nature draw us away from seeking God in everything," said Sr Marilyn.

Sr Amy said that "perhaps this notion has its roots from the historical development of spiritual direction – people who are exploring Religious life seek a spir-

itual guide. But spiritual direction is not limited only to those discerning a Religious vocation."

Is spiritual direction becoming increasingly popular?

Fr Agustinus said that he sees more people seeking spiritual direction, especially from individuals who have just gone for retreats and those active in church ministries.

"I believe this increase is also due to the faithful taking seriously the Archbishop's vision to build a 'more vibrant, missionary, and evangelical' Church in Singapore. In the past two to three years, the percentage rise [in director-ees] at Kingsmead Centre has been about 10-15 percent," he said.

Life Direction Singapore said that they have received more enquiries lately for spiritual direction and silent retreats from Catholics and other Christians. Over at LifeSprings Canossian Spirituality Centre, Sr Marilyn share some statistics which show an increased demand for spiritual direction from 2016 to 2017. In 2016, about 71 groups and 154 individuals sought spiritual direction. Those numbers grew to 81 and 183 respectively in 2017.

In 2018, the figures dipped slightly to 78 groups and 179 individuals. □

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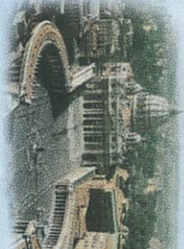
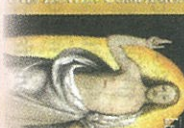


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