

Spirituality Gal

By Tammy Ann Winn, M.A.

"Whatever is true and holy in the world's religions is a reflection of the one divine light which enlightens the whole world."
— Elizabeth A. Johnson, referencing *Nostra Aetate*

Tammy Ann Winn works as a writer, recording artist, and fundraiser whose career has taken her around the world to continents such as Europe, Africa, and Australia. With a graduate degree in Religious Studies, Tammy's theological interests encompass promoting global justice and peace through interreligious dialogue and nourishing the feminine soul life through well-rounded spirituality. Tammy lives in the Milwaukee area with her husband, Ben, and their daughter, Nadia.



The Art of Spiritual Direction

For centuries, spiritual direction has existed in all major world religions as a means for one to awaken more fully to the work of the divine, within oneself and the world around them. Spiritual direction can be described as a process wherein a seeking individual meets with a skilled director to cultivate his or her ability to discern God's presence. Although known by various terms (Spiritual Companion, Spiritual Mentor, Soul Friend, Guru, Spiritual Teacher, Spiritual Guide), a spiritual director's role is to accompany one on his or her faith journey.

A seasoned spiritual director in the Milwaukee area, Sister Dawn Capiluppo, understands spiritual direction as "watching the movement of God." She says, "At times, it's being about the work of unlocking the heart. One's capacity as a spiritual director allows one to create a reverent space for 'fine tuning'—to see how grace is alive in the self and in the everyday events of life. A skilled director protects the sacred movement wherein the heart is revealed, the intellect is honored, and the spirit is invoked." Spiritual direction "looks for divine life," states S. Dawn, and "the goal is always union with the divine."



Sister Dawn Capiluppo

The pursuit of spiritual direction generally begins with a desire. S. Dawn explains that a person may come seeking to “reveal a deeper prayer life or some kind of discernment,” or they are “looking for answers to things that have happened to them.” She continues, “The goal is to respond to what it is they came for – working through grief, discerning the greater good, feeling empty when they pray, resources for their relational life, resolve feelings – it’s all about grace and the life of the spirit.”

A typical schedule for spiritual direction is to have the client and director meet once a month for about an hour. The session itself can take on various formats, such as question-and-answer, sharing and reaction, or conversation. Prayer is often included as well, usually before or after the session. As for how long a client may partake in direction varies depending on one’s purpose for coming in the first place. Sometimes it is a time-bound discernment; for others it is a lifelong venture.

The work of a spiritual director, like many helping professions, is a vocation. “People are drawn to the work because others often come to them for guidance,” S. Dawn shares. “You find yourself in reverent space with another person. It is a calling, an invitation that comes outside of yourself.” She believes those who are selected from the “midst of the people” often make the best directors. She adds that any spiritual director of integrity will have his or her own spiritual director as well.

While spiritual direction is not a licensed practice, there are various options for training in this field. Many seminaries and Universities have programs; there are also institutes, such as the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, where S. Dawn attended (in addition to already having a MA in Franciscan Studies and Spirituality from Bonaventure University). Yet, S. Dawn cautions that training alone does not create a quality director, pointing out that a good director often has skills one cannot train for, such as the ability to read or intuit the heart of the person coming.

When asked why she works as a spiritual director, S. Dawn’s answer is clear. “Because I’m a seeker myself. I am absolutely awed by how grace works in the human person. Every person is unique and how God works in an individual is unique....I have

a tremendous respect and reverence for that kind of mystery unfolding before me.”

For those interested in finding a spiritual director to work with, start with personal referrals through people or institutions you trust. Meet with a potential director. Pay attention to how comfortable you are as well as if you feel understood, safe, and respected. As for compensation, in the Milwaukee area one can expect to pay \$50-75 per session for a qualified director. Many directors, however, use a sliding scale based on the client’s needs. ☺

Sister Dawn is a member of the Wheaton Franciscans (a community of Catholic nuns). In her ministry she welcomes people of all faith traditions. Feel free to contact her at 414-332-3557 for more information. Other resources regarding spiritual direction include: The Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, Inc. (www.shalem.org) and Spiritual Directors International (www.sdiworld.org).



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