

Moving in God's Direction



**Essentials of Christ-centered
Spiritual and Vocational Direction**

MARY SHARON MOORE

MOVING IN GOD'S DIRECTION

Essentials of Christ-centered

Spiritual and Vocational Direction

A guide for spiritual directors, directees, and the spiritually hungry,
including topics worth exploring in the direction session,
plus questions for personal reflection

Mary Sharon Moore

AWAKENING VOCATIONS

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
Part I GETTING THE CONVERSATION GOING: THE SPIRIT MEETS THE NEED	7
1 Moving in God’s Direction: The Spiritual and the Vocational are One	9
2 What to Look for in a Christ-centered Spiritual Director: Seven Core Elements	17
3 A Match Made in Heaven: Discerning the Right Director-Directee Relationship	35
4 Navigating the Director-Directee Relationship: Four Mutual Commitments	49
5 Why in the World does Spiritual and Vocational Direction Matter? A Look from Three Perspectives	59
Part II THE MATURING CONVERSATION: THE SPIRITUAL MEETS THE VOCATIONAL	71
6 God Meets Me Where I Am: A Look at Vocational Lifestyle	73
7 You Stand Anointed: Confirmation as a Lifetime Event	95
8 Washed, Anointed, Fed, Ready for Work: Growing into a Life of Meaning	111

9	Living Your Calling Responsibly: Vocational Discernment in a Nutshell	129
10	More Prayer, Less Words: Contours of a Mature Christ-centered Prayer Life	147
11	Integrating God’s Movement: Finding Freedom of Speech in the Direction Session	165
12	Living in God’s Economy: The Well-directed Home Life	185
13	Embracing the Beatitude Life: Who in the World are You?	199
	 EPILOGUE	 215
	 APPENDIXES	 217
	1: The Mechanics of a Spiritual Direction Session: “Do I Just Start Talking?”	219
	2: Knowing When to Revisit Your Calling: Three Life Conditions Subject to Vocational Shift	223
	3: Seven Steps in Vocational Discernment	229
	 SCRIPTURE REFERENCES AND CITATIONS	 233
	 BIBLIOGRAPHY	 235
	 INDEX	 239

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I owe a debt of gratitude to Francis Kelly Nemeck, OMI, and Marie Theresa Coombs, canonical hermit, of Lebh Shomea House of Prayer in Sarita, Texas, for their deep study and eloquent writings on the fine-tuned workings of the Holy Spirit in the spiritual direction relationship and in the vocation discernment process.

And my own formator in the art and practice of spiritual direction, Antoinette Traeger, OSB, of Queen of Angels Monastery in Mount Angel, Oregon, holds a special place in my heart.

The Lord GOD has given me
a well-trained tongue,
That I might know how to speak to the weary
a word that will rouse them.
Morning after morning
he opens my ear that I may hear;
And I have not rebelled,
have not turned back. *Isaiah 50:4–5¹*

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a
place that he was to receive as an inheritance; he went out, not
knowing where he was to go. ... For he thought that the one
who had made the promise was worthy of his trust.

Hebrews 11:8–11 (author's wording)

There is something I cannot learn alone on my spiritual path,
no matter how much I try and no matter how much I want. As
I cannot perform an operation on myself, I need the hand of
another whom I trust in matters of the soul. A good spiritual
director is that “other.” *A directee*

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are to the *New American Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Catholic World Press, 1987).

INTRODUCTION

What is Christ-centered Spiritual and Vocational Direction?

Perhaps you remember when personal trainers and life coaches were all the buzz. Everyone from celebrities to budding entrepreneurs had their mentor, their coach, their trainer, to whom they tithed their rising fortunes to keep them focused, disciplined, and motivated toward higher goals. Personal trainers became “the new therapists.” Spirituality, jettisoned earlier by many in this fast-moving crowd, was now repackaged, rebranded, and “in” again, embraced by these cultural and corporate icons as a way to achieve one’s personal best—and perhaps even to dominate one’s chosen field.

Connecting the dots to our lives in the twenty-first century, we find it easy to ask: Are today’s spiritual directors our culture’s “new personal trainers”?

Spiritual directors have been around for centuries, going back to the monasteries of medieval times, or even further, in the Christian tradition, to those early abbas and ammas of the desert tradition. A deeper look at this uniquely Christ-centered spiritual direction makes clear that this spiritual practice is not about getting the world to move in your direction; rather, it is about you moving in God’s direction—a far more humble proposition.

In fact, to speak of Christ-centered spiritual direction is to speak of spiritual *and vocational* direction. The spiritual and vocational dimensions of a person's life simply cannot be separated. Why? Because by its very nature a robust experience of Christ-centered spiritual direction takes you straight into the heart of the mystery of life in Christ—specifically, the paschal mystery. This work of dying and rising to new life unfolds over the course of a lifetime, touching and shaping and defining every dimension of human life and the life of all of creation.

This mystery of the dying and the rising to new life which lies at the heart of all living things shapes the core of every Christian sacrament and the whole of sacramental life. This rhythm of dying and receiving new life indeed is a universal—or “catholic”—experience, raised to a redemptive level in the life of the church. In Christ-centered direction the very rhythm of the dying and rising which defines the Christ event forms the core understanding of what God is up to in the directee's life.

While I am Catholic, I do not expect you to be. Several of my directees are clergy and lay men and women of the various Christian denominations. What we cherish, wrestle with, and share in common is the inescapable engagement in the paschal mystery, the dying and the rising to new life.

Even if you are Catholic, I do not expect that your expressions of faith will be just like mine, because your life's narrative is unique to you and prised through the facets of your unique personality. Your life will be graced and burnished in ways that will call forth your particular and eternal dignity and beauty, and I will be graced and burnished in ways unique to me.

But I do expect one thing: that in your life you already will have experienced the dying and the rising in more ways than you may have imagined. Even your living of your vows and sacred commitments—whether expressed publicly or honored interiorly—will expose you and render you vulnerable to the ineffable mystery of God's movement in your life.

What, then, *is* Christ-centered spiritual and vocational direction? How shall we describe it? I propose that it is a *relationship* of a trained and appropriately gifted director with the directee in the work of God-centered listening: in Scripture, in conversation, in exploring life experience in light of the church's liturgical and sacramental practice and body of wisdom; and listening, too, in the silent spaces between the spoken words. In the course of conversation, and in a very fine-tuned way, the director listens with the outer ear to the directee, and with the inner ear to the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual direction indeed is "holy conversation." Yet the term "holy conversation" can sound too superficial for the deep, interior, and sacred work of the dynamic process that lies at the heart of this graced relationship. Spiritual directors and authors Francis Kelly Nemeck and Marie Theresa Coombs describe spiritual direction as the work of guiding others through their "passover in the Lord, ... a unique participation in another's spiritual regeneration, deification, transformation."² Spiritual direction is no small work. In its richest expressions spiritual direction is an individual's real spiritual birthing into the fullness of life in Christ, through the wise and graced counsel of another.

In the chapters ahead we will explore in detail, first, what constitutes an authentically Christ-centered spiritual direction relationship. And second, we will explore the dynamics of the spiritual and vocational direction process and the topics and life circumstances deserving of this holy conversation.

Christ-centered spiritual direction integrates reflection on the directee's circumstances with the wisdom of Scripture and the church's rich liturgical and sacramental life and body of teaching. Why do we include these elements? Because these elements of the actual lived Tradition of the church exist in service to the core expression of Christian faith in the human experience of the paschal mystery. This integration of personal experience and the church's rich

² Francis Kelly Nemeck, OMI, and Marie Theresa Coombs, *The Way of Spiritual Direction* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazer/The Liturgical Press, 1985), 16.

heritage, properly called theological reflection, is sadly missing in much of adult faith development, yet this integration is vital to spiritual growth and one's maturing into the fullness of authentic personhood.

The unique approach I bring to spiritual and vocational direction, and which I have found unusually fruitful, unites my areas of inquiry and interest: what I call "classic Christ-centered spiritual direction" shaped by the paschal mystery, as noted above, united with charism discernment, and discernment of how God is calling the directee to fullness of personhood through life circumstances, vocational lifestyle, unique gifts, and personal mission. I believe deeply that *every* baptized man and woman is anointed to live, as Jesus lived, generously and lovingly for the sake of the world. I count it a distinct blessing when I can assist a directee in the fine-tuned work of preparing the soul for such engagement in life.

Moving in God's Direction is not a "how to" book for would-be spiritual directors. If you seek to become a spiritual director, you will need to work in a committed way within the scope of a rigorous curriculum, under the guidance of an experienced spiritual director who also is qualified to teach the art, science, and theological foundation of spiritual direction. Such a program will equip you for the deep work of personal discernment and formation for this ministry.

Moving in God's Direction is designed, however, to serve two audiences. First, the book serves spiritual directors who seek a means to integrate their living faith experience, and a deepened understanding of the dynamics of God's calling and individuals' free and loving response, with their presence to others in this specialized form of "holy conversation." Second, the book is designed to be used by individuals—including directees—who are searching for a deeper understanding of what to expect, not only in truly Christ-centered spiritual and vocational direction but in the lifelong endeavor of becoming their authentic self-in-God.

This book is meant to be used. Take notes, capture ideas, highlight passages that resonate with you or challenge you or expand your horizons. Each chapter ends with reflection questions designed to help you to apply the chapter's material to your own experience. These questions also can serve to spark small group discussion.

If you are alive, you are moving. And if you are moving, you are moving in some direction. What does it mean to move in God's direction? It means to move both *in* the direction and *at* the direction of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus says in his holy conversation with Nicodemus, the wind "blows where it wills, ... so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

Here is an overview of what we will cover:

In Part I, "Getting the Conversation Going: The Spirit Meets the Need," we will examine what goes into the formation of the Christ-centered spiritual director who seeks to be well-equipped to meet the spiritual and vocational needs of baptized men and women living in our twenty-first century church and world.

In Part II, "The Maturing Conversation: The Spiritual Meets the Vocational," we will look at topics of life experience and spiritual growth that are appropriate to Christ-centered spiritual and vocational direction. These areas of inquiry uniquely guide a person toward vocational fullness of personhood according to their anointing in Baptism and Confirmation. We will conclude with a focus on how spiritual and vocational direction supports the man or woman of mature faith in the work of standing in the place of Jesus in our twenty-first century world.

As you can see, *Moving in God's Direction* covers a lot of territory. We will take it one thoughtful step at a time. I am glad that you can join me in exploring this amazing lifelong journey of "moving in God's direction."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Sharon Moore is founding director of Awakening Vocations and an active writer and speaker on the nature of God's calling. Her spiritual and vocational direction practice spans the United States, Canada, and beyond.

Moving in God's Direction is a practical, in-depth resource for those who are, or who are preparing to become spiritual directors, for men and women receiving spiritual direction, and for all who desire to understand the deeper dimensions of their spiritual journey.

Bulk discounts for *Moving in God's Direction* start at 10 copies. More at www.awakeningvocations.com/store

Personal and parish resources for spiritual and vocational development can be found at www.awakeningvocations.com as well. Visit us on the Web, or call us toll-free during usual business hours: 1.888.687.2046 (Pacific).

Also from Awakening Vocations: *Anointed for a Purpose: Confirmed for Life in the 21st Century*. This personal and parish resource explores Confirmation not merely as a sacrament of initiation but as a lifelong anointing that enables us to be the living presence of the risen Lord in our place and time. *Anointed for a Purpose* is ideal for young adults, older adults, those who are new to Christian faith or for those returning to practice of their faith.

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