

Ad Clerum 1.91

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

There can be few privileges greater than being a spiritual director/soul friend. It is, however, a privilege which carries with it great responsibilities.

It requires the spiritual director to:

- be very self-aware and to recognise that the gift someone is sharing, that is, their own deepest inner nature, is to be treated with the utmost trust, humility and respect;
- discern when the person receiving direction needs further counsel, perhaps from a suitably qualified therapeutic counsellor;
- behave at all times in an entirely professional manner.

The role of spiritual director has a long and impressive history in the Church. It has often been parish based, with the parish priest offering a ministry to his flock that encouraged growth in prayer, discipleship and ministry. There have also been those who have offered this ministry more widely and in a capacity that is distinct from parish structures.

Until recently, the ministry of spiritual direction has been seen largely as the preserve of the ordained or the Religious. It was regarded as a ministry which was entered informally, on the basis of ordination training, or an aptitude discovered or revealed by practice, and the living out of the Christian faith. In the last twenty years, however, the Church has recognised that this ministry can be enhanced by training and there are now several ways in which this can be undertaken, including the Diocesan Initiatives in Spirituality (DIS) course: *Sharing the Journey*.

It is the case that if anyone seeks to become a spiritual director through the DIS, there will need to be a careful monitoring and assessment process. We would wish to encourage and support all who are involved in this ministry and to ensure that it is offered to the highest possible standard. To this end, we have asked DIS, which currently runs our training, to produce a scheme for maintaining standards and for brokering between spiritual guides and directees.

We have also been in touch with our insurers who assure us that, provided we use people who are adequately trained, the diocesan policies provide appropriate cover through the diocesan scheme (a necessary requirement in these litigious times). Where the ministry is offered within parishes and outside the diocesan scheme, please note the following: if the parish uses EIG insurance, it is vital that the 'Parish Guard' element is included; if another insurer is used, it should include the equivalent of 'Parish Guard'. If individuals are offering this ministry independently, they should ensure that they have in place public liability/professional indemnity insurance to cover themselves. As far as EIG is concerned, its cover is conditional on the person ministering within the diocesan Code of Practice for spiritual direction and it specifically excludes the provision of professional counselling services.

There are great advantages to those offering spiritual direction to come within the diocesan scheme:

- a full training course *Sharing the Journey* for those wishing to become involved in this ministry
- a broker service to help link spiritual directors and directees
- a Code of Practice to guide all involved in this ministry
- membership of a supervision group (costs of supervision being covered)

- an annual 'in-service' training day for the development of ministerial skills
- a short course for those currently ministering on the basis of their life and faith journeys but who have had no formal training for spiritual direction.

Whilst all spiritual direction should be professional, it would be a great loss to the Church if spiritual direction became a kind of profession and it would also be a loss if that profound spiritual pilgrimage, on which all of us are engaged, became overregulated.

In brief, we want to cherish that deep and indefinable gift which spiritual direction can offer and yet, at the same time, have processes in place to ensure that no vulnerable directee becomes embroiled in a manipulative relationship and no spiritual director abuses their position of trust.

It goes without saying that at the heart of spiritual direction there must be absolute confidentiality, but those coming for spiritual direction must also be made aware that should anything emerge which could affect the safety or wellbeing of any person, especially children or vulnerable adults, the spiritual director will need to seek advice immediately from the archdeacon or one of the bishops.

Should other matters be raised which might require a priestly confession, then the spiritual director should seek the advice of the chair of the Diocesan Initiatives in Spirituality, of one of the archdeacons, or of one of the bishops. It is worth remembering the great gift that sacramental confession offers, and also the wisdom of the Church of England which has said of sacramental confession: 'All may, some should, none must.'

For further information about spiritual direction, please see the diocesan webpage: www.stalbans.anglican.org

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