

Group Spiritual Direction for Pastors

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To Karin, my best friend, who told me I could do it,
then made sure I did it. Thank you for believing in me.

With deep gratitude to...

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Y.N.W.A. (You Never Write Alone)

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A Gift for the Reader

Imagine the excitement of a family gathering around a beautifully wrapped gift under their Christmas tree. The gift is for the whole family. With joy they begin to open it, anticipating the blessing it will be for them all for years to come.

I was one of seven pastors in Iowa who together unwrapped the gift of Group Spiritual Direction and God used it to transform us.

This little booklet grew out of the story of those seven pastors who longed for spiritual vibrancy and joined together on a journey of listening and discerning God's presence in one another's lives. Perhaps in hearing our story you may find your heart stirred. You may notice a longing awaken.

This booklet is an invitation to discover if group spiritual direction may be a gift for you and others whose hearts are also stirred, whose longings are also being awakened. I offer this booklet to you, dear Reader, as an invitation to gather some others with you to open this gift together.

Invitation: A Story from Iowa

The contrast was stark. The young pastor, full of energy for ministry, was growing weary, impatient, irritable with his family. His mentor, on the other hand, was nearing forty years in ministry – still vigorous in the work and full of joy and laughter. After forty years he was aware of shortcomings, both his and the church's, but he delighted in serving as a minister of the gospel. The young pastor saw his own shipwreck ahead. He wanted to finish his years of ministry with the same joy as his mentor, but he didn't think he'd make it four years, let alone forty.

The young pastor wasn't alone. He considered his colleagues in ministry and most of them slaved on the same treadmill. Few exuded gospel joy like his mentor. Some were involved in or headed toward ministry failure of one sort or another. Others acknowledged parched souls despite witnessing growing congregations and effective ministries. They recognized something was missing, but couldn't diagnose the problem. They read scriptures devotionally. They prayed. But they lacked joy. Though they saw God at work in the congregation, they no longer sensed God's presence in their own lives.

Eugene Peterson notes that spiritual direction is one of the main elements of a pastor's calling.¹ So why can't pastors do spiritual direction for one another? Imagine pastors gathering regularly to reflect together on the Holy Spirit's presence in their lives and ministries. They meet, paying attention the Spirit's promptings in each other, praying for each other with awareness of the Spirit's work.

That young pastor was me. I wanted to try spiritual direction, but pastoring in Sioux County in rural Iowa made access to a trained, licensed spiritual director difficult. So I sought out colleagues in the area to see if group spiritual direction might help us find joy and flourishing in ministry.

Six pastors from Sioux County joined me in an experiment of nine monthly meetings for group spiritual direction. We recognized the spiritual importance of what was happening so much that, when the nine-month thesis project was over, the group refused to quit meeting. Years later, when I left the county to pastor in another part of Iowa, the group took a six-month break and then restarted by adding new members and forming two groups.

Throughout this booklet I'll include "Iowa Interludes" to share some of our experience and learning as a group of pastors. These interludes show how the content of this booklet arose from a real life context. Our small group of pastors in Iowa experienced highs and lows of life and ministry together. Sharing these experiences benefitted our spiritual formation and our pastoral ministry. So what gifts did we unwrap in our experiment in rural Iowa? The treasures can be grouped into three categories: heightened sensitivity to God's voice and leading, personal spiritual formation, and effects on pastoral ministry. Here's how we benefitted in each area.

Heightened Sensitivity to God's Voice and Leading

One benefit of group spiritual direction is becoming more aware of the presence of God in our lives. As we listen prayerfully and attentively to one another's lives, we discover God's hand writing our stories. We learn, as Buechner did, that God is present in even the "chance" happenings: "The question is not whether the things that happen to you are chance things or God's things because, of course, they are both at once. There is no chance thing through which God cannot speak.... Listen for him."² We long to hear God's voice, to discover his guidance, and group spiritual direction provides a place to learn how to hear and discover.

As we started our direction group, we expressed our desires to be more aware of God's voice and leading. One noted that he struggled to be quiet before the Lord to listen. Another wanted to improve his prayer life by learning to listen to God, something he hadn't practiced before.

With time together in group direction, members noted benefits such as these:

- “Being shown a tangible way to seek God’s guidance has helped me to sense his leading more clearly in other settings.”
- I’m beginning to grasp “the importance of self-consciously thinking about what God is doing or saying in my life.”
- The process of preparing to share my thoughts with the group is “important for me in coming to know myself and the place of God in directing the events and pattern of my ministry.”
- “I’ve developed a better sensitivity to God’s presence in my life and ministry and the lives of other pastors.”
- One pastor who was skeptical about hearing from God apart from scripture noted that God was speaking in the group not only through scripture, but also through other people’s experiences, listening prayer, and in the silence.

An additional benefit of doing group direction with a group of pastors was that our rich pool of scripture knowledge and wisdom from broad experiences gave us a sense of confidence that we could listen for God and not be as likely to be led astray by our own hearts and voices.

Personal Spiritual Formation

A second benefit of group spiritual direction is personal spiritual formation. We engage in spiritual disciplines because we want to be formed in Christ, shaped for service in his kingdom. At the same time we recognize our lack of formation and our struggle to practice the spiritual disciplines. Group spiritual direction provides a safe place for honesty about our spiritual practice (or lack of it) and encouragement for our formation in Christ.

One pastor said it well: “I noticed progress in myself and thought I saw it in others.... Our listening to God together helped us grow in our journeys of faith... all of us were renewed in faith, hope, and love.” The most obvious way our spiritual journeys were transformed was in our prayer lives. As one pastor put it, “I found my prayer life improved and sought to depend more closely upon God than my own strengths.” All of us found the emphasis on silence and prayer to be transformative in our spiritual lives.

One pastor also noted that as he became more prayerfully attentive to God’s leading, he saw his spiritual life move from being based on the needs and expectations of the congregation to being based on God’s leading. Rather than a need-driven spirituality, he found he was involved in a more intimate relationship with God, with an improved prayer life.

Effects on Pastoral Ministry

The third benefit of group spiritual direction is the effect on our pastoral ministries. By taking time with other pastors in the presence of God, we can examine our ministry practices in the context of grace and creativity. Pastors examine situations in which they find themselves, looking for God’s presence. They find the Spirit sparking creative ideas and solutions where they had previously felt stuck and confused. Pastors become formed in Christ through group spiritual direction for the sake of ministry.

Formation is meant to be missional, to have an effect not only vertically in our love for God, but also horizontally in our love for others. Participating in the spiritual direction group affected our ministries, both directly and indirectly. In some cases, incidents were shared with the group which led to seeking God’s leading. These included issues of

conflict with a congregation, conflict with a spouse, and concerns about being overwhelmed in ministry. Sometimes the insights of the group had a bearing on resolving these issues. At other times the group provided space to listen in a new way for God's leading.

One pastor brought concerns about the lethargy of his congregation: "There is a relative lethargic happiness, without crisis, chaos, or growth." He was looking for direction for his and his congregation's future. He said:

In the course of the time together I explored the options before me, and felt God calling me to be faithful in this advent season of my ministry, waiting for God to do a new thing. As these months have gone on, I have listened to God point to places of creative chaos in my ministry. Where I found chaos, others found boundaries, riches, patience, strength, and trust.

We applied our new abilities to listen for God in our own ministry settings. For example, one pastor approached his Advent and Christmas sermon themes and messages by seeking and sensing God's leading. Another gained insight into his positive and negative effects on the dynamics of the church leadership team. Ultimately, our group experience led to spiritual formation as we discovered an increased ability to discern God's voice and presence in our lives and ministries, experienced stronger prayer lives, and found God's leading in specific areas of pastoral ministry.

Group spiritual direction is a discipline that has the potential to bear fruit for pastors, missionaries, and others involved in Christian leadership.³ This guide is an invitation to discover what benefits group

spiritual direction may have for you and your colleagues in ministry leadership.⁴

May the story of a few pastors in Sioux County, Iowa, serve as an invitation for you to seek out colleagues to begin a spiritual direction group. The information in this booklet can get you started. If you are looking for more ideas and information, take a look at the Helpful Books section at the end.

May you find a spiritual direction group that will nurture your spiritual formation, strengthen your ministry, and lead you to joyful, faithful ministry for a lifetime.

What Is Christian Group Spiritual Direction?

Spiritual direction is what happens when two people, recognizing the presence of Christ in and with them, listen together for God's voice in their lives. Spiritual direction is uniquely different from other one-on-one relationships in the following significant ways.

- A teacher or tutor will have some content to bring to the meeting, something to impart to the student, but a spiritual director comes to listen and discern God's presence.
- A counselor will also listen, as the counselee brings the agenda for the counseling session, but both spiritual director and directee are attentive to discern the Holy Spirit's agenda in the directee's life.
- A mentor or coach is seeking the development of specific character or skills in the mentee, but a director is open to notice how the Spirit is forming the directee and encourage the directee to lean into this formative work.

Spiritual direction is founded on the assurance that the Holy Spirit is at work in the life of a believer. As they meet in the Christ's name, Christ fulfills his promise to be present with them (Matt. 18:30). So they listen together for Christ's presence, for the Spirit's working. The director may ask questions, the directee may speak of events, people, reactions, and emotions. There will be times of speaking and of silence, but always there is listening, noticing, being attentive.

Most often in spiritual direction one person takes the role of director – of listening, inviting, asking questions – to help the other person, the directee, to grow in awareness of the Spirit of Christ in his or her life. Sometimes spiritual direction is done in a mutual way, with roles shared together. And spiritual direction can also be practiced in groups. Although many evangelical Christians may not have practiced spiritual direction, all of these forms of direction have been practiced in the Church, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant, through the centuries.

By seeking to listen attentively for God's action in one another's lives, spiritual direction groups may discover great blessings. Participants may find revelation in an awareness of God's presence and work. They may see together things in their lives that they may not see alone. This is especially true as groups meet together over time, as members are more able to notice patterns, growth, or returns to old, unhelpful ways. There is encouragement in being aware that God is at work in our lives, and there is fruitfulness in welcoming and participating in God's good work.

Group spiritual direction may be for you if:

...you desire to be more aware of and attentive to God's presence in your life.

...you desire a more vibrant prayer life that includes listening for God's voice.

...you have a tendency to isolate yourself in ministry, or you long for more community in ministry.

...you desire to be like my mentor at the end of your years of ministry: vigorous and full of joy and laughter, aware of shortcomings yet delighted to be a minister of the gospel.

...you want to practice the discipline of spiritual direction but cost or distance make it difficult, or you want to practice it with the benefit of community.

...you desire the wisdom, knowledge, and presence of others as you navigate the path of ministry.

While group spiritual direction offers great potential benefits, there also are potential dangers. Fallen human beings participate, so sin can tarnish a group experience in many ways. Groups can be hindered by individuals or by the group as a whole. Leaders and powerful personalities can dominate or manipulate a group. Hard hearts can also hinder a group from receiving God's blessings. Some might come with personal agendas. Spiritual immaturity or lack of biblical awareness may distract the group.

With caution about the potential dangers in group spiritual direction, a group can establish practices to avoid and address problems. For example, direction and discernment must always be compared to scripture, as the Spirit will not work in ways contrary to it. Evaluation of the group process as part of each meeting is one way to notice where the group may be going astray and to call the members to faithful

community. The evaluation should also include the positive, celebrating God's presence and work in the group.

Iowa Interlude: Benefits of Spending Time Together

By meeting monthly for a number of years, our Iowa spiritual direction group established deep roots, experienced whole and wholesome community, saw the presence of God bringing blessing to our spiritual journeys, and found joy in gospel ministry once again. After hearing one another's stories prayerfully over the course of months, we began to see connecting points. First within another person's story: "What you said today made me think of what you said last spring about...." But then we even began to see connecting points within our stories. We heard common themes. We knew we weren't walking alone because we had heard a colleague speak of the same path from a slightly different perspective. When we looked at that path we saw it was the same Good Shepherd leading us at different times and in different ways through the same terrain.

Why Pastors Should Engage in Group Spiritual Direction

The spiritual formation of a pastor is not different in nature from that of a lay person, but there are distinct challenges. One of these challenges that is especially significant for pastors and leaders in congregations is what Parker Palmer describes as the "shadow side" of a leader.

A leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to project on other people his or her shadow, or his or her light. A leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to create the conditions under which other people must live and move and have their being – conditions that can either be as illuminating as heaven or as

shadowy as hell. A leader is a person who must take special responsibility for what's going on inside him or her self, inside his or her consciousness, lest the act of leadership create more harm than good.⁵

Although Palmer was speaking of leadership in general, he also had pastors clearly in mind. "I'm thinking about a clergy person who has a choice between creating conditions in a congregation which are of the light, or conditions which are of the shadow."⁶ As Palmer notes, the pastor must be aware of what is going on inside of him so that his leadership will be positive rather than negative.

One of the ways to ensure that the internal shadows of a pastor do not create a "hellish" situation for a congregation is for the pastor to seek the light of God's revelation and working to illuminate the dark corners of her heart.

Practicing the disciplines of prayer, reading Scripture, and giving and receiving spiritual direction postures the Christian leader to receive the presence of God. As God's light shines within and through the follower of Christ, ministry takes on a decidedly different hue. The Church has always believed that the leader's relationship with God has a profound influence upon the practice of ministry.⁷

Although spiritual formation is not different in quality for pastors, it is crucial for pastors to be spiritually formed, and to be consistently moving forward in conformity to Christ's likeness for others. Spurgeon encouraged pastors to be diligent in pursuit of Christlikeness. "If we obtain conformity to Christ, we shall have a wondrous unction upon our ministry, and without that, what is a ministry worth?"⁸ Pursuit of conformity to Christ is the expectation of the congregation, the hope of

the minister, and the work of the pastor to keep the pastor's "shadow side" from defining her ministry.

Pastors may do their work each week – preparing and delivering sermons, counseling, teaching, visiting, meeting with committees, administering – without an awareness of God's presence. God may be actively at work in their lives, but if the pastors are not alert to God's activity and presence, they may find it more difficult to join with God in the work of their own spiritual formation. Johnson and Dreitcer note, "Many leaders who have difficulty engaging brothers and sisters spiritually are not lacking spiritual experience but spiritual formation."⁹ They write:

The Presence of the Spirit is always there [in situations that involve teaching, preaching, or administering, and pastoral care] but often acts with such subtlety and gentleness that the untrained eye fails to notice. Yet, in the person who is truly looking, listening, and sensing, the Presence can be named and affirmed.¹⁰

A lack of awareness of God's activity and presence may hinder spiritual formation and hamper work. The answer to this problem is to encourage and enable pastors to consciously seek to be formed spiritually. Johnson and Dreitcer note that:

This formation is not mysterious, nor is it difficult to engage in. But it does require that they take the time to reflect on their experiences in the light of God's purpose and presence being manifested in their lives. A clear perspective on this spiritual development will assist them in their ministry.¹¹

Johnson and Dreitcer emphasize that such awareness often occurs after the fact, during times of prayerful reflection. Memory is a key to identifying God's presence and action.

The spirituality of ministry finds its life not only along the lines in doing the work but also in moments of reflection on the experiences of giving and receiving, listening and discerning, and hearing the words of others as Christ's words. The words spoken in the give-and-take of ministry often etch themselves in the memory of God's servants. And one day, when a weary pastor or a hardworking elder takes a few minutes to relax, he or she sits down and remembers. The memory preserves more than a naked outline of a Habitat house being built or a well-delivered sermon or a Spirit-led elder's meeting; it also holds a recollection of meeting God along the lines of ministry. And when the servants of Christ recall these encounters, amazing things happen in their spiritual lives. They experience a growing capacity to notice God's presence in every part of life. Clarity about their calling increases. Thankfulness grows.¹²

This "capacity to notice God's presence" and the resultant thankfulness is enhanced in community. As pastors remember and reflect on God's activity and presence, they can then communicate together about the workings of God in each other's lives. "When leaders in the church begin reflecting on their lives with an eye toward discovering the presence of God embedded in their narratives, they will be able to talk with others about God and assist them in their journeys."¹³

Community is an essential element in the formation of believers that remains crucial for pastors. There is a temptation for some pastors to isolate themselves from other colleagues in ministry. This inhibits a pastor's personal and ministry growth and can be a recipe for moral

failure. We need others for accountability, mentoring, encouragement, and formation. Pastors are part of the body, and need other parts of the body to grow and function effectively. Mulholland notes this communal essence of our spiritual journey when he writes:

Our personal spiritual disciplines, rather than separating us from the other cells in the body, become a means of binding us together in love and support as we seek each other's growth into wholeness. Meanwhile, the corporate disciplines of the body supply the supporting nurture of Life for each of the individual cells.¹⁴

He goes so far as to say that without the body, without others to help us on the journey and in corporate disciplines, we cannot be fully formed in Christ's image. "...[C]orporate spirituality is the only context within which we can grow toward wholeness in the image of Christ."¹⁵ Dawn agrees. "...[A]ll shaping of the spiritual life and a servant's character takes place in the midst of the entire Christian community throughout space and time."¹⁶

Pastors are expected to be spiritually formed, mature, and aware of God's work in their lives and others'. This formation, maturity, and awareness, while personal, must be done in community and for community. Group spiritual direction draws together all these elements. Spiritual direction builds capacity for noticing God's presence by being attentive in community. It is centered upon prayerful reflection which overflows into daily prayerfulness. It grows thankfulness through attentive prayerfulness in the group and in life and ministry. Group direction is a practice that enables pastors to be spiritually formed through community. A community of pastors, sharing a common call and vocation, gathering for spiritual direction together, can be an effective place of spiritual formation.

How to Form a Spiritual Direction Group for Pastors

Some books are available that provide good ideas and resources for forming and maintaining good spiritual direction groups.¹⁷ Here are some basics ideas to consider as you form pastor's group.

First Steps

It may seem obvious, but having a posture of listening to the Holy Spirit's leading is crucial for embarking on a journey of group spiritual direction. Start with an awareness of your own spiritual longings or struggles and ask for God's direction. Let the Spirit lead you to others in whom he is stirring.

So begin with prayer. Seek God's leading and direction as you invite others to consider being part of a spiritual direction group. Share with others what group spiritual direction is, perhaps by sharing this booklet, as well as sharing what hopes or expectations you may have. Being clear about details (such as meeting frequency, length, and duration of the group) and expectations (like regular attendance, confidentiality) will help others decide whether or not to join.

During the process of invitation and convening of a group, the purpose and process of the group should be kept before the participants. Dougherty notes that "It is important for the participants and leader to have the opportunity to explore the appropriateness of group direction for applicants and to arrive at as much clarity as possible before the first meeting."¹⁸ This means that it may be most helpful to have an initial informational meeting before the members commit to the group. Prechtel suggests that this meeting is a good time to review the expectations for the group, and then to reaffirm them at the first group meeting.¹⁹ For a newly formed group, the first meeting is an appropriate time for the members not only to introduce themselves, but to discuss the future of the group. Dougherty suggests that there should be:

time to talk about hopes and fears in relation to group spiritual direction. We find that giving people an opportunity to voice their

fears in the beginning helps them realize that they are not alone in their apprehensions. Also, hearing the hopes of others allows facilitators to address unrealistic expectations.²⁰

Hopes and fears, purpose and process should be discussed at an introductory meeting, and again at the first meeting, in order to set a solid and achievable direction for the group. This can include establishing a group covenant, including expectations about attendance, confidentiality, honesty, etc.²¹ Without commitment to making the group a safe place through confidentiality, a secure community through regular attendance, and a transforming practice through evaluation, a group will not be effective and will not last.²² These expectations and commitments should then be held before the group on a regular basis as well, perhaps every six months to a year, and revised as needed.

Rose Mary Dougherty wrote the seminal book on group spiritual direction that guided the formation of our group. She notes that a trustful openness to the Holy Spirit working in each member must undergird any effort at group spiritual direction. This trustful openness requires honesty about the individuals' relationships with God and prayerful readiness to participate in the process. Out of this trustful openness group members "will share the reflection on our prayer, our tending to God, and will listen to what rises in the silence and words of the direction time."²³ When the group members are trustful, honest, and open to God and each other, they "can allow other participants to be who they are with God and offer the fruit of our prayerful consideration of their words without the need to impose our belief system or experience on them."²⁴ This honest, trustful, prayerful openness to God and to other pastors should be noted as part of the invitation to a spiritual direction group.

There should also be an expectation that the members of the group are practicing individual disciplines on their own. Dougherty writes, “We have found that an ability to engage in group discernment tends to come naturally if a group’s members are individually practicing traditional exercises of spiritual formation. Over time, individuals who are engaged in these practices begin to develop a communal trust, a deeper sense of God’s ways, and an ability to discern God’s call.”²⁵ If members are actively pursuing spiritual formation on their own using traditional spiritual disciplines (such as daily Bible reading, prayer, worship, fasting, solitude, silence), their relationship with God will enable them to be more trustful, open, and able to discern God’s activity in their own lives and the lives of group members.

Iowa Interlude: Apprehensions

As our group gathered for the first few meetings, the members were anxious. An older pastor noted his apprehension that the younger pastors would be looking to him for solutions to problems. Another member felt like an outsider, not knowing much more than the names of the others. Some were anxious about being the presenter – what would the others think about me and what I share? One was concerned that his denominational affiliation might be a hindrance. Whenever a new group is formed to do a new thing, there will be apprehensions. Clear expectations, open acknowledgement of anxieties, careful facilitating, and a gentle spirit moved our group to a sense of belonging in community. It didn’t happen quickly, but it did happen.

Diversity and Power

One caution in group formation to avoid is basing a group on, or placing significance in, any organization or hierarchy. “Spiritual direction is first born out of natural, spontaneous human relationships. A hierarchical, or even organizational system, is not essential to its function and is often destructive to it. The ordinary kinds of caring and sharing that belong to the Christian community are the starting point for spiritual direction.”²⁶ When there is an unbalanced power dynamic in the group, that dynamic can cause those in subordinate or superior positions to withhold from the group, or cause other behaviors that undermine the essential trustful openness of the group.

Ideally the group will not be homogenous, for diversity enriches the experience. Dougherty notes that:

...when people are dealing with their relationship with God, homogeneity is rarely possible or desirable. Diversity of articulation within the group can open people to fresh possibilities for encountering and responding to God. Also such diversity can engender a reverence for the mystery of God who will not be contained by the confines of our experience. Sometimes even extreme personality differences among members can be the inspiration for reverence. People can be surprised by the way God is present for them even through people they don’t like.²⁷

Groups benefit by having members of different genders, ages, ethnicities, theological traditions, and so forth. Having everyone from the same viewpoint is not ideal, especially as we desire to be open to the full variety of ways in which God works in our lives. Kropf describes the benefit one group found in their diversity:

Through patient, attentive listening month after month and a willingness to be with each other, no matter where their theological questions took them, the spiritual direction group grew more courageous in their explorations. Instead of being hampered by their differences or constrained by their fears, they began to delight in the surprises they discovered as they engaged each other's views and experiences of God.²⁸

Through the process of beginning a group, the leader and the potential participants need to assess these issues of diversity and power in order to make sure that the direction group will be purposeful, meaningful, healthy, and effective. An attentive leader who raises these questions at the outset should be able to shepherd a group to a healthy place. This may require hard conversations and excluding someone or someone excluding himself or herself from a particular group because of power dynamics. By at least making these dynamics apparent, the group can discern a path together that will minimize the potential harm of power imbalance or lack of diversity.

Iowa Interlude: Diversity

Although our group was all male and all white, due primarily to the fact that there were very few female and no non-white pastors in the county, we were thankful for the other dimensions of diversity in our group. We had pastors from Reformed, Baptist, and Methodist backgrounds, with a range of theological perspectives from strongly evangelical to invitingly mainline. We had pastors in their first charge and one nearing retirement. While one member struggled initially with the idea of hearing God somewhere other than from the scriptures, another longed to hear the scriptures speak to him again. Because of the variety of denominational affiliations, we didn't have to deal with direct power issues, although we had to move beyond the perception that I was the "expert" because I formed the group as part of my thesis project. It didn't take long for us to see each one as a fellow pilgrim on the journey and to welcome insights that came from someone outside of our stories. We were blessed by the diversity of insights from colleagues with whom we might not otherwise have engaged at a spiritual level.

Size of the Group

Size of the spiritual direction group is a significant concern. Ideally, each participant will be able to present to the group at least every four-to-six weeks. Dougherty suggests limiting the group to four or five members to assure that each person has time to participate, while assuring that there are at least three members in order “to benefit from the collective wisdom available through the group process. If groups can meet bi-weekly, six members would be optimum to allow for three people sharing one week and three the next.”²⁹ Groups can be creative and adaptable to make this work. Some might choose to lengthen each meeting while making sure to have occasional breaks during the meetings. Some might have a large group meet briefly for fellowship and prayer before breaking into multiple smaller groups for direction. The key is to have at least three members in the group, but not be so large that regular presentation by members is inhibited.

Iowa Interlude: Acceptance

As with any group that forms, members were anxious about their place in the group. Would they be welcomed and accepted? It's crucial for groups to be accepting and non-judgmental, and this spirit allowed our members to feel accepted quickly. The member nearing retirement was regularly affirmed about “being faithful and finishing the course well,” which he said he needed to hear from the group. Another said, “Often our congregations don't affirm in the ways we need,” and the group was a place to be built up and affirmed. The welcome and acceptance grew as we spent time together and shared our stories. As one member said, “We won the battle of isolationism by meeting together and sharing common struggles and concerns.”

Purpose and Mission

While most of this booklet describes what some would consider a basic or standard type of spiritual direction group, there are other themes and forms a group might take.³⁰ Consider these ideas, gathered from some of the books referenced at the end of this booklet:

Clearness Committees

Contemplative Prayer

Healing Prayer

Justice and Peace

Character Stories³²

Focus on Spiritual Disciplines

Holy Reading/Lectio Divina

Seasons of Transition

Liturgical Seasons³¹

Whatever the type of spiritual direction group, it is important to recognize that the purpose is always outward, missional. We don't practice spiritual disciplines just for our own relationship to God. That love for God must also overflow in love for neighbor. Prechtel assures us that "as we discover the compassion of God acting within us to bring about new wholeness and wisdom and understanding, inevitably we will want to move out with compassion beyond ourselves."³³ Reese describes this missional focus as it was experienced by United Methodist clergy in group spiritual direction:

When experienced clergy find ongoing support for their growth as leaders, they will be able to lead their congregations with courage and joy. Group spiritual direction offers one model for such support and may help "to spread God's grace and love throughout the world." As clergy discover the healing, strengthening, and nurturing offered by God in direction groups, they become better equipped to lead congregations through the changes necessary to become fruitful. Thus, the effort to create space for group direction directly

enhances the effectiveness of clergy to engage in the...mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”³⁴

We are formed through spiritual disciplines like group direction so that we will grow in our fulfillment of both of the great commandments – to love God and to love our neighbor.

Iowa Interlude: Direction and Mission

Our group gathered with a variety of expectations regarding ministry. One served a vibrant, growing congregation, but was spiritually dry. Another was in a plateaued congregation and longed for signs of spiritual life. Another was dealing with a young church and was trying to find wisdom for important decisions. Another dealt with an impending call to serve a different congregation. Our settings were different, but by meeting together each of us gained clarity of insight to guide us in making decisions, choosing ministry paths, and serving our congregations with a deeper sense of God’s presence in us as pastors and in our congregations. Although the focus of our meetings was on our personal stories, we departed with more passion, wisdom, and clarity for the work to which we were called.

Role of the Facilitator(s)

Another decision that must be made regards the facilitation of the group – whether there will be a single facilitator and, if there is to be one, what the role of the facilitator will be. Dougherty suggests that considerations regarding the need for a facilitator include assessing the previous experience of the members with spiritual direction in general and with small group activities, as well as consideration of the familiarity of members with each other to determine how well the group will be able to establish an atmosphere of trust.³⁵ For a new group, Dougherty suggests that a facilitator should be designated in order to give form and direction to the group. She notes:

At least in the beginning, I would encourage the presence of a facilitator who, in modeling group spiritual direction and taking over the mechanics of the group, can free participants to more easily enter into the spirit of the process. An alternative to a single facilitator might be the rotation of the task among participants from meeting to meeting, or even within a given meeting, so that every person will have a time for sharing.³⁶

The role of a facilitator involves time-keeping and protecting the atmosphere of “prayerful listening” for the group. This role does not require experience as a spiritual director. Dougherty emphasizes that facilitators must:

...appreciate the process they will facilitate. Usually the facilitators have another place for their own spiritual direction and they make this clear to the group. In the interest of time, they are not a directee in the group, but they do share fully in the rest of the process.³⁷

In Dougherty's experience:

...the best facilitators are those who have a familiarity with or at least an appreciation for the dynamic of group spiritual direction and who are wise enough to know that this dynamic does not depend on their expertise. They are tentative in their approach to the group. They are willing to trust God more than they trust their sense of readiness as a facilitator.... They know and acknowledge that they do not have a monopoly on the Holy Spirit and are ready to involve the group in the process of discernment early on.³⁸

Iowa Interlude: Facilitating the Group

Initially the plan for our group was that I would serve as the facilitator of the group, watching over group dynamics, keep track of time, making sure the group functioned well. Before we began meeting, the members of the group insisted that I be part of the group. Since it was my project, I took responsibility for facilitating the group except for the times when I was the presenter. I then handed off the facilitating and time-keeping to one of the group members. This model worked for us, as it kept a consistent rhythm and format while allowing me to be included in the group process.

Community and Formation

Formation is done in community and for community. It cannot be done privately, and it must be done for the benefit of others. Excluding the role of community as a place for the work of the Holy Spirit in formation is a common mistake. The work of formation is God's, working through the community to bless the community. Parker Palmer notes that:

...while inner work is a deeply personal matter, it's not necessarily a private matter. There are ways to be together in community to help each other with that 'inner work.' I have been very touched in my own experience by the Quaker tradition where they know how to come together around people who have deep 'inner work' to do. They come together with them in a way that is supportive but not invasive, that asks a lot of questions but never renders judgment or gives advice. They come together with them in a way that respects the mystery of the human heart, but that still allows people to challenge and stretch one another in that work.³⁹

Pastors, too, must be formed by the Spirit in community in order to serve the community out of wholeness and strength. Congregations expect pastors to be mature, spiritually formed, so that they can lead, teach, and preach with effectiveness. Without community as part of the formative work, pastors will not grow in full maturity and will be more susceptible to moral failure. "We must always be vigilant against thinking that we can grow ourselves in faith and faith-life or that we, pastoral servants, are 'necessary' to the formation of congregation members."⁴⁰

Pastors, like other believers, are spiritually formed in community, but pastors can especially be tempted to short-circuit the listening

process of direction by trying to solve problems, give comfort, or just share their own thoughts. Bonhoeffer emphasizes that to listen is prior to and sometimes greater than to speak:

So it is His work that we do for our brother when we learn to listen to him. Christians, especially ministers, so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others, that this is the one service they have to render. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking.⁴¹

This is a significant issue when pastors engage in spiritual direction, since pastoral training emphasizes the skills of teaching, training, and problem-solving. Pastors engaged in spiritual direction need to learn what Eugene Peterson describes as “the two essential preconditions for spiritual direction: unknowing and uncaring.” Of “unknowing” he writes:

Spiritual direction is not an opportunity for one person to instruct another in Bible or doctrine. Teaching is an essential ministry in the community of faith. Knowing the scriptures, knowing the revelation of God in Israel and in Christ, is supremely important. But there are moments when diligent catechesis is not required and a leisurely pause before mystery is. None of us knows in detail what God is doing in another. What we don’t know far exceeds what we do know. There are times in life when someone needs to represent that vast unknowing to us. When that takes place, spiritual direction is in motion.⁴²

Part of this unknowing includes setting aside some preconceived ideas about the presenter, about the other group members, and about how God has, can, or will work.

In addition to “unknowing,” pastors also need to practice “uncaring” as part of their work of direction. Peterson says this of “uncaring”:

Spiritual direction is not an occasion for one person to help another in compassion. Compassion is an essential ministry in the community of faith. When we get hurt, rejected, maimed emotionally and physically, we require the loving and healing help of another. Helping in Jesus’ name is supremely important. But there are moments when caring is not required, when detachment is appropriate. What the Spirit is doing in other persons far exceeds what we ourselves are doing. There are times in life when someone needs to get out of the way in order that we might become aware of the “silent music.” When that takes place, spiritual direction is in motion.⁴³

This “uncaring” seems paradoxical with Bonhoeffer’s comments about listening as being an expression of love for another, but group direction includes both. Listening is an important part of love for another, but in direction it must be disconnected from the pastoral instinct to provide counseling and care, to solve problems. It involves humility before another person’s soul, being “unknowing” and “uncaring” and so, also, willing to allow God to be the one who knows and cares. John of the Cross writes that spiritual directors should determine the way “by which God is leading the soul, and if they know it not, let them leave the soul in peace and not disturb it.”⁴⁴

The invitation is for the group members to be fully present for one another, both in presenting and in listening. In presenting and listening, we are called to humility, trusting God to speak and lead as he will. As pastors, we may need to set aside our training and desire to compassionately fix things for each other, so that we may attentively

listen with unknowing and uncaring. A group of pastors, meeting together and listening for God in each others' lives in this way, can provide a safe environment to learn and grow together, to be formed together in the image of Christ for the benefit of others.

Iowa Interlude: The Problem of Problem-Solving

Early in our group's story, there was a distinct tendency for the members to want to solve problems. Some presenters wanted advice. Some listeners were willing to give it. Although we had a designated time for listeners to respond to presenters, some didn't even want to wait for the presenter's time to be over before dispensing wisdom. It was important for the facilitator to step in gently and consistently to remind the group that we are not gathered to give advice or problem-solve. It took a few meetings for us pastors to set aside our knowledge and experience and our desire to solve problems. Once we did, we were able to be more fully attentive to the presenter and to the Spirit.

Length of Meetings

In organizing the group meetings, it is important to provide time for prayerful listening and allow the process to unfold fully. It may be best to keep meetings no longer than two-and-a-half hours, as longer meetings will strain the ability of most people to listen effectively. “A quiet room, moderate temperature, and comfortable seats will make it easier for people to concentrate.”⁴⁵ In addition, seating the group in a circle allows for the group to see all the members, alert for physical cues, as well as to symbolize the community and equality of the group.⁴⁶

There also should be significant time between meetings to allow for the group process to have its effect within people, where Dougherty says “ultimately all discernment happens.” She suggests four-week or five-week intervals, unless the group divides the sharing times into two segments, half at one meeting and half at the next. In such a situation, meetings could be held bi-weekly.⁴⁷

Once the group has been formed and the initial meeting has been held, at which the purpose and process have been described, and at which hopes and fears for the process have been discussed, the regular meetings will be held. The meetings must provide sufficient space for group members to share, to listen, and to reflect back upon what is shared with the group.

Iowa Interlude: Benefitting from Longer Sessions

Our group in Iowa had seven members, so we committed to spending a full afternoon together each time we met. It was long and intense, but full of benefits for us all. Our group was determined by the number of pastors from the county who responded positively. Six members, plus me. Had it been any larger, we would have formed two groups. Although I initially planned to only be a facilitator and not a presenter, the group insisted I be a presenter, too. They were wise. Although the time frame was stretched, the group bonded more fully through the increase of time together. Like the rest of the group members, I felt both the anxiety of presenting at the first meeting and the wonder of hearing God's voice in the words of colleagues who listened to my story. Though we took whole afternoons for the group, we reaped the benefits together.

How Should We Conduct Our Meetings?

Our group in Iowa used this simple format:⁴⁸

1. **Gathering Time.** Five to ten minutes to visit and reacquaint the participants with each other.
2. **Silence to Prepare Our Hearts.** This time would consist of five minutes of silent reflection and prayer to prepare the participants for the session.
3. **Presentation.** A presenter would be given up to ten to fifteen minutes to talk about an incident or issue in his ministry or life. Questions would be allowed from the other participants for clarification only.
4. **Silent Reflection.** Three to four minutes would be given for prayerful reflection on the presentation, with attention paid to the promptings of the Spirit and the presence of God in the presentation.
5. **Response.** The participants would spend up to ten minutes to share insights gained during the presentation and reflection times.
6. **Silent Prayer, Including for Any Absent Members.** Five minutes would be given to pray silently for the presenter and to prepare the participants' hearts for the next presenter.
7. Items 3 through 6 would be repeated so that each participant would have the opportunity to present.
8. **Prayer.** Conclude the session with silent prayer, about five minutes. If any members of the group were absent, this time would include prayer for these members.
9. **Reflection.** Up to ten minutes would be spent in reflection on the session.

Let's unpack this process and note some suggestions and ideas to consider as you structure your group sessions.

1. **Gathering Time.** Five to ten minutes to visit and reacquaint the participants with each other.

It is important to build community in the group. A brief time to gather, check in with each other, and settle into the space together is helpful. Fight the temptation to linger too long, but don't make the mistake of missing the time to reconnect with each other.

2. **Silence to Prepare Our Hearts.** This time would consist of five minutes of silent reflection and prayer to prepare the participants for the session.

The facilitator may open with a brief prayer and/or an invitation for the participants to pray silently. The lights could be dimmed to create a more prayerful atmosphere,⁴⁹ or a candle could be placed in the midst of the group as a reminder of Christ's presence.⁵⁰ These times of silence are an opportunity for group members to "become settled in God's presence."⁵¹ This five minute period ends with an invitation from the facilitator for a member to begin sharing when ready.⁵²

3. **Presentation.** A presenter would be given up to ten to fifteen minutes to talk about an incident or issue in his ministry or life. Questions would be allowed from the other participants for clarification only.

During this ten to fifteen minute period, the presenter talks about something from her experience. Whatever is shared should be offered in the context of the presenter's relationship with God. The presenter's prayer life in relation to what is shared should be part of the presentation. The presenter should avoid seeking advice, solutions, or information, but should instead present what is going on in her life.

During this time the group listens prayerfully without interruption.⁵³ Members should listen with the whole self (senses, intuition, feelings, rational faculties).⁵⁴ Kropf and Schrock describe listening in three directions: to the person, to the group, and to the Holy Spirit. Listening to the person involves hearing what is described while also noticing desires, especially deeper desires of the soul. Listening to the group means noticing what the group notices and also looking for movements or patterns that develop in the group or in individuals over time. Listening to the Holy Spirit is an invitation to notice “the gentle murmurs and rustlings of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁵

4. **Silent Reflection.** Three to four minutes would be given for prayerful reflection on the presentation, with attention paid to the promptings of the Spirit and the presence of God in the presentation.

During this three to four minute period, space is made for God to cut through our biases and habitual responses to prompt prayerful responses to the presenter. “Silence can be a tremendous gift in group direction, especially when emotions surfaced in the presenter.”⁵⁶ This silence can be difficult at first, but it is appreciated by the members after it has been practiced over a number of meetings.⁵⁷

5. **Response.** The participants would spend up to ten minutes to share insights gained during the presentation and reflection times.

This ten minute period is initiated by the facilitator, who invites questions or comments from the group members. These questions should be life giving, inviting presenters to search, to go deeper, to wonder.⁵⁸ Having listened prayerfully, group members ask questions that help to bring focus⁵⁹ or to offer images or to call to mind

Scripture passages or other ideas that were raised in their spirits.⁶⁰ Noticing emotions and inviting reflection on them – “Can you say more about the ____ [anger, fear, perplexity, etc.]?” – often proves helpful.⁶¹

Group members may want to “fix” things by offering advice or suggestions, but the facilitator or other group members should help to bring the group back to listening, perhaps by another period of silence, if necessary. Beginning a question with “why” is usually unhelpful, as is asking if the presenter has prayed about a matter.⁶² Giving advice in the form of a question or asking questions simply for curiosity’s sake should be avoided.⁶³

The facilitator may need to make gentle comments to help keep the group on task. Questions such as, “Has everyone who wants to speak had a chance to do so?” or “Are we truly listening to one another?” or, when a speaker has gone too long, “Have we heard the heart of what you have to say?” or “Could you wind up your remarks so that other can speak?” can be helpful for focusing and directing the group process.⁶⁴

Members should “listen to the group as a whole; be attuned to those who have not spoken verbally as well as those who have.”⁶⁵

Listening for the flow of the group, rather than sharing a personal agenda for the presenter, should be the nature of the responses. Offering images, questions, or even sitting in silence together can be helpful ways of responding to what was shared.⁶⁶ A few good questions are much more helpful than a lot of questions.

“Sometimes questions lose their value because we ask too many.”⁶⁷ Responses should be short and to the point, allowing all members the opportunity to respond, if they feel so led.⁶⁸

6. **Silent Prayer.** Five minutes would be given to pray silently for the presenter and to prepare the participants' hearts for the next presenter.

This five minute period is intended to be used for prayers for the presenter and for re-centering before the next presenter. The presenter may want to take notes on what was shared.⁶⁹

Iowa Interlude: Silence

Our group quickly discovered the importance of silence. The discipline of silence is difficult for many, but the context of prayerful reflection and attentiveness to the divine required these spaces of silence in the group time. One member said that "over time, this silence became the best part of the sessions as we waited and listened for God to impress upon us a thought or image." Another said, "After awhile I felt myself craving [the times of silence]. The prayerful silence formed the structure for the whole experience which caused us to focus on listening to God rather than on what we were saying." We realized that if we were ever pressed for time in our meetings, we would not shorten the times of silence.

7. Items 3 through 6 would be repeated so that each participant would have the opportunity to present.

The process repeats, with a break at the midpoint, if necessary, until all the group members have presented.⁷⁰ Breaks are useful for preventing fatigue, restlessness, and discomfort, and can aid in keeping the process from becoming overly repetitive or intense.⁷¹

8. Prayer, Including for Any Absent Members. Conclude the session with silent prayer, about five minutes. If any members of the group were absent, this time would include prayer for these members.

This time of at least ten minutes is inserted at any point during the meeting, but should not be forgotten, as it honors the belief that the most important thing we can do for another person is to pray, and that their presence is not necessary for us to do this important thing.⁷²

9. Reflection. Up to ten minutes would be spent in reflection on the session. Questions⁷³ to consider would include:

- How well did the group stay focused on the spiritual life of each presenter, and God's presence in each person?
- Were there any places where the group seemed to get off track?
- What was the quality of the silence?
- What was the quality of our attention to God?
- Were there any personal responses to one's own presentation or the responses?
- When I was the presenter, was I vulnerable, willing to share what seemed to be called for? Was I open to hearing what others had to say to me?
- As a listener for the others, where did my words or my silence seem to be coming from? A place of trust? A place of competition? My need to feel superior to others or appear learned? Am I willing simply to offer a question, an idea, or an image to a person for their consideration and then let go of it, or do I keep on pushing it?
- Is there any particular awareness or prayer that we take from our time together?
- Did a member or the group sense any nudges of God's presence?
- Is there anything the group should do differently in the future?

This concluding time of about ten minutes is meant to be a time for “noticing with God how the time together went, and an honest sharing around what is seen.”⁷⁴ It’s a good time for personal reflection (what was happening in me as presenter/as a listener?), group reflection (how did it go? what could we improve?), and spiritual reflection (what may God be up to in our group?).

A Gift for You to Unwrap?

Dear Reader, I began this booklet with an invitation to discover if group spiritual direction may be a gift to unwrap for you and others whose hearts are also stirred, whose longings are also being awakened. So once again I extend the invitation to gather some others with you to open this gift together.

As you consider unwrapping this gift, note that there are two appendices to this booklet. One is a brief, annotated list of books that may be helpful if you want to learn more about group spiritual direction. The other is the brief format of a group spiritual direction session – ready for handy reference when you gather a group to meet.

So take some time to pray and consider whether now is the time to unwrap the gift of group spiritual direction. Prayerfully wonder if there are others who may be drawn to this gift, who might find joy and blessing in unwrapping the gift with you. This gift has been unwrapped by many disciples of Jesus before you. Perhaps now is the time for you to unwrap it with others.

My prayer is that this gift will bless you as it blessed seven pastors in Iowa.

Helpful Books for Spiritual Direction Groups

Dougherty, Rose Mary, S.S.N.D. *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment*. New York: Paulist Press, 1995

The first book on group spiritual direction. A solid introduction to principles and practice. Describes the practice used by Dougherty with large groups of participants who then move to smaller groups for the actual group direction sessions. This was the basis of our project in Iowa.

Fryling, Alice. *Seeking God Together: An Introduction to Group Spiritual Direction*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009

A solid, evangelical introduction to the practice of group spiritual direction. Fryling explores some of the essentials of group direction – listening, prayer, question asking, confession, scripture meditation, etc. – in much more detail. An excellent guidebook to group spiritual direction.

Kropf, Marlene and Daniel Schrock, eds. *An Open Place: The Ministry of Group Spiritual Direction*. New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2012

A collection of essays on a variety of topics related to group spiritual direction. Deals with topics like confidentiality, denominational mentoring, fellowship, diversity, hospitality. Includes a section of essays about different constituent groups for group direction such as business people, women, retirement communities, and pastors.

Prechtel, Daniel L. *Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Spiritual Direction for Small Groups*. New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2012

Describes a variety of types of spiritual direction groups while providing helpful resources for them. Includes groups focused on holy reading, contemplative prayer, dreamwork, transitions, healing, peace and justice. Creative ideas and practical resources.

Sajdak, Jeffrey L. *Group Spiritual Direction for Pastors in Sioux County, Iowa*. D.Min. thesis. St. Paul, MN: Bethel University, 2005

If you want the story of our little group in Iowa and the research that went with it, this is it. Accessible through TREN Dissertations at Asbury Seminary here:

<https://place.asburyseminary.edu/trendisertations/3643/>

Webb, Heather. *Small Group Leadership as Spiritual Direction: Practical Ways to Blend an Ancient Art into Your Contemporary Community*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005

Considers how the principles and practices of spiritual direction can be used in small group ministries within the church. Provides examples of what this might look like with story-centered, text-centered, and prayer-centered groups. Not about pastors or group spiritual direction per se, but helpful for understanding and bridging the gap to ministry.

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- ¹ Eugene H. Peterson. *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987, 18.
- ² Frederick Buechner. *The Sacred Journey: A Memoir of Early Days*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1982, 77-78.
- ³ Without a doubt, laypeople will also benefit from a spiritual direction group, but this guide is meant as a resource especially for pastors and other church leaders. If you are considering group spiritual direction for laypeople, this guide will still be useful, but may require some translation to a different context.
- ⁴ This booklet has been adapted and expanded from my D.Min. thesis at Bethel University, with the encouragement of Carol Muller and the support of my colleagues at Calvin Theological Seminary.
- ⁵ Parker J. Palmer. *Leading From Within: Reflections On Spirituality And Leadership*. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana Office for Campus Ministries, 1990, 5.
- ⁶ Palmer, 5.
- ⁷ Ben Campbell Johnson and Andrew Dreitcer. *Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001, 22.
- ⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures To My Students: Complete and Unabridged*. New ed. containing Selected Lectures from series 1, 2, and 3. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954, 216.
- ⁹ Johnson and Dreitcer, 88.
- ¹⁰ Johnson and Dreitcer, 30.
- ¹¹ Johnson and Dreitcer, 88.
- ¹² Johnson and Dreitcer, 30-31.
- ¹³ Johnson and Dreitcer, 88.
- ¹⁴ M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993, 156-157.
- ¹⁵ Mulholland, 157.
- ¹⁶ Marva J. Dawn, "The Call to Be Formed and Transformed by the Spirit of the Ascended Christ." In Marva J. Dawn and Eugene H. Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call*. ed. by Peter Santucci. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000, 149.
- ¹⁷ See "Helpful Books for Spiritual Direction Groups" at the end of this booklet.
- ¹⁸ Rose Mary Dougherty, S.S.N.D., *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment*. New York: Paulist Press, 1995, 57.
- ¹⁹ Daniel L. Prechtel, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Spiritual Direction for Small Groups*, New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2012, 115-116.
- ²⁰ Dougherty, 45.
- ²¹ A good sample covenant can be found in the appendix of Marlene Kropf and Daniel Schrock, eds., *An Open Place: The Ministry of Group Spiritual Direction*, New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2012, 175.
- ²² Alice Fryling, *Seeking God Together: An Introduction to Group Spiritual Direction*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009, 29.
- ²³ Dougherty, 56.
- ²⁴ Dougherty, 56-57.
- ²⁵ Johnson and Dreitcer, 115.
- ²⁶ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, Revised Edition, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988, 186.
- ²⁷ Dougherty, 64-65.
- ²⁸ Marlene Kropf, "Becoming Faithful Mirrors: Diversity in Group Direction," chapter in Kropf and Schrock, 155.
- ²⁹ Dougherty, 63.
- ³⁰ Group direction has grown in some circles as a practice within psychotherapy.
- ³¹ See Sarah Bania-Dobyn, *Liturgy and Imagination in Group Spiritual Direction*, Presence, 18:4, December 2012, 54-60.
- ³² One group used the development of one character from the television series *M*A*S*H* as a focus for their meetings. (Jerilyn E. Felton, "A Cultural Icon as the Basis for Group Spiritual Direction: The 'Theology of M*A*S*H'", Presence, 16:2, June 2010, 50-54)

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- ³³ Prechtel, 25.
- ³⁴ Jeffrey L. Reese, "Group Direction in Denominational Mentoring Structures," chapter in Kropf and Schrock, 101-102.
- ³⁵ Dougherty, 65.
- ³⁶ Dougherty, 65.
- ³⁷ Dougherty, 38.
- ³⁸ Dougherty, 66.
- ³⁹ Palmer, 16.
- ⁴⁰ Dawn, 149.
- ⁴¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Life Together: A Discussion of Christian Fellowship*. Trans. by John W. Doberstein. New York: Harper & Row, 1954, 97.
- ⁴² Eugene H. Peterson. *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992, first paperback ed., 1994, 186.
- ⁴³ Peterson, *Unpredictable Plant*, 186-187.
- ⁴⁴ John of the Cross, quoted in Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend: Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction*, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980, 128.
- ⁴⁵ Suzanne G. Farnham, Stephanie A. Hull, R. Taylor McLean. *Grounded in God: Listening Hearts Discernment for Group Deliberations*. Rev. ed. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999, 74.
- ⁴⁶ Farnham, Hull, McLean, 74.
- ⁴⁷ Dougherty, 63.
- ⁴⁸ Based on Dougherty, 49-55.
- ⁴⁹ Suzanne G. Farnham, Joseph P. Gill, R. Taylor McLean, and Susan M. Ward, *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community*. Revised edition. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1991, 80.
- ⁵⁰ Farnham, Hull, McLean, 74.
- ⁵¹ Farnham, Hull, McLean, 58.
- ⁵² Dougherty, 50.
- ⁵³ Dougherty, 50.
- ⁵⁴ Farnham, Hull, McLean, 58-59.
- ⁵⁵ Marlene Kropf and Daniel Schrock, "Practical Considerations in Group Spiritual Direction," chapter in Marlene Kropf and Daniel Schrock, eds., *An Open Place: The Ministry of Group Spiritual Direction*, New York: Morehouse Publishing, 5-7, 2012.
- ⁵⁶ Jeffrey L. Reese, "With Seasoned Clergy," chapter in Kropf and Schrock, 53.
- ⁵⁷ Dougherty, 50-51.
- ⁵⁸ Fryling's chapter, "Asking Life-Giving Questions," 45-54, is a helpful chapter.
- ⁵⁹ Farnham, Gill, McLean, Ward, 80.
- ⁶⁰ Farnham, Gill, McLean, Ward, 81.
- ⁶¹ Fryling, 62.
- ⁶² Fryling, 53-54.
- ⁶³ Farnham, Gill, McLean, Ward, 81.
- ⁶⁴ Farnham, Hull, McLean, 62.
- ⁶⁵ Farnham, Hull, McLean, 60.
- ⁶⁶ Dougherty, 51.
- ⁶⁷ Fryling, 54.
- ⁶⁸ Farnham, Gill, McLean, Ward, 82.
- ⁶⁹ Dougherty, 51.
- ⁷⁰ Dougherty, 51.
- ⁷¹ Farnham, Hull, McLean, 74-75.
- ⁷² Dougherty, 53.
- ⁷³ Some of these questions are adapted from Dougherty, 53-54.
- ⁷⁴ Dougherty, 53.

A Simple Format for a Spiritual Direction Group

1. **Gathering Time.** Five to ten minutes to visit and reacquaint the participants with each other.
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