
A MOTHER'S GUIDE
TO

*Spiritual
Direction*



LIS LUWIA

A CATHOLICMOMMYBLOGS.COM BOOK

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DEDICATION

To my husband, for teaching me what my heart is capable of.

To my children: your smiles are contagious.

To the readers and contributors at CatholicMommyBlogs.com, thank you for your support and encouragement.

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A huge, round of applause for Fr. Mike Schmitz and Fr. Rocky for your advice, helping to form this book.



INTRODUCTION

I know you want to start off with me answering the question: Do Catholic Moms need Spiritual Directors? But hold on! We have to lay the foundation first, right? Don't worry; we'll get to it!

I know you're pretty busy, Mom. Your children might have just gone to bed and this is your free time or maybe you're putting off doing the dishes for the umpteenth time today. (That's an all too familiar feeling!) Whatever it is, I just want to say that you did the right thing. Instead of vegging in front of the tv, you're making an active effort to learn more about prayer and how you can become closer to God.

Do you know how happy you must make him feel because of this? Just by making that conscious effort, you are acting like such an amazing disciple!

Ok, let's get down to it. I read St. Faustina's *Diary (Appendix 1)*, which is a feat in itself. If you haven't read it and like challenges, my friend told me that few people actually finish the book... because it makes you want to

change your life, flip it upside down, shake it,

and pour the goodness of God all over it. It sounds amazing, but change is hard and scary. Take the challenge!

In the *Diary*, St. Faustina describes her spiritual director and how much he helped her to understand certain aspects of her spiritual life. It made me contemplate what a spiritual director could help me with in my life. And I came back with so many ideas!

You see, if St. Faustina grew in her faith with the help of a spiritual director, shouldn't I also attempt to do so? Would I be a fool not to? Through my indecisiveness (and hope that God would plop a spiritual director down on my doorstep to answer my prayers), I started researching everything I could get my hands on about spiritual direction. I wanted to know if a spiritual director was really necessary for me, a homeschooling mom, to have a director.

Through my research and contemplation, I soon realized that the knowledge I was collecting was quickly becoming a book of valuable information. And it answered my questions.

So I started writing, because the goal of my website, CatholicMommyBlogs.com, is to provide information on the Catholic faith and connect Catholic moms. This book fits right in line with that mission and I figured that if I pondered these questions others might too. Why not provide the answers for you?

You might be wondering about my degree or what exactly makes me credible in this subject. I don't have a theology degree (maybe someday?), but I did find some

AWESome resources, saint quotes on spiritual direction, and what the Catechism of the Catholic Church says on the subject.

In addition, I reached out of some very well-known folks in Catholic media and they sent me exclusive answers to my questions. You won't find these quotes anywhere else... from Fr. Rocky at Relevant Radio and Fr. Mike Schmitz. So, thankfully, I'm not alone in uncovering this beautiful mysetery and presenting it to you. Thanks to the help of these souls, this book has come to fruition.

I'd also like to give a super awesome shout-out to my amazing husband. There are no words to describe how much I love this man. And my children are my sweet everythings. I'm so blessed to spend everyday with them and their beautiful personalities.

I hope that you enjoy reading this book and become a part of our Catholic Mommy Blogs community through following us on scoail media (see Author's bio at the end of the book for links), CatholicMommyBlogs.com, and through emails. This website is here for you.



WHAT IS SPIRITUAL DIRECTION?

If you're reading this book, you may be wondering if spiritual direction is the right path for you or you may just be interested in learning more about it. Or, maybe you found this book on your computer and you're wondering where all those pictures you took of your baby last year have gone.

Whatever your interest is, I hope to uncover your basic questions concerning spiritual direction and provide you with the facts so you can make an informed choice. Let's get to it!

So, What is it? Spiritual direction is when someone attempts to deepen their relationship with God and to grow in their spirituality

As you may have seen before, spiritual direction is commonly referred to in books written by saints. The saint might refer to something that their spiritual director said (like I mentioned with St. Faustina in the Introduction) and it makes you, the reader, wonder if you

should also have a spiritual director. After all, if this saint who you are inclined to follow to Christ's kingdom had a spiritual director... shouldn't you?

In Matthew 7:14, we can read "But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (NIV)

Yes, We have rules that have been established for us and Jesus has given us a path to follow to get into Heaven, but that road may look different for each person. Something that worked for St. Francis won't necessarily work for St. Faustina or me or you. God gives each of us different gifts and provides different things in our lives to help us along the way. We should expect that our road to eternal life looks different from our neighbors' road. How do we know if we're walking the road in the right direction?

I believe that having a spiritual direction is essential to growing in the faith and growing spiritually closer to God. Yes, you can walk the right "road that leads to life" and you can grow closer to God on your own, but there is so much left to uncover –unveil- before our eyes so we can more clearly understand God and His purpose for us in our lives. Spiritual directors can help to lift that cover and help you to glimpse inside of your soul, your actions, and your feelings so that you can mold them better into the image that the Creator desires from you.

Saints have had spiritual directors, as well as priests, nuns, and religious sisters and brothers. Why are we, the laypeople, uncertain if we need that as a priority in our prayer life? **Do we somehow believe that these religious sisters and brothers are called to a deeper**

faith than we are?

Unfortunately, some people do think that. If a nun devotes her entire life to prayer and service, than it would be only reasonable for her to have a spiritual director, right?

How about you, as a mom? **Your life is devoted to prayer and service too, right? It could be, if you choose to look at it like that.** Our service looks different than a nun's, and our prayers do too, but in the end, *essentially* we're doing the same type of things: working hard, serving, loving others, and praying. It's the core of what we do as moms, when all those distractions don't get in the way, that is.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, when discussing someone seeking spiritual direction, describes the person looking for a spiritual director (added emphasis):

"According to St. John of the Cross, the person *wishing to advance toward perfection*" (16)

Again: the Catechism describes a person seeking spiritual direction as "the person wishing to advance towards perfection." The Catholic Church doesn't require everyone to seek a spiritual director, but they believe that those who wish to "advance towards perfection" does. Shouldn't everyone want to advance towards perfection and sanctification?

So I'm going to say this flat out: I think everyone who is called to deepen their prayer life and wants to grow closer to God should consider a spiritual director of some type.

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called to deepen their prayer life and wants to grow closer to God should consider a spiritual director of some type.

Spiritual direction could look different, just like that path you're on to get into Heaven. Let's delve into the two types: traditional and having an accountability partner.

Traditional: It could be through contact with a priest in a traditional setting: meetings monthly and confession with your spiritual director.

Accountability Partner: This could mean that your best friend, who is faithful and responsible, holds you to the truths of the church and pushes you to grow in faith. That's great!

When I asked Father Mike Schmitz, a priest and social media evangelist if he thought mothers needed spiritual directors, he responded,

"What I would encourage is spiritual friendship or "disciplining" even. Some form of accountability can be very good."

Catholic blogger, Kendra from Catholic All Year, says,

"St. John Paul II's first spiritual director was the town tailor. Not because he was a tailor, of course, but because he was a holy man, living out his faith. A good, knowledgeable Catholic, can help you become a good, knowledgeable Catholic. And can give you support and accountability" (2).

Having friends and accountability partners who can walk with you on the journey to heaven are most beneficial.

However, you have to be sure that they can and will keep you accountable. You will need to ensure that they can speak the truth into your life regardless, and you have to be open to hearing it.

When it comes down to these two options, I lean more towards the traditional form of a spiritual director because of the depth of insight that he could provide, however I can see how many people, especially in smaller communities without access to spiritual directors or those with a tight-knit group of friends, could benefit highly from an accountability partner. And if it is possible, both avenues of spiritual direction at work in your life could be most beneficial to your spiritual life.

I love this simple statement from Julie Paavola describing what spiritual direction is:

“Spiritual direction is a discipline, like fasting, prayer and other practices that are meant to lead us to greater intimacy with God” (3).

What Julie is really describing here is another way for us to grow in deeper intimacy with God. Spiritual direction could potentially help all people grow in faith, just like other types of prayer and sacrifice can. Finish reading this, pray about it, and listen to what God has to say about this in relation to your own spiritual journey.



IS SPIRITUAL DIRECTION RIGHT FOR ME?

The priest who oversaw my husband and my pre-marital counseling in the Catholic Church once said that we:

“go through a dozen years of schooling to prepare us for the ‘real world,’ go to a couple years worth of college to prepare ourselves for a job, and some couples don’t think it is necessary to go through a year’s worth of pre-marital counseling to prepare themselves for a lifetime of marriage.”

These words resonated with me then, and they still do, but to a different effect. Now, I consider them in light of spiritual direction. We go through all of this education (primary school, college, etc) to prepare us for success in this world, but what about educating and preparing ourselves for our eternal life... after we’ve already been confirmed (or gone through RCIA) in the church?

St. Vincent Ferrer, in discussing the importance of a spiritual director says (emphasis added):

“Our Lord Jesus Christ, without whom we can do nothing, will not give his grace to him who, though he has access to an expert guide, rejects **this precious means of sanctification**, thinking that he can look on after his own everything that touches on his salvation. **He who has a director... will reach his goal more easily and more quickly than if he acted as his own guide**, even if he be very intelligent and have the very best of spiritual books” (4).

St. Vincent thinks spiritual direction is a “precious mean of sanctification” and that spiritual direction will help us to reach our spiritual goals more easily. Sign me up! What mom doesn’t want life a little easier, especially when we’re putting kids to bed? I could use a little more Holy Spirit in my life to control my patience and St. Vincent is saying spiritual direction will help me. What could it help you with?

St. Josemaria Escriva concurs with his own thoughts on spiritual direction (emphasis added):

“You wouldn’t think of building a good house to live in here on earth without an architect. How can you ever hope, without a director, to **build the castle of your sanctification** in order to live forever in heaven?” (5).

and

“You think you are really somebody: your studies — your research, your publications, your social position, your name, your political accomplishments — the offices you hold, your wealth, your age ... no longer a child. Precisely because of all of this, you – more than others – **need a**

director for your soul.” (6).

According to these great saints, spiritual direction would be beneficial to everyone, especially those who consider their own accomplishments of great importance. I’m sure we can all attest to this feeling at times.

Now, I’m not talking about taking pride in your work or the excitement you feel when you accomplish a great feat. I’m talking about that idea of taking credit for something that you are or have done and separating God from that accomplishment.

For example, a mom might say, “I work full-time, make dinner every night, and find time to exercise and spend time with my kids. My organization skills really make my life run smoother.”

This mom might be putting all of the credit of her life running smoothly on her own shoulders. (I say “might” because you never know what she is really thinking.)

Here is an example of how she could give God credit for some of her accomplishments:

“I work full-time, make dinner every night, and find time to exercise and spend time with my kids. By the grace of God, organizing everything really made my life run smoother.”

Do you see the difference? She didn’t take the credit; she gave it to God, where it belongs. Because we know

that without Him, what goodness could we truly accomplish?

Now that I've completely digressed, let's get back to what the saints are saying. In both St. Vincent and St. Josemaria's quotes we see this word "*sanctification.*" Do these saints really think we can become sanctified, become

holy? It sounds like a heavy, unattainable burden, doesn't it? I mean, those saints were *really* holy people!

But Pope Francis tells us on Twitter, "To be saints is not a privilege for the few, but a vocation for everyone" (7).

I guess that means me too. And all those busy moms who barely have time for a shower, struggle to keep their kids in line at the grocery store and growl at their husband if he's five minutes late getting home. Pope Francis means everyone can be a saint. Take a moment to reflect on these questions:

Do you believe you can become a saint? Really?

Do you know what you have to change in your life in order to become closer to sanctification?

Do you know how to do it?

Reflect on these questions and write out the answers. This can be your first set of notes to bring into the meeting with your spiritual director, if you decide to go that route. Either way, understand that a spiritual director can help you to find a way to become closer to sanctification. It's not always easy to see the answer, but it helps having a more

spiritually mature, outside perspective help to show you.

Why Spiritual Direction?

The primary focus of spiritual direction is to deepen your relationship with God and have a better understanding of your relationship with God. A spiritual director's main responsibilities from the time he or she spends with you will be to ask questions, offer suggestions, help you to grow in prayer, and help you to uncover the voice of the Holy Spirit within your soul.

Your spiritual director isn't going to give you a magic formula to comprehend all of God's mysteries or solve your life's problems. But he might just be the key to help you hear God's voice more clearly, to forgive those people in your life who have wronged you, and to make drastic steps to change your life to live more in Christ. Because if that's not what we're living for... what is?

In addition, spiritual direction can help set you on the right course. According to Dan Burke,

"[Pope Benedict says] a spiritual guide helps ward off subjectivist interpretations as well as providing the counseled with the guide's 'own supply of knowledge and experiences in following Jesus.'

"He likened spiritual direction to the "personal relationship that the Lord had with his disciples, that special bond with which he led them, following him, to embrace the will of the Father (cf. Luke 22:42), that is, to embrace the cross" (8).

Attributes

The Emmaus House is a Catholic spiritual retreat center that specializes in spiritual direction. They listed some attributes that people in need of spiritual directors may have.

“Spiritual Direction may be for you if...

- You are an average person who is serious about growing in your spiritual life.
- You desire to deepen your relationship with God.
- You wish to have an opportunity to talk about your life journey and how God fits into this journey.
 - You are interested in exploring spirituality and different ways of praying.
 - You desire to become more aware of God's presence.
 - You are striving to become a person who lives for others and you wish to have your life centered in God” (9).

I wish this list described everyone, but I know not everyone is interested in deepening his or her relationship with God. However, did you notice that this list doesn't say “unless?” It doesn't say

You desire to deepen your relationship with God *unless you are a busy, stay-at-home mom/ working full-time and exhausted mom, single mom, etc.*

You desire to deepen your relationship with God *unless you just started a new job and you're too busy or your in-laws are visiting.*

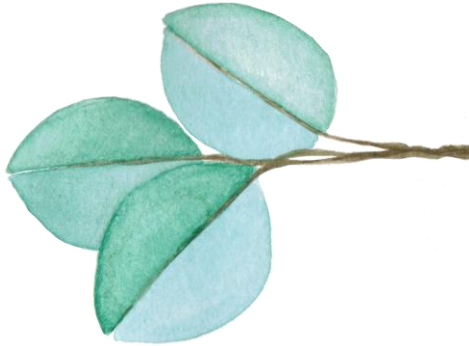
The word “unless” (with the excuse) isn’t there because spiritual direction can be for everyone. *Everyone who wants to make the effort.*

I’ll leave you with this thought from Woodeene Koenig-Bricker, writer The Catholic Answer:

“If you wanted to become a mountain climber, you could go to a sports store, purchase some equipment, read a book and head out to ascend the nearest slope. However, the odds are pretty good that you would have problems that might easily be avoided if you had consulted someone who had actually climbed mountains. In the same way, a spiritual director is able to give you advice that can assist you through some common pitfalls on the

spiritual journey. For instance, he or she might recommend valuable readings, suggest ways of prayer and encourage participation in different devotions- activities you might not ever think of on your own.

“While having a spiritual director isn’t a necessity (if it were, the Church would require it), the outside help and advice a spiritual director offers can often help you both deepen and mature your faith much more quickly than if you were doing it all alone” (10).



SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS, SPIRITUAL MENTORS & COUNSELORS- OH MY!

(Disclaimer: I am not a medical professional and cannot assist in determining which of these helpers best suits you, but I can give you the information for you to determine your own choice.)

What's the difference between spiritual directors, spiritual mentors, and counselors and which one should you see? Maybe you feel like you need that guidance but spiritual direction isn't the path for you.

It is important to choose the right helper in your life, whether you plan to use the help of a spiritual director, spiritual mentor, or counselor... or even a combination of these options. When choosing what helper fits your situation best, it is important to reflect interiorly and understand what your true need is. From his book, *Navigating the Interior Life*, Dan Burke says:

“The psychological and physical aspects of our souls impact our spiritual lives. There is no easy way to extricate these realities from one another. Yet, just as you would not go to a spiritual director for physical therapy, it is also unwise to attempt to deal with deep psychological issues with a spiritual director (at least not one who has not received special training in both fields).

“It is true that the state of our spiritual lives can and will affect us emotionally. If these emotions prove to be a hindrance to your spiritual progress, they should be addressed with your spiritual director. Conversely, your spiritual life, as it grows, will positively impact your psychological and physical health.

“When emotional or psychological issues are serious, it is important to seek out those specially trained professionals that can help you as needed” (11).

Improving your spiritual life can help other problem areas in the rest of your life, but it isn't a one fix all. If you have emotional or psychological needs that aren't or can't be addressed through spiritual direction, you may need to consider visiting a professional for care in that area.

Please see appendix for larger view of this chart (12).

Comparison of Helping Relationships: Nurturing Mental and Spiritual Health and Wellbeing

One-to-One Helping Modalities	People Involved Who comes? Why?	Goal/Purpose Why stay?	Relational Process What happens?	Techniques How does it work?	Content What to talk about?	Assessment How is it going?	Professionalization
Spiritual Direction	A person who is mentally stable and mature and is seeking Mystery many name God	Deepen one's relationship with God; discover, attend to, and savor presence of God every day	Telling of stories; open responses; silence; waiting; noticing; together God's guidance	Sharing; listening; discernment; and contemplative practices, e.g. prayer, surrendering ego to God's guidance	Daily life, relationships, deepest desires, struggles, prayer, God's presence and spiritual director's responses	Discernment; mutually agreed-upon evaluation; deepening of relationship with Mystery many name God	Potential for fees or exchange of services; variety of training programs; not accredited; professional guild
Pastoral Care	A mentally stable parishioner or member of a congregation in need of specific pastoral services	To receive spiritual support in a time of need, transition, and growth	Clergy or spiritual leader offers a service; parishioner receives its spiritual benefits	Depends on the service needed. Examples may be: home visit, sick visit, liturgical service, programs, etc.	Revolves around the specific life events of the service being offered	Formal methods like boards, elders, bishops, etc., depend on community	Fees for services, not for visits; training usually in seminary; oversight depends on denominational structure
Pastoral Counseling	A mentally stable person with areas of dysfunction who seeks a faith perspective	Facilitate growth, personal integration, and freedom of choice through increased self-knowledge and awareness of God's healing within a faith context	Talking, getting it out; advice giving; support; resolving issues; client and counselor discern faith meaning together	Understand the source of the issues; provide techniques and ideas for how to become more free; model healthy interactions between client and counselor	Relationships; life experience related to areas of pain, shame, and guilt; discover God's presence in the healing process	Increased sense of freedom, independence	Fees might be covered by parish or by person; academic training programs; accredited institutions offer training
Psychological Counseling (developmental)	A mentally stable person with a specific problem seeking help finding a solution	Alleviate pain and disorder; resolve inner conflicts, and promote growth and integration	Talking; analysis; often learn "through" relating with the counselor	Get "under" the issues; teach or model techniques; problem solving, challenging	Relationships; life experience related to areas of pain, shame, and guilt; discover places for healing	Developmental comparison to others in similar stages; increase in personal freedom, independence	Usually involves fees; academic training programs; certification monitored by state and national standards
Psychotherapy (abnormal psych)	A mentally unstable person; unable to function	Get back to—or achieve—healthy functioning; recover from trauma	Depends on form of therapy; return to stability and functioning	Will vary depending on the school of practice, e.g. psycho-somatic, shock, hypnosis	Life dimensions related to the problem	Diagnosis by skilled practitioner	Usually involves fees; specialized training programs; certification monitored by state and national standards

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This is an awesome chart detailing the categories of helpers, the purpose, and assessment of professions in how they can help you.

I asked Fr. Rocky when he would recommend psychological counseling rather than spiritual direction and he responded:

“Some obvious signs would be:

- 1) A continual lack of obedience or persistence in doing his or her own thing;
- 2) A depression or melancholy that never seems to go away;
- 3) A persistent lack of peace or stability.

“Humility, obedience, joy and peace are key signs of God’s presence. If the opposing characteristics are present

- not just temporarily, but consistently - that could be a sign of some psychological healing that needs to take place.”

If you feel that any of these characteristics are frequent feelings for you, you may want to consider psychological counseling instead of or in addition to a spiritual director.

What if you don’t know which helper best suits you? I would recommend starting out by making an appointment with a priest to talk about it. Even if you end up not choosing to go through spiritual direction, priests are open to counseling appointments and can help you to answer tough questions.

I hope this answers some questions for you. As you can see now, spiritual direction is not psychological counseling and there are many different types of helpers you can seek out to find direction in certain areas of your life... you just have to discern where to go.



HOW TO FIND A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

Let's say you've decided to go to a spiritual director and seek guidance there. The hardest part is probably finding the person that will be your director. There are a couple of things you should keep in mind when discerning who would be the best person to guide you.

First, let's review some of the things you do **not** want from a spiritual director:

Online or On-the-Phone Direction: Unless you know the person well, I wouldn't recommend receiving direction by the phone because it isn't as personal and it may be easier for you to become distracted during the meeting or skip over information. I would not ever recommend doing it online. That's not direction. I found something like this when I was searching on Google and it had "fishy" written all over it.

Differing Religious Views: If you're looking for a spiritual director, be sure to find someone who is a strong Catholic

and adheres to the Vatican's teachings. Be aware that there are

spiritual directors in other religions; look for a Catholic director.

Also, there are some who may have different views than you have. To truly know if they're following the Church's teachings, some interview questions could help decide if you make a good fit (13).

Someone Who is Too Busy: This is another big one. If you have someone you would like to be your spiritual director, but they're not able to spend the time with you on a monthly basis or sit with you when you need to talk, they aren't going to be the best spiritual director to fit your need.

For example, priests are extremely busy and only have so much time on their hands. If you can't make it work to meet with your spiritual director regularly because he or she is too busy, you will need to find a different director.

These ideas are simple, but the core to finding a good spiritual director who will fit your needs. Now, let's move on to how to find and select a spiritual director.

Looking for a Spiritual Director

When you start looking for a spiritual director, the first thing you want to do is pray. God already knows the desires of your heart. He will help to lead you to the right person to assist you in spiritual direction or He will show you the path you need to be on.

Not everyone has an experience like St. Faustina. St. Faustina saw a vision of her spiritual director before she met him so she knew exactly who it was that God wanted to direct her. As amazing as that would be, you're probably going to have to

rely on the intuition of the Holy Spirit guiding you. Pray that God leads you to someone who will direct you well.

Author Dan Burke offers his two cents:

“My advice? Go deeper. Find a faithful director and make the appointment. The worst thing that can happen is that in your self-evaluation and openness to God’s leading, you might just gain confirmation that you are on the right track” (14).

When you first start looking, consider the people you already know: your parish priest, the priest who baptized your children, a friend who became a nun, etc. It takes some guts to ask people out of the blue, but if this is what God wants for you then you'll find someone! If you aren't able to find a spiritual director that you already know (a priest or mentor), then you can try these resources.

Word of Mouth: Ask your priest, family, and friends if they know anyone. I was referred to my spiritual director through our parish priest. He was unable to devote the time needed for this and he gave me the name of someone he recommended.

SDIWorld.com: This website lists the spiritual directors in a given area, based off of the zip code you provide. The denomination of the spiritual director is listed and some

are not Catholic, so keep that in mind when you're searching. Also, I did notice from my research on this website that Catholic priests are not listed.

Ask Your Diocesan Office: Your diocesan office can point you in the direction of religious orders or retreat centers which are good places to find a potential spiritual director.

Float for Confession: Try confession out at several different

churches to see if you can connect with any priests. Obviously, the primary objective is to go for the actual sacrament, but it doesn't hurt to get to know some amazing priests along the way and discern if they would make a good spiritual director for you!

Catholic-Affiliated Groups: You could find a spiritual director or mentor through Catholic groups such as: Knights of Columbus, Catholic Scripture Study, Catholics United for the Faith and other great groups. You could start by attending some meetings and connect with others who take their faith seriously.

To be honest, finding a spiritual director can be difficult. Fr. Larry Rice says,

“Perhaps the greatest challenge in the field of spiritual direction today is finding a director. Many priests and religious sisters or brothers can provide spiritual direction, but their numbers are far exceeded by the demands for their services.

“Fortunately, there are formation programs developing around the country to train lay people in the art and practice of spiritual direction. If you think you might benefit from spiritual direction, a good place to start is your local Catholic parish, who may be able to put you in touch with spiritual directors in your area” (15).

You might start looking for a spiritual director only to find yourself disappointed with rejection. Priests are incredibly busy and it might be hard to find someone who will agree to become your spiritual director. It has nothing to do with you! If God really wants you to find a spiritual director, you will find one.

I sincerely hope these resources help you to find what you’re looking and praying for. Remember to follow the Holy Spirit’s guidance in your discernment on this.



HOW TO FIND A GOOD MATCH

A friend approached me, excited about her recent confession. “The priest was amazing,” she said.

You could see it in her eyes. It had been one of those once-in-a-lifetime confessions. “Who was the priest?” I asked.

She didn’t know. She hadn’t asked for his name and couldn’t seem to find him. “He would have been a perfect spiritual director for me,” she thought out loud.

It would be amazing to find a spiritual director this way, and I hope she does find him. It’s hard to put yourself out there. It’s hard to talk about your feelings and vulnerabilities and it’s even harder to talk about your spiritual life.

What should you look for in someone who might be a good

fit for you?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church discusses spiritual direction in a section titled *Prayer* (I quoted some of this earlier):

“According to St. John of the Cross, the person wishing to advance toward perfection should take care into whose hands he entrusts himself, for as the master is, so will the disciple be, and as the father is so will be the son.”

And further: "In addition to being learned and discreet a director should be experienced ... If the spiritual director has no experience of the spiritual life, he will be incapable of leading into it the souls whom God is calling to it, and he will not even understand them." (16)

Let's break this down. According to the Catechism, a spiritual director should:

- Be learned
- Be discreet
- Have experience in the spiritual life

These are the most important qualities to look for in a spiritual director. Yes, it's important that you can talk with each other without wanting to rip each other's hair out and it's important that your spiritual director actually has time to meet with you.

But, I'm sure you can agree with me, that the discretion of the person you are divulging your spiritual life and private details to is of utmost importance, along with the

other qualities pointed to above. Basically, you have to be able to trust each other.

Fr. Rocky says:

“Trust is a key element to spiritual direction, both on the part of the director and the directee. God only works where there is trust.”

According to Fr. John Bartunek, a spiritual director should be:

- Prudent, practical, knowledgeable (about the faith and spiritual life), and balanced

- An excellent listener, not afraid to be honest and demanding with you, and to make sure you're being honest with yourself

- Optimistic, show enthusiasm for the things of God, energetically engaged in their own pursuit of holiness

- “Someone you can trust- either someone you already trust, or someone who easily and naturally wins your trust during the first few times you meet.” (17).

Jennifer Fulwiler, mom, popular author and radio host, discusses her feelings on finding a match with a spiritual director:

“It's perfectly acceptable to meet with more than one spiritual director until you find someone with whom you click. It's important to find someone whom you feel very

comfortable with since you'll be discussing important issues with them.

"I did have to meet with more than one person before I found someone who was a good fit. After meeting with the first person, I had a rather lukewarm feeling and wasn't particularly excited about the idea of scheduling another meeting. But after one meeting with my current spiritual

director the peace of the Holy Spirit was palpable and I could not wait until our next meeting- that's how I knew she was the right person for me" (18).

I bet you didn't think it would be this difficult to find a spiritual director that fits your personality, did you? Or, maybe you did and that's why you haven't taken the first step. Just like the road to Heaven; nobody said it is going to be easy, but it will be worthwhile.

I wish it could be too easy for you to find a perfect spiritual director; that you could find that person in your next confessional. But, to be honest, it isn't so simple. It's hard to take that first step to put yourself out there and look for a spiritual director and it's hard to find someone who you can open up to. But, the beauty in your spiritual life that can come from all of those difficult things can help to shape you into a saint.

If God is calling you to find a spiritual director, take that first step and look for one. Trust that God will direct your steps and you will be able to find a confidant to assist you in your spiritual life. Just don't give up, especially if that's God's will.



HOW CAN WE DO IT WITH LOTS OF LITTLE ONES?

(Insert nervous laugh.) As a homeschooling mom, with kids always around and a very busy husband, I know how hard it can be to find the time or a babysitter to watch the kids for an hour so you can make a meeting. But, it's so important to make time for yourself, especially for your spiritual well-being.

Jennifer Fulwiler agrees, "It's definitely harder for those of us with children to arrange spiritual direction meetings, but I think that sometimes it's people in our phase of life who could benefit from the guidance of a spiritual director the most" (19).

When I asked Fr. Rocky how a mother would benefit from spiritual direction, he said:

"Greatly! The role of a mother is critical to the healthy formation of her children, her husband, her entire family. Her influence goes far beyond her personal circle and has

ripple effects into the greater society, especially as her children grow and become adults, gaining responsibilities of their own. How the mother goes, so goes the family. She is the heart of the family.”

[So much relies on you in your family.](#) Here are some ideas that can help you find the time and ability to make it to a meeting with your spiritual director.

Swap with Friends. Oh, you have kids? I do too! Let’s take turns watching each other’s’ kids so we can go to OBGYN appointments, confession, and meet with our spiritual directors. Realistically, it only takes about an hour and you would gladly do it for your friend if she asked you. Just make sure to return the favor!

Bring Them. Some locations where a spiritual director typically meets could be child friendly. They might have a spacious office with a table and crayons ready for your kids. Or maybe your spiritual director could meet at your home or at a playground where your kids can be more comfortable. Just remember that wherever you meet, it has to be a place you can open up and probably cry and be vulnerable. If you’re not cool getting gross crying face at the playground, don’t go there.

Get a Babysitter. When you get down to it, your spiritual life is way more important than the \$20 or whatever it is baby sitters ask for nowadays. (Or ask Grandma!) You, Momma, need that time and deserve that time to get away, refresh yourself, and run closer into God’s arms.

Jennifer Fulwiler points out that a lack of childcare shouldn’t be an issue: “I strongly encourage you not to let

a lack of childcare dissuade you from seeking a spiritual director. I'm sure that if you pray for God to show you a way that you can make this happen he will show you a path that works for you. Again, I think that it is often we busy moms who could most benefit from regular spiritual direction" (20).

I think you get the drift. It's not easy, right? But, it's also not easy getting your kids to stay quiet during Mass, feeding a fussy eater vegetables, or juggling a million things everyday. I shouldn't be the one to break this to you, but God made moms pretty amazing and adaptable. You grow with each thing that is thrown at you. If you really want to make meeting with a spiritual director a priority, you can make it happen.



WHAT DO YOU TALK ABOUT?

When you have a meeting scheduled with your spiritual director, take time before the meeting to jot down some ideas to discuss with him or her. While some ideas might come easier than others, here's a general list of ideas that you could consider discussing:

- Your faith journey
- Discerning where God is leading you in a certain area of your life
- How to cope with spiritual dry spells
- Anything that could be causing you the inability to grow in faith
- Recurring spiritual roadblocks or temptations
- How to have a more fruitful prayer life

- A moral issue that causes you stress

For a real life example, Jennifer Fulwiler describes some questions she might ask her spiritual director:

“I used to love praying and received great consolation from it, but now my prayers are really dry and I have to force myself to do it. Sometimes it even feels like I’m talking to myself. Is this normal? Is there anything I can do about it?”

“I find myself constantly plagued with unnecessary, irrational worry about issue X. How can I overcome that and better trust in God?”

“In prayer a while back I got the idea that I need to stop being such a perfectionist about parenting, that I need to relax and stop trying to do so much. But now I’m wondering if that was the voice of the Holy Spirit or the voice of my inner laziness. How can I better discern what God is telling me in that area of my life?” (21).

You can see the openness in which she shares her struggles as well as how prepared she is with her questions. Spiritual direction gives you an opportunity to share your story and faith journey. By coming prepared to the meeting, you are making the most out of your and your spiritual director’s time.

What Else Should I Prepare?

During your meeting, take notes.

Trust me, you won’t remember everything, especially with all the things on your plate, Mom. The meeting with your spiritual director might be helpful, insightful, and bring you

peace, but the moment you step back into your real life, you need to think about what you're preparing for dinner and if little Johnny has

finished his homework. Take notes!

Another great reason to take notes is that you never know what might speak to you in a couple of hours that didn't speak to you in the moment. I would recommend writing out your prepared ideas to discuss and meeting notes in a journal so you can keep track of your questions and the answers to them.

It also helps to take notes in the same journal or paper that you jotted your discussion ideas on so you can track your progress and meetings over the course of months to see your development and revisit something you might have missed before.

Be sure to set up your next meeting.

That might seem like common sense, but I'm sure you've had months go by without seeing your best friend, just because you never set up your next play date or girls' night out. There's a lot of stuff on your schedule; make the meeting with your spiritual director a priority and schedule that meeting monthly.

Why monthly? Regularly scheduled visits allows for ongoing attentiveness to your personal experience and growth. This helps you and your spiritual director to uncover the ways God speaks to you and invites you closer to him.

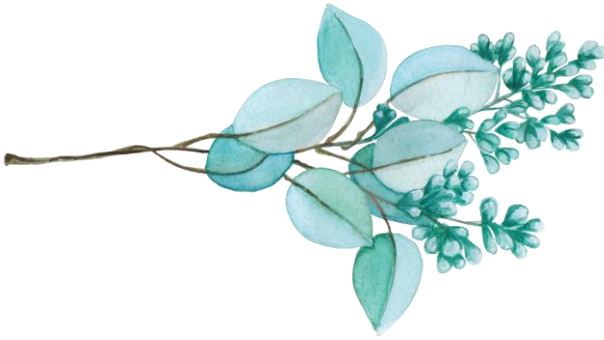
Now that we have discussed what *you* will bring to the meeting, here is some insight into what your spiritual

director will and will not bring to the meeting:

- He or she will *not* bring judgment or condemnation.
- He will not bring hate or the “iron fist of justice.”
- He *will* bring compassion, understanding, and the ability to help you sort through your thoughts.
- He won’t have all the answers, but he can help you to find the path that God is using to lead you to Heaven, especially if you have lost it, can’t see it, or have gone astray.

Think of your spiritual director like a lighthouse, lighting the way to bring you, the mighty ship, back to shore. The lighthouse can’t tell you about the rocks in the shallow water because it can’t see it. **But it can help you to navigate the storm and guide you home.**

I pray that through the meetings with your spiritual director you are able to find guidance, reassurance, and peace as you navigate your interior obstacles.



WHAT NOW?

You probably have a lot of questions still clouding your mind. That's a good thing. It's good to question things, dig deeper, and uncover the Truth. I know so many Catholic converts who came to the Catholic faith precisely because it's the only place their questions could be answered.

I know it seems like a lot of work, and you're already busy. You have kids, dirty dishes (why won't they go away?!), and maybe you're homeschooling or you work or volunteer or whatever it is... your plate is full.

God wants more room for himself on your plate. In fact, he wants to be the salt and seasoning, sprinkled over everything on your plate, enhancing it and making everything you do that much more amazing and delicious.

Sometimes, the pressures and busyness of daily life tempt us to limit our faith to church on Sunday. But, as the angel says in the Book of Revelation: "I know your works; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth" (22).

Examine yourself. Is your spiritual life lukewarm? Can you allow yourself to seep deeper into the heart of Christ? Can you make more time for prayer, remember God in your daily activities, and clear your mind to find peace?

From Catholic Answers, Koenig-Bricker says, “Finding and working with a spiritual director is one way that we can free ourselves from the temptation to become a lukewarm Catholic. With our director’s guidance, assistance and encouragement, we can, in the words of Father James Keegan, S.J., of the editorial review panel of Spiritual Directors International, “awaken to the mystery called God in all of life, and to respond to that discovery in a growing relationship of freedom and commitment” (23).

I would encourage you to take this to prayer. By reading this book, you’ve already shown an interest, now be sure that it’s the Holy Spirit calling you to this. Discern... Will I regret not doing this? Can it do any harm?

If, through your prayers and discernment, you still don’t know if you’re supposed to seek out a director or not, try it out. Sometimes, when His voice is so quiet that I can’t make out what it is He wants me to do, I just do it. (Disclaimer: only for morally acceptable behavior!) And I pray that if this isn’t what God wants me to do, where he wants me to go, that He removes that as an option and makes it impossible.

“Act as if everything depended on you; Trust as if everything depended on God.” St Ignatius Loyola

Don’t let fear or uncertainty be the thing that holds you back from God. Make sure that your interior door is open,

allowing God in and allowing yourself to go deeper.

“Modern life challenges us to actually go deeper, to be more discerning and to sort out among the many choices presented to us, what will help us grow humanly and in our faith life. The literal meaning of the word “discernment” is *sorting*. St. Ignatius counsels us: to know the inner movements of our hearts so that we may distinguish between that which is of God and that which is of our own ego, a worldly spirit or of “the enemy of human nature” (his term for the devil). The purpose of discernment is so that we may embrace what leads us closer to God.

“Spiritual direction helps keep us grounded, connected to who we are in the eyes of God. If a flood is coming, a tree with deep roots can stay in the ground, but one with shallow roots will be uprooted and carried away with the tide. So today, followers of Christ must go deeper, to live their faith at this intimate level” (24).

God bless you in your journey, especially as you lead your children closer to Christ through your prayers, actions, and proof of trust in Him. May you more fully reach his infinite love in your life and come to a fuller understanding of his goodness, love and mercy.

Do you still need more information or are you interested in reading more on the subject of spiritual direction? Here is a link to several resources that can help you on your journey: <http://www.catholicmommyblogs.com/mothers-guide-spiritual-direction-resources/>. This page also has links to all of the books quoted from in this book.

Don't forget to keep in touch with us at
CatholicMommyBlogs.com! There are more books coming
out

and we have several new posts that are published every
week, including weekly motherly motivations sent to your
inbox and on Instagram. God bless you and your family!

Prayer to Know the Way of Peace

Father of Heaven and earth,
hear my prayer and show me the way to peace.

Guide each effort of my life
so that my faults and my sins
may not keep me from the peace You promised.

May the new life of grace You give me
through the Eucharist and prayer
make my love for You grow
and keep me in the joy of Your Kingdom. (25)

APPENDIX

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Comparison of Helping Relationships: Nurturing Mental and Spiritual Health and Wellbeing

One-to-One Helping Modalities	People involved Who comes? Why?	Goal/Purpose Why stay?	Relational Process What happens?	Techniques How does it work?	Content What to talk about?	Assessment How is it going?	Professionalization
Spiritual Direction	A person who is mentally stable and mature and is seeking Mystery many name God	Deepen one's relationship with God; discover, attend to, and savor presence of God every day	Telling of stories; open responses; silence; waiting; noticing together God's guidance	Sharing, listening; discernment; and contemplative practices, e.g. prayer, surrendering ego to God's guidance	Daily life, relationships, deepest desires, struggles, prayer, God's presence and spiritual director's responses	Discernment; mutually agreed-upon evaluation; deepening of relationship with God Mystery many name	Potential for fees or exchange of services; variety of training programs; not accredited; professional guild
Pastoral Care	A mentally stable parishioner or member of a congregation in need of specific pastoral services	To receive spiritual support in a time of need, transition, and growth	Clergy or spiritual leader offers a service; parishioner receives spiritual benefits	Depends on the service needed. Examples may be: house visit, sick visit, liturgical service, programs, etc.	Revolves around the specific life events of the service being offered	Formal methods like boards, elders, bishops, etc., depend on community structure	Fees for services, not usually; training usually in seminary; oversight depends on denominational structure
Pastoral Counseling	A mentally stable person with areas of dysfunction who seeks a faith perspective	Facilitate growth, personal integration, and freedom of choice through increased self-knowledge and awareness of God's healing within a faith context	Talking, getting it out; advice giving; support; resolving issues; client and counselor discern faith meaning together	Understand the source of the issues; provide techniques and ideas for how to become more free; model healthy interactions between client and counselor	Relationships; life experience related to areas of pain, shame, and guilt; discover God's presence in the healing process	Increased sense of freedom, independence	Fees might be covered by parish or by person; academic training programs; accredited institutions offer training
Psychological Counseling (developmental)	A mentally stable person with a specific problem seeking help finding a solution	Alleviate pain and disorder, resolve inner conflicts, and promote growth and integration	Talking; analysis; often learn "through" relating with the counselor	Get "under" the issues; teach or model techniques; problem solving, challenging	Relationships; life experience related to areas of pain, shame, and guilt; discover places for healing	Developmental comparison to others in similar stages; increase in personal freedom, independence	Usually involves fees; academic training programs; certification monitored by state and national standards
Psychotherapy (abnormal psych)	A mentally unstable person; unable to function	Get back to—or achieve—healthy functioning; recover from trauma	Depends on form of therapy; return to stability and functioning	Will vary depending on the school of practice, e.g. psycho-somatic shock, hypnosis	Life dimensions related to the problem	Diagnosis by skilled practitioner	Usually involves fees; specialized training programs; certification monitored by state and national standards

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*Quotes from Fr. Rocky and Fr. Mike Schmitz are from personal email correspondences with them. Read about it in the Introduction.

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