

## **Australian Ecumenical Council for Spiritual Direction**

# **Code of Ethics for Spiritual Directors**

### **Introduction**

#### **What is spiritual direction?**

Spiritual direction is a process by which one person helps another grow in intimacy with God and in right relationship with all creation. This ministry has a long and revered history in the Christian tradition and has been practised by lay people, religious and ordained ministers. The focus of this ministry is the relationship between God and the person seeking direction.

#### **Who is a spiritual director?**

A spiritual director is one who helps the person coming for direction to notice how God's Spirit is moving in his or her life. Spiritual directors act as spiritual guides or enablers rather than as organisers or instructors.

Spiritual directors have a sense of call to their ministry, a call that is complemented by appropriate gifts and recognized by the faith community. They are able to listen contemplatively and respond appropriately from a depth of personal experience of life and faith. They are able to allow their Christian faith to grow and mature with an ever-deepening awareness and understanding of struggle, paradox and mystery. They are able to develop a wide vision embracing the various traditions of Christianity.

Spiritual directors cherish and foster an active life of faith and prayer, and regularly seek spiritual direction and supervision for themselves.

Spiritual directors have formal qualifications in their practice or, alternatively, have had long experience and demonstrated equivalent competence.

#### **Why do spiritual directors need a code of ethics?**

In common with persons who, in a professional capacity, engage in deep personal contact with others, spiritual directors have responsibilities and are exposed to risks. A person seeking spiritual direction is vulnerable. Any personal interaction between a trained and experienced person and someone without those qualities involves an exercise of power. Without the power that comes from training and experience the practice of spiritual direction would be impossible. The possession of this power exposes the person being directed to the possibility of its abuse.

The practice of spiritual direction takes place in private and potentially places both parties at risk. Directors have consequent public responsibilities. Spiritual directors share these issues with other professionals such as medical practitioners, psychologists, social workers and counsellors.

Spiritual directors need to be prepared in advance for what they may meet in the course of their practice. They may meet ethical issues in unfamiliar guises. They may need to react quickly. This code provides behavioural standards for spiritual directors, so that legal consequences, such as litigation against a director, can be avoided.

Spiritual direction, being set in the context of the Christian faith, has values that are derived from the nature of God in creation and incarnation. Individuals must be regarded as those bearing the image of God and beneficiaries of the sacrificial love of Jesus. They cannot be used for the pleasure, satisfaction or benefit of others.

For all these reasons, a code of ethics is an essential part of the practice of any group that sets out to be involved in the lives of others.

### **About the code**

This code is based on the responsibilities pertaining to the spiritual director's exercise of power within this ministry.

It is divided into sections that reflect the different areas of responsibility. Although it begins with responsibility towards the director's own self, there is no order of priority in the code. Each area will assume its own importance on different occasions.

### **Terms defined**

- i. *Directee*: a person seeking spiritual direction from a spiritual director;
- ii. *Spiritual direction*: the process by which one person helps another grow in intimacy with God and in right relationship with all creation.
- iii. *Spiritual director*: the person who helps the directee become more aware of God's self-communication, respond to that self-communication, and live out the consequences of that relationship.
- iv. *Evaluation*: an intentional process by which a spiritual director and a directee assess the progress of spiritual direction and agree on its future.
- v. *Termination*: an intentional process by which a spiritual direction relationship is brought to an end.
- vi. *Education and formation*: a process involving the provision of the necessary knowledge, the learning of skills and the development of personal qualities necessary for the proper practice of spiritual direction.
- vii. *Professional qualifications for spiritual directors*: those formal requirements that enable directors to exercise their ministry. (see AECSD *Formation Guidelines: Recommendations to Foster, Support, and Recognise the Formation of Spiritual Directors in Australia (Revised June 2008)*)
- viii. *Supervision*: the processing of the inner experiences of the director during direction sessions so that, growing in awareness of his or her reactions and responses, the director might maintain a contemplative focus and be freer in attending to the needs of the directee. Other secondary tasks and benefits may occur through teaching, consultation and in gaining personal insights and healing
- ix. *Supervisee*: the person receiving supervision.

## The Code

### 1. Spiritual directors act with responsibility towards themselves by:

- a. Maintaining responsible association with their own faith community.
- b. Remaining abreast of developments in the field of spiritual direction through continuous practice and on-going formation.
- c. Maintaining their own life of faith and prayer.
- d. Receiving appropriate supervision.
- e. Maintaining contact with an appropriate spiritual direction community or peer group.
- f. Consulting other appropriately qualified persons when necessary.
- g. Maintaining an appropriate understanding of the cultural, socio-historical and environmental contexts in which contemporary spiritual direction operates.
- h. Exercising self-care by living a wisely balanced life-style.

### 2. Spiritual directors act with responsibility towards their directees by:

- a. Commencing spiritual direction by first discussing with the prospective directee:
  - i. The nature of spiritual direction;
  - ii. The respective roles of spiritual director and directee;
  - iii. The length and frequency of direction sessions;
  - iv. Confidentiality and its limitations;
  - v. Remuneration, if any;
  - vi. The regular evaluation of the relationship;
  - vii. Freedom of both parties to terminate the relationship.
- b. Limiting the number of directees to that which is reasonably possible.
- c. Seeking to maintain a reasonable workload by ensuring an appropriate spacing of appointments.
- d. Referring directees to other appropriately qualified persons as necessary.
- e. Ensuring that directees who have ongoing relationships with other professionals make known their involvement in spiritual direction where appropriate.
- f. Ensuring, in situations where they have other professional qualifications (such as a psychologist) that they clarify with their directees the nature of their relationship as a spiritual director.
- g. Not continuing spiritual direction relationships in cases where they depend on income earned from spiritual direction solely for financial gain.
- h. Not entering a relationship with a directee where there is a conflict of interest with other directees or relationships maintained outside of spiritual direction.
- i. Respecting the individuality and dignity of their directees, for example, by:
  - i. Respecting the directee's values, conscience, spirituality and theology; limiting inquiry into the personal life of the directee to those matters directly relevant to spiritual direction;
  - ii. Recognising the unequal power relationship between a trained person and a directee and acting to avoid exploitation;
  - iii. Refraining from behaviour that is sexualised, manipulative, abusive or coercive;

- iv. Maintaining appropriate physical and psychological boundaries;
  - v. Conducting direction meetings in an appropriate location.
- j. Respecting the privacy of their directees, for example, by:
- i. Protecting the identity of the directee, including the fact that a person is a directee;
  - ii. Keeping confidential all oral communications concerning spiritual direction;
  - iii. Not recording personal information;
  - iv. Conducting direction meetings in an appropriate location;
  - v. Ensuring that both spiritual director and directee are aware of any legal requirements that may override confidentiality, including, but not limited to, provisions about child abuse, sexual assault of children or adults, elder abuse and physical harm to self and others, and other criminal behaviours.

### **3. Spiritual directors act with responsibility towards faith communities by:**

- a. Being sensitive to the faith traditions to which their directees belong.
- b. Not engaging in any proselytising that is directed towards changing the commitment of a directee to the director's faith community.
- c. Respecting the processes of corporate discernment, accountability and support offered by faith communities.

### **4. Spiritual directors act with responsibility towards colleagues by:**

- a. Respecting other spiritual directors, ministers and professionals and not disparaging their work.
- b. Requesting their directees to inform other appropriate professionals that they are in spiritual direction.
- c. Not giving to or receiving from other spiritual directors, ministers or professionals information about their directee without the written permission of the directee.

### **5. Spiritual directors act with responsibility towards society by:**

- a. Representing their qualifications clearly and accurately in any public communication.
- b. Providing information about their services within the context of the Church's ministry and not on an independent basis. Such information may be sent to professional persons, religious institutions and other agencies where appropriate, but only to prospective individual directees in response to inquiries.
- c. Not making statements that contain any of the following:
  - i. A false, fraudulent, misleading, deceptive or unfair statement;
  - ii. A misrepresentation of fact or a statement likely to mislead or deceive because in context it makes only a partial disclosure of relevant facts;
  - iii. A testimonial from a directee regarding the quality of spiritual direction received from the spiritual director;
  - iv. A statement intended or likely to create false or unjustified expectations of favourable results of spiritual direction;

- v. A statement implying unusual, unique, or one-of-a-kind abilities, including misrepresentation through sensationalism, exaggeration or superficiality;
  - vi. A statement intended or likely to exploit a directee's fears, anxieties or emotions;
  - vii. A statement concerning the comparative desirability of the spiritual direction offered;
  - viii. A statement of direct solicitation of individual directees.
- d. Conforming to legislation about non-discrimination.
  - e. Conforming to legislation requiring the disclosure of information to public authorities in cases of abuse, danger or crime.

**6. Spiritual directors act with responsibility in the role of supervisor by:**

- a. Not providing supervision or consultation without the necessary knowledge and skill to supervise or consult appropriately and only within their areas of knowledge and competence.
- b. Working towards setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries.
- c. Not engaging in any dual or multiple relationships with a supervisee in which there is a risk of exploitation of or potential harm to their supervisee.
- d. Evaluating their supervisee's performance in a manner that is fair and respectful.

**7. Spiritual directors act with responsibility towards students by:**

- a. Instructing only within their areas of knowledge and competence.
- b. Evaluating their students' performance in a manner that is fair and respectful.
- c. Ensuring that directees are allocated to students only after appropriate consultation and assessment of both the student and the potential directee.
- d. Taking reasonable steps to ensure that directees are informed that their director is in formation.
- e. Ensuring that their relationships with students are constructive, non-exploitative, and respectful.
- f. Ensuring that ethical responsibilities of spiritual directors, as set out in this code, are an integral part of the students' course work