

RELATIONAL SPACE
AND THE
PRACTICE OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

The Lorian Association
Center for Incarnational Spirituality
Soul Friending Masters Degree Program

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May 2009

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Introduction

From June 2007 to June 2008, I was a student in a Soul Friend course offered by the Lorian Center for Incarnational Spirituality. The course curriculum provided training in the practice of spiritual direction. In addition to online coursework and bi-monthly weekend intensives, an essential aspect of the program was to work directly with clients, or directees, and support them in their ongoing process of spiritual formation and development.

These supervised sessions were held both with fellow students during the intensive weekends as well as with individuals who had agreed to be volunteer directees. As the relationships with my volunteer directees and the other students in the class developed and the practice sessions continued, it became apparent that there is a particular feeling quality or atmosphere that develops around the spiritual direction relationship that can be perceived as a non-physical container or relational space.

It also became apparent that the potential inherent in spiritual direction is greatly enhanced when the relational space within which the work takes place is well formed and capably held. This realization was intriguing and led to a further perception that the process of establishing such a space could be analyzed and defined. As a result I developed a methodology and framework for how to form and hold this kind of space. The following thesis describes this process, beginning with a section that describes what is meant by relational space. The paper then describes the elements of invocation, intention, and holding that are relevant to forming this space. After these elements are described, there is an exploration of the process of engagement that occurs within the space that has been formed. The paper concludes with a section on releasing the space between sessions and a summing up of what has been learned.

Characterizing Relational Space

What has been alluded to as a ‘relational space’ or ‘container’ might also be referred to as sacred space, sacred enclosure, grail space, relational vessel and other terms. Perhaps the term that comes closest to characterizing this space is the Greek word *temenos*, which in ancient Greece was a precinct or territory marked off as a sanctuary for communion with the Gods (“Temenos”). In modern usage, developed mainly out of the writings and work of C. G. Jung, the *temenos* is the space that develops around the relationship between the analyst and the analysand (Jung 200-201; Stein 195). Given the somewhat specialized use of *temenos* in Jungian analysis, it will not be utilized in this paper. Nevertheless, in the sense that it defines a context where the work of the soul is done in relationship with the divine, the meaning does effectively evoke the sense of sacred space that is the subject of the following analysis.

By whatever name it might be referred to, what is being described is the non-temporal space that forms around the relationship between the spiritual director and the directee. There is nothing particularly new about the premise of a relational container or space forming in a spiritual direction relationship. Gerald May, a well known writer on spiritual direction, evokes the quality of this space in Care of Mind, Care of Spirit when he writes that “spiritual direction is generally surrounded by a characteristic atmosphere that is seldom encountered in any other interpersonal relationship. This atmosphere is one of spaciousness and underlying peace; of openness and receptivity; of a kind of quiet clarity in which it is easier to allow and let be” (113).

A direct expression of this relational space is found in a 2003 essay in Presence exploring the relationship between medieval alchemy and contemporary spiritual direction. The author, Betsy Hedberg, writes of both alchemy and spiritual direction as

work that takes place “in a sacred container” and describes the importance of the sacred vessel in alchemy. “It (the vessel) was a sacred space, even referred to at times as ‘the alchemical egg’: that is, a place of incubation and hatching.” Hedberg posits that “the idea of the ‘container’ or ‘well-sealed’ vessel also applies to the relationship between the guide and those seeking companionship”, and suggests that directors ask themselves whether their “direction relationships have this safe, diligently protected quality” (32).

It is apparent that in whatever way the process might be characterized, there are a variety of effective approaches to forming and holding a ‘safe, diligently protected’ space in spiritual direction. Regardless of the approach that one might choose, there are also fundamental aspects of forming and holding this protected space that approach being universal. As Quaker writer and teacher Parker Palmer has written: “Spaces designed to welcome the soul and support the inner journey are rare. But the principles and practices that shape such spaces are neither new nor untested” (57). Palmer continues: “What sort of space give us the best chance to hear soul truth and follow it? A space defined by principles and practices that honor the soul’s nature and needs” (58).

What are the ‘principles and practices’ that go into defining and forming this protected space? In developing an answer to this question, it is helpful to consider the process of forming and holding the space in terms of the steps that are integral to the process. These five steps can be termed intention, invocation, holding, engaging, and releasing. The following sections explore each of these steps in turn.

Intention

The first consideration is intention. Intention is the basic orientation towards the general work of spiritual direction that is held by the spiritual director. Intention is foundational because it functions as the basis for approaching each specific relationship

that develops in spiritual direction. For myself, as for many other spiritual directors, this core intention is rooted in an aspiration to be of service: to serve and support the person I am working with; to serve and support the greater mystery of the movement of spirit or soul within; and, to serve and support the whole in whatever ways I and the person I am working with might choose to perceive that.

According to Sandra Lommasson, Executive Director of the Bread of Life Center for Spiritual Formation, the spiritual director is one who is able to “sit without agenda in service of the directee’s unfolding relationship with the Holy Mystery” (162). Similarly Rose Mary Dougherty of the Shalem Institute has said that “the role of the spiritual director is to provide (a) supportive atmosphere that allows the person coming for spiritual direction to move into that place (where they can be) present to God” (Being Present 15).

Parker Palmer writes that the “singular purpose” of working together is “to support the inner journey” and “help each person listen to his or her inner teacher” (54). It should, perhaps, be noted that while Palmer is writing about the Quaker tradition of circles of trust, which might be characterized as a form of group spiritual direction, he is also explicit in stating that a circle of trust is not “defined by numbers ... a circle of trust can form where ever two or three are gathered—as long as those two or three know how to create and protect a space for the soul” (29).

In his writings on spiritual direction, Thomas Merton expresses this same concept in a slightly different way: “the kindly support and wise advice of one whom we trust often enables us to accept more perfectly what we already know and see in an obscure way” (29). James Neafsey, a spiritual director and supervisor of spiritual direction training programs, also expresses this essential idea in his own way: “The purpose of

spiritual guidance is ... to help those who seek guidance to make personal contact with the energy of Spirit in their lives” (98).

David Spangler, a spiritual philosopher, teacher and director of the educational activities of the Lorian Association, describes the process in a way that also brings out this expression of wanting to serve:

In spiritual direction ... one person’s task is actually to hold the other person ... the fundamental ground is to support what’s coming through (the directee). There are different ways we can talk about it: ‘I honor the sacredness within you’, ‘I honor the soul in you’, ‘I want your life to succeed’, but essentially I want to hold your space in an honorable and helpful way.”

From Spangler’s perspective, the process “begins with honor, or respect.... Love is a part of it, but I suppose for me respect is more important, or at least it is the beginning place from which love can come...” (6 Feb 2009 Interview).

There are several qualities that naturally align with or are integral to the intention to be of service. One of these is the spiritual director’s capacity to be accepting of what arises in the relationship. This is a form of acceptance that grows out of an appreciation for the wholeness and humanity of the person they are with while not avoiding the inevitable challenges that arise in the shared endeavor of spiritual exploration.

This capacity can be expressed in various ways. It might be stated in the language of a particular tradition, as in the case of Episcopal priest Margaret Guenther, who describes acceptance as follows: “the director who is convinced of God’s love and mercy, even when the directee is not, is able to accept any disclosure with equanimity. Through her loving acceptance she is able to model and reflect the love of God...” (21). Thomas

Merton characterizes the quality of acceptance in the following way: “The director is one who knows and sympathizes, who makes allowances, who understands circumstances, who is not in a hurry, who is patiently and humbly waiting for indications of God’s action in the soul” (33).

Acceptance can also be characterized in more neutral, less religious terms. Parker Palmer, for example, describes acceptance as being rooted in an unconditional love: “the relationship ... combine(s) unconditional love, or regard, with hopeful expectancy, creating a space that both safeguards and encourages the inner journey,” affirming that regardless of what might arise “in such a space” one can know that they “will be accepted no matter what the outcome” (60). In "What to Expect in Islamic Spiritual Direction", Jamal Rahman describes the relationship in somewhat similar terms: “In the history of Islamic spiritual direction, students traditionally sought the tutelage of enlightened Sufi teachers.... The relationship ... was marked by devotion, love, and service ...” (35). In the language of incarnational spirituality as explicated by David Spangler, a full expression of acceptance might be seen as being similar to the radiant form of light and love that the sun provides unconditionally. Just as the sun illuminates the entire solar system, acceptance illumines the spiritual direction process in beneficial ways.

Trust is another essential quality in the spiritual direction relationship and the intention to be of service. This is a quality that is unlikely to be immediately present in a new relationship and that most often needs to be nourished and developed over time. In Holy Listening, Margaret Guenther describes the fruits of this dynamic well: “Trust must be allowed to build. I discover that it forms in strata: just when I think we are hopelessly stuck in banalities or stranded on a plateau, there is a sudden new openness” (23).

As trust begins to develop in the relationship between the director and the directee it engenders a deepening trust in the work that is underway. Parker Palmer states that there are at least four dimensions of trust that take root as the relationship develops: “We trust the soul ... we trust each other ... we trust the principles and practices that create (the) space and safeguard the relationships within it ... (and) we trust that welcoming the soul with no ‘change agenda’ in mind can have transforming outcomes” (66).

These qualities, and certainly others as well, such as integrity, commitment of purpose, empathy, and so forth are all relevant to the forming of the sacred container within which the work of spiritual direction takes place. As Buddhist monk Tejadhammo Bhikku writes in Tending the Holy: Spiritual Direction Across Traditions, “The director employs a wide range of skillful means to assist the student to realize this experience of opening of the eyes of the heart and mind ... allowing the student to see him or herself clearly with honesty and integrity in the director and within their interaction” (6).

Invocation

The next step in the process of engendering sacred space is invocation. Intention and invocation are mutually supportive. Intention establishes one’s basic orientation towards the work. Invocation proceeds from that basic orientation and can serve several purposes. One is to establish an appropriate psychic atmosphere. Another is to ask for protection and support. It can also be used to express an invitation to the numinous or divine to be actively present. The invocation might occur prior to a session beginning, at the beginning of a session, or both. Richard Rohr, OFM, has said that, “Ritual has the power to create the container and ... space” for the directee to approach the liminal space where the encounter with the numinous can be experienced (12-13). Though it might at

times be more elaborate, in spiritual direction invocation is often composed of a simple ritual such as the lighting of a candle or offering of a prayer.

Many spiritual directors find particular value in a shared period of silence at the beginning of a meeting with a directee. Margaret Guenther, for example, writes that, “it helps to begin with silence.... the silence helps define the borders and makes it clear what we are about” (Holy Listening 17-18). Tilden Edwards of the Shalem Institute writes that “five minutes of silence at the beginning of a session can be invaluable” in making the transition from the concerns of the day to the direction session (Spiritual Friend 134). In the Quaker tradition silence is seen as a process of waiting, and a means for creating space for God’s voice (Traditions 242).

Silence, of course, is not the only ritualistic means of invoking sacred space. Every spiritual director has the opportunity to experiment with and find the particular tools or techniques that work best for them. In a 2005 essay in Presence, spiritual director Kent Ira Groff describes a number of other possibilities:

Sometimes I use a visual, audio, kinesthetic, musical, tactile, or poetic mediation to lead into silence, to express the person’s feelings during the session, or to offer blessing at the end. For example, we might meditate with a Langston Hughes or Mary Oliver poem or a sacred text; with art like Van Gogh’s ‘Starry Night’ painting; with the song version of ‘Vincent’ ... Or I may hand the person an empty chalice, a seashell, or a rock to hold in silence. (42)

Out of these foundational ingredients of intention and invocation the container takes shape. In a material sense, this space is essentially formless, as it is made up of a subtle energy field that is composed of the various qualities that are woven into it. In this

more etheric sense its form encompasses and holds the developing relationship between director, the directee, and the work they are doing together.

Holding

The next step in the process is the holding of the space that has been formed and the activity that is taking place within it. There is a circular sort of flow in the inter-relationship between forming and holding that must be acknowledged. From a logical and sequential point of view, forming the container would, of course, precede the holding of the container. In actual practice both capacities—forming and holding—are already present as the container takes shape.

For the purposes of analysis it is helpful to break the process down into its component parts. In doing so, however, it is important not to lose sight of the reality that the process in its wholeness is more circular than linear. In other words, there is a mutually reinforcing interrelationship between forming and holding that begins in the realization that both are rooted in the aspiration and intention to be of service. In this sense, the intention to be of service is, in and of itself, an element of holding.

It is also interesting to observe that the process of holding has both impersonal and deeply personal elements. It is essentially impersonal in the sense that the basic stance or practice of holding is similar regardless of what is being held. It is deeply personal in the sense that the holding process is influenced and molded by the relationship that develops with that which is being held. In other words, one approaches the process of holding with a general orientation, and then works within that general context to respond to circumstances that arise out of the particular dynamics of relationship that present themselves.

As the manager of a spiritual retreat center for eleven years, I often experienced these dynamics. It was my practice on a regular basis, and particularly on the mornings that a program activity was scheduled to begin, to meditate and visualize myself holding the space defined by the physical boundaries of the seventy-eight acre property. In visualizing the holding of the place, in my mind's eye I would perceive myself standing, with my arms extending out from my body in an open circle, as if I were hugging someone. My palms would be facing inwards towards my body and my fingertips would be one foot or so apart. I would then call on the angel of the place and express the following aspiration: 'May all who come here be touched by the beneficent energies of this place and find within themselves the capacity to take the next step along their spiritual path, however large or small that step might be.'

After stating this aspiration, I would remain in meditation for another few minutes and delicately sense my way into whatever the upcoming gathering might hold. 'Who is going to be attending?' 'What is the weather forecast?' 'Is everything ready?' – those sorts of things. Then I would let go and carry this general orientation into the world and head out for the days that lay immediately ahead.

Throughout the program that followed, I would, from time to time, recall this posture of holding a space for spiritual growth and continue to put some energy into it. Then, as the program or gathering proceeded, the opportunity would inevitably arise to directly engage with people or circumstances in ways that were closely tied to the general aspiration. At those times, the specific circumstances of the situation would provide guidance in developing the appropriate means for seeking resolution or further exploration.

I've carried this practice of holding into my training as a spiritual director and have found that the same dynamics are as relevant as they were in the management of the retreat center. While the context is different and the process of sensing my way into the relationship raises different questions, it is still an open-ended sort of stance, in that I am seeking to be in a posture that invites something beneficial to happen without any expectation of what that might be or even that it will occur.

This openness to what arises in the moment is another aspect of the quality of acceptance that was discussed earlier. The spiritual director seeks to support what is happening without being heavy handed in their guidance or management of that process. David Spangler expresses a similar sort of perspective in describing the way he would encourage holding the relationship: "I'm not trying to make something happen. If anything, what it feels like is pushing open a space and just creating an empty space in which there is room for something to happen.... It's not up to me what happens, but what I can do is try to create room for it to happen" (Interview).

In the spiritual direction literature there is little to be found that explicitly addresses the practice of holding. There are relevant resources and information available outside of spiritual direction. In her writings on circle work, Christina Baldwin, who is also a spiritual director, provides valuable insight into the process of holding group circles that can also be applied to individual work. Baldwin's book, Calling the Circle, is filled with useful insights into the process of holding sacred space (Baldwin). Another writer and theorist who considers holding in this way is Harrison Owen, a key figure in the development of open space technology. There are also some interesting and relevant discussions and papers about holding space in group work that can be found on the website of the Collective Wisdom Initiative (www.collectivewisdom.org).

It is unclear why the discussion around the forming and holding of the container in spiritual direction is more implicit than explicit. William Bloom, the director of a spiritual companioning program in Britain, suggests that because holding is a deeply innate human capacity, there is little perceived need to give direct voice to something that is so apparently obvious (Bloom). This perception seems valid. It also seems likely that ‘holding’ is a relatively new term in the language of the process of human interaction and its usage is not yet as commonplace as it may be in the future.

Given the general lack of discussion on this topic in works on spiritual direction, it was helpful to be able to explore these ideas in an interview with David Spangler. In response to a question about how to approach holding space in spiritual direction, Spangler said that

In a sense I want to hold an open space in myself. That’s where the holding begins. I’m not rushing to fill the space with my own thoughts, prejudice, opinions and all of that ... (I’m wanting) to provide an opportunity, a space for the other person to reveal himself or herself.

(Interview)

The capacity for holding, according to Spangler, emerges from our sovereignty, in that the capacity to stand within that sovereign field within oneself supports the capacity to hold the other person’s sovereignty. Spangler defines sovereignty as our individual “capacity for self-governance”, an “individuated expression of the Will-to-Be ... that generates the boundaries ... that define us and give us an expression of Self” (Glossary 26). According to Spangler:

In spiritual direction and in many other kinds of relationships, one person’s task is ... to hold the other person ... so that the other person’s

sovereignty ... has a more spacious area to express its uniqueness.... The fundamental ground is to support what's coming through (the directee) ... essentially I (the director) want to hold your (the directee's) space in an honorable and helpful way. (Interview)

Spangler also brought up another aspect of holding that is significant. It is that our ability to hold the space is strengthened by our working within the tradition and practice of spiritual direction itself:

Part of the holding is that you're standing in a particular lineage, a way of doing things that has been tested by time and experience ... and the lineage suggests what works and what doesn't ... and just being in that place, holding oneself within the wisdom of the lineage is part of creating the space within which spiritual direction takes place. (Interview)

While the literature seems lacking in its direct discussion of the process of holding this non-temporal space, it does place a great deal of emphasis on the physical setting and appropriate atmosphere for spiritual direction sessions. There is general accord that, as Margaret Guenther puts it; "physical space is, in its own way, as important as spiritual space" (Holy 15).

Parker Palmer expresses the same idea in slightly different terms: "there is one more condition that helps make a circle of trust attractive to the soul... We must gather in settings that ... possess simple grace" (84). Betsy Hedberg suggests that in considering physical setting the spiritual director ask of themselves: "Can I translate the alchemical precept of the vessel into the space in which I see directees? For example, how do I care for it? If this space is also used for other purposes, how does this affect it as a space for direction? (32)

Tilden Edwards writes that one of the first needs someone arriving for a spiritual direction session has is “for cleansing away the accretions of anxiety, crowded mind, and bodily tension that cloud clear presence.... The simpler, quieter, and aesthetically warmer the room, the more (it) will invite a simpler, quieter, more secure presence” (Spiritual Friend 133). Margaret Guenther supports this premise also:

The space offered for spiritual direction should be as welcoming as possible: icons, a plant or a few flowers, gentle light, a comfortable temperature, and quiet all contribute. More importantly, though, it should be a safe space, almost a sanctuary, which means it is secure from interruptions.... In the safe space that has been created, the director can be totally committed, attentive only to the welfare of the guest. (Holy 16)

One form of interruption that is increasingly widespread comes from the increasingly ubiquitous and often disruptive presence of cell phones and other personal electronic devices. It is worthwhile to offer a reminder at the beginning of a session to turn these devices off.

Anne Silver, in an informative and comprehensive introductory text on spiritual direction, explores the use of physical space at some length. She writes, in part, that:

We are not disembodied souls that exist with no connection to the space we inhabit. Everything we do takes place in a physical context and that context will have some effect on the quality of our experience. Therefore, if directees are to feel they can trust us to hear the deep secrets and longings of their souls, it is essential that we provide them with a suitable place in which to tell them.

More subtle aspects of context can influence the interaction as well. The effect of light, color temperature, sounds, smells, familiarity, controllability, proximity to other people, and even electromagnetic fields are now being examined by means of an emerging interdisciplinary approach called 'the science of place'. (2-3)

My own experience supports what has been written about the significant impact of physical space. During the Soul Friend program, I met with two directees by telephone and with two directees in person. The in-person work was clearly affected by my not having a consistent or appropriate physical space in which to meet. With those whom I met in person, our meeting places included coffee houses, my apartment, restaurants, and local parks. I felt that the lack of consistency in having a designated meeting place did adversely impact the quality of our interaction. Meeting in public places also increases the potential for disruption. One of my meetings in a park was quite tranquil and was going very well until a police car rumbled across the grass behind our bench and the officers met with a distraught mother who had briefly lost her child. Fortunately, the child was found and all ended well, but that was the end of that particular spiritual direction session.

In the case of those I met with by phone, it was much easier by all accounts, regardless of where we were individually, to establish and enter into a container that was formed not by four walls but by the quality of our commitment to the process. This experience indicates that maintaining an effective relationship (and container) over the telephone is possible. It also suggests that there may be times or circumstances that make it a preferable option to meeting in person. When not meeting in person, it is also appropriate to take some time to discuss physical setting with the client so they take it

into consideration in choosing where to be during the session. Sharing a description of the physical setting where one is can also help to establish a fuller sense of connection and deepen the work. Lighting candles in the separate locations or beginning the conversation with silence or prayer can also be beneficial.

Engagement

The skill with which the sanctuary space is constructed and held greatly influences its capacity for supporting and nurturing the relationships that are at play within it. The term ‘engagement’ can be used to refer to these dynamics. The process of holding and engaging within the sacred space that is formed is a dynamic one that develops over time. Within a capably formed and well-held space, various relational dynamics are going to gradually develop and present themselves. In this section, several of these dynamics are examined and discussed. The section begins with a discussion of relationship. Other elements of the engagement process that are explored include authenticity, witnessing, discernment, listening and communication, emergence, relational dynamics, and, Principle and Foundation.

Relationship

‘Relationship’ can be defined as ‘a connection, association, or involvement’ (“Relationship,” def. 1). At the heart of spiritual direction is the relationship that exists with the sacred holy essence that is the primary focus of the work. A core responsibility of the spiritual director is to maintain an orientation towards this relationship for the benefit of the directee. As Gerald May states in reflecting this, “spiritual guidance...applies not only to deepening (the directee's) personal realization of relationship to God, but also to the dynamic living-out of that realization in the actions of

daily life” (8). Our calling as spiritual directors or soul friends is to support those we work with in fully realizing and experiencing these various dimensions of their being.

The process of relationship in spiritual direction can be considered on many different levels. The most essential of these are the particular dynamic of the relationship between the spiritual director and the client; the relationship each has with the divine; and, most particularly the relationship that the directee has with the divine that is the central focus of spiritual direction. Every relationship contains distinct qualities and characteristics and each of these relationships will develop and evolve over time.

Authenticity

These observations suggest that finding the proper balance in relationships is an essential consideration for the spiritual director that should be conscientiously attended to. It is important to emphasize that there is no single formula for the mixture of qualities that strengthen one’s ability to effectively engage within a well-formed container. There is a general consensus that regardless of the qualities or characteristics we may have as an individual, an essential element of engaging meaningfully is to be authentic in our expression of self.

According to Carl Rogers, a key founder of humanistic psychology and client-centered therapy, authenticity means that we do not hide behind our role (as a spiritual director in this case) in attempting to acknowledge, incorporate and speak to what it is we are experiencing in the moment. Rogers observed that if we are authentic and approach our relationship with others from a place of regard and esteem for their humanity, we are well along the path towards establishing mutual trust and confidence (35-36). To the degree that the spiritual director is able to be authentic, the directee is also better able to express his or her own true nature and experience. As Thomas Merton writes: “The first

thing that genuine spiritual direction requires in order to work properly is a normal, spontaneous human relationship” (19).

The expression of what is authentic in each of us will vary from person to person. In the appendix to Henri Nouwen’s posthumous book on spiritual direction, editor Rebecca Laird shares her experience of being in spiritual direction with two very different types of persons. Her first spiritual director, Barbara, a quiet and self-contained minister, would accept no fees, and when they would meet, “always a candle was lit, (and) a tea kettle under a quilted tea cozy was hot and ready to pour.” With her second spiritual director, Meg, surface appearances were quite different. “Some monetary exchange was essential....Meg blew in at the last moment for appointments. She forgot matches for the candles ... and could laugh uproariously...” (153-154). But with both women Laird found the capacity within the context of the relationship to deeply explore her spirituality.

Gerald Hair, co-founder of the Jesuit Renewal Center and a spiritual director for over thirty-six years, says something similar in describing the ‘art of spiritual guidance’:

Ultimately...what the (spiritual guide) is to be is a place [sic] for someone to come and sit down and be present to whatever is true in their life. The (guide) is not trying to figure out their enneagram point, their Myers'-Briggs type, or what stage of spiritual development they are in. (He or she) is present to what this person is...then that person wakes up to who they are because a spiritual guide is the mirror to who they are. (71)

The Initial Meeting

Whether the on-going relationship between the director and directee will be over the phone or in person, it is valuable, if at all possible, to meet in person for the initial

session. This initial meeting serves a valuable purpose in establishing the nature of the relationship and meeting in person is a fuller expression of relationship than any other form of encounter.

This first meeting is an optimal time for establishing the basic ground rules that are to govern working together. It is useful to have a checklist of topics to discuss at this initial session. The checklist includes 'administrative' items such as the frequency and timing of sessions, financial expectations, confidentiality, opting out, and so forth. After reviewing these items, it is worthwhile to explore any other expectations or assumptions either of us may have and to respond to any questions that arise. It is also an appropriate time to consider any processes or rituals we might use to begin and end our sessions. Using the initial session in these ways is beneficial in beginning to build a sense of mutual trust based on having a common frame of reference for how the work will proceed.

While it is worthwhile to establish a general framework, it is also helpful to discuss the nature of the process that is being embarked upon and the likelihood that the true nature of the work will only reveal itself as it unfolds. As Anne Silver says:

Certainly it is true that the process of spiritual direction is likely to be hindered by the inflexible application of a lot of complicated rules. But a defined structure need not be a legalistic straitjacket. In any helping relationship, explicitly understood boundaries help to secure the 'safe space' within which mutual respect can take place. (12-13)

In this regard, addressing the desirability of being flexible and having the capacity to adapt to circumstances as they arise is important. There is an appropriate balance to be found that seems to differ slightly from one client, and even from one session, to another.

As the work gets underway and the spiritual direction relationship develops, there are a number of time-tested tools that can be utilized to build trust and strengthen the relational space that is being engendered. These include the use of spiritual autobiography, journaling, and various forms of creative expression such as *lectio divina*, divination, values clarification, discerning one's calling, and so forth. The selection of the tools to be used depends largely on the relationship that develops and the interests and needs of the directee.

Regardless of which tools are chosen it is the underlying process of engagement that ultimately affects the relational space that has been formed. In other words, the dynamic nature of holding the space is influenced by the capacities of both the director and the directee to engage with the process that they have entered upon together. In this sense, the process of strengthening and holding is ongoing in nature and, as such, calls for continued care and nurturance.

Witnessing

One of the qualities of spiritual direction that distinguishes it from other caring professions such as pastoral care, psychological counseling, or life coaching is the great emphasis that is placed on the director's role as a witness to the relationship. Henri Nouwen, a priest, author, teacher at Yale Divinity School and well-regarded spiritual director describes this quality in the following way: "What matters most, what transforms, is the influence of a humble, vulnerable, witness to the truth.... (T)he essence of spiritual direction is the quality of witness" (10-11). Nouwen goes on to state that, "to be a witness means to offer your doubts and hopes, failures and successes, loneliness and woundedness available to others as a context in which they can struggle with their own humanness and quest for meaning" (11).

As Rose Mary Dougherty writes, witnessing also encompasses the relationship between the directee and the ineffable. “It is not mine to create the relationship (with the holy) but to witness to its unfolding, and to assist the other’s appreciation of it and participation in it as I can” (“Experiencing” 32). This perspective is also reflected in Freya Secrest and Suzanne Fageol’s essay on interspiritual spiritual direction: “Spiritual direction also serves as a container for witnessing, celebrating, and holding one’s spiritual experiences....A spiritual director serves as a companion to witness you (the directee) as you walk the path of your spiritual journey” (10).

Margaret Guenther points out that by witnessing, or “attending” as she puts it, we are supporting the capacity of the directee to do the same: “attending, with its connotations of paying attention, waiting, and simply being present ... offers a succinct definition of our work as spiritual directors, we attend – and we help those who come to us also to attend, to be attentive” (Guenther Traditions 67-68).

The following excerpt from Thomas Merton’s essay on spiritual direction describes this capacity for witnessing in a way that encompasses the range of qualities that are present in a capable witness:

The director is one who knows and sympathizes, who makes allowances, who understands circumstances, who is not in a hurry, who is patiently and humbly waiting for indications of God’s action in the soul. He is concerned not just with this or that urgent problem, this or that sin, but with the whole life of the soul. He is not merely interested in our actions. He is much more interested in the basic attitudes of our soul, our inmost aspirations, our way of meeting difficulties, our mode of responding to good and evil. In a word, the director is interested in our very self, in all

its uniqueness, its pitiable misery and its breathtaking greatness. A true director can never get over the awe he feels in the presence of a person.... It is, in fact, this respect for the mystery of personality that makes a real director; this, together with common sense, the gift of prayer, patience, experience, and sympathy. (Merton 33-34)

This is an engaged and active form of witnessing that is rooted in a quality of presence or mindfulness. It requires a capacity for careful listening and active participation in the process of both supporting the directee's spiritual explorations and being aware of what is arising as the process develops from moment to moment. As Paul Roy, a spiritual director trained in the Jesuit tradition writes:

Mindfulness (is) primarily a quality of presence. I would define presence both in terms of attending to what is and also as being in the present moment.... (S)piritual guidance (is) a process in which a guide accompanies another person with a view to developing and attending to what is present and what is in the present moment.... Practicing mindfulness can help us find the Divine in every aspect of our lives. It is surely a major aspect of the work of spiritual guidance. (61-62)

Discernment

This attentive witnessing serves as a foundation for the discernment process that is an essential aspect of spiritual direction. As Gerald May says, "The essence of spiritual guidance or direction can be seen whenever one person helps another to see and respond to spiritual truth" (1). May defines discernment as "finding and choosing the appropriate directions to follow in response to felt callings, leadings and inclinations" (9), which again points to the role of the director as attentive witness in the relationship. Rose Mary

Dougherty offers this perspective: “In speaking of spiritual direction as an act of prayer, I might also describe it as a time of intentional availability to God on the part of both the director and the directee for the sake of the deepening discernment of the directee” (Experiencing 28).

The tradition is clear on the appropriate way for the director to interact and engage with the directee in this process of discernment. As Thomas Merton writes in quoting Dom Augustine Baker, a seventeenth-century Benedictine mystic and director,

The director is not to teach his own way, nor indeed any determinate way of prayer, but to instruct his disciples how they may themselves find out the way proper for them.... In a word, he is only God’s usher, and must lead souls in God’s way, and not his own. (20-21)

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius of Loyola offers similar advice, suggesting that the “one who gives” (the director) not go into too much detail in offering instruction, for then the directee

... may by oneself come upon things that ... better bring home (the) meaning.... This is more gratifying and spiritually profitable than if the director had explained and developed at length the meaning.... For it is not so much knowledge that fills and satisfies the soul, but rather the intimate feeling and relishing of things. (283)

This perspective is echoed in the writing of contemporary spiritual directors. Henri Nouwen, for example, puts it this way:

Any spiritual guide who anxiously avoids the painful search and nervously fills the gap created by unanswerable questions should be avoided.... Living into a new way of self-understanding and spiritual depth is aided

by having a sturdy spiritual companion or soul friend. The best guides are willing to be silent yet present, and are comfortable with unknowing. (8)

Parker Palmer offers an insightful perspective on why this is so:

The deeper your issue goes, the less likely it is that my advice will be of any real value.... If your problem is soul-deep, your soul alone knows what you need to do about it ... so the best service I can render ... is to hold you faithfully in a space where you can listen to your inner teacher. (116-117)

Listening and Communicating

Dialogue and interaction between the director and the directee are essential elements in the process of engagement. As Margaret Guenther notes, “directors are primarily listeners, but also participants in their own right.... directors should not fear the self-revelation that comes from joining the conversation” (Listening 35). It is important to appreciate the interrelationship between the processes of engaging and deep listening. The process of effectively witnessing and holding the spiritual direction relationship calls for deep empathetic listening. Out of that practice of listening one finds ways of pointing to the movement or presence of spirit that honors the personal experience of those one is standing alongside of.

Some of the sources that serve as intellectual underpinnings and inform my approach to listening and communication are David Bohm’s writings on dialogue, Thich Nhat Hanh’s teachings on deep listening and Heinz Zimmerman’s Speaking, Listening and Understanding, which is written from an anthroposophical perspective. Robert Keegan and Lisa Lahey’s How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work is also a valuable resource.

These writers and teachers have been helpful in illustrating how the way one approaches the process of listening can strengthen one's capacity to effectively understand what is really being said and how the use of language provides insight into the basic orientation a person or group has towards the world. A central premise of each is that by bringing awareness and care to the process of listening, it is possible to both deeply support and make apparent the potential for change in basic habits and patterns that may be inhibiting a person, group or organization. As Zimmerman notes in quoting Rudolf Steiner, by developing the capacity to listen deeply, "we begin to learn how to unite ourselves with the being of the other person and fully enter into it. ... As we consistently practice this ... habit, sound becomes the medium through which we can perceive soul and spirit" (112-113).

There is another aspect to language that these sources bring out. That is the role that language and perception play in understanding the world. There are schools of thought that propose that language determines our way of being in the world. Benjamin Lee Whorf, who did much of his work in the 1930's and 1940's is perhaps the theorist most associated with this view. More recently Humberto Maturana, Francesco Varela and others have broadened this theoretical approach and posited a biological dimension, which encompasses emotion and bodily sensation, as well as language, in describing an ontology, or way of being in the world (Sieler 75-96).

This view informs our work as spiritual directors in that one of our roles can be to offer language that supports the developing spiritual perspective of a directee. One way of approaching this might be to ask ourselves if the directee seems to be aware of a potential for development in the language they use. If not, perhaps one of our responsibilities with that directee is to hold or offer a space that invites them to widen

their perception. So in addition to the challenge of understanding the language that another uses, there is also the challenge of assessing how well that language works for them, and, if appropriate, exploring language that both encompasses their spiritual perspective and provides room for future development.

Another effective way to ‘join the conversation’ is through the raising of insightful questions that develop out of careful listening. In a 2004 interview, Richard Rohr states that this is an essential role for the director to play. When asked if the spiritual director's role is in asking the right questions, Rohr replied “...the right questions determine the quest. And they come from the spirit, those questions.... if you keep leading people to their soul questions, they become invested in them. They’re their questions, not yours” (15).

Henri Nouwen adds that, “Spiritual guidance ... calls for the creation of space in which the validity of the questions does not depend on the availability of answers, but on the questions’ capacity to open us up to new perspectives and horizons” (9-10). Gerald Hair notes that this is an ever-evolving process:

What is interesting is that you ask the question as a beginner in the spiritual life, and then the question changes. It’s a moving question. It shifts and you wake up.” One may evolve from ‘God is out there’ to ‘God is everywhere, there’s no separation’ and “as a spiritual guide, my work is to ... know that this question is going to move and be changing in the people I walk with through the whole process of spiritual direction. (68)

Emergence

Emergence is “the process of coming into being, or of becoming important or prominent” (Emergence, def. 1). Establishing a context in which the potential for

emergence is facilitated is at the core of the spiritual direction process. Spiritual director and author Diarmuid O Murchu, describes this as follows:

The way to come to deep understanding...requires creating some kind of space where one can just be long enough to detect with more clarity what the emerging pattern might be all about. If people will allow these meanings to emerge out of the interrelationships of their experience they will encounter the Trinitarian God, the god of relationship. (O Murchu 24)

This process of emergence is reflected in the metaphorical imagery that spiritual directors use to describe their work. In her book Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction, Margaret Guenther compares the work of the spiritual director to that of being a mid-wife: “We are reminded that the midwife helps new life into being and protects it; even more than the mother, she is the tender guardian of its safety (84). The midwife is ... capable of a loving detachment, but at the same time feels solidarity with the one giving birth” (97).

Tilden Edwards also uses the imagery of the midwife in describing the work of spiritual direction:

Being a spiritual friend is being the physician of a wounded soul. And what does a physician do when someone comes with a bleeding wound?... The physician does not heal. He or she provides an environment for the dominant natural process of healing to take its course. The physician really is midwife rather than healer. The physician of souls explicitly is a midwife, providing an environment for the birthing and nourishing of a whole soul. (125)

The potential for emergence in spiritual direction is also reflected in the promise that is contained in the biblical promise that ‘where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them’ (The Jerusalem Bible, Mt. 18:20). This mysterious and mystical pledge holds within it the potential for that which is unanticipated and original to emerge from this matrix of intentional orientation towards the divine.

About halfway through the Soul Friend program year there was an experience that was particularly meaningful in bringing out this relational aspect of spiritual direction. During one of the program's intensive weekends, the class was being led in a blessing exercise that involved working in pairs. The exercise was composed of each of us holding the other in a silent blessing. After the exercise there was a debriefing of our experience. The person I was working with mentioned that she had been aware of the image of two circles intersecting during the exercise. As she shared this, I realized that this image had been present in my mind also, accompanied by a lyrical phrase from “The Wedding Song”, a popular song from the 1970's that was written by Paul Stookey of Peter, Paul and Mary. The lyric that accompanied the imagery that arose during the exercise was ‘the union of your spirits here has caused him to remain, whenever two or more of you are gathered in his name, there is love...’ (Stookey).

The shape that is formed by the intersection of two circles is known as either the mandorla or the *vesica pisces* (sometimes *pisces*). This image had spontaneously arisen in my mind from time to time during throughout the time of the Soul Friend program, particularly when I was serving as the director in a spiritual direction session.

This particular incident provided a direct realization that in the intersection space of the circles (representing each of us as individuals) that have come into relationship with each other there are qualities engendered that are something other than and greater

than that which each individual brings to that relationship. In other words, in the intersection space of the relationship between the spiritual director and the directee, there is an additional mysterious and unpredictable element that arises or emerges.

In his Glossary of Terms, which was written as an aid to understanding the terms used in the teaching of incarnational spirituality, David Spangler relates the premise of 'where two or more are gathered' to what he calls the 'gathering principle'. Gathering, in Spangler's terms 'is a coming together of two or more into a relationship that generates a field (or space or domain) within which or from which something may emerge which is greater than any of the participants could have manifested on their own' (9). In our interview, Spangler elaborated on these perceptions:

I think in spiritual direction what you want is to create a state of emergence, a state that in a way you are both helping to co-create, a space in which the directee can experience whatever it is that he or she is trying to experience around the sacred or spirit. (Interview)

Relational Dynamics

In developing an understanding of the relational qualities that develop during spiritual direction it can also be helpful to utilize this imagery of intersecting circles as a diagnostic tool. This perception develops out of my own experience and is corroborated by an interview with Jack Blackburn, a body worker and spiritual director who uses the representational process of circles coming into relationship with each other as a form of assessment in his Trager work. (Blackburn Interview)

As a way of documenting sessions, Blackburn will use circles and arrows within the circles to represent the inner orientation of both himself as the practitioner and his client. If we consider and describe the process of individuals becoming involved in a

relationship as individual circles coming into relationship with each other, this can be more clearly understood. Before the two individuals have met, there is no overlap between the circles (setting aside, for our purposes here, the reality of the ultimate interconnectedness that is already, and always, present).

An initial meeting of these two individuals would be represented as a process of these two circles coming into proximity with each other. Depending on the circumstances and the trust that is or isn't engendered, these circles might draw apart from each other, touch each other at their perimeters, or overlap slightly. If all goes well, as the relationship continues and trust deepens, the dimensions of the overlap would deepen symbiotically. Similar dynamics occur in the process of relationship with the divine. In our interview, Blackburn was enthused about the possibility of using similar representational tools in assessing spiritual direction sessions.

In considering the nature of relationship, there are many interesting questions and lines of thought that can be developed around the optimal degree of intersection between the intersecting circles of the mandorla. It is likely that the optimum varies with the relationship that is being considered. The appropriate amount of overlap between two people, for example, is arguably quite different than between an individual and the divine.

In one of Jan Struther's Mrs. Miniver stories that were published in the London Times beginning in the late 1930's, consideration of the appropriate degree of overlap in interpersonal relationships gave rise to a geometry problem that is still used in schools today. In the story, Mrs. Miniver is musing about her relationship with her husband of seventeen years:

She (Mrs. Miniver) saw every relationship as a pair of intersecting circles. The more they intersected, it would seem at first glance, the better the relationship; but this is not so. Beyond a certain point the law of diminishing returns sets in, and there aren't enough private resources left on either side to enrich the life that is shared. Probably perfection is reached when the area of the two outer crescents, added together, is exactly equal to that of the leaf-shaped piece in the middle. On paper there must be some neat mathematical formula for arriving at this: in life, none. She breathed surreptitiously on the window of the car and drew two circles with her finger; but they hardly intersected at all -- a mere moonlight infatuation which would soon peter out... (“A Country House Visit”)

While Mrs. Miniver sees no neat mathematical formula for the optimal relationship between individuals, a classically formed mandorla does offer a meaningful solution to the problem by drawing the lines of intersection through the center of each of the circles. In this way, symbolically, the core essence of each participant in the relationship is engaged, but there is sufficient area remaining in each circle to retain both autonomy and self-identity.

One way that David Spangler describes these interpersonal dynamics is in terms of boundaries and sovereignty (see p.12 for a definition of sovereignty). A boundary, as defined by Spangler, is, “the threshold where one identity, domain, space, area or field ends and another begins.... In Incarnational Spirituality, a boundary is a dynamic interface, a place of meeting, connection, and engagement” (Glossary 3). On a personal, individual-to-individual level, Spangler described this relational dynamic as follows:

In a healthy sense, my sovereignty reaches out to strengthen and assist your sovereignty so it would be like members of the same family, or brotherhood, or profession, meeting and saying 'let me help you out' because the function or spirit of sovereignty in me wants to strengthen the spirit of sovereignty in you and be strengthened by you. The way that translates for me is that the more you can be you, the more that actually will enrich me because we don't then have a monoculture. We affirm this difference and the (relationship) between us becomes that much richer. But if I try to ... dominate, then something collapses and (there is) a less rich situation. (Interview)

The degree of overlap between individuals is one thing. If the relationship under consideration is that of the individual with the divine, Robert Johnson suggests that the appropriate amount of overlap may be quite different:

To reconcile so great a span as heaven and earth is beyond our ordinary way of seeing.... It takes a poet—or the poet in us—to overlap such a pair and make a sublime whole of them.... In your own poetic struggles you may make only the tiniest sliver of a mandorla that will vanish a few minutes later. It can be hoped that by the end of your life the two circles will be entirely overlapped.... Finally one sees that there was only one circle all the time. This is the true fulfillment of the Christian goal... (108-109)

In his Introduction to Incarnational Spirituality, Spangler writes of a future 'spirituality of boundaries' that had been described to him by John, an inner teacher and mentor (52). In our interview, Spangler offered the following observations about this:

Basically, what John was getting at is that life itself is something that is empowered by boundaries, that emerges at boundaries.... These thresholds are also places where energy arises, they're very generative, so what John was saying is that when two people come together and their boundaries meet there's the potential for generative activity.... Where things are different there is the opportunity for energy to be generated between them, for flow to take place and for information to arise.... And in fact, at one ... time I was watching a nature show on TV and it was showing these places in the very deep ocean where the magma is erupting and around those vents there were all these organisms, rich colonies of life, feeding on the energies coming up out of the earth, the warmth and all that, and John said that the boundary where people come together, that's where God erupts. He was saying that if God is the ground of all being, there is this magma of love and sacredness underneath all things that when differences meet, when people come together, there's a chance this magma of love and awareness and of sacredness will erupt. (Interview)

In considering the challenging issues that arise in relational processes it is helpful to recognize that while relational dynamics are complex, interwoven, and multifarious, they can also be considered as discrete and individual expressions or representations of dynamics that are unfolding over time on numerous levels. Given these intricacies, the significance of the spiritual director's capacity to hold a well-formed container can be seen, regardless of how these dynamics might arise and be expressed in a particular situation.

Principle and Foundation

The framework of relationship and emergence that develops out of the process of engagement also informs the concepts of Principle and Foundation that are core aspects of the practice of spiritual direction in the tradition established by St. Ignatius of Loyola. Principle can be defined as the knowledge that there is some greater being (or beingness) that is beyond our individual being (or beingness). Each individual is an aspect of, part of, or reflection of this greater something. The essential idea behind the concept of Foundation is that as the individual enters into a deeper awareness of that greater something, he or she eventually responds in a way that opens the heart.

Principle and Foundation can be seen as being procedural rather than fixed. In other words, neither is an endpoint in and of itself, but more of an experience that evolves as one's awareness and understanding evolve. In this sense, both Principle and Foundation can be considered as expressions of the process of emergence as it is reflected in a particular tradition. Spiritual directors are responsible for meeting the other person where they are and proceeding from that place along whatever course is appropriate for them. To the degree possible, the spiritual director should not have preconceived notions as to what that course is.

Taking this approach doesn't mean that the spiritual director doesn't have an awareness of the context or basic human patterns by which spirit tends to manifest or reveal itself. It does mean that she or he isn't trying to lead a person somewhere. Spiritual direction best affirms and supports one's individual wholeness without necessarily relying on or naming concepts of God or the Sacred to affirm or contextualize that wholeness. For in that place of wholeness, a person comes into relationship with that which is greater than the individual self, regardless of what one might choose or prefer to call that

something greater. This process does not require that a person accept a particular premise of 'God' or 'sacred' or 'divine' in order to live a spiritually rewarding life.

There is another aspect to this subject that has to do with supporting the directee's capacity to find both Principle and Foundation within themselves, in order that they might fully embody who they are as a human being. In other words, there is the presence and unique configuration of the sacred within each individual being. This presence has the capacity to be a source of radiant light, rooted in the love that brings us into incarnation. David Spangler characterizes this responsibility of the spiritual director as follows:

Yes, absolutely, our incarnational work, and that's part of what sovereignty is, is to have this deep connection and know that (we are) connected to the sacred. What I don't want is for that knowledge to obscure or eliminate or override the knowledge that I'm also an incarnate being.... From the incarnational spirituality standpoint, the spiritual director wants to be aware that the purpose of this attunement to the sacred is not to deny or move out of the world but to engage the world.... I don't think (the directee) can adequately be in touch with the sacred from an attitude of seeking to escape because the sacred itself, by virtue of what it is, is always seeking to engage. 'For God so loved the world.' So in effect, the journey that the spiritual director is assisting is one that will help the person engage their lives and their world. It's not a navel-contemplating going off into the heavens kind of thing. (Interview)

This is an issue that will almost certainly arise in a spiritual direction relationship around how one understands Principle and Foundation, particularly, perhaps, in an

interspiritual context. It means that the seeming materiality of both the earth and human embodiment does not diminish the capacity of these vehicles to serve as means to fuller spiritual awareness. In other words, that which is most essentially holy is not only to be found in transcendent experience that goes beyond human embeddedness in the world. If one accepts the premise that the experience of higher consciousness or awareness through fuller self-embodiment has an individual as well as a collective dimension that can only be expressed through engagement with the world, then somewhat by definition that which is conceived of as divine or holy is going to be an intrinsic aspect of that expression of wholeness. It is both transcendent and immanent and need not be sought in one realm to the exclusion of the other.

There is much more, of course, that might be said about the process of engagement in spiritual direction and its many dimensions and dynamics. Regardless of the specific dynamics, personal authenticity, deep listening and serving as witness to the directee in their relationship with the sacred all help to effectively hold, strengthen and further develop the container that has been the focus of this inquiry.

Releasing

The remaining step in the process is that of releasing the energy that is present in the sacred space that has been formed between meetings. This is an important step that allows the energy that is present in a certain way during a session to be held more lightly for the period between meetings. In our interview, David Spangler offered the following insights on this topic:

In terms of the individual session you want to draw a boundary of some kind that says this is now over.... What you (the spiritual director) don't want is for your energy ... to continue to be present in the life of the

directee in ways that might prove to be interfering or bothersome.... It doesn't mean that between sessions you stop caring, but especially in spiritual direction you're trying to get them to work on their own, to do what they need to do uniquely in their spiritual journey and that's what they need to do ... in those in-between times. (Interview)

Margaret Guenther suggests that this process begin ten minutes or so before the end of any particular session:

As director, it is my responsibility to keep track of the time and to draw the meeting to a close at the proper moment.... About ten minutes before the time is up, I manage to interject, 'We'll have to stop in a few minutes.' These words almost always result in a sharpened focus, and the most important material of the session may be introduced at this point. (Holy Listening 22)

Both Spangler and Dennis Billy note that there is a role that ritual can play in the process of bringing the session to a close. There might be a shared prayer, or if a candle has been lit during the session, it might be blown out by one or both parties. Some form of appropriate ritual, "conveys ... the sense that the process continues, even as it draws to a momentary close. It reminds us to be conscious of the loose ends we are leaving behind as we end the session and of the kind of work that still needs to be done" (Billy 42). Some spiritual directors make a practice of praying for or holding the people they are working with in their hearts between meetings. This can be beneficial, though I agree with Spangler in his assessment that this it is "up to the individual director to determine", to determine the appropriateness of this, perhaps in consultation or at least with the consent of the directee. (Interview)

Summing Up

This completes the discussion of the various steps (intention, invocation, holding, releasing) that go into engendering the space within which the spiritual relationship takes place. Careful consideration of these steps and the process of working with them enhance the capacity of the spiritual director to hold a well-formed space. Within this sacred space, as the engagement process unfolds, a certain kind of collaborative energy develops and the potentials that are inherent in the process of spiritual direction have the opportunity to manifest.

This paper has explored various ideas and insights around these dynamics. A framework and methodology for engendering sacred space has been defined that is composed of the elements of intention, invocation, holding, engaging, and releasing. Insights into the dynamics of relationship and emergence, as well as an expression of the concepts of Principle and Foundation that are integral to the Ignatian tradition of spiritual direction have also been discussed.

This contextual framework offers valuable insight into the process of spiritual direction. A conscious awareness of the space that is engendered and the potentialities that arise within it has informed my practice and understanding of spiritual direction and, more generally, the process of being in relationship with others. There is a definite, yet subtle influence that I have seen in the way that I strive to hold relationships and engage with the world.

At the same time, measuring the effects of this holding is somewhat comparable to describing exactly how the flapping wings of a butterfly influences weather patterns. There are a lot of other factors that come into play. In this sense, it is very much an expression of the inherent nature of the process, rather than a mechanism that readily

lends itself to measured application according to which cause and effect might be discerned. Ultimately, that which emerges out of any particular spiritual direction relationship will reflect the unique qualities that both the director and directee bring to their work together.

In concluding, it seems appropriate to recall that my experience of sacred space has grown out of the very personal dynamics of coming into relationship with others in the context of the practice of spiritual direction or soul friending. This deeper understanding of the dynamics of spiritual direction serves as an affirmation of my individual capacity to hold the spiritual direction relationship in a way that is of benefit to those I work with. And an affirmation, as well, of our human capacity to come together in ways that honor the universal premise that where two or more are gathered, there too a divine presence is engendered that supports and sustains the deep processes of emergence, self-awareness and self-transformation that are at the heart of the work.

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