

Spiritual Guidance at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church

The Very Rev. Jeff Jackson

Spiritual Guidance is a ministry offered as part of the pastoral care and spiritual formation of St. Margaret's Episcopal Church. I am being trained through the Shalem Institute in Washington, D.C. in spiritual guidance, which is a 2-year certificate program.

A typical session of Spiritual Guidance is done monthly either in-person in my office, or online via FaceTime or Zoom. We block off an hour per session. A session will normally begin with some silence as we reflect on the Spirit's presence with us. Then, whatever you may bring to the conversation is up to you. The Holy Spirit is the true "director," you are the "directee," and I am just a guide, walking alongside you. All conversations are strictly confidential. If there appears to be a need other than spiritual guidance, like counseling therapy, I am happy to refer you to where you can get further help, and I'll continue to walk with you. But the majority of our time will be spent reflecting on where God is working in your personal, professional, and spiritual life.

Typical conversations in Spiritual Guidance can include, but are not limited to

- + Prayer & Spiritual Practices
- + Discernment: What is God calling me to do?
- + Questions/Doubts/Spiritual Slumps
- + God in the midst of stress, trauma, longing, and joy
- + Relationships between loved ones, co-workers, family members

Some people ask about payment for these sessions. If you are a member or attendee of St. Margaret's, I see this as an extension of my pastoral ministry, and therefore do not expect payment. However, some people like to give an extra donation in gratitude for this ministry, and I would recommend giving to one of the many programs of St. Margaret's. For those who are not connected to St. Margaret's, and are able to pay, my rule of thumb is to give whatever you make on an hourly basis. If you make \$10/hour, then \$10 is a fine gift to give for an hour of spiritual guidance. Of course, never let money get in the way of spiritual guidance.

Below is an article that describes more about what Spiritual Direction, or Guidance, is. If you have further questions, please contact me at 706-761-0115 or jeff@stmargaretsga.com.

What Is "Spiritual Direction?"

Ann Kline & Shalem Senior Staff

What do we mean by "spiritual direction?" What is the dynamic of a relationship where people expose to one another their intimate spiritual life? What is the "point?"

At the heart of all spiritual direction, by whatever name, is an individual's desire for God, or the Holy, or the Real. Each person is a "word of God" (Meister Eckhart), spoken with a depth of meaning that is unique to that individual and which finds its expression in the particulars of that

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person's life. This meaning goes through and beyond the more surface layers of need that we experience—physical needs for survival and well-being, psychological needs for functional engagement with others, emotional needs for love, appreciation and a sense of belonging. Underneath and entwined with these needs, which capture a significant amount of our attention, is another sense of ourselves. This sense of our being is not dependent upon the satisfaction of our needs and it transcends their fulfillment. It goes beyond the functional, to the essence of who and what we are and what we are called to become. It calls us to a larger sense of ourselves than what we need and what we do to fulfill those needs. As Abraham Joshua Heschel explained it, we go from God being a need of ours (to give us what we want, etc.) to us being a need of God's (to fulfill the promise of creation).

Spiritual direction is a place where we can “redirect” the focus of our attention from the more functional to the more-felt-than-known sense of a larger context for our lives. In this larger sense of relatedness to life there are no “problems to solve” or “decisions to make” although the content of our sharing may be about the difficulties, uncertainties and challenges we face. These problems, questions, or challenges become a part of this larger context of Being in which things are just what they are and so become a place of encounter with the holy. With our directors we take off our shoes and feel the ground of our life and longing. What we look for in spiritual direction are not answers or strategies—a little instruction book on how to live or pray—but a place to deepen our felt sense of that larger context where there are no answers or purposes, just life as it is. God as God is.

Spiritual direction is not about knowing ourselves better, living our lives more creatively, or engaging in life more fully, although all of these may be the fruits of the relationship. Ultimately, spiritual direction is not about us at all. It is about God. It is about turning to God and claiming our relatedness. It is about orienting ourselves to a desire in us beyond needs—to live the whole of our lives as a radically-involved dialogue with the Holy.

This may not sound like much. It is, in fact, very simple. Its value cannot be quantified (although we may offer something to our spiritual directors for the gift of their time), its success cannot be measured (although we may undertake periodic discernment of the continued rightness of the relationship). Every breakthrough of understanding, awareness or openness can be accompanied by another experience of confusion, obscurity, and darkness. We never seem to “get” anywhere. That is because in spiritual direction there is, ultimately, nowhere to go. Rather, like the lines in a T.S. Eliot poem, we seek to come back (again and again) to where we are and know it again for the first time. Spiritual direction is a process of discovery and rediscovery of the basic mystery of our being: the wonder, the promise, the limitations and the losses and the miracle that is life itself. God as God would live in us. Love as Love would love through us. Letting go time and again of the old agendas that no longer give us a satisfying structure, the old stories that would trap us in who we were and blind us to who we are becoming. Spiritual direction helps loosen our grip on the side of the pool where we cling to avoid the deeper water of what our life is truly about.

The focus of the spiritual direction relationship is not what the director says. It is not even so much what the directee says, although hearing our words out loud can have its own power of

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prayer and provide some helpful clarity. It is what each hears God saying in the spaces between the words, in the quiet attentiveness to what lies beneath the words: a deep desire to sense God's presence, here and now, and find that to be a steadfast and trustworthy reality.

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