

ATTENTIVENESS TO GOD: CONTEMPLATIVE PRESENCE IN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation explored the quality of presence practiced by Christian spiritual directors. Contemplative presence was defined as an inner orientation toward the mystery of God's presence in the moment, within and beyond all experience. The hermeneutic research method of intuitive inquiry was used. The researcher began by using self-reflection and a literature review to articulate her preliminary understandings, or lenses. These lenses were then modified and developed through engagement with 2 sets of data: the writings of 4 selected Christian mystics (anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, St. Teresa of Avila, Jean-Pierre De Caussade, and Evelyn Underhill), and transcripts from interviews with 12 nominated Christian spiritual directors with at least 10 years of experience (7 women and 5 men, 44 to 75 years of age; 9 (75%) from California, 2 (17%) from other states, and 1 (8%) from Australia). Findings included summaries of the mystics' contributions to the topic, summary portraits for each participant, and 11 final lenses. The central interpretation was that contemplative presence is an ongoing, committed, conscious practice leading to transformation and not simply an attitude to be applied in spiritual direction. Other lenses included (a) presence as an act of will, (b) attentiveness to God in and for the directee, (c) presence as more important than any experience that arises, (d) presence in service of the directee's contemplative stance, (e) embrace of paradox, (f) faith in God's presence, (g) detachment from self-will, (h) inspiration from the Spirit, (i) ritual and other aids, and (j) presence as a constantly renewing moment-by-moment choice. These lenses were integrated with literature, and a comparison between presence in spiritual direction

and presence in transpersonal psychotherapy was included. The researcher concluded that the study of contemplative presence illuminates a way of being that is relevant to all modes of human service.

Dedication

In memory of John Firman, who taught me the healing magic of remembering our connection to Spirit and dying to one's self in being with another person. His compassion and integrity inspired me to live and love by his example. The light he brought to my life continues to guide me, now and always. Thank you, John.

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As I look back over the journey of this dissertation, I cannot help but think of all the steps involved in the process, and how many variables must be in place for each step to be taken. I am profoundly moved when I reflect on the many sources of support that showed up at all the right moments to inspire me to begin, and to help me reach the final culmination of this project. The fact that life has given me this wonderful opportunity is a gift that I do not take for granted. I thank God for leading me down this path, with all of its twists and turns along the way. My dearest wish as I look toward the future is that I will “walk the talk,” as they say, and that my own remembrance of God will be of benefit to my family, friends, and clients.

I thank Genie Palmer, my Committee Chairperson, for being with me every step of the way. Thank you, Genie, for giving me the initial idea to incorporate the mystics’ writings—it turned out to be a beautiful addition to the work and to my own learning. I appreciate your thoughtfulness, your insight, your patience, your keen eye for detail, and most of all your kindness and warmth. I felt your genuine caring as you always took the time to ask me about life outside of the dissertation, which helped me to weave it all together as one path. I feel blessed to have shared this journey with you.

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Thank you to my son, Julian. When I look at this dissertation, I think of you. I felt you kick as I sat in my interviews, watched you sleep on my lap as I typed my chapters, and celebrated your first birthday along with my draft meeting. Even as I write this, you are sleeping beside me. These are sweet days. Thank you for the joy you bring to my life.

I would never have been able to come this far in my education if it were not for the love and support of my parents, Marilyn Compton and Donald McLennan. Thank you, Mum and Dad, for believing in me, encouraging me, and opening up my world to so many new and enriching experiences. Thank you, Dad, for your huge generosity and for all the years of hard work that made it possible for you to support me in pursuing my Ph.D. Thank you to my stepmother, Judy McLennan, for her kindness and loving support through the years.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
 For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
 For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
 But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
 Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
 So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.
 —T. S. Eliot (1991, p. 184)

When sitting with another person who is seeking to cultivate his or her relationship with the Divine, what is the ideal quality of awareness to bring to the encounter? This study aims to come to a greater understanding of this question through an intuitive inquiry into contemplative presence. The above quotation, from a poem by T. S. Eliot, captures the intention to open oneself to the Divine in the present moment, without expectation or effortful striving to alter one's experience in any particular way. This quality of simple attention, receptivity, and willingness is the essence of contemplative presence.

Definition of Contemplative Presence

This dissertation explores contemplative presence from an explicitly Christian perspective, bringing in the literature of Christian spiritual direction and the lived experience of Christian spiritual directors. Although the intention is that the research findings will be applicable for practitioners within other spiritual traditions, as well as transpersonal psychotherapists, the language and context for this work is from the Christian tradition. Spiritual direction may be offered in small groups or in one-on-one relationships; this dissertation focuses on individual spiritual direction. In Christian spiritual direction, the spiritual director cultivates contemplative presence in the service of deepening the directee's relationship with God. Tilden Edwards (2001), an Episcopal priest and widely known writer in the field, defines contemplative presence as “rest in a naked trust of God's loving mystery in the moment, before, within, and

beyond any of our images of it” (T. Edwards, 2001, pp. 4-5). Whether or not the Divine Presence is directly experienced, one orients toward God in the here-and-now. Gerald May (1982b), a well-known author, spiritual director, and psychiatrist, viewed contemplative presence as spiritual surrender: a conscious, intentional, responsible act of “willingness to engage the fullness of life with the fullness of oneself” (p. 308). He emphasized that this moment-by-moment attention toward God is the most important task of the spiritual director.

James Neafsey (2005), a retreat leader and teacher of spiritual direction, agrees that a spiritual director needs to be rooted in contemplative awareness, which he describes as “aware of and open to the Mystery, . . . free to let other people and things be who and what they are in their uniqueness and otherness. We are ‘here for God’ rather than for the preservation and enhancement of our own ego” (pp. 21-22). It is an act of letting go of one’s usual desire to categorize and control experience, “for in contemplation we know by ‘unknowing.’ Or, better, we know *beyond* all knowing or ‘unknowing’” (Merton, 1972, pp. 1-2).

Related Literature and Rationale for Study

The experience and practice of contemplation is not a new concept in Christianity, although it has had ambiguous and varied meanings over time (Keating, 2003). For the first 15 Centuries of the Christian era, it was viewed in a positive light and was seen as the ultimate goal of every spiritual practice. Its meaning was understood as “the knowledge of God based on the intimate experience of His presence” (2003, p. 20). During the 16th Century, contemplation began to be thought of as a rare, miraculous, and possibly even dangerous grace that only a few could experience, and Christians were encouraged to practice more intellectual forms of prayer. Today, contemplation is receiving attention once again; Thomas Keating, a Cistercian priest and leader in contemplative Christianity, suggests that this renewal is due to the teachings of John of

the Cross and other spiritual masters, as well as the influence of Eastern spiritual practices on Western seekers.

In the contemporary literature, contemplation is often written about as a form of prayer, a surrender to God's will, and the foundation of a spiritual life (e.g., Keating, 2003; May, 1991; Merton, 2003). Contemplative presence as an integral component of a relationship between two people, however, has not been as deeply explored. Although many spiritual director-authors have written extensively about the importance of the spiritual director's intention and attention toward God in spiritual direction (K. R. Anderson & Reese, 1999; Barry, 1983; Bowen, 2005; Dougherty, 2005; J. Edwards, 1986; T. Edwards, 2001; May, 1982a; McCarty, 1986), very few have provided descriptions from their own experience. May (1982a) included descriptions from hospital chaplains and pastoral counselors who were asked to offer spiritual direction for the first time. One of them commented:

My being-in-God is something that I know to be true in my regular counseling work. . . . But in spiritual direction it comes right up front. It is no longer just a background knowledge or inference, but a fully lived and experienced reality. I no longer know it in the usual sense. Instead, I *sense* it in its lively, loving action—in the immediate moment. It's like the difference between thinking about love and being in love. (p. 115)

Spiritual directors and those involved in spiritual formation and training can benefit from more extensive descriptions and a richer, more elaborated understanding of the lived experience of contemplative presence in the context of spiritual direction.

Relevance to Transpersonal Psychology

In the field of psychotherapy, presence has been widely explored. However, in her study of the healing presence of the psychotherapist, Cortney Phelon (2004) notes that the research on presence was scattered and undeveloped. She gathered an abundance of literature on presence from various sources (philosophy, Eastern spiritual traditions, psychotherapy, and nursing

literature) in order to formulate a focused and distilled definition of presence in psychotherapy. She identified three central qualities of healing presence: development and growth, qualities of awareness, and therapeutic alliance. Her study is a valuable addition to the literature, but deliberately minimizes the transpersonal aspects of presence; the psychotherapists who participated in her resonance panel pointed out that healing presence does not necessarily include a spiritual component. The current study is valuable in furthering our knowledge of healing presence from an explicitly transpersonal perspective, which is relevant for both spiritual directors and psychotherapists.

An approach to psychological study and practice that addresses optimum health, well-being, and the full range of human potential is referred to as transpersonal: *trans* (beyond) and *personal* (meaning mask or façade), or beyond the limited biological and psychological self (R. Anderson & Braud, 1998). In transpersonal psychology, it is assumed that human beings have the capacity to grow beyond their usual identification with the individual personality and undergo a radical transformation in the process of self-transcendence. Carl Rogers (1980), a central figure in humanistic psychology, wrote about his experience of the transpersonal potential of presence in psychotherapy:

There is nothing I can do to force this experience, but when I can relax and be close to the transcendental core of me, then I may behave in strange and impulsive ways in the relationship, ways which I cannot justify rationally, which have nothing to do with my thought processes. But these strange behaviors turn out to be right, in some odd way; it seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. Our relationship transcends itself and becomes a part of something larger. (1980, p. 129)

Several psychotherapist-authors have written about the importance of the therapist's spiritual intention. They refer to qualities of transpersonal presence by different names; for example, nondual presence (Belschner, 2002), spiritual empathy (Firman & Gila, 2002), unconditional presence (Welwood, 2000), transcendental empathy (Hart, 1997), being together (Prendergast,

2003), naked presence (Wellings & McCormick, 2000), and being intimate with what is (Hunt, 2003).

These writers share in common the assumption that the consciousness of the therapist deeply affects the therapeutic process, as Brant Cortright (1997), a transpersonal psychotherapist and author, points out, “consciousness is contagious . . . *it is the therapist’s intention and spiritual aspiration that count most, the active inner work of seeking to contact a deeper level of Being than just the personality level*” (p. 57). Spiritual directors share the same fundamental assumption; therefore, psychotherapists and spiritual directors have much to gain from mutual learning and dialogue. Although this level of presence is of passionate interest to many psychotherapist-authors, it is an emerging area of exploration in transpersonal psychotherapy, and is only beginning to be studied in a systematic way (e.g., Macecevic, 2008).

An inquiry into contemplative presence in spiritual direction expands our understanding of how one cultivates the attitude and/or state of consciousness that best fosters the process of companioning another person on the spiritual journey. This helps bring to light and clarify the silent inner workings of the attention and awareness of spiritual directors while they sit with their directees. Transpersonal psychotherapists then have the opportunity to share this knowledge as well as gain a greater understanding of the similarities and differences between presence in psychotherapy and presence in spiritual direction. It is hoped that this study will encourage more dialogue between transpersonal psychologists and spiritual directors, two groups that have sometimes had a distant and even adversarial relationship (Butlein, 2005).

Overview of the Current Study

The guiding research question for this study is: What is the experience of being attentive to God in spiritual direction? The goal of the study is to come to a greater understanding of the

nature and value of the experience of contemplative presence within the context of facilitating another person's connection with the Divine. Other pertinent questions include: What is the quality of awareness cultivated by the spiritual director? What facilitates contemplative presence, and what hinders it? How does the spiritual director know that he or she is being attentive to God? How is the experience different from solitary prayer, or other interpersonal work that does not emphasize attentiveness to God? What is the perceived effect on the directee, and on the process of spiritual direction?

These questions are addressed through the method of intuitive inquiry (R. Anderson, 1998, 2000, 2004), a qualitative approach that follows a hermeneutical structure of five iterative cycles of interpretation. The initial cycle, Cycle 1, involved a creative process of engaging with a chosen text, image, or experience—in this case a personal experience that led to the choice of contemplative presence as a research topic. In Cycle 2, a formal literature review was completed, which, in addition to my own personal relationship to the topic, helped me to prepare a list of my preliminary understandings, or interpretative lenses. These lenses describe the researcher's understanding of the topic prior to collecting original data.

In Cycle 3 of intuitive inquiry, the researcher collects data and prepares descriptive summary reports, while in Cycle 4, he or she interprets the data in order to revise and/or develop the preliminary Cycle 2 lenses. This study included two sets of data: the work of four selected Christian mystics who have written about contemplative presence, and the transcripts from interviews with 12 exemplar spiritual directors (practicing 10 years or more) who claim to have experienced attentiveness to God, and who consider it to be an essential component of the practice of spiritual direction. In Cycle 3, the selected mystics' writings were explored in depth and summarized, leading to the articulation of a new, refined, and enhanced set of interim lenses.

Next, interviews were conducted with the 12 participants and summary reports were written. Cycle 4 resulted in a final, revised set of interpretative lenses. Finally, in Cycle 5, the transformed lenses were integrated with the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in the initial stages of the study.

Conclusion

This study is an intuitive inquiry into the spiritual director's experience of contemplative presence in the service of another person's relationship with God. This introductory chapter has offered a beginning exploration of contemplative presence and its relationship to spiritual direction and transpersonal psychotherapy, as well as a brief overview of the research questions and method. The following chapter, Chapter 2, will include a review of relevant literature, and Chapter 3 will provide a detailed elaboration of the research method. In Chapter 4, the summaries of the mystics' contributions to the topic will be presented. Chapter 5, the research findings, includes summary portraits of each exemplar spiritual director who participated in the study. Finally, Chapter 6 introduces the final set of interpretative lenses along with a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the study. For clarity, throughout this document, authors with the same surname as another author in the reference list will always be cited with their first and last names in the text; other authors will be cited with their full names only the first time they are cited.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, a review of the literature will be presented, covering a brief history of Christian spiritual direction, a description of the purpose and meaning of spiritual direction, and an overview of the journey of spiritual transformation from a Christian perspective. The chapter will also include a deeper investigation into the nature of contemplation and the presence of the spiritual director. Presence in transpersonal psychotherapy will also be explored, including a comparison of the objectives and processes of psychotherapy and spiritual direction.

A Brief History of Christian Spiritual Direction

In their search for deeper meaning, guidance, truth, and a conscious relationship with the Mystery beyond and within their daily lives, people often choose to enter into relationships with spiritual teachers and leaders, guides, or mentors. The tradition of guiding souls in the spiritual life predates Christianity, with the guru in Hinduism, for example (McNeill, 1951). In the Christian tradition, the practice of spiritual direction is thought to have evolved primarily from three different sources: the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament, the Desert Fathers and Mothers, and the 17th-Century European mystics (Lamontagne, 2002).

Jesus revolutionized the Hebraic concept of spiritual direction (thought to be mediated by wisdom figures, religious leaders, and Scriptural texts) by declaring that He and the Father were one. He taught the Spirit of God dwells in us, and that God “is not only transcendentally removed at an infinite distance above us, but also and at the same time He is immanent in our world” (Merton, 2003, p. 44). Every individual has the capacity to awaken the interior self and be transformed by the action of the Holy Spirit, to lose oneself and find one’s true identity in God. Jesus delivered His message by talking with large and small groups, sharing parables, and empowering and comforting people in their suffering. Tilden Edwards (2001) names two

constants from Jesus' teachings that have defined spiritual direction over the course of church history:

(1) a sense of serving and sharing with rather than 'lording it over' another, even when there has been a context of obedience to the guide; (2) confidence in the human capacity and calling to be in contact with the Holy One, and to mediate the Presence to one another through word, sacrament, and deed. (T. Edwards, 2001, pp. 9-10)

Richard Lamontagne (2002) suggests that Jesus changed the emphasis in spiritual direction from following the law to guiding from truth and love, from status and authoritarianism to gentleness and charity, and from alienation to intimacy with God.

In early Christianity, spiritual direction was the duty of the priest, who was responsible for encouraging churchgoers to "live as those in whom Christ has wrought an inner transformation, and to expend their energies in service to their fellow men" (McNeill, 1951, p. 88). At baptism, Christians were expected to repent and renounce their sins, and the early Church Fathers struggled with the question of how to discipline those who continued to stray from the Christian way. During this period, there was, consequently, a strong focus on metanoia (translated most often as repentance, but its root meaning refers to a change of consciousness or way of seeing) and exomologesis (confession). At first, sinners were required to undergo a single act of public confession, but the practice eventually evolved to allow frequent, private confessions to a priest. The role of the priest became to "admonish, exhort and instruct the sinner, bring him to repentance and correct him of his faults and so fit him for the favor of God" (McNeill, 1951, p. 95).

In the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Centuries, individual Christians sought guidance from hermits in the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria (Merton, 1960; Waddell, 1972). This was the first manifestation in Christian history of the intentional practice of spiritual direction on a large scale (Leech, 1977). Disillusioned by the secularization of church life, thousands of men and women

chose to turn their backs on the world in order to offer their lives to Christ, to “surrender their will, their possessions, and their procreative powers to God” (Barrette, 2002, p. 292). They resided in desert caves or small communities, and lived a life of radical simplicity, prayer, solitude, and manual labor (T. Edwards, 2001). Some of these seekers became known as holy men and women, or Desert Fathers (abbas) and Mothers (ammas). The guidance they offered to others on the spiritual path centered on the skill of discernment of spirits: the capacity to discern between good and evil spirits, or the forces within that move one’s soul toward or away from God (Leech, 1977). The Desert Fathers and Mothers also gave advice on spiritual practices such as prayer, fasting, discipline, and the development of virtues. Their words of wisdom were known to be succinct and designed to cut through to the heart of the matter and address the spiritual needs of the seeker (Lamontagne, 2002). Often, only a single word was given: “The action of God was paramount and the only point of such ‘words’ was to free the disciple to be led by the Spirit of God, just as the abba himself would” (Ward, 1990, p. 10). Seekers were not expected to discuss or even understand the word, but simply to absorb it and use it as a way to bring them closer to God. For further discussion of the sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, see *Wisdom of the Desert* (Merton, 1960), *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks* (Ward, 2003), and *Early Fathers From the Philokalia* (Kadloubovsky & Palmer, 1954).

By the 5th Century, the desert communities had evolved into monasteries. As a result, spiritual direction became increasingly formal and institutionalized (T. Edwards, 1980). “The ‘abba’ became the ‘abbot’ or ‘abbess,’ drawing into himself or herself both the discernment function of the Desert Father/Mother and the organizational authority of a ruler” (1980, p. 56). The Rule of St. Benedict, A.D. 529, thought to have shaped Western monasticism, set forth

precepts for followers of Christ to live together in community (Benedict, 2001). In the Rule, the abbot was instructed to lead the community in such a way that his commands and teachings “be a leaven of divine justice kneaded into the minds of his disciples” (2001, p. 24). The monks, on the other hand, were advised to “tender the charity of brotherhood chastely; fear God in love; love their abbot with a sincere and humble charity; [and] prefer nothing whatever to Christ” (2001, p. 154). Spiritual direction was not focused as much on sacramental confession, as in early Christianity, but rather on a relationship of disciple to master (McCann, 1952; McNeill, 1951).

Formalized systems for spiritual growth grew beyond the monasteries and helped structure spiritual direction within lay communities as well (Morris, 1987). Gregory the Great (590-604) followed the Rule of St. Benedict for 16 years as a monk, and later became a priest and wrote the book *Pastoral Care*, a guide for secular clergy and an influential work for spiritual direction (McNeill, 1951). He encouraged priests to lead by example and “in the greatest humility and with selfless devotion . . . the guide of souls must be a compassionate neighbor to all, but superior in spiritual qualities. He should be a mother in tenderness, but a father in discipline” (1951, p. 109). Over the next several Centuries, the guidance of souls continued with the same emphasis on overcoming sin and obeying authority—both the authority of the director and that of Scripture.

By the 11th Century, more laypeople were receiving personal spiritual direction from monks (Leech, 1977). The 12th-Century Cistercian Abbot, Aelred of Rievaulx, wrote *On Spiritual Friendship*, which put forth a vision of deep, enduring human friendship without greed or hope of personal gain. Aelred named four qualities essential to spiritual friendship: loyalty, right intention, discretion, and patience (Aelred of Rievaulx, 1977). Despite the discouragement of personal friendship in monastic settings, the kind of loving friendship advocated by Aelred

flourished in the 11th and 12th Centuries, especially through Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, and William of St. Thierry (T. Edwards, 1980). By the late Middle Ages, however, monks were banned from engaging in friendships of any sort.

The Middle Ages brought a new perspective to spirituality when people began to question and analyze the spiritual life (Barrette, 2002). Stages of spiritual development were proposed and used by spiritual directors, and there was a greater emphasis on one's personal experience of God, Jesus, and the Spirit, and less on the abstract content of theology. Spiritual directors began to be guided by the heartfelt writings of mystics describing "the ravishing experience of God's presence and love or the near-death sense of God's absence and silence" (Barrette, 2002, p. 294). In addition, spiritual direction became increasingly available to men and women living in the world outside of formal religious life, and not simply a practice for the spiritually elite.

The 16th and 17th Centuries brought feelings of insecurity in response to war and religious and social upheaval, as well as a theological rigidity that finally prompted spiritual leaders to offer more intimate and comforting spiritual direction relationships (T. Edwards, 1980). A few of the most influential European men and women of this era were Martin Luther and John Calvin, key figures in the Protestant Reformation; and Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross, who were aiming for reform within the Roman Catholic Church. (Lamontagne, 2002). Although the Protestant traditions more often emphasized spiritual counsel through preaching, church discipline, and group Bible study rather than a relationship with a spiritual director (Whitlock, 2002), both Luther and Calvin gave personal guidance in the form of letters (Leech, 1977). Calvin also encouraged people to seek individual counsel from their pastors when needed for their spiritual growth and health (Whitlock, 2002).

While Protestant reformers were aiming for a renewal of Christian disciplines among the laity, members of what Protestants refer to as the Counter-Reformation within Roman Catholicism were working toward a renewal of Christian spiritual life within monastic settings. Ignatius of Loyola published his *Spiritual Exercises* in 1540, which served as a structured guide for meditation, contemplation, and prayer over a period of 4 weeks, practiced under the supervision of a spiritual director. The focus of the exercises was discernment and the examination of conscience, and the retreat practices taught in *Spiritual Exercises* provide “the most ‘tested’ and ongoing experimental approach to Christian spiritual direction” (T. Edwards, p. 60). Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, both Carmelite mystics, believed strongly in the need for all Christians, religious and lay people alike, to participate in spiritual direction (Morris, 1987).

In the last 400 years, spiritual direction has evolved within and outside of monastic institutions, in a rich variety of diverse traditions and understandings of how spiritual growth is nurtured (Benner, 2002). At times, spiritual direction was viewed as the principal task of the pastor, or as closely related to confession; other times, it was seen as another discipline altogether (May, 1982a). The Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox traditions have developed forms and structures for spiritual direction that are still in use today (Barrette, 2002; May, 1982a; F. G. Rogers, 2002). The last 30 years has seen a burgeoning interest in reviving the ancient practice of spiritual direction, both within and outside of traditional religious understandings of the spiritual search (May, 1982a). This renewed enthusiasm has led to rapid growth in the number of spiritual direction centers and academic training programs for spiritual directors (Schneider, 1989). In 1989, an interfaith organization, *Spiritual Directors International* (SDI), was formed. SDI currently has a membership of over 6,500 (Spiritual Directors

International, 2008), and has been publishing a journal entitled *Presence* since 1995. The journal is peer-reviewed, containing practical and experiential articles rather than scholarly or academic content.

The current literature in the field of spiritual direction consists of both theoretical and empirical explorations. The number of popular books on the topic continues to grow, published by leaders in the field and teachers of spiritual direction (e.g., Barry & Connolly, 1981; S. M. Buckley, 2005; Dougherty, 1995; T. Edwards, 2001; Guenther, 1992; May, 1982a; Ruffing, 2000). In the academic literature, there are studies on the effects of individual and group spiritual direction (Barnes, 1998; Doss, 1995; Fitzgerald, 1998; Morris, 1987; Wilkinson, 1997) and spiritual direction for particular populations (Boys, 2002; Galindo, 1987). Authors and researchers have explored the relationship between spiritual direction and psychotherapy (Bidwell, 2003; Crumpler, 1994; Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1991) as well as the varieties of spiritual direction across religious traditions (Thal, 2003; Valantasis, 1991; Vest, 2003). Overall, most of the literature in spiritual direction is in the field of religion and Christian psychology; there is very little empirical research on spiritual direction within the psychology field, especially transpersonal psychology. As a result, many of the references for spiritual direction used in this review of the literature are drawn from popular books and journals related to the psychology of religion.

Purpose and Meaning of Spiritual Direction

Gary Moon (2002) identifies three broad styles of contemporary spiritual direction: (a) supportive approaches, which emphasize qualities of spiritual accompaniment; (b) teaching approaches, which involve instruction in spiritual practices; and (c) reconstructive approaches, which focus on spiritual transformation. In addition, spiritual directors may differ in the level of

authority they assume in the relationship. For example, a high-authority director may also be in the role of priest and may perform other duties such as confession, while a low-authority director may describe himself or herself as a trusted friend, peer, or companion on the path to God.

Robert Schmitt (1995) refers to two basic approaches to spiritual direction that reflect the high-low authority polarity: the life-fixer model (a highly directive approach focused on mastery and control) and the life-servant model (an approach that honors “not-knowing,” trust, and “the mystery of God’s ways”) (1995, p. 19). The core assumption of all Christian traditions, however, is that “no one comes to God alone. We may meet God alone but we do not come to union with Him apart from the accompaniment of others on the journey” (Benner, 2002, p. 356).

May (1982a) defined spiritual direction as a relationship in which one person helps another to perceive and respond to spiritual truth, “a relationship that seeks realization of that which is beyond human comprehension” (p. 1). The director helps the directee cultivate his or her relationship to God, and listen to the inspirations of grace in his or her daily life. The spiritual director’s role is neither to solve problems nor to declare the will of God, but rather to aid the directee in the task of clarification and discernment (Benner, 2002), and to honor the integrity of the directee’s individual journey and experience of the Divine (Merton, 1950).

A central assumption in spiritual direction is that God is always, already present and active within us, and that this presence is not something to be attained, but rather to become increasingly made conscious (Moon, 2002). The Mystery of God is revealed not only in peak experiences of joy and insight, but also in our pain, loss, and simple, day-to-day experience of living (Neafsey, 2005). Ongoing experiential awareness of God’s presence leads to “conversation, communion, and ultimately authentic transformation of the entire person by an

internal yielding to His will” (Moon, 2002, p. 265). The ultimate goal of spiritual direction, therefore, is to foster union with God (Barry & Connolly, 1981).

Another way of expressing this goal is to say that spiritual direction involves “dethroning the false self” (Moon, 2002, p. 266) and waking up to our true identity. Thomas Merton (1950), a Trappist monk, spiritual director, and influential writer and peace activist, further explained:

The whole purpose of spiritual direction is to penetrate beneath the surface of a man’s life, to get behind the façade of conventional gestures and attitudes which he presents to the world, and to bring out his inner spiritual freedom, his inmost truth, which is what we call the likeness of Christ in his soul. This is entirely a supernatural thing, for the work of rescuing the inner man from automatism belongs first of all to the Holy Spirit. The spiritual director cannot do such a work himself. His function is to verify and to encourage what is truly spiritual in the soul. (p. 17)

The true self, or “inmost self” (Merton, 2003, p. 36), is free from our usual sensations, unconscious drives, preoccupations, desires, and ideas. It is an interior, hidden, existential reality that cannot be objectified, not an ideal self to which we must aspire. The true self does not seek to have, control, or achieve anything, but is simply content to be, because its being is intimately connected with, and ultimately inseparable from, the Being of God.

The true self is not something that can be achieved or attained by any conscious means or planful process (Merton, 2003). We cannot lay claim to our true self, nor have power over it; but rather, the true self is what we essentially *are* at the deepest level of our being. The only way of awakening this interior awareness, according to Merton, is to engage in silence, detachment, solitude, and other spiritual disciplines that create the necessary environment for the true self “to make some shy, unpredictable manifestation of his presence” (2003, p. 7). It is not by our own choice that we awaken; God awakens us in God’s own time and in God’s own way (Merton, 1972). The goal of spiritual direction is to prayerfully uncover the true self and let go of the identifications of the false self. Part of this work involves examining one’s motivation:

discerning whether one's motives for action come from self-preoccupations and conditioning, or from the truth and grace of God (Whiston, 2005). Our ability to discern grows as we advance on the spiritual journey; the next section describes the stages of transformation on one's path toward union with God.

The Journey of Spiritual Transformation

Evelyn Underhill (1990a), an early 20th-Century British spiritual and theological writer and Anglican spiritual director, studied the lives and writings of Western mystics in an effort to clarify the psychospiritual process of mystical development. She described mystical development as the process by which we come “into conscious possession of all our powers; and, rising from the lower to the higher levels of consciousness, become aware of that larger life in which we are immersed, attain communion with the transcendent Personality in Whom that life is resumed” (Underhill, 1990a, p. 50). Through cultivating contemplative presence with their directees, spiritual directors are accompanying their directees on a journey of transformation, while at the same time walking the journey themselves. Underhill (1990a) identified five stages in the process of growing in spiritual consciousness: (a) the awakening of the self, (b) the purification of the self, (c) the illumination of the self, (d) the dark night of the soul, and (e) the unitive life. Underhill pointed out that the stages represent a composite portrait of various individuals' experience, not a rigid set of universal states. The next section will summarize each of the five stages.

The Awakening of the Self

The initial stage of the mystic path involves a profound shift in one's inner life, from an orientation toward one's individual personality and its needs, desires, and pursuit of gratification, to a new orientation toward a larger whole that transcends the self (Underhill, 1990a). This shift

in consciousness, or “opening of the soul’s eye” (Underhill, 1990a, p. 177), can happen suddenly or gradually, and impacts every area of one’s life. Underhill suggested that it most frequently occurs in an abrupt, unexpected way that sets it apart from any other experience. The awakening feels as if it is gifted from a source outside the self, even though it often comes after a long period of spiritual seeking, restlessness, and intuitions of a greater reality that one cannot define.

The Purification of the Self

The mystic who has undergone the awakening of the self feels as if he or she has begun a new journey, the goal of which is union with God (Underhill, 1990a). This journey involves discarding all the elements of daily life and personality that are not in harmony with reality as it is now perceived. Underhill called this stage in the mystic’s development the purification of self because it involves an intentional purgation of the illusions, impurities, and imperfections that keep one apart from the truth and goodness of God.

This stage consists of two processes: negative purification, or detachment, and positive purification, also referred to as mortification (Underhill, 1990a). Detachment involves the stripping away of all that is false and distracting to the self, including both material and immaterial possessions, attachments to all finite things, and personal desires and preferences of all kinds. Mortification is the purifying of all the elements of character that remain after the stripping of distractions and false attachments. This stage of growth is often experienced as the death of the old self: “It is a period of actual battle between the inharmonious elements of the self, its lower and higher springs of action: of toil, fatigue, bitter suffering, and many disappointments” (Underhill, 1990a, p. 217). The mystic exercises unrelenting self-discipline in service of the spiritual virtues until finally a higher consciousness is established by the grace of God, and the virtues arise naturally and without effort.

The Illumination of the Self

Throughout the process of growth, the self is constantly changing and struggling, always in relationship with the world of illusion as well as the world of the infinite (Underhill, 1990a). The stage of purification, in reality, never ends as the mystic continually finds himself or herself experiencing both the highs of transcendental awareness and the lows of darkness and mortification. More and more, however, one finds oneself able to perceive another order of reality and establish a firmer center in it. This is the birth of a new consciousness of Divine reality, along with a movement away from one's usual self-centered orientation to the world.

This stage of the mystic path includes all spiritual experiences in which the sense of "I" persists and there is a relationship between the Divine as object and the self as subject (Underhill, 1990a). The mystic now joyfully feels that he or she has arrived and finally found that which he or she was seeking. Underhill classified the experiences of illumination in three categories: (a) sensing the presence of God; (b) perceiving the immanence of the Divine in the phenomenal and finite world; and (c) experiencing Divine direction by intuitive means such as visions, voices, dialoguing with a higher intelligence, or automatic writing.

The Dark Night of the Soul

Underhill (1990a) referred to the stage of illumination as the first mystic life, while the final stage, union with God, is called the second mystic life. In between these stages lies a period of darkness, pain, and stagnation she called the dark night of the soul. At this point on the journey, the mystic feels abandoned by God as all of the visions and exalted states of illumination are replaced by utter emptiness and desolation. Underhill wrote:

After a long life passed in faithful correspondence with the transcendental order, growing consciousness of the "presence of God," the whole inner experience is suddenly swept away, and only a blind reliance on past convictions saves them from unbelief. The great contemplatives, those destined to attain the full stature of the mystic, emerge from this

period of destitution, however long and drastic it may be, as from a new purification. . . . This “great negation” is the sorting-house of the spiritual life. . . . Those who go on are the great and strong spirits, who do not seek to *know*, but are driven to *be*. (Underhill, 1990a, pp. 382-383)

The mystical path often brings an oscillation between states of intense joy and intense pain. This is sometimes referred to as God’s Game of Love, in which He continually shows Himself and then hides Himself once again.

During the dark night, one loses interest in and passion for the spiritual life that was once so compelling and fulfilling (Underhill, 1990a). Temptations, illusions, and worldly preoccupations previously renounced strongly reassert themselves. One’s creative and intellectual life becomes dry and lifeless. Even outer circumstances, such as one’s relationships, work, and health, are negatively affected by the dark night, and it may feel as if one is suffering trial after trial with no relief in sight. Inevitably, then, the suffering and confusion that comes with the dark night leaves the self little option but to surrender to circumstances as they are and accept the impotence of the individual personality.

The mystic’s goal is to selflessly and persistently trust God in *all* experience, even when it no longer seems that God is present at all. “The function of this episode of the Mystic Way is to cure the soul of the innate tendency to seek and rest in spiritual joys; to confuse Reality with the joy given by the contemplation of Reality” (Underhill, 1990a, p. 395). The mystic realizes that the blissful experiences of illumination are not the end of the road but only signposts on the way to God, the loving means by which the Divine calls the self to higher consciousness. Through the dark night, one learns to love God without conditions or consolations. This act of complete surrender allows one to finally enter the last stage of mystical development: the unitive life, or union with God.

The Unitive Life

In the stage of illumination, the sense of “I” remains intact as the self who experiences beautiful visions and intuitions of the Divine (Underhill, 1990a). One’s personal knowledge and happiness is greatly enhanced. With the dark night, however, one’s dependence on personal satisfactions is entirely renounced. As a result, one’s being becomes more and more intimately joined with Divine Being, as expressed by St. Catherine of Genoa: “My *me* is God: nor do I know my selfhood except in God” (as cited in Underhill, 1990a, p. 396). This direct contact with the Absolute is a perfect union of one’s own will with Divine Will. All personal struggles are now over as the separate self is annihilated, drowned in the whole, “that it may become one and the same thing with the Sea” (Madame Guyon, as cited in Underhill, 1990a, p. 401).

Underhill (1990a) outlined three characteristics of this stage. First, one becomes totally absorbed in the interests of the Absolute, in whatever way the Absolute is experienced by the self. Underhill stressed the fact that the personality is not destroyed, but remains in a new form, stripped of all personal, individual initiative. The second characteristic of this stage involves acting by Divine authority, sharing in its vitality, compassion, and serenity. Many mystics become passionately involved in service, education, or political activism. It appears that the human being has a two-fold spiritual destiny: a balance of quiet contemplation and divinely inspired action in the world. Finally, the third characteristic of the unitive life is the mystic’s ability to attract disciples and create spiritual community, becoming “a parent of spiritual vitality in other men” (1990a, p. 416). In this way, he or she becomes an agent and channel of Divine truth in the temporal world.

The Formation of a Spiritual Director

The spiritual director's role is to companion another person on the journey of spiritual transformation; it is therefore essential that he or she be a fellow traveler on the path. This implies that the spiritual director is involved in his or her own spiritual formation, which Joann Conn (1999) defines as "our cooperation with the Spirit's action over our lifetime, the action of transforming our desires, our deepest self, into the relationship Christ has with God" (p. 88). Spiritual formation includes a wide variety of means and methods of deepening faith and fostering spiritual growth, including theological study, spiritual direction, and spiritual practices such as solitude, silence, prayer, fasting, and communal worship (May, 1982a; Willard, 2003). Formation involves an active cooperation with the Holy Spirit in "reshaping the personality" (Willard, 2003, p. 6) through both overt behavior and inner disciplines. Ultimately, transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit and not the individual self; at the same time, we are called upon to take a conscious role in noticing, responding, and giving thanks for the Divine presence in our lives (T. Edwards, 2001; Willard, 2003).

Joann Conn (1999) suggests that programs of preparation for spiritual directors are formation and not training programs. They are not simply training people in skills and methods, but are helping to "'form' one to attend in a conscious and critical way to the 'form' or shape of doing spiritual direction" (1999, p. 90). She emphasizes that spiritual direction is a gifted calling and identifies four signs of this gift: (a) one desires spiritual growth through one's own prayer and participation in a spiritual community, (b) one desires spiritual support for oneself through the companionship of a spiritual director, (c) one is freely approached by others to talk about their spiritual lives, and (d) one can name one's personal gifts as a potential spiritual director as well as areas for further development. From interviews with 29 spiritual leaders, Tilden Edwards

(1980) concluded that personal spiritual commitment, experience, knowledge, and an active discipline of prayer were the most important qualities in a spiritual director.

Janet Ruffing (1999), an author, teacher, and supervisor of spiritual directors, warns that spiritual directors without personal spiritual experience or adequate knowledge of God's ways can lead others astray. She suggests that spiritual directors who are at less advanced levels of spiritual development than their directees can experience envy and fear in spiritual direction, leading them to behave in inappropriate ways. She, therefore, argues that spiritual directors "need to have experienced a spiritual awakening, entered the beginning stages of contemplative prayer and made a real, ongoing commitment to developing their spirituality" (Ruffing, 1999, p. 24). An experience with one's own discernment and prayer is essential to being able to bring the same intention and attitude to spiritual direction. The qualities of contemplative prayer are the same as the qualities of contemplative listening: "quieting of body, mind, and faculties; awareness of present space; focused awareness, open waiting, and active reaching out to the other; wordless communication; letting go; willingness to be changed by the relationship" (Galli, 2000, p. 16). The essential element in spiritual direction is not the mastering of skills or methods, but the ability to sustain this contemplative attitude and "lean prayerfully into the loving presence of God" (Schulte, 2005, p. 8). This brings us to the next section where we will explore the presence of the spiritual director.

The Presence of the Spiritual Director

What is the ideal attitude and quality of presence of the spiritual director? Several contemporary writers have addressed this question (e.g., Barry, 1983; Bowen, 2005; T. Edwards, 2001; May, 1982a), and they all agree that the intention of the spiritual director is vitally important to the ministry of spiritual direction. Rose Mary Dougherty (2005), a spiritual director

with 30 years' experience, describes this type of intention well when she calls spiritual direction an act of prayer:

We consciously choose to put ourselves in the way of grace, or to enter the sacred space of our True Self, or open ourselves to the Indwelling Mystery of our souls. 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. This shared act of prayer is the acknowledgment that the Holy Spirit is, indeed, the spiritual director and that the time together is about creating an atmosphere supportive of detached listening and fresh seeing. In this time of prayer, both director and directee are transformed. (Dougherty, 2005, p. 28)

In spiritual direction, the conscious intention to orient oneself toward God is often referred to as contemplative presence (May, 1991), contemplative listening (Bowen, 2005), or the contemplative attitude (Barry & Connolly, 1981; J. Edwards, 1986). This section will review the nature of contemplation as it relates to the spiritual director's presence, as well as two other themes to which Dougherty makes reference: the acknowledgement of the Holy Spirit as the true director, and the intention to create a space for detached listening and fresh seeing.

The Nature of Contemplation

As stated earlier, the foundation of Christian life is faith in the potential of one's being to be transformed, the potential to awaken to one's true self and God by consenting to the presence and action of the Holy Spirit within (Keating, 2003). When one prays with the intention of opening one's whole being to God, one lets go of the thoughts, feelings, and sensations arising in the present moment, and instead listens for the deeper Mystery within and beyond any image, experience, or form. This way of praying opens up the possibility for the inspiration of Spirit to flow into one's being directly and "without the intermediary of our own reflections or acts of will. In other words, the Spirit prays in us and we consent" (2003, p. 13). This is the classical meaning of contemplation.

At the heart of contemplation is a direct, immediate, intentional relationship with the Divine Source:

Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that Source. It *knows* the Source, obscurely, inexplicably, but with a certitude that goes both beyond reason and beyond simple faith. For contemplation is a kind of spiritual vision to which both reason and faith aspire, by their very nature, because without it they must always remain incomplete. Yet contemplation is not vision because it sees “without seeing” and knows “without knowing.” (Merton, 1972, p. 1)

Merton was pointing to a vivid awareness of the presence of God that comes not from one’s thinking mind or one’s emotional experience, but from an intuition that transcends all the usual and familiar ways of knowing and perceiving. This awareness is not something that can be attained at will; therefore Merton (2003) referred to it as passive or “infused contemplation” (p. 71). It is a gift from God that lies outside of one’s personal control. As one progresses in spiritual development, however, the sense of God’s presence becomes increasingly clear, close, and unmistakable (Underhill, 1990a).

Keating (2003) states that as one becomes established in contemplative prayer, “a mysterious undifferentiated and peaceful Presence seems to be established inside of you. Some people say they feel that God is living within them” (p. 72). In a study of the Celtic Christian practice of the presence of the Divine, William Parks (2002) found that a group of 12 Christian college students who participated in a 7-week prayer and study group increased their sense of God’s presence during their ordinary activities. The participants also reported an increased integration of their faith into their daily lives. Parks discovered that simply writing down how they experienced God’s presence, before even engaging in any spiritual practices, increased participants’ perception of that presence. Although the sample size in this study is small, the results suggest the usefulness of this simple practice.

Contemplation does not simply refer to an awareness of God beyond all concepts and experience; rather, it consists of a range of possible experience (Merton, 2003). Although contact with “the Real within all that is real” (Merton, 1972, p. 3) can occur beyond the senses and the intellect, this represents only the purest form of contemplation and the one toward which all other forms are ultimately leading. The experience of God in the ineffable darkness of unknowing is referred to as apophatic contemplation (Keating, 2003). On the way, however, people can experience mystical intuitions and intimations of God through the symbols and events of the material world, including feelings, images, thoughts, memories, and movements of the will (T. Edwards, 2001; Merton, 2003). This experience of Divine Presence in all manifest things is called kataphatic contemplation. Both kinds of contemplation are essential aspects of mystical experience: “In these two forms of perception we see the growing consciousness of the mystic stretching in two directions, until it includes in its span both the World of Being and the World of Becoming; that dual apprehension of reality as transcendent yet immanent” (Underhill, 1990a, p. 240).

How does one invite the experience of infused contemplation, either apophatic or kataphatic? This question points to another distinction that needs to be made. The practices that people engage in to become closer to God, such as prayer and spiritual direction, demand a particular way of being present in the moment. The presence that the spiritual director cultivates is not purely passive—it is an intentional receptivity to God, “an orientation to the Real One in the immediate moment, whether anything is consciously gifted experientially or not in that time” (T. Edwards, 2001, p. 5). Merton (2003) referred to this cooperation and conscious effort to open oneself to God as “active contemplation” (p. 57). He suggested that a long-term commitment to active contemplation prepares one for sporadic and unpredictable gifts of infused contemplation.

The contemplative presence of the spiritual director is a form of active contemplation. What does contemplation look like in spiritual direction? The following sections will describe the process in greater detail, starting with a core assumption of the contemplative practice of spiritual direction: the Holy Spirit, not the director, is the true healer and agent of growth and change (Merton, 1950).

The Holy Spirit as True Director

According to Tilden Edwards (2001), the greatest gift a spiritual director can give is the willingness to be present to God for another's soul. The director is an intercessory presence (T. Edwards, 2001) and the servant of the directee's contemplation (J. Edwards, 1986), always turning his or her attention back to God and away from self-preoccupation. The intention of a spiritual direction session is not to solve problems, or even to help the client reach his or her full human potential; rather, it is to foster the growth of the directee "in a love relationship with God and others in Christ" (McCarty, 1986, p. 230). In the service of that relationship, the director recedes into the background and acknowledges that any healing comes from the Holy Spirit through the relationship rather than as a result of his or her skills and efforts alone (May, 1982a). Instead of one person providing another with guidance, both director and directee are the recipients of Divine grace, with the only agenda being to recognize God at work in the relationship (Merton, 1950).

When May (1982a) asked a group of pastoral counselors and hospital chaplains to offer each other spiritual direction for the first time, one of them responded as follows:

It's difficult to express and it sounds paradoxical, but here where I'm dealing with what is obviously the most important part of a person's life, it's like my input is the *least* important. Maybe a better way to put it is that at this level I *can't* really know how things should come out. I still have to use all my faculties and my best judgments, but I am almost forced to surrender the ultimate outcome of things. (p. 114)

Dougherty (2005) expresses a similar attitude of surrender in her sessions with people in the dying process:

In these experiences, I rarely think about how I can help the person, what I can do for them. Rather, I am usually given to realize that there is a deep mysterious process going on that is not mine to see. I can only stand in reverent awe and service of it. . . . This is a new moment, and I see clearly that despite all I think I know, I don't know what is here, now, in this moment. So I pause at the sacred threshold of this moment in the prayer of not-knowing presence. Here I wait to be shown my place of entry, and what is mine to do or leave undone. (p. 31)

The acknowledgment of the Holy Spirit as the true director, therefore, involves an intentional listening and surrender to the influence of a Third-Party Presence in the spiritual direction relationship (McCarty, 1986).

May (1982b) defined true spiritual surrender as a conscious, intentional, responsible act directed not toward any known goal or object, but toward God beyond all image and conceptualization. For May, spiritual surrender demanded a profound involvement in the unfolding drama of life with an open, peaceful heart, and a deep “willingness to engage the fullness of life with the fullness of oneself” (1982b, p. 308). The spiritual director's role and responsibility is to practice spiritual surrender for the sake of the directee. Margaret Guenther (1992) illustrates this intention with a prayer before and during her sessions: “Dear God, let me put myself out of the way!” (p. 18).

Different authors emphasize different aspects of this surrender and contemplative presence. William Barry and William Connolly (1981), well-known authors and Jesuit teachers of spiritual direction, describe an attitude of reverence, awe, and wonder in the presence of the other, whether a person, a natural setting, or a Scriptural text. One forgets oneself in absorption of the other, allowing the other to be who he or she is rather than a construction of one's own conditioning. In one's self-forgetfulness, God makes Himself known. Similarly, Maria Tattu

Bowen (2005) suggests that the spiritual director listen carefully to the directee as well as his or her own experience, trusting that in this listening God's prompting and invitation will also be heard. The assumption is that the more attentive one is to one's life experiences, the more likely one is to encounter God's presence within.

Janice Edwards (1986) states that the spiritual director needs to both notice God and savor God's presence, which is experienced as an interior attraction:

What does this attraction look like interiorly? Many directors sense a shift in their own inner reactions when the directee becomes aware of God's presence. They experience an attraction or an allurements. Their interest is heightened, even if they were previously bored. This spontaneous, felt response, essential for noticing God's movement within the directee, alerts the director to God's presence, providing an opportunity to pay more attention to God's movement. (p. 185)

The director then allows this felt sense of Divine presence to guide the session, rather than his or her own ideas of what to do next. Shaun McCarty (1986) suggests that if both director and directee maintain a discerning attention to God, the appropriate guidance will be indicated at the right moment. The director may hear the Holy Spirit in a word or image, an insight, a piece of advice, or a warning for the directee (K. R. Anderson & Reese, 1999). Whatever comes, the hope is that "the Spirit will show itself between us in fruitful ways, despite and even through our limitations" (T. Edwards, 2001, p. 106).

Detached Listening and Fresh Seeing

In order to attend to the Holy Spirit in the ways described above, one must cultivate detachment. Merton (2003) wrote that in order to detect the will of God, there must be a renunciation of the usual claims on one's attention and demands of the exterior self. This is a practice of being content with whatever is arising in the present moment without seeking gratification of any kind. Merton (1972) noted:

The mind that is the prisoner of conventional ideas, and the will that is the captive of its own desire cannot accept the seeds of an unfamiliar truth and a supernatural desire. For how can I receive the seeds of freedom if I am in love with slavery and how can I cherish the desire of God if I am filled with another and an opposite desire? (Merton, 1972, p. 16)

A spiritual director needs to practice detachment by listening prayerfully with an attitude of unknowing and uncaring, trusting that the action of the Spirit within the directee is far greater than his or her own influence (K. R. Anderson & Reese, 1999).

Tilden Edwards (2001) describes the contemplative presence of the spiritual director as a “simple open presence to what is, a presence that can accommodate all that is, a presence that is dedicated to the ultimate loving Source that pervades what is” (p. 4). In practicing this presence, or attentiveness to God, one relinquishes one’s attachments to the content of the directee’s story, as well one’s own anxieties, preferences, expectations, psychological insights, and self-importance as a director (May, 1982a). One even lets go of any personal caring for the directee; May pointed out that one’s caring and concern for the directee’s struggles can lead one’s attention away from Divine love.

The ideal quality of awareness during spiritual direction, according to May (1982a), is therefore open and inclusive, excluding nothing from the field of awareness, yet fascinated by nothing. Whenever the director notices his or her attentional field becoming restricted and overly focused on one aspect of experience, he or she makes a conscious effort to relax, open, and surrender again. In this way, the director encourages a continuous, moment-by-moment attention towards God throughout a session with a directee. He or she then lets “whatever silence, words, or acts come from that groundedness. In the purest moments the director melts into God’s Presence and carries the directee in selfless prayer” (T. Edwards, 2001, p. 114). Merton (1996) described the experience of pure contemplation:

Contemplation is essentially a listening in silence, an expectancy. And yet in a certain sense, we must truly begin to hear God when we have ceased to listen. What is the explanation of this paradox? Perhaps only that there is a higher kind of listening, which is not an attentiveness to some special wavelength, a receptivity to a certain kind of message, but a general emptiness that waits to realize the fullness of the message of God within its own apparent void. In other words, the true contemplative is not the one who prepares his mind for a particular message that he wants or expects to hear, but who remains empty because he knows that he can never expect or anticipate the word that will transform his darkness into light. He does not even anticipate a special kind of transformation. He does not demand light instead of darkness. He waits on the Word of God in silence, and when he is “answered,” it is not so much by a word that bursts into his silence. It is by his silence itself suddenly, inexplicably revealing itself to him as a word of great power, full of the voice of God. (Merton, 1996, p. 90)

The spiritual director cannot will such an experience to happen, but simply holds the vision and intention for it, as a servant of the directee’s contemplation (J. Edwards, 1986).

The Presence of the Psychotherapist

If the optimal quality of awareness for spiritual direction involves excluding nothing and being fascinated by nothing, what is the optimal quality of awareness for psychotherapy? I begin this discussion with a clarification of the differences between spiritual direction and psychotherapy. Next, I will pursue an exploration of the dynamic relationship between spirituality and psychotherapy, followed by an introduction to transpersonal psychotherapy and the topic of presence within the field.

Spiritual Direction and Psychotherapy

Spiritual direction differs from counseling and psychotherapy in both content and intent (May, 1982a). Clients in psychotherapy are likely to bring psychological content in the form of issues that are troubling them, such as emotional crises, relationship conflicts, life transitions, or addictions, to name just a few examples. Directees in spiritual direction, however, are more likely to discuss explicitly spiritual issues such as their prayer practices, their sense of God’s presence in their lives, or their spiritual experiences. In a survey of 68 spiritual directors and 50

psychotherapists, Marilyn Ganje-Fling and Patricia McCarthy (1991) found that although psychological content (such as self-esteem, relationships, occupation, sex, and health) came up equally frequently in both spiritual direction and psychotherapy, directees were significantly more likely than psychotherapy clients to discuss spiritual topics (such as spiritual self-improvement, relationship with God, and religion). May (1982a) asserted that although a variety of life issues inevitably surface in spiritual direction, the content of the session should always be examined for its relevance to the directee's spiritual inclinations and experiences of fundamental meaning.

In addition to content, psychotherapy and spiritual direction also differ in their basic intent. A survey of 134 spiritual directors, 72 psychologist members of the American Psychological Association (APA), and 109 Christian psychologist members of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS) revealed that all three groups shared basic mental health values of emotional expression, human autonomy, responsibility, and effective coping (Howard, McMinn, Bissell, Faries, & Van Meter, 2003). The spiritual directors and CAPS psychologists, however, endorsed the values of spirituality, forgiveness, detachment, suffering, and spiritual maturity significantly more than did the APA psychologists. The authors bemoan the fact that psychotherapy is part of our mainstream consumerist culture, where our search for wealth, pleasure, and success has led to both a loss of spiritual values and a lack of development of Christian virtues.

In Ganje-Fling and McCarthy's (1991) study, psychotherapists reported psychological growth and resolution of psychological issues as significantly more frequent goals than did spiritual directors. Spiritual directors, on the other hand, reported spiritual growth and resolution of spiritual issues as significantly more frequent goals in their work with directees. Traditional

psychotherapy generally aims for therapeutic goals such as symptom reduction, problem solving, greater adjustment and functioning for the client, resolution of inner and outer conflicts, and the removal of obstacles to further growth. May (1982a) pointed out that:

In general, psychotherapy hopes to encourage more efficient living, and its values and intentions often reflect those that prevail in the culture at any given time. For example, psychotherapy often seeks to bolster an individual's capacity to gratify needs and desires and to achieve a sense of autonomous mastery over self and circumstance. . . . In contrast spiritual direction—at least in its more mature forms—seeks liberation from attachments and a self-giving surrender to the discerned will and power of God. (p. 17)

Spiritual direction does not seek to solve problems nor achieve any particular outcome; rather, the aim is simply to help the directee attend and respond to God (Benner, 2002). The psychotherapist's goal is psychological health and well-being; the spiritual director's goal is to companion the seeker in a lifelong process of spiritual transformation (Sperry, 2003).

Spiritual directors and psychotherapists use different means to achieve their goals. Len Sperry (2003) describes the spiritual director's stance as one of "quietly waiting and listening for the movement of the Spirit" (Sperry, 2003, p. 10), while the psychotherapist is more concerned with actively designing and implementing therapeutic interventions. On the being-doing continuum, spiritual directors, therefore, tend to be closer to the being end while psychotherapists tend to be closer to the doing end (Sperry, 2003). Ganje-Fling and McCarthy (1991) found that both groups used techniques of self-disclosure, information-giving, and homework with similar frequency. Although they expected to find that the psychotherapists used more leading techniques (open and closed questions, advice, confrontation, and interpretations), both groups reported using them equally infrequently. Spiritual directors, however, used significantly more meditation, prayer, and silence, as well as significantly more continuing responses (reflecting content and feeling). From these results, the authors speculate that spiritual directors may place greater emphasis on self-exploration and the directee's perceptions rather

than on attempting to analyze or intervene as psychotherapists are expected to do. The authors suggest, however, that the results be considered tentative because they are based on self-report rather than behavioral assessment of practitioners engaged in their work.

In another study by Gary Moon, Dale Willis, Judy Bailey, and John Kwasny (1993), 32 Christian psychotherapists, 28 pastoral counselors, and 43 spiritual directors were surveyed to determine their use of Christian spiritual direction disciplines and techniques. The results showed that spiritual directors were both significantly more likely to receive training in the techniques and significantly more likely to use them in their practice than either of the other two groups. The groups also preferred to use different techniques. Spiritual directors most frequently employed discernment, solitude/silence, spiritual history, listening prayer, and contemplative prayer, while Christian psychotherapists were most likely to use forgiveness, intercessory prayer, teaching from Scripture, journal keeping, and confession. It was also found that practitioners who held doctorate degrees in psychology were less likely to use any of the spiritual direction disciplines and techniques in practice than master's level practitioners; in addition, members of the American Psychological Association were less likely to use them than nonmembers. The authors question whether or not practitioners with a higher level of training are more likely to "psychologize" their clients' spiritual issues, or whether the differences are simply a reflection of the practitioners' preferred orientation.

Other areas of divergence between spiritual direction and psychotherapy include the relationship, professional role differences, and the stance of the practitioner. In psychotherapy, the primary relationship is between the psychotherapist and the client (Sperry, 2003). Often this relationship is seen as the central healing force in psychotherapy. In spiritual direction, however, the relationship is triadic; that is, the primary connection is between the directee and the Holy

Spirit, and the director is simply fostering that connection. May (1982a) emphasized this radical difference and stated that:

any spiritual direction that loses its sense of human subservience is bound to be distorted. . . . The seeds of its potential are in every such thought as I have to help this person, or I must do something to make this person see things differently. . . . In each of these thoughts the power of God, even that which works *through* us, is ignored. (p. 18)

This stance of human subservience to Divine truth leads to a professional stance that differs from that of the psychotherapist: it is one of a perpetual beginner, not an expert (Guenther, 1992). June Schulte (2005), a spiritual director, expresses this attitude well:

The particular gift central to my authentic ministry is not professional . . . it is ever “amateur” in the best sense of that word: as a “lover” and “one practicing an art without mastery of its essentials” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary). Over the nine years that I have been offering spiritual guidance, I have continuously experienced needing to lean back into God’s presence and breathe: “How do you see this moment, God?” (p. 9)

Because of this difference in stance and professional attitude, as well as the fact that there are currently no set educational nor certification requirements for the practice of spiritual direction, spiritual directors as a group are more likely to have a wider variety of educational backgrounds than psychotherapists, and are less likely to have formal training for their role (Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1991). This is changing, however, with the proliferation of spiritual direction training programs that have evolved over the last 30 years; currently, Spiritual Directors International lists 328 training programs worldwide (Spiritual Directors International [SDI], n.d.). In addition, SDI has published guidelines for ethical conduct in order to establish professional standards for the practice of spiritual direction (Ludwig, 2002; SDI, 1999).

The spiritual director’s intent to be a servant of the directee’s relationship with God requires a particular quality of presence that has been previously described in this paper as contemplative presence. Tilden Edwards (1980) points out that while the psychotherapist tends to focus on the contents of consciousness (such as thoughts, feelings, and memories), the

spiritual director is more concerned with the nature and quality of consciousness. In fact, too much interest in the contents of consciousness can interfere with the gentle, subtle attentiveness required in spiritual direction. “It is all too easy for both director and directee to be seduced into extensive psychological exploration at the expense of attention to the numinous and delicate calling-forth qualities of spirituality” (May, 1982a, p. 14). This quality of spiritual attentiveness has rarely been discussed in the context of traditional psychotherapy; however, it is beginning to be more deeply explored within the field of transpersonal psychotherapy.

Transpersonal Psychotherapy

Over the last Century, the relationship between religion, spirituality, and mainstream psychology has been distant at best. In the field of marriage and family therapy, for example, the topic of spirituality was “even more taboo than sex and death” (Prest & Keller, 1993, p. 138). Not only did the counseling profession find it difficult to integrate religious and spiritual issues into scientist-practitioner models, but in addition, powerful role models set the stage for the denigration of spiritual values. Sigmund Freud, commonly known as the father of psychoanalysis, viewed religiosity as a sign of developmental immaturity (1927/1989). Albert Ellis (1980), the founder of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, stated that “the elegant therapeutic solution to emotional problems is to be quite unreligious and have no degree of dogmatic faith that is unfounded or unfindable in fact . . . the less religious [people] are, the more emotionally healthy they will tend to be” (p. 637). Ellis’ hypothesis has been thoroughly investigated and mounting evidence shows the opposite to be true (Worthington, Korusu, McCullough, & Sandage, 1996).

Carl Jung’s work was a notable exception to the widespread avoidance of spirituality within Western psychology (Jung, 2009). He sought to integrate spirituality within

psychotherapy, and conceived of the unconscious as a limitless, unknowable, intelligent, transpersonal source of inspiration and creativity (Jung, 1968). He believed that the individual conscious ego's task is to come into authentic relationship with the Self, the core archetype of the psyche and the ultimate transpersonal ground of being. According to Jung, the ego receives guidance from the Self through images, symbols, and dreams; Jungian therapeutic techniques therefore include dream analysis, art, active imagination, sandplay, and guided imagery (Stein, 1995). Above the door to his house Jung carved in stone, in Latin: "Called or not called, God is present."

The last 15 years has seen a significant growth in awareness and research on spirituality and psychotherapy, paralleled by an increasing interest in spirituality among the general population (Worthington et al., 1996). A recent study involving 153 randomly selected marital and family therapists revealed that 95% of the respondents considered themselves to be a spiritual person, and 72% agreed that spirituality was relevant in their clinical practice (Carlson, Kirkpatrick, Hecker, & Killmer, 2002). The American Psychological Association published its first book on the relationship between spirituality and psychotherapy in 1996 (Shafranske, 1996), followed by three more over the next 3 years (Miller, 1999; Richards & Bergin, 1997, 1999a). Froma Walsh (1999) attributes the increasing professional attention to spirituality in marriage and family therapy to the "renewed vitality in organized religion and expanding landscape of faiths" (p. 8) during the 1990s in the United States. Scott Richards and Allen Bergin (1997) describe the developments in psychology as a new, more spiritually open zeitgeist, or spirit of the times, while Edward Shafranske and Len Sperry (2005) see it as "a renaissance in psychological healing" (p. 11).

The field of transpersonal psychology has been addressing the relationship of psychology

and spirituality since it first emerged as a distinct discipline in the late 1960s. In the first public and formal presentation of the transpersonal movement, a talk titled *The Farther Reaches of Human Potential* presented at the First Unitarian Church in San Francisco in 1967, Abraham Maslow (1969) emphasized the need for psychology to develop a fourth force in addition to the first three: psychoanalytic, behavioral, and humanistic. This evolving psychology would expand beyond the conventional realms of study into the most profound aspects of human experience, including altered states of consciousness, mystical experiences of unity and connection, feelings of awe and ecstasy, expanding awareness, and questions of ultimate meaning and values.

Transpersonal generally refers to the human potential for experience and development beyond the personal; that is, beyond conventional and individual levels, and ultimately beyond attachment to the personal self and its usual identifications (Scotton, 1996; Vaughan, 1985). The field of transpersonal psychology, however, explores a wide and diverse range of topics. Glenn Hartelius, Mariana Caplan, and Mary Anne Rardin (2007) performed a thematic analysis of 160 definitions of transpersonal psychology published over a span of 35 years. Their results yielded three themes that represent the major subject areas of the field: beyond-ego psychology, integrative/holistic psychology, and psychology of transformation.

For the purposes of this paper, the terms *spiritual* and *transpersonal* will both be used to refer to “levels of functioning of human consciousness that are potentially available in all cultures, with widely varying content and context” (Scotton, 1996, p. 4). In their review of definitions used within the field of psychology, Shafranske and Sperry (2005) point out that throughout history, the terms *spirituality* and *religion* were used interchangeably to refer to humans’ relationship to a larger reality. More recently, however, spirituality has been associated with individual, private, spontaneous experience, while religion has been connected with public

participation in formal rituals and other activities associated with particular religious institutions. From this perspective, it is possible to have a strong personal spirituality and not be a member of a religious denomination, and conversely, it is also conceivable “to adopt the outward forms of religious worship and doctrine without having a strong relationship to the transcendent” (Shafranske & Sperry, 2005, p. 15).

An important distinction needs to be made between the integration of spirituality within traditional psychotherapy and a transpersonal approach to psychotherapy. Commonly hoped-for outcomes of psychotherapy are improved well-being and reduced distress, and psychotherapists working within traditional frameworks may, therefore, strive to utilize clients’ spiritual resources for furthering therapeutic goals (McLennan, Rochow, & Arthur, 2001). A growing body of correlational research documents a positive relationship between religious involvement and health outcomes, including mental health (Miller & Thoresen, 1999; Worthington et al., 1996). Religious and spiritual beliefs and practices “can both prevent problems and help promote coping and healing where problems have occurred” (Richards & Bergin, 1999b, p. 10). Empirical studies over the last 20 years show that religiously committed people tend to experience greater subjective well-being, easier adjustment to stress, better physical health, and higher marital satisfaction than those with lower levels of religious involvement (Richards & Bergin, 1999b). Psychotherapists are, therefore, well advised to make use of religious community resources to help clients maintain healthy functioning.

A few authors in the field of marriage and family therapy are questioning the goal of integrating spirituality and therapy, pointing out that religion and psychology need to be understood and appreciated as two distinct epistemological paradigms (Rivett & Street, 2001; Watson, 1997; Wendel, 2003). Richard Wendel suggests that “to be insufficiently trained or

over-committed to the clinical or religious domain inevitably moves toward forms of reductionism, tacit superiority of domain, and using one area to achieve the goals of the other” (Wendel, 2003, p. 172). He proposes a correlational approach, in which psychotherapists view their clients’ situation from a clinical perspective, and then switch domains to view it from a religious point of view. William Watson (1997) takes the argument one step further and suggests that a second-order integration is necessary, in which clinicians do not simply change the content of their work to include spiritual concepts and practices, but instead transform their philosophical approach to therapy.

Transpersonal psychology can contribute a great deal to this discussion, especially by providing a framework for the inclusion of religious and spiritual issues in therapy. Instead of viewing spirituality as something to be tolerated or utilized as an adjunct to the therapeutic process, implying “that God can be used pragmatically, just as any other strategic technique” (Rivett & Street, 2001, p. 462), transpersonal psychology puts therapeutic work in the larger context of the client’s connection with a Divine source that transcends the individual self (Boorstein, 1996a). A transpersonal approach to psychotherapy espouses not only the goals of symptom relief and psychological growth, but also includes spiritual development as one of its goals, which may include disidentifying from expectations and letting go of the need for gratification of one’s personal desires (Boorstein, 1996a; R. N. Walsh & Vaughan, 1980).

As in spiritual direction, the satisfaction sought in transpersonal psychotherapy does not necessarily involve comfort or a lack of distress, but rather the deeper fulfillment that comes from an unconditional acceptance of one’s experience and a surrendering to spiritual ideals and inclinations. Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan (1980), both psychotherapists and key theorists in transpersonal psychology, offer the following definition:

Transpersonal psychotherapy includes traditional areas and techniques, adding to these an interest in facilitating growth and awareness beyond traditionally recognized levels of health. In so doing, the importance of modifying consciousness is emphasized, and the validity of transpersonal experience and identity is affirmed. (R. N. Walsh & Vaughan, 1980, p. 9)

Transpersonal psychotherapy, thus, does not differ from other approaches in method or technique as much as in orientation and scope (Boorstein, 1996a).

Transpersonal psychotherapy is not a unified field with a single approach or theory; rather, there are various different theorists, techniques, and syntheses (Boorstein, 1996b; Cortright, 1997; Rowan, 1993; Sperry & Shafranske, 2005; Wellings & McCormick, 2000). Under the umbrella of transpersonal psychotherapy are included Carl Jung's analytical psychology (Corbett, 1996; Jung, 2009), Ken Wilber's spectrum model (Forman, 2005; Wilber, 2000), Roberto Assagioli's psychosynthesis (Assagioli, 1965; Firman & Gila, 2002), A. H. Almaas' diamond approach (Almaas, 1988), and Stanislav Grof's holotropic model (Grof, 1980). Some transpersonal psychotherapists have attempted to bring together Western psychology and Eastern contemplative techniques (Epstein, 1995; Wegela, 2003), while others have incorporated altered states of consciousness (Grof, 1980).

Bryan Wittine (1993), a transpersonal psychotherapist, outlines five general assumptions of transpersonal psychotherapy: (a) Transpersonal psychotherapy is an approach to healing and growth that addresses all levels of the spectrum of identity: egoic, existential, and transpersonal; (b) the therapist's spiritual worldview and unfolding awareness of the Self are central in shaping the nature, process, and outcome of therapy; (c) transpersonal psychotherapy is a process of awakening from a lesser to a greater identity; (d) the process of awakening is facilitated by enhancing inner awareness and intuition; and (e) the therapeutic relationship is a vehicle for the process of awakening in both client and therapist. Some of the techniques used in the process of

transpersonal psychotherapy are active imagination, dream analysis, guided imagery, meditation, sandplay, disidentification, and breathwork (Scotton, Chinen, & Battista, 1996; Vaughan, 1993; Wellings & McCormick, 2000).

In addition to content (transpersonal experiences) and process (the shift from egoic identification to self-transcendence), Vaughan (1979) identifies a third important element of transpersonal psychotherapy—context. She explains that context is determined by the orientation and intent of the therapist, including the belief that in therapy, consciousness is both the vehicle and the object of change. Indeed, this idea is presented by many transpersonal psychotherapists as the key component that distinguishes a transpersonal approach. Vaughan (1979) elaborates: “For example, the relationship may be deepened by the therapist’s awareness of the underlying oneness of all beings and his/her essential connectedness with the client” (p. 103). It is not only a shared set of theoretical assumptions to which Vaughan is referring, but also the state of consciousness of the therapist.

Other transpersonal psychotherapists echo Vaughan’s perspective. Seymour Boorstein (1996a) states that the essence of transpersonal psychotherapy “lies in the attitudes of the therapist, attitudes that shape the course of therapy” (p. 3). Wittine (1993) agrees that the spiritual perspective of the therapist is central to psychotherapy: “As I see it, therapy can be considered transpersonal insofar as the therapist seeks to realize the Self, the deep center of Being” (p. 168). Cortright (1997) also affirms that although the therapist is not in a position of spiritual teacher, “transpersonal psychotherapy is realized via the consciousness of the therapist. *It is the therapist’s own inner work with his or her consciousness that provides the psychic support for working transpersonally*” (p. 57). What does it mean to work with one’s

consciousness in this way? This question leads us to an exploration of what is often referred to as the presence of the psychotherapist.

Presence in Psychotherapy

In her recent study of healing presence, Phelon (2004) condenses many writings on the topic of presence into a single, comprehensive definition. She reviewed the subject of presence from multiple points of view: existential philosophy, Eastern spiritual traditions, clinical writings in psychology, and empirical studies of presence in psychotherapy, nursing practice, and pastoral counseling. After creating a preliminary theoretical structure from the literature, she shared her findings with 12 advanced clinician-client exemplars who had experienced healing presence both as therapists and as clients. From their interview data, she then revised her formulations and completed her final theoretical model for healing presence.

Her model presents three main qualities of healing presence: (a) development and growth, (b) qualities of awareness, and (c) therapeutic alliance (Phelon, 2004). The theme of development and growth refers to the therapist's commitment to personal growth, integration of disparate aspects of self, and spiritual practice, as well as the richness of his or her ongoing professional and life experience. The theme of qualities of awareness includes the therapist's ability to give full attention to the client while at the same time attending to his or her own inner experience. This theme also includes what Phelon calls the kinesthetic aspects of presence, which refers to an intuitive, bodily awareness of the client's experience. Finally, the theme of therapeutic alliance refers to the therapist's understanding of the client and receptivity to what he or she brings with "an inner sense of quietness, stillness, and the ability to 'not do'" (Phelon, 2004, p. 351).

It is clear from Phelon's (2004) study that presence is a quality that needs to be cultivated in a conscious manner, through one's own personal psychotherapy, for example, or through supervision and/or spiritual practice. The overall message from the exemplar clinicians was "to never stop working on yourself" (Phelon, 2004, p. 352). They emphasized, however, that spiritual practice was not a necessary tool for developing presence. Although 10 of the 12 therapists had a committed spiritual practice and felt that it was supportive of their ability to be present in psychotherapy, it was not considered to be a requirement by these clinicians. In fact, they warned against misusing one's spiritual beliefs by imposing them on the client or allowing them to distort one's view of the client (Phelon, 2001). The current study will bring greater clarity to the distinction between cultivating spiritual attentiveness and imposing one's beliefs on directees and psychotherapy clients.

Several authors have explored the similarities between the qualities of the therapist's awareness and Buddhist meditative practices (Bobrow, 2000; Dubin, 1994; Speeth, 1982; Twemlow, 2001). Mark Epstein (1984) points out that although Freud espoused the psychoanalyst's application of what he called "evenly suspended attention" (Freud, 1912/1955, p. 111), there has been very little development of the concept in research or training. Freud believed that the analyst should strive for an optimal state of mind that gives open, impartial attention to whatever occurs in the field of awareness, without judgment, expectation, reflection, or a search for meaning. He described the technique as follows:

It consists simply in not directing one's notice to anything in particular and in maintaining the same "evenly suspended attention" (as I have called it) in the face of all that one hears. . . . The rule for the doctor may be expressed: "He should withhold all conscious influences from his capacity to attend, and give himself over completely to his 'unconscious memory.'" Or, to put it purely in terms of technique: "He should simply listen, and not bother about whether he is keeping anything in mind." (Freud, 1912/1955, pp. 111-112)

Freud believed that practicing this attentional attitude would allow unconscious meanings to emerge into consciousness. Another psychoanalyst, Wilfred Bion (1970), expanded on Freud's ideas and wrote that the analyst should "avoid mental activity, memory and desire" in order to be open to the unknown (p. 42).

Epstein (1984) notes the similarities between Freud's evenly suspended attention and the Buddhist meditative practice of bare attention, mindfulness, and choiceless awareness. He suggests that therapists have had great difficulty following Freud's technique because of the tendency to be distracted by their diagnostic categories, theoretical orientation, therapeutic goals and ideals, and personal biases and preconceptions. Freud's (1912/1955) attentional attitude is a way of being that requires training, diligence, and practice, but therapists are finding themselves striving after an ideal without a method to achieve it. Epstein (1984) proposes that through the regular practice of meditation, one's open attentional stance can develop "to the point where it proceeds effortlessly and becomes the predominant influence on an individual's experience" (p. 196). Although Epstein laments the fact that evenly suspended attention is one of the least discussed aspects of psychoanalysis, more psychotherapists are beginning to appreciate the value of the psychotherapist's use of attention (e.g., Cortright, 1997; Prendergast, Fenner, & Krystal, 2003; Welwood, 2000), and some are incorporating Eastern spiritual practices into training (Dubin, 1994; Twemlow, 2001). This study will contribute to the literature on the attentional attitude of the spiritual director or transpersonal psychotherapist, adding the perspective of Christian spiritual practices.

What do psychotherapists view as the benefits of cultivating healing presence? Several benefits have been identified by psychotherapist-authors, for example: staying aware of one's countertransference reactions and encouraging empathy through introspection (Epstein, 1984),

learning the difference between thinking about one's client and being with one's client (Dubin, 1994), cultivating the ability to witness one's attentional patterns and identifications as they occur (Speeth, 1982), and experiencing spontaneous compassion that emerges naturally from a stance of open, spacious presence (Wegela, 2003). A transpersonal phenomenon that is sometimes reported involves an expansion of personal boundaries "beyond a threshold of logical inference and deduction and to a direct knowing of the other" (Hart, 1997, p. 249). Carl Rogers (1961) described this experience from his own practice:

The essence of some of the deepest parts of therapy seems to be a unity of experiencing. The client is freely able to experience his feeling in its complete intensity . . . and I am able with equal freedom to experience my understanding of this feeling, without any conscious thought about it, without any apprehension or concern as to where this will lead, without any type of diagnostic or analytic thinking, without any cognitive or emotional barriers to a complete "letting go" in understanding. When there is this complete unity, singleness, fullness of experiencing in the relationship, then it acquires the "out-of-this-world" quality which many therapists have remarked upon, a sort of trance-like feeling in the relationship from which both the client and I emerge at the end of the hour, as if from a deep well or tunnel. (p. 202)

When therapists are able to shift from an analytical stance toward the client to "a radical opening and *accommodation* of the other" (Hart, 1997, p. 262), they have the capacity to physically sense the emotions of the client, directly perceive his or her feelings and thoughts, or experience imagery that is relevant to the client's situation. Several different names are used in the literature to refer to this phenomenon: transcendental or deep empathy (Hart, 1997), kinesthetic aspects of presence (Phelon, 2004), therapeutic resonance (Prendergast, 2000), exchange (Wegela, 2003), or bidirectional psychic resonance (Butlein, 2005).

Another transpersonal outgrowth of cultivating presence in psychotherapy is an opening to intuition or creative, unexpected insight and/or action (Rea, 2001; Rosenthal, 1992).

Therapists describe spontaneous insights emerging when they quiet the mind, stop seeking answers, and are able to let go of their usual clinging to concepts and ideas (Giacalone, Bradford,

& Sherkejian, 2006). Ram Dass and Paul Gorman (1985), in their book about compassionate service, write: “when we function from this place of spacious awareness rather than from our analytic mind, we are often surprised to find solutions to problems without our having ‘figured them out’” (p. 109). Dorothy Hunt (2003), a transpersonal psychotherapist, describes this process:

Obviously, methods and techniques may be used in psychotherapeutic work, but our effectiveness depends on how much we can *unlearn*, how much our minds can rest in unknowing. Intuitive speaking and listening is immediate, resonant with the moment, spontaneous, and intimate. Truth seems to directly touch itself. This movement is totally in the moment’s unfolding. It could contain the application of learned techniques, but it is not coming from some intention to use them to effect a change. Preconceived ideas about how the moment *should be* limit our availability for the movement of truth or awakens or healing. Often what comes is quite surprising, yet right on the mark, when we are working from Openness and not from ideas. (p. 181)

Joseph Rosenthal (1992) refers to creative solutions that arise from the therapist’s mindfulness and openness to the unknown as “creative void interventions” (p. 48).

Explorations into the transpersonal qualities of presence are rare in the literature, and there are very few empirical studies. A recent development in psychotherapy, called nondual psychotherapy, involves the integration of nondual understanding from many spiritual traditions (Prendergast et al., 2003). Nondual wisdom is defined as “the understanding and direct experience of a fundamental consciousness that underlies the apparent distinction between perceiver and perceived” (2003, p. 2). Within this school of psychotherapy, the therapist’s spiritual development and attentiveness to subtle transpersonal states is highly valued. The nondual therapist is assumed to be free from an exclusive identification with his or her role as a helper and working toward being centered in unconditional presence (Welwood, 2000). Unconditional presence is described as “compatible with a wide range of therapeutic methods.

. . . It is not a passive stance, but rather an active willingness to meet and inquire into felt experience in a totally unbiased, nonreactive, noncontrolling way” (Welwood, 2000, p. 118). In nondual therapy, this kind of presence is viewed as the most important quality in a psychotherapist (Prendergast, 2003; Welwood, 2000).

Wilfried Belschner (2002) designed a 50-item questionnaire to identify three empirically distinct modes of presence in psychotherapy: empathic presence, algorithmic presence, and nondual presence. Empathic presence is defined as a stance in which the therapist attempts to relax, let go of his or her personal preoccupations, and attend to the client’s verbal and nonverbal communication as well as his or her own inner experience in response to the client. Algorithmic presence is described as the stance of a professional expert who has concrete strategies in mind and follows commonly accepted rules and standards (such as diagnosis and intervention). Nondual presence goes beyond one’s ordinary state of consciousness and opens up the possibility of transpersonal experiences such as a feeling of oneness with the client, or extraordinary clarity, humility, timelessness, and peace. Belschner (2002) views nondual presence as a healing field in which the therapist and client can encounter each other without judgment or attempts to control the situation. Some of the questionnaire items related to nondual presence include: “I relax and entrust the whole process to be guided by a supreme power,” and “During my contacts with Person B, I have the impression that I am not simply Person A, as experienced in everyday life, but that I am more wide and open” (Belschner, 2002, pp. 180-181).

Belschner (2002) surveyed 65 psychotherapists and found that men and psychotherapists with medical degrees were significantly more likely than women and those without medical degrees to prefer the use of algorithmic presence to nondual presence. Two overall therapeutic strategies were identified. The first strategy, empathic discourse, occurred when nondual

presence and empathic presence scores were low and algorithmic presence scores were high. These therapists were unfamiliar with transpersonal orientations and preferred a planned and rule-directed approach to therapy. The second strategy, empathic resonance, occurred when both nondual presence and empathic presence scores were high and algorithmic presence scores were low. The therapists in this group emphasized being with the client and being “guided by the flow of current events rather than by strict observation of a treatment plan” (Belschner, 2002, p. 187).

Belschner’s (2002) results also showed that many more therapists were familiar with algorithmic presence than nondual presence. He concludes that a transpersonal orientation is still relatively unknown among psychotherapists, and states his belief that nondual presence will be a future qualification of all psychotherapists. His study is a rare and valuable exploration of therapist states of consciousness, although his results are limited by the low response rate of 29% on the questionnaire. The study was conducted in Germany; it would be interesting to replicate it in North America and other parts of the world, and perhaps compare different professional groups, including spiritual directors.

Another study conducted by David Butlein (2005) compared three groups of psychotherapists: 5 nontranspersonal therapists, 5 transpersonal therapists, and a third group of 5 transpersonal therapists determined by a spiritual teacher to be spiritually awakened. To be spiritually awakened, as defined by Butlein, is “to consciously dwell as nondual awareness or consciousness, and to have had a relatively permanent, fundamental shift in context so that a person no longer exclusively locates one’s identity within a fixed sense of self” (2005, pp. 5-6). From a thematic analysis of interviews with the participants on their understanding of psychotherapy, Butlein (2005) identified six extraordinary personal qualities that emerged more

frequently in the group of awakened therapists: mental clarity, energetic transmission, nondual abiding, spacious presence, heartfelt/mindful contact, and deep empathy.

The awakened therapists tended to be grounded in spacious presence, described as the realization of self as “awareness itself which is prior to thoughts, feelings, and sensations” (Butlein, 2005, p. 121). They believed that this awareness could be unintentionally transferred from the therapist to the client (energetic transmission), and described being able to see and feel the experiences of the client without becoming identified with them (deep empathy). The awakened therapists were also likely to talk about engaging deeply with the client without any intent to change the person (heartful/mindful contact). They spoke of gaining wisdom and insight by surrendering their conceptual mind and listening to the unknown or emptiness (mental clarity). One participant described his experience as follows:

The whole structure of what I’ve seen to be psychotherapy or me as a psychotherapist is crumbling, disintegrating. I think it’s completely ashes on the ground and then there’s more that crumbles. . . . I notice the mind keeps, whether it’s a theoretical structure or based on my own personal experience, it’s always trying to build some structure, some conceptual framework that it perceives things through. So then it feels safe. Then it feels like it knows something. Then you have someplace to work from. Anything but that empty, unknown mystery where you’re sitting in front of somebody and you really don’t know what they need or what to say or where it’s going to go. (Butlein, 2005, p. 132)

Finally, the awakened therapists experienced an embodied sense of oneness with their clients and the world, and described being the instrument of an impersonal force (nondual abiding).

Each psychotherapist in Butlein’s (2005) study conducted a single session with a volunteer client who filled out a questionnaire afterwards about his reactions to the session. The group of awakened therapists received significantly higher scores on the questionnaire than the other two groups, suggesting that the awakened therapists “conduct therapy in a way that is more profound and meaningful to the client than therapy conducted by unawakened therapists” (Butlein, 2005, p. 194). Although the sample size is too small to draw any conclusions, Butlein

suggests that spiritual awakening decreases therapists' countertransference and defensiveness, increases their acceptance of clients, and positively impacts the therapeutic relationship.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered a review of the contemporary spiritual direction literature and current writers' insights and descriptions of contemplative presence. Parallels were drawn with healing presence and nondual presence in psychotherapy. The research method of intuitive inquiry is described more fully in the next chapter, along with a detailed description of the steps taken in carrying out this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Overview of Intuitive Inquiry

Intuitive inquiry is a qualitative approach to research originally designed by Rosemarie Anderson (1998), author, researcher, and professor at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, to investigate transformative experiences. It seeks to bridge the gap between art and science, subjective and objective knowledge, and intuition and observational data. A hermeneutical process of interpretation is used within a structure of iterative cycles. There are two arcs to the hermeneutical circle: the forward arc and the return arc. In the beginning of the study, the researcher attempts to identify his or her values and assumptions regarding the topic under investigation, and then explores the experiences of others through these lenses. This is referred to as the forward arc of the hermeneutical circle. In the return arc of the circle, the researcher's initial lenses are modified, expanded, and refined through active engagement with the data.

In hermeneutic research, the researcher lets what is seen show itself in its own way and does not impose his or her preconceptions onto it or try to fit it into prior categories. At the same time, it is acknowledged that one can only interpret the new from the perspective of the already known—in this way there is an essential circularity to understanding. Mats Alvesson and Kaj Skoldberg (2000) describe this circularity as follows:

Nobody proceeds from a tabula rasa and this includes the one seeking to understand . . . to understand presupposes preunderstanding, but at the same time preunderstanding is an obstacle to understanding. To prevent this from developing into a vicious circle, the existential hermeneuticians advocate a constant alternation between merging into another world and linking back to our own reference system. (p. 84)

Understanding of the new is, thus, achieved through this back and forth movement, a movement that is often characterized as an I-Thou relationship between knower and known (Buber, 1958).

Understanding is, therefore, dialogic and participative (Schwandt, 2000). In the process of coming to know through dialogue, the knower puts his or her preconceptions at risk. This demonstrates a willingness to learn and change, and “to let reality speak its word, regardless of the impact of that word on the security or self-esteem of the knower” (Fowler, 1981, p. 185). In hermeneutic inquiry, the researcher must, therefore, be open to self-transformation through the gradual revising and enriching of his or her original point of view (Smith, 1994).

In this study, intuitive inquiry was chosen because it is especially well-suited for delving deeply into “some of the most inexplicable aspects of human experiences” (R. Anderson, 2000, p. 32), including transpersonal experiences. This approach to research encourages an in-depth, reflective process that values the researcher’s intuitive process and personal connection to the topic. The subjectivity of the approach is both a gift and a limitation (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2004). The researcher must be rigorous in the effort to be aware of his or her perspective and inner experiences, and must also seek data likely to contradict his or her values and assumptions. There must also be a commitment to be fully honest in the documentation of the entire research process, including mistakes made and periods of confusion or doubt (R. Anderson, 2004). This detailed documentation strengthens the internal validity of an intuitive inquiry by allowing readers to evaluate the researcher’s conclusions for themselves.

Validity of Qualitative Research

The qualitative approach to research is appropriate for this study because of its emphasis on seeking understanding rather than explanation, prediction, or control. In a constructivist paradigm to research (Mertens, 2005), which includes many qualitative methods including intuitive inquiry, the researcher does not try to define, simplify, categorize, or manipulate variables. Instead, one asks questions and then sits with them, letting any tensions be present

without rushing to resolve them. One deliberately stays open, even through discomfort, in an effort to keep thinking, to go beyond the taken-for-granted, and to make the implicit explicit. One stays conscious of one's own reactions, examines one's interpretations, and insists on being tentative, not conclusive in one's reporting. This is in contrast to a positivist approach, in which the researcher manipulates concretely observable and quantifiable events in order to test hypotheses and determine cause-and-effect relationships (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989).

In intuitive inquiry, the value of a study lies not only in its potential to contribute to understanding of a topic, but also “in its capacity to help readers ask good questions of their own lives or of experiences they wish to understand” (R. Anderson, 2004, p. 331). Rosemarie Anderson (2004) identifies two kinds of external validity in intuitive inquiry: “resonance validity” (p. 331) and “efficacy validity” (p. 333). Resonance validity refers to the ability of readers to recognize another's experience as deeply true in their own life as well. Efficacy validity refers to a study's capacity to add value, understanding, and meaning to the lives of the researcher, the research participants, and the readers. In this study, it is hoped that the experiences of the participants will be resonant with readers across the fields of spiritual direction and transpersonal psychology, and that the findings will inspire new insights and possibilities for action among all those involved in the research process.

As described in Chapter 1, there were five iterative cycles of interpretation in this intuitive inquiry (R. Anderson, 2004). Cycle 1 involved clarifying the research topic, then preliminary lenses were identified in Cycle 2. In Cycle 3, two sets of data were collected and summarized: (a) the selected writings of four Christian mystics, and (b) the transcripts from interviews with 12 exemplar spiritual directors. The preliminary lenses were transformed and refined twice in Cycle 4—once after reading the mystics' writings, and again after engaging with

the interview data. Finally, in Cycle 5 I integrated the findings with the literature on the topic and evaluated the study as a whole. I will outline the procedures undergone for each cycle in turn.

Cycle 1: Clarifying the Research Topic

In intuitive inquiry, researchers are encouraged to select topics that “claim their enthusiasm, honor their own life experiences as sources of inspiration, and invite the research process to transform not only their understanding of the topic but their lives” (R. Anderson, 2004, p. 308). In Cycle 1, one selects a text, image, or experience that repeatedly attracts one’s attention and relates to one’s area of interest in a general or unclear way. This could be a painting, symbol, song, poem, dream, or record of a meaningful transformative experience.

The object that claimed my attention and inspired this study was a spontaneous spiritual experience I had 10 years ago in which a sudden and unshakeable knowing came over me: at the deepest level, the nature of reality is utter perfection. It was clear to me that nothing is good, nothing is bad; all dichotomies are illusory, and everything fits perfectly into an intricately complex, awesome, and beautiful whole. I also had an insight at the time: there is absolutely nothing for me to *do*. Everything is already exactly as it should be. After the experience, which only lasted a few seconds, I felt an ongoing desire to open myself more fully to every experience in my life, not only accepting it, but trusting it and being grateful for whatever arose.

Ever since the experience, I have wanted to understand how it informs my relationship to others, and especially helping relationships. I wanted to help people not only at the level of their immediate problems and needs, but also at another level altogether, at which these problems can be seen from a much broader perspective. From this new vantage point, the so-called problems, although they may remain unchanged, cease to be problems. As a counselor at the time of my experience, I wanted to help clients not only weather but transcend the emotional storms of life,

and find more liberating ways of perceiving themselves and the world. I also became fascinated with experiences of nondoining—what does it mean, how do people experience it, and how does it arise in psychotherapy and spiritual direction?

Although the state of consciousness I experienced cannot be achieved at will, I asked myself: what kind of presence do I need to bring to a session in order to be loyal to the truth that I felt so deeply 10 years ago? This is where the motivation came from for studying attentiveness to God in spiritual direction. May (1982a) pointed out that spiritual direction is permeated by an atmosphere of underlying peace, allowing, and letting be. Keating (as cited in an interview with Whiston, 2005) puts it well: “God gives us everything we need to be happy in the present moment no matter what evidence to the contrary there may be. A good spiritual director helps us to sustain that trust” (p. 16).

Cycle 2: Developing the Preliminary Lenses

In Cycle 2, the researcher re-engages the topic through a set of theoretical, research, literary, or historical texts (R. Anderson, 2004). The dialectic and reflective process of engaging with the texts helps the researcher clarify his or her values and assumptions about the topic, and these are articulated as fully and clearly as possible. After a period of intense engagement with the texts, the researcher quickly brainstorms an initial long list of interpretative lenses. The researcher then goes back to the texts on a daily basis to note consistent patterns or clusters of ideas in his or her pre-understandings. Through this process of organizing and combining ideas, the list shortens to a manageable size.

At this stage in my research, I followed Rosemarie Anderson’s (2004) method and articulated 14 preliminary lenses from my own personal experience as well as my reading of the literature up to that point. To aid the process, I wrote a longer, more elaborated version of my

own story and personal motivations for wanting to learn about contemplative presence. I then read both the story and my literature review over and over again. I also printed out the quotations from the literature that most clearly and eloquently expressed the essence of the topic for me, and read these many times as well. Finally, I sat down one evening and quickly wrote out a list of major points and themes, and edited these over the next couple of days to form the following list of pre-understandings, or preliminary lenses:

1. Contemplative presence is better defined by what it is not than by what it is. It is not self-preoccupation, nor an attempt at manipulation and control, nor analysis, nor seeking gratification of needs and desires, nor even personal caring for one's directee.
2. Contemplative presence can only happen in the immediacy of the present moment. It is a close, intimate encounter with experience just as it is.
3. Contemplative presence is an inner orientation or personal stance that necessarily involves one's conscious choice and intention to cultivate it.
4. Spiritual directors can affirm their intention and desire to cultivate contemplative presence through rituals with and without the participation of their directees, for example, prayer before a session or shared silence during a session.
5. The inner orientation of contemplative presence must be chosen, again and again, in a constantly renewing moment-by-moment process.
6. To cultivate contemplative presence from a Christian perspective, one must have faith that God is present and active within oneself and one's directee in every moment, despite and even through one's personal limitations.

7. Contemplative presence involves using one's attention in a mindful way: remaining open to whatever arises in one's field of awareness without restricting one's focus to a particular content of consciousness.
8. Contemplative presence involves a profound willingness, receptivity, and surrender to God in the here-and-now, whether or not one consciously experiences God's presence.
9. The experience of contemplative presence can feel threatening or scary, like an experience of leaping into the unknown and letting go of everything one usually holds onto for a sense of safety and identity.
10. The experience of contemplative presence can also feel liberating, spacious, grounding, and full of reverence, wonder, and awe.
11. If one is able to maintain a contemplative stance of attentiveness to God in the moment, one may receive inspiration from the Spirit in the form of images, emotions, insights, or inner promptings toward action.
12. These gifts of grace are spontaneous, surprising, fruitful, and entirely out of one's personal control.
13. Contemplative presence in spiritual direction can lead to experiences of deep connection with one's directee in which both people feel transformed and a part of something larger than themselves.
14. Contemplative presence is not reserved for the spiritual direction session alone; it is an important part of the spiritual director's life and is cultivated through formal and informal spiritual practices.

Cycle 3: Collecting and Summarizing Data

In Cycle 3 of the research process, the researcher collects original data and prepares summary reports (R. Anderson, 2004). Interpretation is to be kept at a minimum at this stage, and the data are presented in as descriptive a manner as possible. This study includes summaries of two sets of data: (a) the selected writings of four Christian mystics, and (b) the transcripts from interviews with 12 exemplar spiritual directors. Each of these will be addressed in turn.

Mystics

The word *mysticism* is historically associated with Greek religion and the cults of the pre-Christian and early Christian era (Egan, 1984). It referred to ritual secrets that were known only by the initiated. In the Christian mystical tradition, mysticism came to mean the living, conscious, immediate knowledge of God and communion with God attained through contemplation (Egan, 1984). Underhill (1964) defined mysticism as:

the direct intuition or experience of God; and a mystic is a person who has, to a greater or less [*sic*] degree, such a direct experience—one whose religion and life are centered, not merely on an accepted belief or practice, but on that which he regards as first-hand personal knowledge. (pp. 9-10)

She pointed out that this knowledge can come in many forms and degrees, from a sudden, ecstatic experience to a gentle, continuous realization. Ruffing (2001) identifies three types of mysticism: (a) the mystical path through knowing, which focuses on the intellect and insight; (b) the affective path, which emphasizes love and devotion; and (c) the path of action, which involves service and works of mercy.

Ruffing (2001) also discusses the kataphatic and apophatic paths, as well as the distinction between world-rejecting and inner worldly paths. Kataphatic mysticism values the content of spiritual experiences, such as images, voices, physical sensations, and visions. In this approach, symbols of the Divine are seen as helpful and even necessary for one's spiritual

growth (May, 1982b). In contrast, on the apophatic path, God is experienced only in the darkness of unknowing. This form of mysticism emphasizes silence and negation, because the contents of consciousness are thought to impede one's appreciation of the mystery of God (May, 1982b). On the world-rejecting path, God is viewed as utterly transcendent and the mystic renounces social, economic, and political goals in favor of contemplation (Ruffing, 2001). The inner worldly path, on the other hand, sees the Divine as immanent in creation and the mystic participates fully in the world while seeking to transform the self according to God's will.

Bernard McGinn (1991) states that the mystical aspect of Christianity involves beliefs and practices related to "the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God" (p. xvii). Mysticism, therefore, does not refer to a single experience but rather a transformative process that continues throughout the life of a mystic. Mystics engage in religious practices to prepare themselves for grace, and also respond to the call by living and working in ways that are in harmony with the presence and consciousness experienced in contemplation. This may include writing mystical texts, forming communities that foster a contemplative lifestyle, teaching, serving the poor, engaging in political action for social justice, or practicing spiritual direction.

I chose to review selected writings of four Christian mystics whose work contributes to the study of the spiritual director's attentiveness to God. The four Christian mystics chosen for this study were (a) the English monk and anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (late 14th Century); (b) St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), a Spanish Carmelite nun; (c) Jean-Pierre De Caussade (1675-1751), a French Jesuit priest; and (d) Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941), an English Anglican spiritual and theological writer. The criteria used to make the selections were modeled after Susan Carlock's (2003) study of true joy, in which she reviewed the writings and lives of

several Christian mystics. The mystics selected for this study met the following criteria: (a) They are spiritual directors, (b) they have a contemplative orientation toward spiritual direction, (c) they have written about what seems to fit my description of the spiritual director's attentiveness toward God, (d) they represent geographical diversity and a gender balance, (e) there are a small amount of writings available for study, and (f) the writings are relatively easily comprehensible. In addition to the above selection criteria, the four mystics' works span a 600-year period in Christian history, and they also represent a range of different mystical paths, from the apophatic to the kataphatic, and from the monastic to the worldly. The mystics and their selected works are introduced in Chapter 4.

As I read the work of each mystic, I held my research question in mind: What is the experience of being attentive to God in spiritual direction? I imagined that I was interviewing them, asking them my interview questions (see Appendix E). I then created a portrait of each mystic and his or her contribution to the topic of contemplative presence. Keeping interpretation to a minimum, I was careful to retain his or her original language and unique way of writing about what it means to be attentive to God. The summary reports are presented in Chapter 4.

Participants

Recruitment procedures. For the second set of data in Cycle 3, I recruited 12 participants for in-depth, individual, semi-structured interviews. The following criteria were used to select the participants: (a) They are currently practicing spiritual direction from a Christian perspective; (b) they have been practicing for at least 10 years; (c) they are also currently in spiritual direction as directees; (d) they engage in regular spiritual practice; (e) they are nominated for demonstrating contemplative presence; (f) they are articulate, willing to share, and able to identify and describe the experience of being attentive to God in spiritual direction; and (g) they

represent a diverse group with respect to age, gender, cultural background, and geographical location within North America. The participants were recruited through a networking procedure of word-of-mouth and referral through my Dissertation Chairperson, Dr. Genie Palmer, as well as my committee members and other interested individuals. I also posted an announcement in an e-mail newsletter from Spiritual Directors International entitled *Membership Moments*. Most of the initial communication with potential participants and those who nominated participants was done through e-mail. Via e-mail, I sent a flyer to people wishing to nominate participants (see Appendix A), and I sent a letter to nominated participants (see Appendix B). Potential participants were screened with a brief telephone conversation to ensure their familiarity with the topic and eligibility (Appendix C).

I received 21 e-mail inquiries about this study. Twenty of them came from people who had read the announcement in the e-mail newsletter from Spiritual Directors International. The announcement did not provide the information that participants needed to be nominated, so I followed up with each person. I then received five nominations from this group, 1 of whom participated in the study. In addition, my three committee members nominated nine people in total, 5 of whom participated. My spiritual director nominated two people, 1 of whom completed the study. Two nominations came from graduate students at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, and both nominees participated. Finally, four nominations came from participants in my study, and 3 of these nominees completed the study.

In total, 22 people were nominated to participate in this study, 12 of whom ultimately completed the study. Eighteen nominees were invited to participate; 14 people agreed, one declined before the screening interview because she felt that she was not well-suited for the study, and three did not respond to the invitation. One person withdrew after being accepted into

the study because she wanted to pursue her own writing project on the same topic. Another person did not complete the screening interview because I had already completed my data collection. Similarly, four of the nominees were kept on a waiting list and never invited to participate because my data collection was complete. Of the nominees, 12 were nominated by a colleague, four were nominated by a directee, three were nominated by a student, two were nominated by a friend, and one was nominated by a supervisor and trainer.

Interview procedures. The interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes long to 1 hour and 15 minutes long, and were audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher. Six interviews were held in person, and six were held over the phone. Two of the in-person interviews were conducted at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, three were conducted in the participants' home offices, and one was conducted in the participant's workplace. In one case, the interview was conducted twice because of technical difficulties in recording it the first time.

I began the interviews by reviewing the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix D) with the participants, explaining that what they shared would be kept confidential, and asking them to sign the form (For the phone interviews, I e-mailed the consent form to the participants before the interview, asking them to read it, sign it, and mail it back to me.). I asked for permission to audiotape and transcribe the interview, and I clarified that while the text of the transcripts may be quoted in the final manuscript, anonymity would be protected by pseudonyms. Ten participants chose pseudonyms themselves, and in two cases I chose pseudonyms for them. After all the participants' questions had been answered, and I received signed informed consent to proceed, I asked them to fill out the demographic information on a form I had prepared (see Appendix F). Again, the participants interviewed by phone were asked to do this a few days before the interview. I then asked the participants to begin our time together in the way that they would start

a typical spiritual direction session (e.g., with silence, prayer, meditation, or ritual). Even if the interview took place over the phone, I encouraged participants to bring to our interview the same quality of presence that they would bring to spiritual direction. I, too, shared a similar intention.

John Osborne (1990) points out that the skills needed to facilitate a good research interview are the same skills used in a counseling situation: empathic understanding, active listening, strong interpersonal communication skills, openness, warmth, caring, genuineness, and ethical responsibility. Using my skills to develop good rapport and trust was essential in my relationships with the participants. I tried to stay open to allowing the conversation to lead me in new or unexpected directions, letting myself be caught off guard or surprised. Before and after the interviews, and throughout the research process, I kept a record of my own reactions, insights, and feelings in a journal. During the interviews, I paid attention to the language used by the participants to describe their experience. For each participant, I attempted to modify my interview questions to incorporate his or her own phrases and terminology in order to stay as close as possible to his or her lived experience of the topic. The questions that guided the semi-structured interviews are listed in Appendix E.

In Cycle 3, the data are presented as intact as possible, without analysis, so I created written portraits for each participant from the transcript material. After transcribing the interviews, I edited the content for clarity and concision and sent each participant a copy of both the original transcript and the summary portrait. Each portrait began with a brief biographical introduction. In order to convey the unique voice of each person, I included many direct quotes, and was careful to use the same terminology that he or she used in the interview with me. Participants were asked to make changes, clarifications, omissions, or additions to the edited material. Each participant read his or her portrait and provided feedback. Five out of 12 of the

participants decided not to make any changes to the portrait, while seven participants did some minor editing of their own words to improve clarity and grammatical correctness. The summary portraits are presented in Chapter 5.

Cycle 4: Transforming Lenses

Cycle 4 involves interpretation of the data in order to modify, refute, re-organize, and expand the preliminary Cycle 2 lenses. In this study, the preliminary lenses were transformed and refined twice—once after reading the mystics’ writings, and again after engaging with the interview data. There is no single, well-established way of proceeding in the analysis; researchers utilize various techniques such as drawing circles or Venn diagrams to represent themes (R. Anderson, 2004), cutting and pasting sections from the transcripts, making tables, and clustering ideas (Miles & Huberman, 1994), or systematically noting significant intuitions or resonances with the data (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2004; Phelon, 2004). I will follow with descriptions of my own processes of data analysis.

Learning From the Mystics

The original list of preliminary lenses was written during the proposal stage of the research, after I had completed the literature review but before my study of the mystics’ writings. After reading the selected books and writing a portrait for each mystic, I began the task of refining the preliminary lenses. The process took several days. I referred to my notes and portraits of each mystic’s work and wrote out the points that stood out for me—the insights that I had had during my study of each mystic, the areas of confusion and sympathetic resonance, the themes I noticed, my intuitive hunches, and the ideas that were still vague but held fascination for me. After summarizing the main points for each mystic, I looked at them all together and went through a process of sitting with all of it at once, looking again for what was most salient in

my understanding of the research topic. Finally, I wrote out a rough list of lenses and compared it to my original list. I found that many of the points I had were already present in my first list, so I chose to leave these original lenses unchanged or add just a sentence or two to express my deeper understanding of that lens. Of the 14 original lenses, 12 remained, seven of which were expanded briefly. Intuitive inquiry researcher Vipassana Esbjörn-Hargens (2004) calls these “seed lenses” (p. 412).

In the process of working with both lists, I added three entirely new lenses and made significant changes to two of the original lenses. In total, then, I had 17 lenses in my list of interim lenses. These are presented in Table 1 at the end of Chapter 4, clarifying for the reader which lenses were entirely new and unexpected (new lenses), which were challenged (change lenses), and which were unchanged or deepened from the Cycle 2 lenses (seed lenses) (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2004). These lenses represent my understandings of the topic of contemplative presence before the interpretation of the interview data from my participants. Following Table 1 in Chapter 4 is a brief discussion of the new and change lenses and how my understandings evolved to that point.

Final Lenses

After completing the interviews with the 12 exemplar spiritual directors and writing a portrait for each one, I started to work on the process of refining the final lenses. I began by reading the transcripts and my journal entries over and over again, making notes as I went. Again, I noted things that stood out for me: themes that seemed to speak directly to the heart of the topic, connections, concepts that didn’t seem to quite fit, areas of confusion, questions, quotes, and my own thoughts and intuitions. I created a large Venn diagram with interlocking circles and different colors to represent the themes and how they were related to each other. I

also read through each transcript carefully and listed the main themes that emerged from it, then looked at all the themes together to try to see patterns and clusters of themes. When I had a list of 30 themes, I cut and pasted all the quotes from the transcripts that related to those themes and categorized them, putting them together in one large document.

Finally, after engaging with the data in these ways for a few weeks, I looked back at the interim lenses to see what had changed, if anything, in my understanding of the topic. I decided to present my final lenses in the form of one core understanding, or “central interpretation” (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2004, p. 413), and 10 other lenses. These are presented in Table 2 at the beginning of Chapter 6. As in Chapter 4, the lenses are presented in three categories: new, change, and seed lenses (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2004), from the interim to the final lenses. I prepared a summary of the data analysis by combining my list of interpretative statements with segments from the transcripts and quotes from relevant literature to illustrate the themes. These elaborated final lenses are discussed in Chapter 6.

Cycle 5: Integration

Rosemarie Anderson (2004) suggests that in Cycle 5, the researcher “stands back from the entire research process to date and takes into consideration all aspects of the study anew, as though drawing a larger hermeneutical circle around the hermeneutical circle prescribed by the forward and return arcs of the study” (p. 323). Not only does the researcher return to the literature review to integrate existing knowledge with the findings of the study, he or she also engages in a critical evaluation of the entire research process. Chapter 6 concludes this dissertation with a discussion of the implications of my study for spiritual direction and transpersonal psychotherapy, and an honest evaluation of what I learned and what still needs to be explored about the topic.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered a detailed overview of the research method used in this study, intuitive inquiry. My Cycle 2 preliminary lenses have also been articulated in this chapter. The next chapter begins Cycle 3 with the summaries of the mystics' selected writings on contemplative presence, followed by a presentation of my interim lenses.

Chapter 4: Learning From the Mystics

In this chapter, I will summarize what I learned from reading the selected writings of four Christian mystics chosen to illuminate my topic of contemplative presence in spiritual direction. The four mystics whose work I studied were (a) the English monk and anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (late 14th Century); (b) St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), a Spanish Carmelite nun; (c) Jean-Pierre De Caussade (1675-1751), a French Jesuit priest; and (d) Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941), an English Anglican spiritual and theological writer. To see the criteria used to select these mystics for my study, please refer to Chapter 3.

As I read the work of each mystic, I held my research question in mind: What is the experience of being attentive to God in spiritual direction? I imagined that I was interviewing them, asking them my interview questions (see Appendix E). I decided to present what I learned in the same way that I present the research findings in Chapter 5: I created a portrait of each mystic and his or her contribution to the topic of contemplative presence. I was careful to retain his or her original language and unique way of writing about what it means to be attentive to God. The reader may therefore notice that God is referred to as masculine, which was the style of these early Christian writers.

Each mystic will be introduced briefly, and then a summary of what I learned from him or her will follow. The writings of these mystics represent the first set of data that I engaged with to enhance my understanding of the topic of contemplative presence. The second set of data comes from the interviews with my participants and will be presented in the next chapter. Because there are two sets of Cycle 3 data, I updated my lenses twice: once after reading the mystics' texts, and again after interviewing my participants. My study of the mystics' writings further developed the preliminary Cycle 2 lenses that I formulated after writing the literature

review (See Chapter 3). This chapter will conclude with a discussion of how these preliminary lenses were refined, along a presentation of a new set of lenses, my interim lenses.

Author of The Cloud of Unknowing

Little is known about the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Anonymous, 1981/2004). The author was an English monastic who wrote during the late 14th Century, and it is suspected that he was male—either a retired Cistercian or a Carthusian priest (J. Walsh, 1981). His intention was to write a long letter of guidance in the life of prayer and contemplation to a friend who was probably not a scholar, but a monk or nun living in a monastery, “with inclinations towards a solitary form of life” (Lonsdale, 1990, p. 54). The author was clear that the book was intended only for serious contemplatives who were sincerely working toward perfection as followers of Christ. It was not meant for “the worldly chatterboxes . . . the rumormongers, the gossips, the tittle-tattlers, and the faultfinders of every sort. . . . I would refuse to have them interfering with it, those clever clerics, or layfolk either” (Anonymous, 1981/2004, p. 4). An exception was made for those living an active life in the world while being inwardly moved by God.

David Lonsdale (1990) describes *The Cloud* as a form of educative spiritual direction, in which an experienced spiritual director gives a relative beginner encouragement and advice, as well as theological and moral information. The anonymous author of *The Cloud* suggested that his own guidance be discussed regularly in meetings with another spiritual director in order to discern whether it is appropriate for an individual at a particular time (Anonymous, 1981/2004). He viewed contemplation as grace from God for which we must prepare ourselves. Contemplation is not an intellectual exploration of God but a willing response of love to God. The anonymous author identified several signs that indicate when a person is ready for the

contemplative life, and he also gave his addressee guidelines for discernment. For the purposes of this study, *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Anonymous, 2004) offers the apophatic perspective and the path of solitude, with a strong focus on love rather than knowledge in contemplation.

Author of The Cloud of Unknowing and Contemplative Presence

For the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, being attentive to God meant following an impulse to love God for no other reason than God himself (Anonymous, 2004). This love leads us to reach out to God as a profound mystery that cannot be grasped by our usual ways of understanding and relating to the world. It is a love that we need not try to explain or even describe; it is enough that we let ourselves be moved and led by it. Contemplative presence from this apophatic point of view means simply to gaze gently at this unknowable God and lift up one's heart to him. We are instructed to follow this blind, humble impulse and "leave him to act alone. Your part is to keep the windows and the door against the inroads of flies and enemies" (Anonymous, 2004, p. 9). Trying to understand and feel God, imagining God's presence, or reflecting on the qualities of the Divine all get in the way of the contemplative exercise that the author taught.

The author used the image of two clouds: the cloud of unknowing above us and the cloud of forgetting beneath us (Anonymous, 2004). The cloud of unknowing represents the fact that God is beyond our ability to perceive through our senses, emotions, imagination, or intellect. The author asserted:

This darkness and cloud is always between you and your God, no matter what you do, and it prevents you from seeing him clearly by the light of understanding in your reason and from experiencing him in sweetness of love in your affection. So set yourself to rest in this darkness as long as you can, always crying out after him whom you love.
(Anonymous, 2004, p. 11)

Since God can be loved but not thought, the author said, “It is my wish to leave everything that I can think of and choose for my love the thing that I cannot think” (Anonymous, 2004, p. 20). For the duration of this exercise, then, thoughts of all kinds are to be ignored and tread down quickly beneath another cloud: the cloud of forgetting. This includes our awareness of all the creatures God ever made and their works and circumstances, our meditations on God’s kindness or our own sins, and even the awareness and experience of our own being. The author stated that “insofar as there is anything in your mind except God alone, in that far you are farther from God” (2004, p. 19).

The author did not regard thinking as a harmful act in itself; in fact, he pointed out that one should prepare for this exercise by undertaking a committed practice of reading, reflection, and prayer (Anonymous, 2004). For the purposes of this exercise, however, thinking is a great hindrance, as he explained:

If any man or woman should think to come to contemplation without many sweet meditations of this sort on their own wretched state, on the Passion, on the kindness and the great goodness and the worthiness of God, they will certainly be deceived and fail in their purpose. At the same time, those men and women who are long practiced in these meditations must leave them aside, put them down, and hold them far under the cloud of forgetting, if they are ever to pierce the cloud of unknowing between them and their God. (Anonymous, 2004, p. 22)

He added:

It is love alone that can reach God in this life, and not knowing. For as long as the soul dwells in this mortal body, the clarity of our understanding in the contemplation of all spiritual things, and especially of God, is always mixed up with some sort of imagination; and because of it this exercise of ours would be tainted, and it would be very surprising if it did not lead us into great error. (2004, p. 27)

The author suggested answering every distracting thought with a single one-syllable word such as “God” or “love.” One should not spend time reflecting on the meaning of the word because this work is achieved “not by reflection, but only by grace” (2004, p. 89). Instead, his advice was

to “fasten this word to your heart” (Anonymous, 2004, p. 23) so that it can be “your shield and your spear. . . . With this word you are to beat upon this cloud and this darkness above you . . . [and] strike down every kind of thought under the cloud of forgetting” (2004, p. 23). The word encompasses our simple and direct reaching out to God, “a sharp dart of longing love” (2004, p. 20).

The author emphasized that this exercise is very hard work, and yet one must persevere in it (Anonymous, 2004). The impulse to love, he said, comes from God, but the need to let go of anything else that arises in awareness is our work. He implored his student to “never cease from your endeavor . . . do not leave this exercise no matter what happens” (2004, p. 34). He suggested that one take good care of one’s physical well-being, because “this work demands a great tranquility and a clean bill of health as well in body as in soul” (2004, p. 92). Although it helps when one is physically strong, this exercise has nothing to do with time, place, or the body:

My counsel is to take care that you are in no sense within yourself. To put it briefly, I would have you be neither outside yourself, above yourself, nor behind, nor on one side or the other. . . . Leave aside this everywhere and this everything, in exchange for this nowhere and this nothing. . . . Who is he that calls it nothing? It is surely our outward man, not our inward. Our inward man calls it All. (Anonymous, 2004, p. 150-151)

The author explained that one can easily be misled by understanding this exercise in a physical way rather than in a spiritual way—for example, by mistakenly trying to lift up one’s physical heart to God rather than one’s spiritual heart, which he defined as the will.

Despite the need for earnest effort, the author encouraged a gentle, peaceful surrender to the exercise, without hurrying, straining, or using brute force: “Let it do with you and lead you as it will. . . . Do not interfere with it, as though you wished to help it on, lest you spill it all. Try to be the wood and let it be the carpenter” (Anonymous, 2004, p. 78). Over time, one’s devotion will increase and the exercise will become easier and more restful, as the author explained:

For then God will work sometimes all by himself, although not always or even for a long time together, but when it pleases him and as it pleases him. . . . Then perhaps it will be his will to send out a ray of spiritual light piercing this cloud of unknowing between you and him, and he will show you some of his secrets, of which man may not or cannot speak. (Anonymous, 2004, p. 65)

Those who are experienced in this exercise, the author said, experience “sudden awarenesses and obscure feelings of their own wretchedness or of God’s goodness, without any previous reading or listening or of a special sight of anything under God. These sudden intuitions . . . are more quickly learned from God than from man” (Anonymous, 2004, p. 82).

The intuition that springs from loving God in this way brings wisdom to one’s day-to-day choices (Anonymous, 2004). Constant practice of this profound contemplative exercise is the only way to achieve true discernment in all things, according to the author. He elaborated:

Work at this exercise without ceasing and without moderation, and you will know where to begin and to end all your other activities with great discretion. I cannot believe that a soul who perseveres in this exercise night and day without moderation should ever make a mistake in any of his external activities; but otherwise it seems to me that he can never be free of error. (2004, p. 94)

The fruits of this form of prayer, then, are found not only during the time set aside for formal spiritual practice, but also during the activities of one’s daily life.

The author made it clear that the exercise he taught is for those living a contemplative life, which he distinguished from an active life. In the active life, one is involved in “good and honest corporal works of mercy and charity” (Anonymous, 2004, p. 26). As one moves toward the contemplative life, one engages in spiritual meditations on the sins of humankind, the Passion of Christ, and the gifts of God. Finally, the highest part of the contemplative life consists in gazing into the cloud of unknowing and loving God for God alone. The author summed it up in this way: “The active life is troubled and anxious about many things; but the contemplative sits in peace, intent only on one thing” (Anonymous, 2004, p. 26). That one thing is “that God may

be loved and praised for himself above all other business, bodily or spiritual, that man can do” (Anonymous, 2004, p. 52).

Loving God above all else, for God’s sake and not for any special reward or release from pain, naturally destroys the root of sin and acquires the virtues (Anonymous, 2004). The author explained:

For when [that blind impulse of love] is truly implanted, all the virtues will be perfectly and delicately implanted, experienced, and contained in it, without any mixture of motive. And no matter how many virtues a man may have, without this they will all be mixed with some crooked motive, and therefore they will be imperfect.

For virtue is nothing else than an ordered and controlled affection which has God for its single object, himself alone. For he himself is the pure cause of all the virtues; so much so that if a man is moved to any virtue by any other cause besides God, even though he is the chief cause, that virtue will be imperfect. (Anonymous, 2004, p. 35)

One way of growing in the virtue of humility, for example, is to develop one’s self-awareness by reflecting on one’s weaknesses and the motivations for one’s behavior. A far superior way to become humble, according to the author, is to engage in the exercise that he taught, following one’s simple impulse of love for God: “Choose rather to be humbled under the wonderful height and worthiness of God, which is perfect, rather than under your own wretchedness, which is imperfect” (Anonymous, 2004, p. 59).

What can the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* teach us about contemplative presence in the context of spiritual direction? The author intended this exercise to be practiced in solitude, by contemplatives “who have with a sincere will forsaken the world” (Anonymous, 2004, p. 66). Although many spiritual directors today are not living a monastic life, they can still benefit from this exercise. The author stated that anyone who has the will and desire to do this work also has the capacity for it. Those best suited for it feel such an affinity that nothing else they do in life is of more value to them than “this little secret love” (Anonymous, 2004, p. 163). People who choose to practice this exercise must be prepared, however, by much reading, reflection, and

prayer, and by “the cleansing of their conscience according to the judgment of the holy church and with the approval of their spiritual director” (Anonymous, 2004, p. 163).

If spiritual directors choose to undertake this exercise, then, what would it mean to bring this humble impulse of love from one’s interior practice to the interpersonal spiritual direction relationship? The author stated that a person may never take leave of the exercise completely without great sin, but that he or she can come down “from the height of the contemplative exercise, which he must do sometimes when it is expedient and necessary according to the demands of charity” (Anonymous, 2004, p. 62). Contemplative presence as it is taught by the author can serve as a guide for spiritual directors. It is an act of will, a redirecting of one’s attention toward God over and above all things. Spiritual directors would therefore relate to the content of what the directee is saying in the same way that they relate to the thoughts and images that arise in their own inner life—all would be let go under the cloud of forgetting.

In practical terms, this means that the spiritual director avoids getting lost in the content of the session and remains continually present to the unknowable God within and beyond what the directee is sharing. The author warned us about what happens when we feed and follow the content of our thoughts:

Before you are even aware of it, your concentration is gone, scattered about you know not where. The cause of this dissipation is that in the beginning you deliberately listened to the thought, answered it, took it to yourself, and let it continue unheeded. (Anonymous, 2004, p. 22).

Although the spiritual director still needs to listen and engage with the directee in conversation, he or she ultimately rests in the darkness of the cloud of unknowing, reaching out with love toward the mystery of God beyond the directee’s experiences. If spiritual directors can do this, both in their own prayer life and in spiritual direction sessions, it will nurture intuition and discernment in their relationships with directees. The author said:

If I could only concentrate with earnestness and a vigilance on this spiritual exercise within my soul, I would be completely heedless about eating, drinking, speaking, and all other outward activities. For I am sure that I would rather arrive at discretion in them by this heedlessness than by any earnest consideration of them with the purpose of achieving a target or a degree of moderation in this respect. Indeed, I would never achieve it, no matter what I did or said. (Anonymous, 2004, p. 94)

From this perspective, no matter how hard spiritual directors may try to be effective directors—by saying just the right thing to guide a directee, for example—they will always be off the mark until they let themselves be led by this simple longing for God.

All their motivations will be imperfect unless God is behind them; therefore this contemplative exercise is the only way to achieve perfect charity in relationship to others, according to the author (Anonymous, 2004). Performing good works as part of the active life, no matter how holy and helpful, will be missing something without contemplation, for “charity means nothing else than loving God for himself above all creatures, and loving man equal to the love of yourself for God’s sake” (2004, p. 60). The author pointed out that this exercise will help a person to have “no special regard for any individual, whether he is . . . friend or foe. For he considers all men alike as his kinsmen” (2004, p. 61). Loving God must come first, and this is why spiritual directors’ personal feelings of concern and caring for their directees can be a hindrance to their contemplative presence. Despite our greatest attempts to help through our own efforts, it is by means of this contemplative love that we are able to serve others best:

This secret love beating on this cloud of unknowing, is more profitable [than the awareness of any other thing, either spiritual or worldly] for the salvation of your soul, more worthy in itself, and more pleasing to God and to all the saints and angels in heaven; yes, and of more use to all your friends both bodily and spiritually, whether they are alive or dead. (Anonymous, 2004, p. 28).

The author believed that because of our spiritual connection to each other, practicing this spiritual exercise benefits all of humankind. He said: “Whoever desires to be a perfect disciple of

our Lord is called upon to lift up his spirit in this spiritual exercise for the salvation of all his natural brothers and sisters” (Anonymous, 2004, p. 63).

In conclusion, the spiritual exercise in *The Cloud of Unknowing* has much to teach spiritual directors about contemplative presence. It is an interior practice that can be extended to one’s daily life, including spiritual direction sessions. It requires intellectual preparation as well as great determination and perseverance. At the same time, it is never forceful or greedy, but rather gentle and joyful. It nurtures discernment and intuition, as well as a genuine love for others, as described by the author:

If a man were practiced in this exercise, it would give him true decorum both of body and soul. . . . He would be able to discern properly, at need, every kind of natural behavior and disposition. He would know how to make himself all things to all men who lived with him, whether habitual sinners or not, without any sin on his own part. He would be the wonder of all who saw him, and would draw others by the help of grace to the work of that same spirit in which he himself is exercised. His looks and his words would be full of spiritual wisdom, full of fire and of fruitfulness, spoken with truth and soberness, without any falsehood, far removed from any hypocritical showing off or pretense. (Anonymous, 2004, pp. 120-121)

This ideal fruit of the practice of contemplative presence is something to which all spiritual directors can aspire.

St. Teresa of Avila

St. Teresa was born in Avila, Spain, in 1515, to parents of the aristocratic class. At the age of 20, she entered the Carmelite Monastery of the Incarnation (Kavanaugh, 1979). Convent life was comfortable and not very strict, and she enjoyed entertaining visitors and pursuing her many interests (Hamilton, 1975). Until the age of 39, St. Teresa struggled with her prayer life, torn between her worldly interests and her mystical calling. In 1554, she had two conversion experiences that deepened her spiritual life and transformed her; in the first, she was deeply

touched by a statue of Jesus and prayed for the strength to trust Him, and in the second, she felt a calling from deep within while reading the *Confessions* of St. Augustine (Kavanaugh, 1979).

After her conversion, St. Teresa's prayer life developed quickly, and she began having extraordinary mystical experiences such as "'visions' and 'voices,' . . . trances and states of rapturous absorption . . . even in public, to her great distress" (Underhill, 1964, p. 175). Her spiritual directors were puzzled and suspicious of these dramatic experiences, and in an effort to be understood she described her states in her book, *The Book of Her Life* in 1562. The same year, she was inspired to lead a new and more serious and secluded way of contemplative life and she founded a new convent, St. Joseph's in Avila (Kavanaugh, 1979). In response to the spiritual direction needs of the nuns, she wrote *The Way of Perfection* in 1565. St. Joseph's was the first of 17 convents she founded in her lifetime in what came to be called the Reform (Hamilton, 1975).

St. Teresa was a strong proponent of spiritual direction for her nuns and felt that she may have progressed more quickly in her own spiritual life had she worked with wiser spiritual directors (Brundell, 1990). She emphasized the need for spiritual directors to be both knowledgeable and experienced in the spiritual life. Her own works were written at the request of others in need of guidance on the spiritual journey, and her final masterpiece, written in 1577, *The Interior Castle*, gives a detailed description of the development of spiritual consciousness. St. Teresa died in 1582 at the age of 67.

St. Teresa was canonized in 1622, and was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church in 1970 (Kavanaugh, 1979). Underhill (1964) describes her accomplishments as follows:

To write a series of works which are at once among the glories of Spanish literature, and the best and most exact guides to the mysteries of the inner life; to practice, and describe with an unequalled realism, the highest degrees of prayer and contemplation; to found numerous convents in the face of apparently insuperable difficulties; to reform a great

religious Order in spite of the opposition of those pious conservatives . . . to control at once the financial and spiritual situations of her enterprise, and to do all this in spite of persistent ill-health in a spirit of unfailing common sense, of gaiety, of dedicated love—this . . . seems a sufficient programme for one soul. (Underhill, 1964, p. 173)

The works of St. Teresa that I studied for this dissertation include *The Book of Her Life* (Teresa of Avila, 1976), *The Way of Perfection* (Teresa of Avila, 1980), and *The Interior Castle* (Teresa of Avila, 1980). Her approach to the spiritual life brings the kataphatic perspective to this study of attentiveness to God, as well as a practical mystical path balancing the life of prayer and contemplation with authentic service.

St. Teresa of Avila and Contemplative Presence

In *The Interior Castle*, St. Teresa envisioned the soul as a beautiful inner castle built out of a diamond or clear crystal (Teresa of Avila, 1980). The castle has many rooms, “some up above, others down below, others to the sides; and in the center and middle is the main dwelling place where the very secret exchanges between God and the soul take place” (Teresa of Avila, 1980, p. 284). The physical senses live in the outer rooms of the castle, and the faculties (intellect, memory, will, and imagination) manage the castle. God lives in the center and is always shining like the sun, but we cannot see Him because it is as if the diamond is covered with a black cloth concealing the light. For St. Teresa, the black cloth symbolized the human state of sin. She taught that the door we use to enter the castle consists of prayer and reflection.

St. Teresa described seven dwelling places that we move through in our inner journey toward the center (Teresa of Avila, 1980). Although these dwelling places represent a general guide to the spiritual path, we do not necessarily progress in strict succession from one dwelling place to the next. We may wander through many rooms, visiting upper ones only briefly or revisiting lower rooms. For St. Teresa, the ultimate goal of the beginner in prayer was “that he work and prepare himself with determination and every possible effort to bring his will into

conformity with God's will" (Teresa of Avila, 1980, p. 301). This true perfection, she said, leads to love of God and neighbor, the fulfillment of the two great commandments.

At the beginning of *The Interior Castle*, St. Teresa made the distinction between our own effort in prayer and "what the Lord does in a soul . . . the supernatural" (Teresa of Avila, 1980, p. 290). In the first three dwelling places, the spiritual seeker must work with great perseverance to repeatedly turn her attention toward the center. She must "approach His Majesty as often as possible" (Teresa of Avila, 1980, p. 293) despite the strong pull of worldly pleasures and distractions. St. Teresa likened this hard work to "draw[ing] water from a well" (Teresa of Avila, 1976, p. 113) in order to cultivate the garden of the soul. In the fourth dwelling place, one begins to have spiritual experiences that are outside of one's personal control, including moments of profound interior silence, intuitive knowing, visions, and inner voices. In these upper rooms, the garden of the soul is watered through our turning a crank on a water wheel, obtaining water from a river or stream, or from rain—ways that are increasingly efficient and free from human effort. These developing degrees of prayer culminate in perfect contemplation, when the soul is united with God in spiritual marriage.

It is beyond the scope of the study to expand on all seven dwelling places in the castle. Since I am exploring contemplative presence in spiritual direction, I will focus on the aspects of St. Teresa's prayer path that lie within our power (with God's help, she would say); that is, the active work of the first three dwelling places. In *The Way of Perfection*, St. Teresa presented a guide to prayer for the nuns in her monastery of St. Joseph (Teresa of Avila, 1980). The most important part of the rule they follow, she said, is unceasing prayer. She explained that this attempt to pray without ceasing helps the nuns with all of the other observances, since "prayer and comfortable living are incompatible" (Teresa of Avila, 1980, p. 53). As a foundation for the

life of prayer, St. Teresa taught that three things are necessary: (a) love for one another, (b) detachment from all created things, and (c) true humility.

When she discussed love for one another, St. Teresa aspired to spiritual love, not sensual love (Teresa of Avila, 1980). This perfect love is free from passion and self-interest, and is in service of God alone. She taught her nuns to love all their sisters equally and to let go of any concern about being loved in return. A person with this virtuous love strives to look beyond the body and toward the soul, always praying that others become “rich with heavenly blessings” (1980, p. 66). If others’ pain and suffering leads them to spiritual growth, she feels joy rather than distress. Loving the body alone, St. Teresa said, is like loving a shadow. Since all love ultimately comes from God, it is as if the perfect lover does not love or know anyone but God.

When she asked her nuns to relinquish their attachments to all created things, St. Teresa included their relationships with relatives who do not follow a spiritual path (Teresa of Avila, 1980). She had an experience in her own life in which she heard these words deep within her spirit: “No longer do I want you to converse with men but with angels” (Teresa of Avila, 1976, p. 211). She was deeply affected by the experience, as she explained:

I have never again been able to tie myself to any friendship or to find consolation in or bear particular love for any other persons than those I understand love Him and strive to serve Him; nor is it in my power to do so, nor does it matter whether they are friends or relatives. If I’m not aware that the persons seek to love and serve God or to speak about prayer, it is a painful cross for me to deal with them. (Teresa of Avila, 1976, p. 212)

In addition to their relatives, the nuns were required to give up their love for the body and their desires for wealth, honor, satisfaction, and self-esteem. The nuns observed holy poverty, “in houses, clothing, words, and most of all in thought” (Teresa of Avila, 1980, p. 46). St. Teresa urged them to bring to mind how quickly everything comes to an end. Turning away from their earthly attachments, they were taught to keep their eyes fixed on God. A prayerful person ideally

goes against her own will in everything, offering her life to God with no reservations. She also practices poverty of spirit, which to St. Teresa meant “being at rest in labors and dryness and not seeking consolation or comfort in prayer” (Teresa of Avila, 1976, p. 197).

True humility, the third necessary virtue on the path of prayer, is the most important one according to St. Teresa (Teresa of Avila, 1980). The way to grow in humility is to strive to know God while at the same time coming back again and again to the first dwelling places of self-knowledge. St. Teresa explained:

There is no stage of prayer so sublime that it isn't necessary to return often to the beginning. Along this path of prayer, self knowledge and the thought of one's sins is the bread with which all palates must be fed no matter how delicate they may be. . . . It must be eaten within bounds, nonetheless. Once a soul sees that it is now submissive and understands clearly that it has nothing good of itself and is aware both of being ashamed before so great a King and of repaying so little of the great amount it owes Him—what need is there to waste time here? (Teresa of Avila, 1976, p. 130)

St. Teresa suggested that a person will progress faster on the path by pondering the purity and grandeur of God rather than dwelling exclusively on her own faults. Although she defined humility as “always finding oneself unworthy to be called His servant” (Teresa of Avila, 1980, p. 101), she warned against false humility, which leads to feeling so unworthy that one dares not approach God and gives up prayer entirely. True humility, she said, brings peace and delight, and enhances our ability to serve God and neighbor.

Developing the three virtues of love, detachment, and humility are important ways of preparing oneself for the gift of passive contemplation, or what St. Teresa called “pure contemplation” (Teresa of Avila, 1980, p. 151). Although she believed that “we should all try to be contemplatives, since we are not here for any other reason” (Teresa of Avila, 1980, p. 103), she advised her daughters to be content with whatever way God wishes them to serve. Serving God is what is most important, not the form it takes, and not all are called to contemplation: “If

His Majesty should desire to raise us to the position of one who is an intimate and shares His secrets, we ought to accept gladly; if not, we ought to serve in the humbler tasks” (Teresa of Avila, 1976, p. 197).

In addition to developing the virtues, St. Teresa taught various ways of turning one’s attention to God (Teresa of Avila, 1980). For her, contemplative presence centered on being aware of God’s presence within us at all times, as he is always aware of us. She called her method the “prayer of recollection” (1980, p. 140), and described it as “the solitude enjoyed between the soul and its Spouse when the soul desires to enter this paradise within itself to be with its God and close the door to all the world” (1980, p. 146). A key understanding in practicing this prayer is that God is very close and we need not travel far nor speak loudly in order to be heard by him. St. Teresa’s writings remind us that “within us lies something incomparably more precious than what we see outside ourselves” (p. 144). The prayer of recollection involves remembering that we are in the company of God and withdrawing our attention from external things to awaken our sensitivity to “things of the soul” (p. 142).

It takes practice to grow in this prayer, said St. Teresa, although she advised one to proceed gently and not forcefully (Teresa of Avila, 1980). It is an acquired habit in which we “grow accustomed to refusing to be where the exterior senses in their distraction have gone or look in that direction” (1980 p. 142). The prayer was called recollection because the senses and faculties are collected together for the sake of entering within oneself and centering our awareness on God. St. Teresa pointed out that we need the help of the faculties to become recollected: the memory, for example, remembers how quickly all things change; the intellect reminds us that we cannot find peace outside the castle; and the will calls back the senses and helps us to be “inclined to love” (Teresa of Avila, 1980, p. 299). These human capacities can

serve us in becoming closer to God and should not be abandoned; without our humanity our souls are left “floating in the air” (Teresa of Avila, 1976, p. 195).

The prayer of recollection can be practiced in many different ways (Judy, 1996). In *The Way of Perfection*, St. Teresa put a lot of emphasis on vocal prayer: reciting the Our Father while “knowing that we are speaking, with whom we are speaking, and who we ourselves are who dare to speak so much with so great a Lord” (Teresa of Avila, 1980, p. 131). This method of vocal prayer is especially well suited to those with minds so distracted that they are like “wild horses no one can stop” (1980, p. 107). Other methods include picturing Christ at one’s side, imagining events in the life of Christ, praying with Scripture or a good book, or carrying an image of God and speaking to him often as one would to a father, brother, or spouse. Above all, we are called to simply gaze at God: “I’m not asking you now that you think about Him or that you draw out a lot of concepts or make long and subtle reflections with your intellect. I’m not asking you to do anything more than look at Him” (pp. 133-134).

St. Teresa instructed her daughters not to be perturbed if their thoughts wander; becoming anxious about it only makes it more difficult to continue praying as best they can (Teresa of Avila, 1980). She elaborated further:

Taking it upon oneself to stop and suspend thought is what I mean should not be done; nor should we cease to work with the intellect, because otherwise we would be left like cold simpletons and be doing neither one thing nor the other. When the Lord suspends the intellect and causes it to stop, He Himself gives it that which holds its attention and makes it marvel; and without reflection it understands more in the space of a Creed than we can understand with all our earthly diligence in many years. (Teresa of Avila, 1976, p. 121)

Practicing the prayer of recollection is akin to “laying a good foundation” (Teresa of Avila, 1980, p. 148) for the emergence of spontaneous moments of contemplation. Although we cannot hear him nor see him with our physical senses, God speaks to the heart and reveals himself to the

soul in many ways, according to St. Teresa. These include moments of deep peace and silence within, along with an inner teaching or “great interior feelings” (Teresa of Avila, 1980, p. 173). St. Teresa wrote at length about the many varieties of spiritual experience and how to discern whether or not they come from God. Some of the overall signs one might observe if one is making progress on the path include: a fervent determination to advance in prayer, an inclination to forgive others, a valuing of challenges and trials, a rejection of honor along with a desire for others to know one’s faults, an increase in humility, and a decrease in self-interest. Ultimately, the purpose of this journey toward God is always the generation of good works: “Perfection as well as its reward does not consist in spiritual delights but in greater love and in deeds done with greater justice and truth” (Teresa of Avila, 1980, p. 313).

The spiritual director seeking to grow in contemplative presence has much to learn from St. Teresa. One can practice the virtues of love, detachment, and humility both within and outside of spiritual direction sessions. One can increase self-knowledge and detachment, for example, by noticing the attachments that arise during sessions—such as being attached to being a good director—and learning to release them, thus making “room for the Lord” (Teresa of Avila, 1980, p. 145). Inspired by St. Teresa, one can be creative in using the imagination to recollect oneself while sitting with directees. For example, imagining God shining out from within directees can help one learn to see them through the eyes of the soul and not the body, thereby practicing the virtue of spiritual love. Another example might be to imagine Christ by one’s side during the session and silently speak to him and listen for his response. St. Teresa’s instructions for the prayer of recollection can easily be applied in spiritual direction:

If you speak, strive to remember that the One with whom you are speaking is present within. If you listen, remember that you are going to hear One who is very close to you when He speaks. In sum, bear in mind that you can, if you want, avoid ever withdrawing from such good company. (Teresa of Avila, 1980, p. 148)

St. Teresa encouraged us to make use of our human capacities to turn our attention toward God, and therefore using vocal prayer, visual images, or spiritual reading can all serve in cultivating one's contemplative presence with directees.

Jean-Pierre De Caussade

Jean-Pierre De Caussade was born in 1675 in the province of Quercy in the south of France (Beevers, 1975). In 1693, he became a Jesuit novice in Toulouse, was ordained a priest in 1704, and took his final vows 4 years later as a member of the Society of Jesus. Until 1720, he was a professor of philosophy and taught Greek and Latin in various towns surrounding Toulouse. He eventually received a doctorate in theology from the University in Toulouse, became a preacher and confessor, and traveled to many places in southern and central France.

In 1729, he was appointed spiritual director of the Jesuit retreat house in Nancy, France, where he provided spiritual direction to the Nuns of the Visitation (Beevers, 1975). During the 7 years he spent there, he gave conferences about the spiritual life and wrote many letters to the nuns. His doctrine was inspired more by St. Francis De Sales and St. John of the Cross than by St. Ignatius. The nuns took notes from his talks and saved his letters, and these were carefully preserved for over 100 years before they were assembled and edited by the French Jesuit, Henri Ramiere. They were published in 1861 under the title *Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence*. The book enjoyed great popularity, has seen many new editions, and has been translated into several languages.

Little is known about the personal life of De Caussade (Beevers, 1975). He was a busy, active priest, but because of his love for silence and solitude he engaged reluctantly in his business duties. After leaving Nancy, he became the rector of the Jesuit College in Perpignan, where he was responsible for administrative tasks. He published one book anonymously entitled

Spiritual Instructions in the Form of Dialogues Concerning Different Methods of Prayer.

According to John Beevers, the book was not outstanding and would have been entirely forgotten if not for the posthumous publication of his passionate notes and letters to the nuns at Nancy. De Caussade spent the last 5 years of his life as director of the theological students in the Jesuit House in Toulouse, and died in 1751.

For this study, De Caussade's book, *Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence*—now renamed *The Sacrament of the Present Moment* (De Caussade, 1966/1982)—has been the focus. This small volume offers guidance for living in communion with God, and encompasses two central themes: surrender of self to God's will and the sacrament of the present moment (Muggeridge, 1966/1982). De Caussade believed that in every moment, whatever happens is to be welcomed as an expression of the will of God, and our duty is to accept and endure our mundane, everyday experience with love and surrender. I believe that his view of contemplation has much to teach us about the spiritual director's personal stance and moment-to-moment attentiveness to God.

Jean-Pierre De Caussade and Contemplative Presence

In *The Sacrament of the Present Moment*, De Caussade taught a spiritual practice that he described as secure, straightforward, clear, and sweet: it is the practice of bringing all of one's attention to the present moment, minute by minute, and surrendering oneself to it (De Caussade, 1966/1982). According to De Caussade, the ordinary events, simple activities, and pain and suffering of the present moment are all clouds behind which God lies concealed. With every moment, we are adding a stitch to an immense tapestry, the beauty, wisdom, and perfect order of which we cannot comprehend. Although we cannot see the whole pattern, De Caussade trusted

that there is meaning and purpose to all things, and everything has its place and relevance in the divine plan. He urged his directees to have faith that God is always available:

You are seeking God, dear sister, and he is everywhere. Everything proclaims him to you, everything reveals him to you, everything brings him to you. He is by your side, over you, around and in you. Here is his dwelling and yet you still seek him. Ah! You are searching for God, the idea of God in his essential being. You seek perfection and it lies in everything that happens to you—your suffering, your actions, your impulses are the mysteries under which God reveals himself to you. But he will never disclose himself in the shape of that exalted image to which you so vainly cling. (De Caussade, 1966/1982, p. 18)

De Caussade's spirituality is down-to-earth and accessible to all; God is found within everyday life, not only in extraordinary acts or experiences.

De Caussade explained that God is hidden, veiled by the events of daily life, and a profound faith is needed to discover him under every disguise (De Caussade, 1966/1982). The only way to cope with this darkness, he said, is to sink further into it and live by faith alone. The divine plan is invisible to our mind and our senses; De Caussade asked, "Should we be amazed that reason is baffled by a mystery?" (1966/1982, p. 83). Only the heart can open to the mystery of God's presence in everything: "The senses run towards the light, but the heart seeks only darkness" (p. 93). The heart is "God's secret hiding place" (p. 40), and faith is an uplifting of the heart, reaching above the mundane and going beyond appearances. De Caussade described the faith of those with a pure and willing heart:

To live by faith, then, is to live in joy, confidence, certainty and trust in all there is to do and suffer each moment as ordained by God. However mysterious it may seem, it is in order to awaken and maintain this living faith that God drags the soul through tumultuous floods of so much suffering, trouble, perplexity, weariness and ruin. For faith is needed to discover in all this God and that divine life which can neither be seen nor felt but, nevertheless, in some mysterious way, unmistakably reveals itself. (1966/1982, p. 23)

The faithful therefore never judge, doubt, or find fault with things as they are; for them, this would be blasphemy. Instead, they trust that they lack nothing and accept whatever happens as a blessing from God.

The passionate self-surrender that De Caussade described leads one to be as a tool in God's hands, loving God for himself and not for his gifts (De Caussade, 1966/1982). In this practice of surrendering to the duty of the present moment, one is detached from one's hopes and desires as well as one's concern with consequences and results. De Caussade encouraged welcoming whatever arises with open arms, ready "to face any situation or condition or person" with good grace (1966/1982, p. 23). We are also instructed to stay in the here-and-now, without regard for the past or the future. It is not necessary to know what the next moment will bring. De Caussade shared the metaphor of the silk worm, which emerges from its cocoon, devours leaves, and spins silk, unconscious of what it is doing: "Who knows where grace may lead them? Who could ever have guessed what nature makes of a silk worm unless they had seen it! Only give it leaves, nature does the rest" (p. 41). We proceed step-by-step, without knowing what will happen next, letting the way open up as we go.

De Caussade urged his directees to relinquish their own efforts and surrender to the will of God in the moment (De Caussade, 1966/1982). In this practice, people feel at a loss without their habitual ways of operating in the world, feeling every moment as if they are "falling down a precipice" (1966/1982, p. 93). They long to feel and see God, and to know his will. Their only duty is to keep their gaze fixed on God and to calmly wait in their blindness, listening for his movements. How does one discern God's will? De Caussade described two kinds of divine will: the manifest and the hidden. God's manifest will is known and defined, and consists of fulfilling the obligations of our state in life and the tasks "to which our circumstances and duty call us"

(De Caussade, 1966/1982, p. 50). In addition to observing external religious practices such as keeping the commandments and frequenting the sacraments, this includes taking care to perform the simple activities that are required of us each moment as part of our day-to-day life. De Caussade called this the duty to the present moment.

Directees were encouraged to be active in their duty to the present moment while being “passive and submissive and self-forgetting in everything else; only meekly waiting on the divine will” (De Caussade, 1966/1982, p. 11). This is the second kind of divine will, which is hidden and undefined. It reveals itself in “almost imperceptible impulses” (1966/1982, p. 16): a feeling of being drawn toward or away from something, a sudden urge to do or say something, a chance occurrence, or an intuitive knowing. De Caussade elaborated further:

Something will prompt us to say: “At the moment I have a liking for this person or this book, or an inclination to take or offer this advice, to make such a complaint, to confide in or listen to this person, or to give away this or to make that.” These stirrings of grace must be followed without relying for a single moment on our own judgment, reason or effort. (p. 15)

Divine action can also bring guidance, inspiration, or insight to a book or a person’s words that was never intended, as De Caussade (1966/1982) explained:

Those who have abandoned themselves to God always lead mysterious lives and receive from him exceptional and miraculous gifts by means of the most ordinary, natural and chance experiences in which there appears to be nothing unusual. The simplest sermon, the most banal conversations, the least erudite books become a source of knowledge and wisdom to these souls by virtue of God’s purpose. This is why they carefully pick up the crumbs which clever minds tread under foot, for to them everything is precious and a source of enrichment. They exist in a state of total impartiality, neglecting nothing, respecting and making use of everything. (p. 80)

We are instructed to let go of every way of searching for direction other than these inner promptings. Books, ideas, supplication, rules, values, and even spiritual direction—all of these are to be surrendered in favor of dwelling in darkness and developing the habit of “acting on intuition and faith in all things” (1966/1982, p. 39). De Caussade was clear, however, that he is

not advocating total passivity. He said it is “useless to dream of ways to surrender ourselves in which all effort of our own is rejected and total quietude sought, for if God ordains that we should achieve certain things ourselves, surrendering ourselves consists in doing these things” (1966/1982, p. 57).

De Caussade (1966/1982) was not rejecting the gifts of other ways of understanding and acting; however, they should be utilized only in accordance with God’s will. If not, our theories are merely “dead letters, emptying the heart by filling the mind” (1966/1982, p. 43), leaving no room for God’s living grace in the moment. De Caussade emphasized that there is no single, specific path to follow; divine will is always fresh, new, and changing. He explained:

What was best a moment ago is so no longer because it is removed from the divine will, which has passed on to be changed to form the duty to the next. And it is that duty, whatever it may be, that is now most sanctifying for the soul. . . . If the divine will ordains that reading is the duty to the present moment, reading achieves that mysterious purpose. If the divine will abandons reading for an act of contemplation, that duty will bring about a change of heart and then reading will be harmful and useless. (p. 43)

We must therefore be “prepared to do anything or nothing” (p. 10), depending on how we are led moment by moment. Perfection does not lie in the tasks themselves, however exalted, but only in the surrender to divine inspiration. De Caussade likened this self-surrender to the death of one’s former self and habits and a resurrection of a new set of behaviors chosen by God.

Divine will is unique for each person and situation (De Caussade, 1966/1982). There is no reason, then, to argue about which activity is more efficacious or holy, as De Caussade asserted:

It is no longer a question of supplication or silence, reticence or eloquence, reading or writing, ideas or apathy, neglect or study of spiritual books, affluence or destitution, sickness or health, life or death. All that matters is what the will of God ordains each moment. (p. 77)

We are urged to offer no resistance, “acting when it is the moment to act, ceasing when it is the moment to cease” (De Caussade, 1966/1982, p. 41). People are called to different ways of being in relationship with God—vocal prayer may be better suited for one person for example, while silence is better for another. The only commonality is love and surrender to God’s will in the present moment: “Being united to God is the only way, not in any specific manner or style, but in a thousand different ways, and the one he chooses for us is the best” (p. 45). De Caussade compared human beings to flowers in a garden, each with its own kind of beauty, but all “content for their part to do what is their nature and state to do” (p. 99), and all surrendered to the work of the gardener.

How can De Caussade guide us in cultivating contemplative presence in spiritual direction? He rarely mentioned spiritual direction in his book. When he did, he warned his nuns to be suspicious of spiritual directors who pursue directees and those who are quick to give advice without being asked (De Caussade, 1966/1982). As a spiritual director himself, De Caussade said to his nuns:

Yes, dear sisters, though I will always welcome you, I will no longer direct the time or manner of your devotions; it is as though through divine action God’s immensity has been revealed to me, and henceforth I shall take no step on my own account, I shall act only within its vast dimension. (p. 71)

Perhaps his most important lesson, therefore, was that nothing extraordinary, complex, or difficult is needed; in fact, a spiritual director’s work can be hindered by trying too hard. He reminded us that “conscious effort is directly contrary to inspired action; this only comes through peace and serenity” (p. 60). Spiritual directors can find peace in their faith that God is at work despite all appearances to the contrary.

Contemplative presence is a focusing of one’s intention on God and nothing more. De Caussade (1966/1982) said to his nuns: “Do what you are doing, suffer what you are suffering,

only your heart need be changed. It will cost you nothing, for this change only consists in desiring everything that God ordains” (p. 61). Contemplative presence is an act of will, an inner orientation to the world. From De Caussade’s perspective, we need only a pure and willing heart; we can leave the rest to God.

De Caussade’s (1966/1982) passionate spirituality can also inspire spiritual directors to keep their attention focused in the present moment rather than dwelling on thoughts of what to say next or wondering how the session will unfold. Instead of being guided exclusively by rules or theories they have learned, they can practice being guided by the freshness and immediacy of each new moment. They can be willing to feel lost and in the dark, ready for anything and waiting for inspiration as the path opens up before them minute-by-minute. De Caussade affirmed that those who are practiced in surrendering to the present moment achieve a balance between method and grace, like a musician who transcends a perfect technical understanding of music to create a masterpiece. The musician’s understanding of technique is necessary but can get in the way of her creativity if followed too carefully. Contemplative presence therefore creates a paradox, as described by De Caussade: “Without rules, nothing more orderly; without preparation, nothing better planned; without thought, nothing more profound; without skill, nothing more accomplished; without effort, nothing more effective; and without precaution, nothing better adjusted to whatever may happen” (1966/1982, p. 39). By staying focused on the present moment and letting go of concern about their destination, spiritual directors can make room for grace.

Evelyn Underhill

Evelyn Underhill was a prolific writer of poetry, fiction, theology, and spiritual direction (Zaleski, 2003). Born in 1875 in Wolverhampton, England, and confirmed as an Anglican in

1891, Underhill spent several years in late adolescence when she believed herself to be an atheist. After beginning to study philosophy, she came to believe in a transcendent reality and briefly enrolled in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an organization that employed ritual to explore personal experiences of the Spirit. Over time, she became attracted to the sacramental life of the Catholic Church and rejected any attempt to induce spiritual experience in favor of a deeper love. She considered conversion to Catholicism but chose not to partly because of the objections of her husband, Hubert Moore, whom she married in 1907.

In 1921, after many years of hesitation and distrust of Church membership and conventional piety, she finally became an active member of the Church of England (Zaleski, 2003). She made great contributions to the revival of Anglican spirituality and was the first woman to lead retreats in the community and lecture on theology at Oxford (Milos, 1990). The work that defined her career was *Mysticism: The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*, published in 1911, which took a psychological and empirical approach to “the expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with the transcendental order” (Underhill, 1990a, p. xiv). *Mysticism* was one of more than 30 books written by Underhill on various aspects of mysticism and the spiritual life. She was an authority on the saints of the Church, and was increasingly sought after as an experienced and compassionate spiritual director.

For my inquiry into contemplative presence in spiritual direction, Underhill brings the perspective of a 20th-Century woman living a contemplative path outside of a monastic setting. For this study, I have focused on three of Underhill’s works: (a) *Concerning the Inner Life* (Underhill, 1956), which consists of her 1926 address to Anglican clergy on matters of spiritual direction; (b) *The Letters of Evelyn Underhill* (Underhill, 1944), containing her letters of spiritual

direction to her directees; and (c) *The Ways of the Spirit* (Underhill, 1990b), which details four retreats given by Underhill.

Evelyn Underhill and Contemplative Presence

In *Concerning the Inner Life* (Underhill, 1956) and in her retreat entitled *Sanctity: The Perfection of Love* (Underhill, 1990b), Underhill underscored the importance of cultivating one's own inner life if one desires to be of service to others. She defined the inner life as "all that conditions the relation of the individual soul with God; the deepening and expansion of the spiritual sense; in fact, the heart of personal religion" (Underhill, 1956, p. 91). *Concerning the Inner Life* (Underhill, 1956) consists of an address made to priests and spiritual directors; *Sanctity: The Perfection of Love* (Underhill, 1990b) is a retreat designed for professional social workers and volunteers. In both cases, Underhill brought to light the duty to maintain a consistent and genuine intimacy with God, following "the wonderful words of Christ in the High Priestly Prayer: 'For their sakes I sanctify myself' [John 17:9]" (Underhill, 1990b, p. 52). A growing awareness of God's presence within and beyond us in every moment is the center from which we reach out to others in authentic service, as she explained:

I feel more and more convinced that only a spirituality which thus puts the whole emphasis on the Reality of God, perpetually turning to Him, losing itself in Him, refusing to allow even the most pressing work or practical problems, even sin and failure, to distract from God—only this is a safe foundation for spiritual work. This alone is able to keep alive the awed, adoring sense of the mysteries among which we move, and of the tiny bit which at the best we ourselves can apprehend of them. (Underhill, 1956, p. 102)

According to Underhill (1956), a spiritual director needs to feel and convey absolute certainty that God is at work in the ever-changing events of daily life.

In order to cultivate this spiritual sense, Underhill (1956) advocated a steady, patient, persistent practice of attention to God. From St. Ignatius Loyola's statement that humans are created to praise, reverence, and serve the Lord, she pointed out the fact that the first two duties

(adoration and awe) are matters of attitude and relationship. Without cultivating these two attitudes, the third duty of service will not be of any worth: “Only persons of prayer can hope to win and deal with souls in an adequate and fruitful way” (Underhill, 1956, p. 110). She concluded, therefore, that the primary religious activity of a priest or spiritual director is attention to God in prayer. She elaborated further:

What then is a real man of prayer? He is one who deliberately wills and steadily desires that his intercourse with God and other souls shall be controlled and actuated at every point by God Himself. . . . There is nothing that you can do for God or for the souls of men, which exceeds in importance the achievement of that spiritual temper and attitude. (1956, pp. 94-95)

For Underhill, growing in contemplative presence meant developing the qualities of adoration and awe, building a new habit of seeing the mundane activities of life against a backdrop of Eternity. Like exercising a muscle that we have neglected, the practice of attention to God is an exercise of the will, a discipline of keeping alive one’s sense of wonder and delight in mystery. Underhill gave us the image of a tree, growing and changing and bearing fruit, but always appreciating the vast system of roots under the earth: “On that profound and secret life the whole growth and stability of the tree depend. It is rooted and grounded in a hidden world” (p. 98).

Underhill (1956) criticized institutional Christianity for its lack of depth and overemphasis on the social and charitable dimensions of religion at the expense of spiritual growth. She said, “It does little for the soul in those awful moments when the pain and mystery of life are most deeply felt” (Underhill, 1956, p. 94). It is for this reason that spiritual directors must take to heart the responsibility of attending to their own interior life. Underhill (1990b) pointed out that people can easily discern true devotion in a minister, therefore it behooves any servant of God to fill his or her own reservoir to overflowing:

Sometimes we are in such a hurry to transmit that we forget that the primary need is to receive in order to nourish our adoring love, our sense of awe, our personal littleness and

dependence. Doing this, perpetually turning to Him, adoring Him, losing ourselves in Him, our souls are slowly flooded by His spirit. Only when our own souls are thus filled to the brim can we presume to offer spiritual gifts to others. (Underhill, 1990b, p. 136)

We cannot give to others that which we do not possess ourselves.

The discipline of attention to God that Underhill (1956) described should not be undertaken with anxiety or “ferocious intensity and strain” (p. 96). One’s practice needs to be gentle and humble; after all, the spiritual life is characterized by peace, Underhill (1990b) explained:

Peace is, above all things, a state of the will. It is a calm, willed acceptance of all the conditions which God imposes upon us. . . . And it is only in such a state of peace as this that our best work can be done. We don’t do it in a state of tension and anxiety. We don’t hear God’s voice then. (pp. 71-72)

At the same time, training one’s attention requires time, effort, and a commitment to remaining “spiritually alive” (Underhill, 1956, p. 104), constantly growing without getting stuck within a static set of beliefs. Underhill’s (1990b) image of the sheepdog serves as a model for this balance between peace and effort. Tirelessly serving his master, the sheepdog works with no regard for the weather or his own discomfort, “yet his faithfulness, his intimate understanding with his master, is one of the loveliest things in the world. Now and then he just looks at the shepherd. When the time comes for rest they can generally be found together” (Underhill, 1990b, p. 62). The sheepdog image also illustrates that “the direction and constancy of the *will* is what really matters” (Underhill, 1944, p. 67), not one’s changing thoughts and feeling states.

Underhill (1944) outlined a practical means of strengthening the will and developing one’s contemplative presence, achieving a life “*consciously* lived in the Presence of God” (p. 70). Each spiritual director must decide how much time he or she can devote to giving undivided attention to God each day, and what would constitute the best use of that time for his or her individual needs and personality. Underhill (1956) considered four things to be necessary

in a healthy religious life: (a) gaining and holding an attitude of adoration and adherence to God, (b) nourishing one's inner life with spiritual reading and reflection, (c) educating one's "mental machinery" (p. 126) to gather itself together and turn from the external world to the internal world, and (d) engaging in creative, spiritual work. Underhill (1956) suggested that one spend at least half of one's practice time in adoring prayer, since adoration—not petition nor intellectual exploration—is the heart of prayer. This can take many forms, including receiving Holy Communion, reflecting on the words and actions of Christ or one of the Saints, or a "quiet dwelling upon the spaceless and changeless Presence of God" (Underhill, 1956, p. 119). In one of her retreats, Underhill (1990b) gave the example of a devoted old man whose prayer is to simply look at God and let God look at him.

Underhill (1990b) taught various ways of training ourselves to attend to our interior life, practices to "accustom our attention, that wanders over all other interests, to fix itself on Him" (p. 77). She described a practice of recollective or meditative prayer in a letter to one of her directees (Underhill, 1944). After sitting comfortably and closing one's eyes, one gently holds a phrase from Scripture or a spiritual truth in one's awareness. Underhill (1944) continued with the following instructions:

Deliberately, and by an act of will, shut yourself off from your senses. Don't attend to touch or hearing: till the external world seems unreal and far away. Still holding on to your idea, turn your attention *inwards* . . . and allow yourself to sink, as it were, downwards and downwards, into the profound silence and peace which is the essence of the meditative state. More you cannot do for yourself: if you get further, you will do so automatically as a consequence of the above practice. (p. 73)

In a letter to another directee, she instructed him not to be overly concerned about distractions that may arise:

Quietly dealing with one's own uncontrolled thoughts and desires is infinitely more humbling than any sort of deliberate austerity; which only makes one feel one has done something! But don't have hand-to-hand tussles with distractions and wanderings of

mind—that intensifies the disease. Try and drop all that and hold some thought or word that does mean something to you, before your soul. (Underhill, 1944, p. 195)

She called this practice the “prayer of aspirations” (Underhill, 1956, p. 120). In this prayer, one frequently repeats to oneself short phrases of worship from the Bible or other spiritual books, in order to “keep our minds pointing the right way. . . . They stretch and re-stretch our spiritual muscles; and, even in the stuffiest surroundings, can make us take deep breaths of mountain air” (Underhill, 1956, p. 120). One can say these phrases aloud to harness attention, or one can use the body to focus the mind on God (Underhill, 1956): kneeling in prayer, for example, or sitting still and straight, or engaging in a movement ritual before meditation to express one’s adoration for God.

The ultimate purpose of this hard work of turning one’s mind to God is not just one’s own spiritual growth; it is rather to make of oneself a better instrument for the work of the Spirit in the world (Underhill, 1956). Ideally, said Underhill, service to others is given with compassion while we are peaceful within: “Action, effort and tension, then, are to be the outward expression and substance of such a life of spiritual creativeness; yet all this is to hang on and be nurtured by an inward abidingness in simplicity, stillness and peace” (1956, p. 134). Formal spiritual practice is not separate from active work—it is simply the training for a continuous inner life of prayer throughout all of one’s activities.

Underhill (1956) described spiritual direction as one such way of weaving together prayer and active service. As our inner life deepens, more people are attracted to us for spiritual direction and we learn more and more about the “difficulties and possibilities” of the work (Underhill, 1956, p. 142). Underhill (1956) asserted that as we attempt to integrate our inner and outer lives and attend to God more continuously, we may notice the following effects:

Almost at once we begin to find that the supernatural energy acts not only on us but through us. Our contact with other people is changed. Our spirit touches and modifies theirs, often unconsciously. We find ourselves more and more able to use, expand, and share the supernatural power received in our own prayer; and this for the most part in very simple and unpremeditated ways. (Underhill, 1956, p. 134)

In her journal, Underhill (1990b) wrote of her own experience giving her first retreat:

As soon as I began . . . I was surrounded and supported by *something* which carried me steadily right through. . . . told me what to say in interviews—how to do the prayers with effect . . . [I] ceased to count as an individual [and] felt completely a tool used by this strong unwavering power. (p. 38)

In the experience of feeling led by divine guidance, one may notice oneself more easily able to discern the needs and personality of one's directees, including the specific way each one has of relating to God.

Underhill (1956) emphasized the need to appreciate the uniqueness of each individual who comes for spiritual direction, resisting the temptation to give general advice or apply the same principles to all. The best spiritual teachers are the most flexible and varied in their approach:

It is a remarkable note of the Gospels that they make clear to us how many different ways our Lord had of saying the same thing; how He met each type on its own ground, and was satisfied to ask some to find the Father through contemplation of the lilies, whilst of others was demanded self-stripping and the Cross. (Underhill, 1956, p. 145)

In working this way with directees, one must be willing to abandon all of one's own most cherished ideals and religious symbols in order to learn from directees what is most meaningful to them. In a letter to one of her own directees, Underhill (1944) said:

As to whether "I shall make you a thorough-going Catholic"—I hope I shall never try to make you any particular thing! My job is simply to try and help you to find out what *God* wants you to be, and what will help and support your particular type of soul in His service. (p. 189)

It is not the information one teaches that influences directees the most, according to Underhill (1956), but rather one's own faith and "un-self-conscious absorption in God" (p. 112). Even in

times of dryness when his or her own sense of God is gone, the spiritual director conveys certitude to others while inwardly waiting and accepting God's apparent absence.

The qualities that Underhill (1956) deemed important in a spiritual director are respect for diversity, selfless patience, humble self-oblivion, wise moderation, gentle wisdom, flexibility, psychological insight, and spiritual firmness. A spiritual director needs to proceed slowly and tentatively, always appreciative of the "slowness of real spiritual growth" (1956, p. 143). Although Underhill acknowledged that knowledge of psychology and the stages and types of spirituality is very helpful, the most important thing for her remained to nurture one's own adoration and attention to God. Underhill said:

Direction work can of course be done only and all the time in absolute interior dependence on God; and all the most valuable part of it will be done silently, by the influence of your prayer on the souls that you are called upon to guide. (1956, p. 142)

She continued:

This is not mere pious fluff. This is a terribly practical job; the only way in which we can contribute to the bringing in of the Kingdom of God. Humanitarian politics will not do it. Theological restatement will not do it. Holiness *will* do it. (1956, p. 149)

For Underhill, then, contemplative presence was the very heart of spiritual direction and the solemn responsibility of every spiritual director to cultivate.

Refining the Preliminary Lenses

The purpose of my study of the writings of these four Christian mystics was to further develop my understanding of the topic of contemplative presence, and thereby enhance the preliminary Cycle 2 lenses that I formulated after writing the literature review. The original list of preliminary lenses (from Chapter 3) is as follows:

1. Contemplative presence is better defined by what it is not than by what it is. It is not self-preoccupation, nor an attempt at manipulation and control, nor analysis, nor seeking gratification of needs and desires, nor even personal caring for one's directee.
2. Contemplative presence can only happen in the immediacy of the present moment. It is a close, intimate encounter with experience just as it is.
3. Contemplative presence is an inner orientation or personal stance that necessarily involves one's conscious choice and intention to cultivate it.
4. Spiritual directors can affirm their intention and desire to cultivate contemplative presence through rituals with and without the participation of their directees, for example, prayer before a session or shared silence during a session.
5. The inner orientation of contemplative presence must be chosen, again and again, in a constantly renewing moment-by-moment process.
6. To cultivate contemplative presence from a Christian perspective, one must have faith that God is present and active within oneself and one's directee in every moment, despite and even through one's personal limitations.
7. Contemplative presence involves using one's attention in a mindful way: remaining open to whatever arises in one's field of awareness without restricting one's focus to a particular content of consciousness.
8. Contemplative presence involves a profound willingness, receptivity, and surrender to God in the here-and-now, whether or not one consciously experiences God's presence.

9. The experience of contemplative presence can feel threatening or scary, like an experience of leaping into the unknown and letting go of everything one usually holds onto for a sense of safety and identity.
10. The experience of contemplative presence can also feel liberating, spacious, grounding, and full of reverence, wonder, and awe.
11. If one is able to maintain a contemplative stance of attentiveness to God in the moment, one may receive inspiration from the Spirit in the form of images, emotions, insights, or inner promptings toward action.
12. These gifts of grace are spontaneous, surprising, fruitful, and entirely out of one's personal control.
13. Contemplative presence in spiritual direction can lead to experiences of deep connection with one's directee in which both people feel transformed and a part of something larger than themselves.
14. Contemplative presence is not reserved for the spiritual direction session alone; it is an important part of the spiritual director's life and is cultivated through formal and informal spiritual practices.

This original list of preliminary lenses was written during the proposal stage of the research, after I had completed the literature review but before my study of the mystics' writings. After reading the selected books and writing a portrait for each mystic, I began the task of refining the preliminary lenses. For a brief description of the process, please refer to Chapter 3. Of the 14 original lenses, 12 remained, seven of which were expanded briefly. I added three entirely new lenses and made significant changes to two of the original lenses. In total, then, I had 17 lenses in my list of interim lenses. These are presented in Table 1, clarifying for the

reader which lenses were entirely new and unexpected (new lenses), which were challenged (change lenses), and which were unchanged or deepened from the Cycle 2 lenses (seed lenses) (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2004). These lenses represent my understandings of the topic of contemplative presence before the interpretation of the interview data from my participants.

As I read through the original list of preliminary lenses, I was struck by the fact that I began with defining contemplative presence by *what it is not*. I also noticed that what was missing from the list was a clear statement explaining what contemplative presence *is*. I realized that the topic was still vague to me at the time, because I could not define for myself what it actually meant to be attentive to God. I struggled with the question: How can one be attentive to God when God cannot be seen nor heard nor felt? I knew that it was an encounter with experience just as it is in the present moment, and that it involved faith and surrender, but I still could not articulate the essence of contemplative presence. After my study of the mystics work, I had a much better understanding that being attentive to God is indeed a mystery, and that I do not have to solve it with my rational mind. Contemplative presence is a delight in mystery, a sinking into darkness and unknowing, a blind faith, a simple reaching out in love toward God. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* reminded us that God can be loved but not thought:

But now you put me a question and say: “How might I think of him in himself, and what is he?” And to this I can only answer thus: “I have no idea.” For with your question you have brought me into that same darkness, into that same cloud of unknowing, where I would you were yourself. (Anonymous, 2004, p. 20)

I understood that the deeper I inquire into this topic, the more intimate I will become with mystery. I grew more and more comfortable with that truth as I progressed in this work. Instead of defining contemplative presence predominantly by what it is not, I added two new lenses that define it by facing the darkness directly and acknowledging that it is an inescapable aspect of this topic. These new lenses were (a) *Contemplative presence is an act of remembering, a continual*

Table 1

Interim Lenses

| Lens type | Description |
|---------------|--|
| New lenses | <p>Contemplative presence is an act of remembering, a continual redirecting of attention toward the mystery of God's presence within and beyond all experiences.</p> <p>Contemplative presence is an expression of love and adoration for God above all else.</p> <p>An ongoing practice of contemplative presence leads to transformation of the personality, and conscious involvement in this transformative process is the only safe foundation for the work of spiritual direction.</p> |
| Change lenses | <p>Contemplative presence involves remaining open to whatever arises in one's field of awareness, and at the same time keeping one's attention on the mystery of God beyond experience. It is, thus, a balance of mindfulness and concentration.</p> <p>Contemplative presence is an attitude of waiting and listening for God's will, and a profound surrender and willingness to do anything or nothing in response.</p> |
| Seed lenses | <p>Contemplative presence is an act of will. It is an inner orientation or personal stance that necessarily involves one's conscious choice and intention to cultivate it.</p> <p>To cultivate contemplative presence from a Christian perspective, one must have faith that God is present and active in every moment, despite and even through one's personal limitations, and whether or not one consciously experiences God's presence.</p> <p>Contemplative presence can only happen in the immediacy of the present moment. It is a close, intimate encounter with experience just as it is.</p> <p>Contemplative presence can be better defined by what it is not than by what it is. It is not self-preoccupation, nor an attempt at manipulation and control, nor analysis, nor seeking gratification of needs and desires, nor even personal caring for one's directee. It is a detachment from self-will and a deferring to God's will in all things.</p> |

| Lens type | Description |
|----------------------------|---|
| Seed lenses (continued) | <p>If one is able to maintain a contemplative stance of attentiveness to God in the moment, one may receive inspiration from the Spirit in the form of images, emotions, insights, or inner promptings toward action.</p> <p>These gifts of grace are spontaneous, surprising, fruitful, unique to each particular situation, and entirely out of one's personal control.</p> <p>Contemplative presence in spiritual direction can lead to experiences of deep connection with one's directee in which both people feel transformed and a part of something larger than themselves.</p> <p>The experience of contemplative presence can feel threatening or scary, like an experience of leaping into the unknown and letting go of everything one usually holds onto for a sense of safety and identity.</p> <p>The experience of contemplative presence can also feel liberating, spacious, grounding, and full of reverence, wonder, and awe.</p> <p>The inner orientation of contemplative presence must be chosen, again and again, in a constantly renewing moment-by-moment process. Although this takes effort, it is a gentle discipline rather than a forceful strain.</p> <p>Spiritual directors can affirm their intention and desire to cultivate contemplative presence through rituals with and without the participation of their directees, for example, prayer before a session, shared silence during a session, or the use of a word or phrase to harness attention.</p> <p>Contemplative presence is not reserved for the spiritual direction session alone; it is an important part of the spiritual director's life and is cultivated through formal and informal spiritual practices. These practices may differ for each spiritual director, including both apophatic and kataphatic approaches.</p> |

redirecting of attention toward the mystery of God's presence within and beyond all experiences, and (b) Contemplative presence is an expression of love and adoration for God above all else. I also added the clarifying statement: Contemplative presence is an act of will to the original lens: Contemplative presence is an inner orientation or personal stance that necessarily involves one's conscious choice and intention to cultivate it.

I decided to keep the previous lens: *Contemplative presence is better defined by what it is not than by what it is. It is not self-preoccupation, nor an attempt at manipulation and control, nor analysis, nor seeking gratification of needs and desires, nor even personal caring for one's directee.* However, I added another sentence that expressed my deeper understanding of this lens: *It is a detachment from self-will and a deferring to God's will in all things.* When I looked at all the things that contemplative presence is not, I realized that they were all expressions of self-will from which the spiritual director must be detached. Detachment is one of the virtues that St. Teresa believed was necessary on the path of prayer, and she described it as “going against [one's] own will” in everything (Teresa of Avila, 1980, p. 76). The author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* referred to this process as letting go under the cloud of forgetting (Anonymous, 2004).

Although one practices detachment or letting go of the thoughts and feelings that arise, the mystics told us not to try to stop the flow of thoughts, nor to fight and struggle with them. Instead, we are to let them come and go, while gently and repeatedly turning our attention back to God. In her prayer of aspirations, Underhill (1956) suggested repeating a meaningful phrase, while the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Anonymous, 2004) used a single word—God or love, for example—to answer every thought that arises and reaffirm his intention toward God. As I came to understand this practice more deeply, I realized that the following lens was incomplete:

Contemplative presence involves using one's attention in a mindful way: remaining open to whatever arises in one's field of awareness without restricting one's focus to a particular content of consciousness.

Within transpersonal psychology, one way of classifying meditation practices is to describe them as either mindfulness or concentration practices (Cortright, 1997; Goleman, 1988). In mindfulness practice, one attends to whatever arises in awareness without judging it or holding onto it, but simply witnessing it as it comes and goes. Cortright (1997) calls this an awareness expansion practice. He describes concentration practice, on the other hand, as a form of awareness narrowing in which the practitioner repeatedly returns to an object of concentration whenever the mind wanders. Psychologist, spiritual director, and author Dwight Judy (2000) describes Centering Prayer (the form of contemplative prayer described in *The Cloud of Unknowing*) as follows:

Centering Prayer, when practiced in a balanced way, is an extraordinary blend of concentration and mindfulness. We repress nothing with Centering Prayer. We allow all things to surface. We bless all things with contemplative love. Yet we simultaneously look for God within and beyond all things and all thoughts. (pp. 102-103)q

Given my better understanding of contemplative presence, I decided to add the missing element of concentration and change the lens to: *Contemplative presence involves remaining open to whatever arises in one's field of awareness, and at the same time keeping one's attention on the mystery of God beyond experience. It is, thus, a balance of mindfulness and concentration.*

The second lens that I decided to change was: *Contemplative presence involves a profound willingness, receptivity, and surrender to God in the here-and-now, whether or not one consciously experiences God's presence.* After reading De Caussade's (1966/1982) work, I realized that the lens seemed vague to me, and I needed to add that contemplative presence is an attitude of listening for God's will. According to De Caussade, the divine will is found in one's

duty to the present moment and in unexpected impulses and inspirations. It is to this discerned divine will that we must surrender, and, therefore, I clarified the lens as follows: *Contemplative presence is an attitude of waiting and listening for God's will, and a profound surrender and willingness to do anything or nothing in response.*

Finally, I added a third entirely new lens that evolved out of my reading of the mystics' texts: *An ongoing practice of contemplative presence leads to transformation of the personality, and conscious involvement in this transformative process is the only safe foundation for the work of spiritual direction.* It became clear to me that one's quality of presence in spiritual direction is not something that remains the same over time; rather, it grows and changes as one undertakes the spiritual journey. Underhill (1956) said, "the sense of the Eternal as a vivid fact can become so integrated with the life of the soul, that it can reach the level of habit" (p. 101). In St. Teresa's (Teresa of Avila, 1980) interior castle, one begins with working very diligently to simply remember God's presence, and over time one progresses all the way to full spiritual marriage and union with God. I felt that it was important to acknowledge this developmental aspect of contemplative presence because it is so essential to a full understanding of the topic.

Conclusion

As I looked over my list of interim lenses as a whole, I noticed that overall they represent a very individual way of understanding contemplative presence. The mystics that I chose were writing to instruct monks, nuns, priests, and spiritual directors in the practice of being attentive to God in their own personal spiritual life. What was still missing, for me, was an understanding of how one cultivates this quality of presence with another person in spiritual direction—an interpersonal contemplative presence, if you will. This leads into the following chapter, which presents the next set of original Cycle 3 data from the participant interviews.

Chapter 5: Findings

This chapter represents a summary of my second set of Cycle 3 original data: the participant interviews (the first set of Cycle 3 data consisted of the selected writings of the four mystics, presented in Chapter 4). I conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 participants, using the interview questionnaire in Appendix E. My central research question was: What is the experience of being attentive to God in spiritual direction? I recorded and transcribed the interviews, then edited the transcripts for clarity and concision, creating a portrait for each participant. In writing these summaries of the transcripts, I used the language of each participant as much as possible, and included many quotes so their voices may be heard with minimal interpretation. Each participant read his or her portrait and provided feedback. Five of the participants decided not to make any changes to the portrait, while seven participants did some minor editing of their own words to improve clarity and grammatical correctness.

The findings of my study are presented in two parts. First, the participant characteristics are summarized from the data collected in the demographic information questionnaires (see Appendix F). Second, a portrait of each participant is presented.

Participant Characteristics

At the time of the study interviews, the 12 participants range in age from 44 to 75. These include 7 women (ages 58, 63, 65, 69, 69, 71, and 75) and 5 men (ages 44, 54, 59, 59, and 68). Nine of the participants live in California, 1 lives in North Carolina, 1 lives in Illinois, and 1 lives in Australia. Unfortunately, I did not include a question about ethnicity on the demographic questionnaire, so I cannot report on it.

Eleven out of the 12 participants were raised Christian, while the 12th had “some Christian exposure” growing up. Seven participants stated that their current religious or spiritual

tradition is Christianity. Five participants included other traditions as well: 1 said he is Christian but added personal studies in Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism; 1 listed Christianity and Taoism; 1 listed Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and Taoism; and 1 listed Buddhism and Christianity, saying that his teachers are from many traditions now. Finally, 1 person circled all the options on the questionnaire and wrote that she works across traditions. When asked their Christian denominational affiliation, 5 participants wrote Roman Catholic, 1 wrote Catholic, 1 wrote Catholic = universal, 1 wrote Presbyterian, 1 wrote Episcopal, and 1 wrote N/A—Divine Feminine. One participant listed several traditions: Old Catholic, Congregationalist, International Council of Community Churches (ICCC), and Unitarian. For another participant, her denominational affiliation is “in flux”: although formally Presbyterian, she currently attends a United Church of Christ (UCC).

All of the participants are highly educated: all 12 have completed a graduate degree, and four have also completed at least some postgraduate work. Fifty-eight percent (7 out of 12) of the participants have a background in theology. Five did graduate work in theology; 1 of these also studied transpersonal psychology, 1 also studied philosophy, 1 has a background in human relations and organizational behavior, and 1 also has a Master’s degree in counseling. Two participants have postgraduate degrees in theology: 1 has a Ph.D. in theology with a specialty in spiritual direction, and 1 has a D.Min. in Anglican Ministries. Fifty percent (6 out of 12) of the participants have completed graduate degrees in psychology; 2 of these have degrees in transpersonal psychology, 3 have degrees in counseling, and 1 has done some postgraduate work in psychology. Two participants have graduate degrees neither in theology nor psychology: 1 of these has a degree in humanities, and 1 has a degree in early childhood education. Other fields of

study mentioned by participants include English, teaching chemistry and physics, and educational administration.

The number of years the participants have been practicing spiritual direction ranges from 11 to 40. One third of the participants have been practicing for under 20 years (11, 15, 17, and 18 years), one third have been practicing for 20 to 34 years (20, 21, 25, and 33 years), and one third have been practicing for over 35 years (35, 37, 38, and 40 years). The number of years they have been in spiritual direction as directees ranges from 8 to 45. Fifty percent of the participants have been in spiritual direction for over 30 years (30, 37, 37, 37, 37, and 45 years), 17% have been attending for 20 to 30 years (24 and 25 years), and 33% have been attending for under 20 years (8, 11, 15, 19).

The average number of hours per month that participants practice spiritual direction ranges from 8 to 100. Three (25%) of the participants practice 10 hours or less per month (8, 8, and 10 hours), 3 (25%) practice between 10 and 20 hours per month (12, 15-20, and 20 hours), 3 (25%) practice between 25 and 50 hours per month (25, 36, and 45 hours), and 3 (25%) practice over 50 hours per month (50, 60, and 100 hours). Two people currently practice for 8 hours per month, but both used to practice much more: 1 for as many as 30 hours, and 1 for 40 hours per month.

Participants' training in spiritual direction varied. Nine out of 12 participants received training at spiritual formation centers: 4 of these attended Mercy Center in Burlingame, California; 1 attended the Center for Religious Development in Cambridge, Massachusetts; 1 attended the Jesuit Renewal Center in Milford, Ohio; 1 attended the Academy for Spiritual Formation, in Nashville, Tennessee; 1 attended the Institute for Spiritual Leadership, in Chicago, Illinois; and 1 attended the Mercy Prayer Center in Rochester, New York, as well as the Ignatius

Jesuit Centre in Guelph, Ontario, Canada). Three participants received training in colleges or universities (Santa Clara University in Santa Clara, California; Notre Dame University in Notre Dame, Indiana; and Regis College in Toronto, Ontario, Canada). Two participants received training at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, California. Two participants attended seminary school (1 at San Francisco Theological Seminary, in San Anselmo, California; and 1 at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois). One participant mentioned being mentored before his formal education in spiritual direction, and 1 participant wrote that she learned spiritual direction “with the Holy Names Sisters and the Jesuits.” Four participants received training at more than one place, 1 mentioned ongoing workshops, and 1 gave credit to “all the years of associating with other spiritual directors.”

Thirty-three percent of participants (4 out of 12) maintain a private practice in spiritual direction and work out of their home office or a room at a church. Twenty-five percent of participants (3 out of 12) work as part of a spiritual community; 2 of these meet with directees at a church, and 1 meets with directees in her home. Twenty-five percent of participants (3 out of 12) work in a spiritual formation or retreat center; one of these centers offers both psychological counseling and spiritual direction. Seventeen percent of the participants (2 out of 12) have a private practice and also work at a second location; 1 of these sees directees at a retreat center, and 1 works in a seminary office.

Forty-two percent of the participants (5 out of 12) are ordained ministers (1 Episcopal priest, 1 Presbyterian minister, 1 Catholic priest, 1 Old Catholic priest, and 1 ordained by the Federation of Christian Ministers); 2 of these work as chaplains, and 2 are also members of a religious order. Forty-two percent of the participants (5 out of 12) are members of a religious

order (4 Catholic and 1 Old Catholic); 1 of these is the director of a spiritual community. Thirty-three percent of participants (4 out of 12) are lay practitioners.

Participant Portraits

Each participant is referred to by a pseudonym in the following portraits and throughout the dissertation. The reader will notice that participants use different words to refer to spiritual direction, including spiritual guidance and spiritual companionship. Some use the word *directee* while others prefer to use the word *client*. In all cases, I have used the same terminology that they used in the interviews with me. Each portrait begins with a brief biographical introduction, and the portraits are presented in the order in which the interviews were conducted.

Maureen

Maureen is a Roman Catholic nun who has been practicing as a spiritual director for 25 years. Her background includes the teaching of science, educational administration, and transpersonal psychology. Five years ago, she left full-time spiritual direction work to found a center for women transitioning from incarceration.

Maureen describes “pure faith” as the context and foundation for her work as a spiritual director. She trusts that “there is a loving presence at work in everything that is at the service of life, no matter what it looks like. . . . There’s nothing that can be divorced from that.” She describes how this faith “colors most of life” for her:

Being a scientist, part of my formation was the big bang theory, which holds, . . . before the beginning of time, nothing was manifest. Creation was not manifest. In existence was only the unmanifest, the formless. And then at that certain instant, all that was in potential became actual, and that was all of God, you see. That’s the way I think of it. . . . We’re all stardust. So there isn’t any thing, a plant or an animal or a person, there isn’t anything that isn’t of God. God’s energy and spirit is everywhere. I think of that when we’re sitting in the direction session, that God’s presence and influence and energy is always at work. And getting in harmony with that makes for joy and peace, and the expression of it is loving, compassionate.

Maureen believes that it is important for “the director and the directee to really have that same faith, that same awareness of what they see as reality, that God is at work.” This mutual understanding makes formal prayer at the beginning of each spiritual direction session unnecessary for her, as she explains:

We just start. But interiorly, I’m aware of my belief system that God is at work in the life of that person and in my life. I am aware of that, and also of God’s presence in what we’re doing. . . . None of my directees want to pray at the beginning of it because I think we have this implicit understanding that this is the context in which we work. So some people I know, new trainees for instance, think it might be a good thing to say a prayer or something, but that is, at least from my perspective, not needed if we bring that whole context into the direction session.

For Maureen, contemplative prayer is a guide for the quality of presence she brings to spiritual direction. She practices Thomas Keating’s Centering Prayer every morning and cultivates the same attitude of surrender in spiritual direction. She elaborates further on what this practice means to her:

When I sit in the morning, I become aware of God’s presence acting within me, and I’m just open to and consent to whatever God needs to be doing at that moment. And it’s the same thing in a direction session. . . . My understanding of contemplative prayer is like the understanding of the direction session, how it flows, . . . and what the questions are about. The person can talk about anything that’s going on in their life, but usually they’re aware that what they are after is not . . . looking at it psychologically, whatever they’re experiencing, but “What is the invitation from God in this particular relationship, or event, or circumstance they find themselves in?” . . . I don’t know what it is. I don’t come with a preconceived idea how this session is going to turn out. And I also don’t take notes and try to remember what happened a month ago, because it doesn’t do any good, really, because the person is different and different things are going to come up. I used to do that when I was a new director, but I don’t anymore because whatever’s supposed to emerge will.

Maureen trusts that directees will bring to the session what is most important for them at the time. Sometimes, they prepare by “taking their own self-assessment,” reflecting on their experience over the last month, and writing down what they would like to talk about in spiritual direction. Other times a topic that is not on their agenda will come up unexpectedly and lead to a

new realization or decision. Whatever happens, Maureen tries not to have “preconceptions about how a person should be.” Instead, she asks herself what is harmonious with who the person is.

She says of her experiences with directees:

I don't know what the right outcome is going to be—not the right outcome, but the way God was calling a person. So you do have to keep an open stance and not think you know what the answer is. . . . And I'm only looking at them in this little tiny slice of their life, and in the meantime they've got this relationship with God since they were in the womb. . . . Who am I to know which way this whole thing is going to evolve? So you have to have a little humility here too.

Maureen points out that people come to spiritual direction “to become more aware of God's presence in their life and how God's acting.” She elaborates further:

There's this agreement in the beginning as to what spiritual direction is all about. That, I think, is extremely important. That it's not about anything else except living life more in harmony with God's call. And God's call is to fuller life. It's pretty simple. There's nothing very complex about it. And that meditation and living in a compassionate way are all part of that.

Directees come to see Maureen in order to receive support in following this call. She adds, “So my desire for them and their desire are the same. That's when it works.” She describes how she provides this support for people:

There's always self-monitoring going on during the session. And I always think, “Don't talk about my own experiences. Just keep having them talk about what's true for them.” That's pretty important. . . . It's always to get them to become more aware of what's going on in their life. So if I talk about what's going on in my life, that's not helpful. That's like advice giving, and that is just something to stay away from completely. It's really at the service of the person's own self-awareness, really, and the person's own contemplative stance toward their own life. And sometimes they'll ask me questions about, “What do I think?” And I always say—and I'm lucky because these people know me very well—“And that's not the point. What is it that's the way *you're* being led?” And it's not that I won't say how I feel about certain things, but I try to avoid that.

In helping directees discern the way they are being led, Maureen is aware of “that quotation where Jesus says, ‘I have come that you may have life to the full.’” She believes “that's what most of us human beings are after is fullness of life in all dimensions.” She uses the

image of little birds hopping around, full of life, to represent the quality of joy that God wants for all of us. During spiritual direction sessions, she is led by the question: “What is it that supports life?” She notices when a directee has a new idea, or is drawn toward something in his or her life. In one example, a directee decided to leave an oppressive work environment in order to follow a call to greater freedom. In another example, Maureen found herself being led to support a directee’s growth in self-confidence and love of herself. At times, people choose to talk about powerful spiritual experiences, but Maureen says:

That isn’t the ordinary focus of what we do in a direction session. . . . People generally are struggling with how to live their life in such a way that they are open to God’s leading. And it’s not like God has this plan and they’ve got to find it, but it’s like, how is God working within them always to live life more fully and more in service of other people? . . . It’s not deep spiritual questions, it’s just how to live life in an authentic way.

She describes how she helps directees “sort out what is truly life giving” for them:

If someone is describing something that is troubling to me, I’ll usually try to ask the person more about it. And if it seems disharmonious, I’ll be alert to that. It’s a matter of being aware of something that doesn’t seem congruous, it’s incompatible with what brings life. If something isn’t bringing fuller life, it’s destructive, then that has to be looked at. If a relationship isn’t supportive, you really have to ask, help a person, to really see, what do they think about it? Is this truly the way they want their life to go? . . . Is this what God is inviting them to? . . . And I think by the time I’ve been with a person and they seem to feel that the way we’re talking is helpful to them because it’s always at the service of life, that they will come to these understandings themselves.

Maureen encourages her directees to engage in spiritual practices, although she acknowledges that each individual has a different approach. She says, “There are other ways, sometimes, of finding contemplative time. And I don’t let them off the hook, but the main thing is their focus and their own desire to be at harmony with God’s will.” Her own spiritual practice is also very important to her in cultivating contemplative presence as a spiritual director:

I do contemplative prayer every morning. I feel a call to do it also in the afternoon but I don’t. But I think that would be an aid to become even more aware. We have opportunities around here to do meditation intensives and that type of thing. I know when

I do that, it enhances my whole ability to be focused and aware. I think that spiritual practice is very important.

Maureen also emphasizes that having integrity and balance in following her own spiritual journey is an essential part of being able to “sit with people authentically.” She explains:

I try to be authentic, and to live a life that’s harmonious as well. . . . Being straight with people. . . . Not avoiding issues when they need to be talked about, that kind of thing. Not even . . . exaggerating the truth. Being really straight with the truth. . . . And self-care, you know, not being too tired, all that kind of thing is important. Because I used to do too much spiritual direction. I had too many directees and it was not helpful. . . . Having a spiritual director myself, and working as authentically on my own life as I am expecting that the directees to be working in their own. . . . That’s important. For instance . . . I left [my spiritual formation center] about 4 or 5 years ago because I felt this call to work with women trying to make it out of prison and jail. And that was a call. No bells and whistles but it kept getting clearer, who else was going to do this? I had a real desire to help people that way. And if I hadn’t, who knows, but I’m glad I did. . . . I’m living with a lot more reality than I used to, with the reality of a lot of people who suffer. Living with reality is another part of it.

Maureen believes that directees experience her contemplative presence—and her support of their own contemplative stance—as freeing. She thinks it brings them to experience more joy, self-respect, and self-love. She adds:

I think people are more aware of God’s love for them. If you think God is some taskmaster that’s out to get you . . . the person lives out of fear. And so the person lives with a greater freedom, I think, when they realize that all God wants is for them to become more fully who they are.

She feels great joy in witnessing these changes in her directees over a long period of time. She says, “That isn’t what you aim for, but it’s the outcome of a good relationship with God.”

Maureen comes back again and again to the pure faith that is the ground of her work, both as a spiritual director and as a counselor for women struggling with addiction and incarceration:

When I’m with the women [coming out of prison], if I didn’t have the belief that God was working in their lives and that God’s life was present in them, wanting to come to a greater fullness, and that God was working in them for greater healing—I wouldn’t have a basis from which to be trusting of the work. . . . There’s a lot of heartache in this work,

too. They come along and do really well for a certain period of time and then some of them don't make it. And you just have to trust that God is still at work even though they relapsed. They may give up on themselves but I really can't give up on them because the same Spirit is at work. That's what keeps this work going. So it's the same . . . it's kind of a stance toward life, I think.

She has a deep trust in God's presence "beyond thought and beyond experience, beyond emotion." She adds:

I think trust is the really important thing here. . . . If things seem to not be working out well, keep on trusting. If you do your best shot and get help from people who are wiser, the thing that's meant to be will happen. The trust is in the inexorable working of the Spirit in everything. I can see it when I take the big view of what has happened since the beginning of time. The whole thing has worked out to this tremendous universe, this beautiful planet, the amazement of who and what human beings are, and all that kind of thing. Who ever would have thought? . . . There's a process at work here that's really beyond anything we can really imagine.

John

John has been practicing spiritual direction for 33 years. His educational background is in theology. He leads retreats, teaches Christian spirituality, and also teaches and supervises in ecumenical formation programs for spiritual directors. He meets with directees at his home office.

Being attentive to God with another person is "the core of spiritual direction," according to John. When people ask him about his approach to spiritual direction, he talks about it in terms of discernment. He says, "not so much discerning a big decision in their lives, but listening for the movements of the Spirit in their life." During spiritual direction sessions, he attends to signs of the Spirit as people talk—both in what they're describing about their lives outside the session, and in their experience within the session. John explains:

In other words, are they manifesting a deeper peace, a sense of joy, a sense of freedom or gratitude or love? Is there a quality of God's presence in the session itself? And that might manifest in all of those qualities or it might manifest in stumbling speech trying to get a hold of something that's deeper than they're usually aware of. It might manifest in a sense of humility, or almost apologetic quality that they might have. Like wondering

whether this could be true, or whether it could really be happening to them. There are many, many signs like that, I think, that are going on. On the other hand, there can be also signs of other spirits of fear, or agitation, anxiety, a certain kind of resignation or despair, or other qualities that might be signs of the Spirit somehow being blocked in their life. So when I'm trying to be attentive, I'm really listening to both those things—where there seems to be signs of the experience of presence of the Spirit of God, as well as where there seems to be blocks to that. And I think my role, first of all, is to notice that, to hear it and see it. Another thing that I would do in response is to try to elicit more from them around those kinds of experiences. And ultimately, maybe, to make some discernments about where God is inviting them or what the challenge might be spiritually for them. But that may come further down the line. The first thing is just, what's the actual quality of this person's experience of presence in the session?

Before beginning a spiritual direction session, John takes time to be silent to “shift out of [his] normal, everyday mind to a deeper type of listening space.” During this time, he tries to let go of any concerns and “come to a place of rest . . . find that center of quiet.” His intention is to “be here . . . to be present to this person.” Sometimes he asks God to help him to be with the person and “love them where they are and as they are.” In his office, on the bookcase behind where the directee sits and over his or her shoulder, there is an icon of Christ. John describes what it means to him:

Christ holds his right hand in blessing and the Scripture text he holds reads, “Come to me all you who labor and are burdened and I will give you rest.” . . . I will imagine the person between me and Christ, and that Christ is blessing that person, and is calling me back to that quality of presence and to kind of rest in the moment. So there's like a little visual reminder that way too that sometimes calls me back. . . . I'm not going to literally raise my hand in blessing, usually at least, but I want a blessing to come to that person.

The process of coming back to being present and resting in the moment continues throughout the session. John says:

Many, many times I may notice myself drifting off or following some other line of thought than they're taking, and realizing I'm losing touch right now with where they actually are and what God may be doing. So I call myself back to that.

John describes his quality of presence as “listening in stereo,” paying attention both to what the directee is saying and also “listening inside to what's coming up in me as I hear them

speak.” Within himself, he may notice restlessness, resistance, a feeling of being drawn into what the person is saying, or a series of thoughts and images emerging in his awareness. Sometimes, what comes up seems relevant to the session, and he may choose to share it with the client: “You know, here’s what occurred to me as you spoke.” Other times, he notices that it’s not relevant for the directee. He explains:

Sometimes I can see that . . . it’s more relevant to me, that it’s touching on something from my own experience that is preoccupying me or whatever. Or occasionally it’s things that I’m just bringing into the session. Some troublesome thing in a relationship, or some project that I’m working on and suddenly I realize, “Oh, my mind is slipping back to that,” and then I bring it back to focus again on the person in the moment.

John finds supervision very helpful in becoming aware of his own preoccupations:

I go to a personal supervisor once a month, but I’m also part of a group, actually two groups now. . . . And processing what’s going on in me, particularly with the individual supervisor, is an important thing. In the group setting, hearing other people process where they are and helping them with that together with the group is a powerful learning experience for me in terms of noticing my own patterns of avoidance, and agendas that I might be bringing that I didn’t even know I was bringing.

In addition to going to supervision, John finds the practice of praying about or for directees useful, although he does not necessarily pray for every directee that he has. He describes one instance in which it was helpful:

I had actually seen [this directee] recently and I was aware that many of the things that he talked about had raised questions in me, made me feel I had given an inadequate response at the time. So I thought about that, I prayed about that, I did a little reading around a couple of things that I thought might be helpful. And then when he came again, I was able to respond from a much more reflective place. I think in the moment I was a little bit overwhelmed with what he was sharing and the intensity of it and the extent of it. And it was hard to get a response to it. So sometimes I’ll, again, go into solitude with that, pray about it, reflect on it, and then make a response.

The quality of attentiveness that John brings to a spiritual direction session is very similar to his own personal prayer. He explains:

It starts with that kind of paradoxical relaxed attention where you’re focused, you’re attentive, but you’re doing it in a relaxed way. You’re not following one train of thought.

There's a certain looseness about that, and openness to letting in other feelings, other information, other imagery, to be guided or led along the way.

He has three foci in his prayer life: his own experience, a text or symbol, and "just the silence itself." He may bring to prayer a life experience or a Scripture passage that he wants to explore, asking himself "Where is God in that?" After reflecting on it for a while, he lets go of his own thoughts on it and simply listens "to see what comes up inside. How does that feel? Does that seem to be true and is that leading to something else?" Sometimes he may take notes in his journal, but keeps returning to "that silent place . . . In that kind of prayer I'll just try and let everything go and kind of deepen the level a little bit." Then the prayer may come back to his life or the Scripture passage again, so in this way all three foci "weave together." He elaborates further:

So how does that relate to listening to someone? I think I do all of those things. I'm listening to their life experience and seeing, as I relax with it, "What's occurring to me around that? What seems to be happening here?" Or I may be just, again, letting all my judgments go and just trying to listen without words. Occasionally maybe there will be some association that comes in with some text, but that's pretty rare actually. Usually I stay close to the experience of the person. In fact, I have felt in the last few months that spiritual direction itself was a prayer for me. It is listening to the God experience in another person, but that *is* a kind of prayer for me. It's like I can listen to the Scripture text of someone else's experience of God and that's a prayer. So this is like a text too. So in that sense there are times when I feel that they're identical, that direction *is* a prayerful experience.

In his openness to letting something emerge from within while the directee is speaking, John often has the experience of feeling led to say or do something in the session. He says "it happens in small ways a lot," and John brings it forward when he knows a directee well and trusts that it will be "seen in an overall context of respect and care." Sometimes he checks with his supervisor before acting on a feeling of being guided. With one directee, for example, he often feels moved to bring a lightness to the session: perhaps playfully exaggerating something the person says, or raising a question that brings a moment of laughter or a shift in perspective.

He says, “Something would come inside that would want to—it felt like an inspiration from God—that would break the seriousness.” These “movements from God” are unique to each individual situation, so while he may bring humor to sessions with one directee, with another he may be more challenging and directly confront the person’s lack of commitment to spiritual direction. He describes the experience of feeling called to say something to a directee:

Somehow when it’s coming from God, it feels . . . deeper, more substantial, more insistent. Something that I might not even necessarily want to say or do but it feels like I do need to say it. And other times it can be something where it can be easier to do, where you’re making a connection or shedding some light on what they’re doing, and it’s maybe very affirming to them to hear that. And it feels easier to do. But I think my growing edge lately has been more around these other things, where it’s harder for me to do. And yet, the contract we’ve made and the commitment to each other seems to demand that. . . . Does that feel like it’s divinely inspired? Well it does, in a very ordinary kind of way, but it does feel like, “No this is necessary. This is important. This is truthful and it needs to be said.”

At times, John may notice agitation or anxiety in a session that at first seems like a distraction, but then leads to an unexpected realization of a movement of God:

These difficult inspirations from God . . . maybe the first manifestation in me is a certain kind of restlessness and maybe even fear of bringing it up, but there is a sense that something is just not quite right. But either then during the session or in the next session when I’ve been with it more, I realize, “No there was something genuine in that response. Something was being neglected or forgotten or violated in some way that needed to be spoken to.” So that wasn’t a distraction, my disturbance. It was the Spirit saying, “Pay attention. There’s something here that needs to be addressed.”

Despite John’s intention to cultivate a relaxed attentiveness, listening to the directee, to his own inner experience, and to movements of the Spirit while returning again and again to a place of rest in the moment, his experience of being present in this way “feels very ordinary most of the time.” Although he acknowledges that there are times when he notices “a deep sense of that quiet or stillness, or active sense of Presence,” most of the time spiritual direction sessions are “not so different from ordinary experience.” He explains:

It's not like, "Oh, we're going along, now we'll sink into meditation and we'll be in this whole other deep unusual space." So maybe I'll take a minute or two at the beginning of a session, and when I come out of that silence, I can't say that I'm noticeably different, feeling different inside, or looking different outside. But I am maybe just a little more alert and present. . . . So that even if I feel kind of distracted or anxious about something, it doesn't necessarily communicate itself to the person. People will say, "You seem so peaceful," or something like that. And I'm not trying to fake it, but perhaps there is actually a deeper peace. Maybe the agitation is more on the surface and they're picking up something deeper, but I'm not even aware of what they're picking up. But it does seem to be affecting them or working on them in a certain way. So I'm less anxious about being anxious sometimes. . . . I don't always have to feel peaceful to feel like I can be effectively present with someone. Maybe it's like sitting meditation, where most traditions say don't worry if your monkey mind starts coming in. That's part of the whole process as well. And I think I feel a little bit of that with spiritual direction. But if you're not worrying about it, if you're just kind of noting it, there is some part of you that's not caught up in it. And that's communicating itself to the person maybe even more than the thoughts that are going through my head in the moment.

The deeper peace, or the part of John that is not caught up in his monkey mind, may be a presence that is affecting the directee in a healing way. John is reminded of the Gospel story in which a woman with hemorrhage approaches Jesus and touches his garment, and power goes out from him. John points out that the Latin word for power is virtue. He shares his thoughts on the story:

To me, it's related to this quality of presence that sometimes something comes out of you and touches or heals another person. . . . And so you could call it power, you could call it presence, I think they're very close together actually. . . . Healing from some deeper divine source flowed through [Jesus] and out to the other person because there was a need there. And he was aware of that happening but he wasn't in charge of it. . . . Sometimes when I work with individuals or especially with groups . . . something will happen in the group. There will be power released in the group, and they will come to a different depth and a level of sharing, and I won't know quite how that happened. And maybe I will have said very little, but there's something about holding the space. Or something about the quality of presence that I bring to it that helps as a catalyst. Maybe somebody else actually takes the risk and shares something deeply, but they wouldn't have done it if a certain atmosphere hadn't been established. . . . I think these are the most important things in working with an individual or group. The most elusive but the most important.

John gives an example of a supervision session in which he felt energized and excited, as if it "enlivened [his] own God experience" to be with the other:

In the dialogue itself, the two of us just seemed to be moving deeper and deeper towards more and more basic truth about life, and about his life, and about God. . . . I was touching the Mystery. And I think he felt the same way. . . . Something about his own desire to be present and the depth of his own experience and inner work really drew me into that place. I think he was more in touch with it than I was, and it kind of awakened me and drew me further into my own God experience, which became present to me in a new way. Insights about life and about what spiritual direction is about, or who God is, just came alive for me. But it was mutual in that moment. And there was a real kind of dialogue going on. It was a little different than most direction sessions in which I take the role of listener. In this situation, there was an exchange back and forth with each of us contributing some piece to this larger and larger Mystery, as we just kept moving with the dialogue.

A person's quality of presence, according to John, comes from who he or she is and not from any particular thing he or she says or does. He points out that in the Gospels, it says that people recognized that Jesus "spoke with authority." To John, this means that he "spoke out of his living experience," not saying what he should say or what the books say, but speaking "out of something deep in the person." It is important to John to be authentic and genuine, even if it means saying "I don't know" when you reach the limits of your understanding. He believes that the only way to prepare to be a spiritual director is to "have experiences yourselves and understand them." Undertaking the spiritual journey and transformation process "changes you into a person who can speak with a certain authority, as well as understand with a certain authority." Others will be able to recognize that:

I know from my experience that I can often tell who I would want to talk to about something, or whether I think they would understand it, even without knowing much about them. That something is communicated. I don't know whether it's by the look in their eyes or how they carry themselves. I can tell whether they are a person of compassion, of gentleness, and whether they have a capacity to listen. How do we sense that? I don't know exactly how we sense it, but I think it's the most important thing.

John is engaged in his own spiritual journey and views this as the most important factor in helping him to be attentive to God with directees. He describes his perspective:

The long-term helps [for being attentive to God] would be basically my own commitment to my own spiritual life and prayer life, and authenticity and honesty, and conversion of

heart, and all of those kinds of things, as well as study, supervision, and colleague work. All of that being about heightening my own awareness of God's spirit in my own life, and my own freedom or lack of freedom to respond to that. So doing that kind of inner work, I think, changes me in subtle and deep ways that allows me to understand and hear somebody in a different way. I think that ninety percent of the work has to do with that long-term effort of changing your personality, in a way, around spiritual values and spiritual ideas, and so forth.

In addition to his inner work and personal transformation, John also acknowledges that part of his ability to be present for others comes as a gift. He recognizes that he “was always kind of disposed to listening.” He received feedback on it in his twenties, and his colleagues today still recognize in him “a quality of presence or a quality of attention or listening.” He describes his experience of this gift:

For some time I've recognized that I have a gift to get people to talk. That they find themselves saying things that maybe they hadn't anticipated saying, or that they feel free to say things and explore things that they haven't felt free to do before. And some of that comes about because of questions I ask. But even beyond that, I think it's more this presence quality. . . . That if I'm really interested, sincerely interested and open and listening, there's a natural desire on people's part to talk that way. And I think some of it might be just also a gift that's been given. So I'm kind of aware of it, mostly in retrospect, that something will shift or that people will open up in a way that's helpful to them. That seems to have to do with who I am or the context we've created together, not so much any particular thing that I say. And that's both mysterious but also powerful. It's as if something, someone, is working through us in that situation. That something in them wants to come out and something in me is open and welcoming it, and then putting the two of them together allows a flow to happen and a breakthrough to happen. . . . And I think the other thing—and this is mysterious too and always feels like a gift—is a kind of spiritual understanding. That people feel understood, that they sense that I get what they're trying to say. . . . I think that's something precious. People look all over for someone who will, not just accept them for who they are, but understand them and then accept them for who they are. “Oh, this is what your experience is of God!”

For several years, John studied with Thomas Hora, a psychiatrist who felt that “our purpose . . . was to be a beneficial presence in the world.” A person who embodied such a presence was able to “become one with [the] divine qualities” of peace, assurance, gratitude, and love. These qualities would naturally flow through the person and touch others, “raising the level of awareness or consciousness of the people around [him or her].” The phrase “beneficial

presence” has stayed with John as an ideal, not only for spiritual direction but also for life itself. He aims “not to be a do-gooder . . . but a be-gooder. It has to take place at that level of being. And if those truths [and qualities] are realized there . . . they radiate.”

Lola

Lola is a Catholic nun who has been practicing as a spiritual director for 35 years. She is currently the director of a spiritual community dedicated to the teaching and practice of Christian meditation.

Lola lives and works in a spiritual community, so being attentive to God is a natural part of her daily life. Among her activities of spiritual reading, journal writing, practicing contemplative prayer, and attending regular meditation and reflection groups, spiritual direction is simply another way of being contemplatively present. She says:

Because of the kind of life I live, I’m pretty much aware of God a lot in my life, so it’s not like I have to make a huge switch [when I meet with a directee]. And it’s not like I’m out there doing a job during the day and then I come home. . . . I used to do that, I used to teach school and see people at night. And that was really a challenge. But now this is the environment I live in, and this is the kind of work I do. It’s very contemplative and it really nurtures that awareness, that openness. So when people come in here . . . they come in and they say, it’s so peaceful in here. Well, it’s because of the kind of energy that’s here. . . . I’m pretty much in the same state whenever people come. I try to be ready, I pray for them, and get things ready, and I always offer them a cup of tea or a cup of coffee, a glass of water or something. And I don’t jam people up back to back.

Lola prepares the environment carefully for her spiritual direction sessions. She believes that the physical space needs to be comfortable and consistent, as she explains:

When people come into [a spiritual director’s] office, it needs to be consistent in terms of where you sit. . . . The only thing that I find difficult with my own experience right now of spiritual direction, and I haven’t really talked to [my spiritual director] about it, but the chair that I sit in, it’s a very comfortable chair, but it’s lower than where he sits. So I feel like he’s looking down on me. . . . I would rather if we could be equal to each other when we’re talking. And I need to talk to him about that. But those kinds of things are important.

In Lola's experience, a simple, uncluttered space is conducive to being attentive to God. She adds:

Just keep it simple. . . . They say, the way your house is, is the way your insides are. So if you live in a place that's totally cluttered all the time, that's how your insides are. I can't live like that. . . . I think that's what spiritual direction does for the other person and for the director, and that is, I think over time, it helps you to realize that your environment is so very important to your spiritual growth. And that if you walk in, and things are all over the place, then there's something going on in here.

In addition to preparing the physical environment, Lola minimizes distractions before meeting with directees. She turns off the phone and lets the answering machine take any calls. During sessions, she and the directee are usually the only ones in the house, and she says, "that's a real blessing. The environment is quiet, and that makes a difference." Before her directees arrive, she looks at her calendar "to see what's on for the day, and who's coming," and takes a few minutes to think about each person as she waits. At the beginning of each session, it is very important to Lola to pray. She says, "it really helps, I find, the directee also, to focus and center. . . . It's kind of a bridge into the process." She uses a prayer that she "made up as [she] went along, it just little by little evolved into what it is now." Lola's prayer at the beginning of our talk was as follows:

Gracious God, we thank you for this day. We thank you for our ability to be alive in it, and we ask that you help us now to be open to your spirit with us and in us, so that we can hear the word that you speak to us this afternoon. And we continue to offer our time together for peace in our world, that somehow what we do here will help those who are making important decisions, to make them with integrity and compassion. And we continue to thank you for all of the gifts that you put into our lives every day. We pray for you, Natasha, and your intentions, and most of all we ask that we just continue to grow in awareness and in gratitude. And we offer this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

Lola says that praying before a session helps to "stop my agenda and open myself to listening." She explains:

It's like meditation. . . . We teach Christian meditation, and the way we teach it is to say a mantra or a word. . . . You cannot have your own agenda going on and also meditate. It

doesn't work, although sometimes it does get in the way of it. But when I say that prayer, I have this image of sort of emptying myself of whatever's going on in my life so that I can be as attentive as possible.

Lola listens carefully to the directee, "attending to what that person is saying, how they're saying it, what their body language is saying to me, how tired or not they look, those kinds of things." She pays more attention to "the spirit of [what is being communicated]" rather than the details of the directee's story. She says:

I think it has a lot to do with my intuition. . . . The way I'm attentive to God in the directee is by listening to what he or she is saying, and getting more of the feel of what they're saying than their actual words, and that gives me a sense of where God is or isn't, from my perception.

Lola notices that her own practice of prayer and meditation helps to develop her intuition.

She elaborates further:

I think when I am in deliberate prayer—I mean, I feel like I'm in prayer all the time—but when I'm in deliberate [prayer], like in the morning, when I have my time, I'm very aware that my intuition is awake and open. And I think it's the same thing when I'm sitting [with a directee]. That's why I like to pray beforehand, because when I'm sitting with somebody, it's that same feeling of this openness and awareness of this presence of the Spirit with us. And it's different from any other way that I [am with people]. . . . I mean, when I'm out to dinner with somebody, . . . when I'm socializing with people, I'm not in the same attitude that I am when I'm sitting here being attentive to this person in this time and this place.

Lola feels the presence of the Spirit as "a sense of something or someone bigger than myself. I like to think of God as energy, so it's a type of energy, I think I'd say." She also experiences it as a physical sensation:

I feel it mostly in my head, in my crown chakra . . . and I can hardly describe it, but it's just a sense of God's presence. It's almost a physical . . . a tingling kind of sensation . . . if I'm aware and awake. It's sort of like, I would think—I haven't had this experience—when you're with someone that you really love and it's just the two of you together, there's a different feeling than there is when you're with that same person, say, with a group of people or in another environment. There's just a different feeling. And that's the kind of feeling that I have when I'm . . . like in the morning or when I'm with people. It's like I'm not doing this by myself. . . . I'm just the channel for this energy. That's how I feel.

Since Lola has started living in a spiritual community and spending more time in meditation, she has learned that she can trust inspirations that come to her in spiritual direction. She says, “Sometimes I find myself saying things, I don’t know where they come from, but I trust them.” In one example, while listening to a directee, Lola noticed that the person was neglecting to mention what she was doing for herself in dealing with a difficult family situation.

Lola continues:

When I brought it up, I had this sense that she didn’t want to talk about it. But I knew that at some level she did, but it was . . . very painful. So I asked her about it, and these tears just came to her eyes, and she said, “It’s working okay, but it’s just painful.” And so I just kind of got the inspiration to say to her, “There’s some important lesson that you’re learning here and it doesn’t have to do so much with [the others in the family] as it does with you.” . . . And she actually responded quite positively to that. She knows that, but emotionally it’s just very difficult.

Other times, Lola notices that a book suddenly comes to mind, and she may suggest it to the directee. She describes the experience as “a very positive feeling and almost a push, a little nudge to say it. . . . I just trust those little inspirations that come along.” Although she views herself as “more directive than nondirective in spiritual direction,” she is tentative in offering an idea to a directee:

When I talk with a person, I always say, “Now, you know, this is only a suggestion,” or, “This is the way I would do it,” or “Take this for what it’s worth.” . . . I reassure them that I’m not trying to tell them what to do.

For Lola, her intuitions are indications of being led by the Spirit. She explains:

I get a sense of the rightness of a decision I’m trying to make. I mean, I always consult with people before I make an important decision, but . . . there’s a rightness about it that you just know. You hear people say, “You know, I should have followed my instinct, and this would have been much better.” But that’s intuition. That’s from the gut, that’s where the Spirit works, not here, not in the head. It’s a process of discernment. It’s organic, it evolves, it’s not something that’s cut and dry. And that’s what directors, I think, should bring to spiritual direction. These people that are coming to see you are evolving, they’re in process, so to offer that kind of spirit to them so that they know that there’s nothing

they have to make, do. It's not like coming to a class or something, where they have to report back.

Lola is deeply grateful for her awareness of the presence of the Spirit, and the opportunity to do this work. She says:

I always write in my journal about the day before so that I can see where the gifts were and so on, and I think a profound sense of gratitude is also there. I mean how am I doing this at this time in our history? With all that's going on in our world, and here I am, doing this! It's such a blessing. And, I think, a need. . . . My directees . . . say, "Oh, thank you and blah, blah, blah." And I say, "You know what? I get as much out of this as you do." Because whatever we do in life, whatever it is, a part of it is because we want to get something out of it. That's just part of human nature. So it's not all just for you, it's also for me, because I learn a lot from people's experiences and how they experience God, or not.

Lola's life in a spiritual community, or what she calls an "urban monastery," nurtures her contemplative presence as a spiritual director. She describes her daily routine:

In the morning, I always . . . try to come into the day quietly and peacefully, do some reading and I write in my journal, do some contemplative prayer, and it's quiet. And then I'm in this environment most of the day, although I'm very social. I eat out a lot for dinner with people, because that's when they have time to be there, and I love movies. But we have a regular schedule of times when people come for prayer, and I really like that. And I like to be able to say to my friends, I can't be there at that time because we have prayer together. And that means a lot to me.

Lola says of her spiritual practices, her quiet living environment, and the support of her community, "All that feeds my spirit. . . . I try to be a person of integrity and I try to walk my talk, as they say. I don't always do it, but . . . it's important to me. . . . It's taken me a while to get here." She also values the support of her own spiritual director as well as spiritual directors' peer groups. She says, "I wouldn't be without a spiritual director. I think it's very important to have somebody that can listen to you as you listen to others." It is also helpful to Lola to have balance in her life, or as she puts it, "good old Benedictine moderation in all things." She adds:

Once a month, I go away from this place from Tuesday to Friday. I go down to some friends' and I just relax and hang out. Because this is very intense work, spiritual direction is. And I can't imagine doing this on a full-time basis, and, for example, raising

a family. Or having another job. It's very intense. And I think that's why a lot of people really don't get into it until they get older, so that they can just focus on that. . . . I have two priorities in my life: [my spiritual community] and play. I don't belong to any other groups, I don't do anything else, this is it. And it's plenty.

The challenges to Lola's contemplative presence in spiritual direction involve distractions in her environment, such as a ringing phone or doorbell, or as she puts it, "regular neighborhood stuff." Usually, she is able to stay present unless she is tired or "really grappling with something pretty serious." She adds:

I find sometimes the person is talking and I'm looking at them and I haven't heard a word they've said. Because I'm distracted by this thing. So I'll just say to them, "Would you mind repeating that? Because I just got distracted. I didn't hear what you said." We all do that. And it's important to let them know that I'm not perfect either. . . . I had four people the other day, and that's way too many in one day. Three is enough. So by the fourth person, I was pretty tired and it was hard to pay attention.

For Lola, part of being present as a spiritual director is being able to keep one's intention simple and clear, and focus on one thing at a time. She elaborates:

I don't have a lot of experience with this, but I am not comfortable with the whole idea of group spiritual direction. I just think that it's so personal. I just can't even imagine group spiritual direction, and yet I think it's getting more and more popular. And also, there are some people that connect it with massage, or reiki, or I don't know what else. For me, this is the hour and this is the focus, and this is your time, and this is what we're doing. And I'm sitting here and I'm listening to you, and my attention is on you. It's hard for people to listen these days. . . . We multitask. When you multitask, you can't pay attention to just one thing at a time.

Lola says that one of her goals as a spiritual director is "to help people to look at the pace of their lives." She explains:

Whenever people ask me what I do for a living, I say, "I teach people how to sit down and be quiet." Then, of course, they want to know more about that. . . . The pace of life is unbelievable. Very destructive, I think. And I don't think it gives people a sense or a time to really develop that sense of intuition that we all have. Whether we have a particular religion or not, there's a spirituality that's there, but what's needed is some quiet time to let that grow.

When asked what effect her quality of presence has on her directees, Lola says:

My sense of it is that they feel affirmed, encouraged, challenged. . . . I keep saying, “God’s love for us is unconditional, so you don’t have to earn God’s love.” But that’s hard for a lot of people, because they grew up with this idea that God’s up there checking off his little black book. And I think over time they get it. It takes a while, but they get it.

A few directees appreciate the spiritual direction relationship so much that Lola encourages them to seek training as spiritual directors. She notices the following qualities in these directees:

Their depth of spirituality, their ability to listen, just their desire for God, and the way they live their lives because of that. There are a lot of little signs. Faithfulness to their own prayer life and the value they find in that, and the fact that people single them out and they talk to them.

Irene

Irene has been practicing as a spiritual director for 40 years. Her educational background includes both spiritual direction and counseling, and she is ordained with the Federation of Christian Ministers. She currently has a private practice and works with people of all faiths.

For Irene, the essence of spiritual guidance is “to really help people to understand their own destiny and what has heart and meaning for them in life.” It is important to her that the people who come to see her share this basic agenda for their work together. She trusts that they are eager to engage with the deeper questions in life, and she feels confident that she can help those who are “searching for meaning or trying to understand how God is working in their life, or [asking] what is the gift in this, what is the invitation here?”

Beyond this fundamental assumption about the nature of spiritual guidance, Irene holds to two truths or practices in her cultivation of presence and her stance toward her work. First, being attentive to God while sitting with another person means beginning a session “with a conscious awareness of the presence of Spirit.” In practice, this involves asking permission, making sure the person feels comfortable, and then perhaps asking:

“Would you feel comfortable taking a few minutes in the beginning of our session to sit in silence?” And I might add “in meditation or in prayer.” Sometimes I’ll just openly say, “There really are not just the two of us in this session. We can expect that God is here and present in the room.” But if I don’t know the person’s background then I probably do it a little more gently, in terms of just taking some quiet time to relax.

Second, Irene reminds herself that she is not in charge or in control, “always coming back to realizing it’s not me.” She engages in self-talk before a session, sitting down to meditate for a while and saying to herself:

I am not God. I am a divine being who is eternal, created by God, coming from God and going back to God, but I am not God. . . . So out of that comes a certain sense of humility, and just really being humble before God and before this person.

An important aspect of this stance is to make it clear to herself and the people she works with that her role is not to solve problems or give people answers to their life dilemmas. She explains:

Because I don’t really have the answers. And so that’s one of the reasons why it’s so important for that awareness of God being, working with us and through us in a situation. . . . And once we can establish that framework, it really allows an openness and an opportunity for deep listening. . . . Because sometimes, the other thing I notice, especially with people when they’re first coming into spiritual direction or guidance work, is that they feel like they have to keep talking. And so they’ll go on and on and on and on, and if you can gently, very gently, remind them that we have an expectation and an anticipation that God is here working and that the Spirit living inside of them will—the answers will come through them—we can stop talking all the time.

Irene uses the image of “trying to squeeze something out of the tube” to convey the attempt to control the session or force an answer. Establishing a framework of trust in God’s presence and action allows both her and the other person to let go of striving and “take time to just be quiet. Maybe to meditate, or to spend a little time in prayer, or just to sit silently and then see what bubbles up.”

It is very important to Irene to acknowledge that the spiritual guide is responsible for creating a “sacred space . . . an environment that helps [the other] to feel not only safe, but an environment of compassion and empathy.” Any concern with performance or needing “to do

something to help this person” only interferes with the guide’s capacity to listen deeply and be consciously aware of God’s presence. Irene adds, “When people feel like there isn’t this performance that has to go on, it’s just amazing how much more open not only can they be, but how much more happens with the Spirit.”

Irene describes listening deeply as “paying attention to what’s happening in the environment and not wandering off in your mind, or saying to yourself, now what do I do next?” When she is able to hold this open quality of presence, she experiences spontaneous moments of “a sharpening of awareness of the presence of the Spirit.” This can happen in many different ways, including feeling sensations such as a tingling in her hands or lips, or a softness in her heart, or a deep bodily feeling of quietness and stillness. She may also experience a tremendous feeling of love for the other person, or a simple knowing, without expectation, that “there’s something happening here.” At these times, she often notices that the other person is also deeply touched; he or she may speak about something very personally meaningful, begin to cry, or hold his or her breath for a moment. Irene underscores the significance of these moments, and feels when they happen that “something is being born, or waking up within the person.”

Irene explains the importance of being aware that these moments of “acute awakening” can happen, recognizing them when they do, and not gliding over them by talking, changing the direction of the conversation, or asking a question:

Those moments are really important to cherish and to not rush through. To just really sit and be present, and to be still. Let happen what’s happening. And they’re very rich. They’re very full. And yet they’re very simple. It’s like if you’ve ever been in nature and you get to some certain point, and you look up and there’s a beautiful animal or a beautiful, beautiful tree or a bird, or even a cloud, and you’re just still for that moment. It’s like that kind of feeling. . . . Sometimes, people have an expectation that the Spirit acts in some great way, you’re going to go out and walk on the water or something, but it’s usually in a very little tiny, gentle, soft, compassionate, loving way that some of the most profound things happen.

Irene finds that profound moments that happen during a spiritual guidance session may touch something in the other person that continues to unfold over time. She says:

I've had people come back and say, "You know, when we were talking about this, and we got very quiet, I had a whole flood of emotions that week that came up around that experience." . . . It's almost as if in that moment you've opened the envelope or you've opened the music box, and then it just seems to play out for them during the weeks that follow.

Being attentive to God, for Irene, involves anticipating these precious moments, being open to them, and cherishing them when they spontaneously occur.

At times, these moments of being touched by the Spirit include a feeling of being guided to say or do something in the session. Irene describes this experience as an idea that suddenly comes to her, accompanied by "a sense of the presence of God, just getting mental pictures in my mind and feeling a softness in my body, an awareness of the presence of the Spirit." Typically, the idea is unexpected and utterly unique to the specific situation described by the directee, and Irene is careful to bring it up tentatively and with "a humble heart": "I may be totally off base on this. This is what comes to my mind, but what do you think about doing this?" When the suggestion is followed, it often has a positive impact and leads to a shift in emotion or insight for the directee. In one example, Irene spontaneously felt guided to lead the directee in an imagery exercise, which resulted in the release of powerful feelings of grief that had been previously unacknowledged and unexpressed. Irene was left awed and surprised, thinking "That was a really significant guidance of the Spirit. . . . After [the person] left, it blew me away because I thought, I never would have thought of doing that! It's the last thing I thought of!"

Irene's experience has taught her a way of discerning whether or not to follow these feelings of guidance from the Spirit. She explains:

When I feel like I'm really being guided by the Spirit of light, there's a peace. There's definitely a peaceful feeling about it. . . . It's just a very little, gentle, soft feeling of love

and compassion and empathy and peacefulness, tremendous peacefulness. And it's not forceful. So in other words, I don't hear in my mind, or none of the pictures say to me, you must do this. Because that immediately would feel to me un-Spirit-like. But it's like, here's a possibility. That's the best way to frame it in terms of words. Here's a possibility. And it's irrelevant whether I use it or not, because there are many ways, there are many paths up the mountain. There are many ways that Spirit can lead. There is never just one way.

If a suggestion is not followed, Irene trusts that the Spirit is working in the directee's life, and that he or she will experience healing at another time or in a different context: "Sometimes the spiritual guide is planting a seed, or maybe scratching the surface a little bit, and then it goes to the next person or the next experience and that's where they benefit. It's all part of a big picture." She adds, "With the Holy Spirit, there is always freedom. The person never has to do what you think they should do. It should always rest in their hands."

When Irene does not feel that freedom and instead feels a sense of pressure to do something or a desire to control the other person, she understands this as an indicator of a "tremendous amount of ego" involved, or something "coming from a spirit other than the Spirit of light, the light of Christ." She says that her ego is the biggest obstacle in her intention to maintain an open, attentive presence in spiritual guidance: "I forget that I am not in charge, or I start to get anxious . . . and as soon as that happens, I know that I'm moving out of that sacred space I need to be in to work as well as I can with this person." She describes how she monitors her own state as she sits with someone:

If somebody is coming for spiritual direction, and I begin to feel myself tense up, I do that check for myself every once in a while and say, "Oh, I'm noticing that I'm really getting tense, or I'm starting to get anxious, or I have a feeling of anxiety." And it's really wonderful because it reminds me. You can either make it your friend or your enemy. You can say, "Oh, I wish I didn't have this, and maybe if I go for a run or walk around the block, I'll feel better." But in another way, it can be your friend because it can remind you. It's ego. "Oh, I have to do something to help this person," and really you don't. What you do do is to create the sacred space.

Irene's inner work during a session therefore includes noticing these feelings, and then turning it all over to God, "always coming back to realizing it's not me."

Irene's ability to let go in this way has grown over many years of practicing as a spiritual guide. She explains:

I'm a high achiever. And I've always gotten really good grades, and I've always tried to do it right, and I'm very creative. And so [when I was young] I would come into a spiritual guidance session with a high school student, for example, and I'd be really preoccupied with what was going on in their lives, and were they going to make it? Were they going to be alright? And now as I get older, and I think it's just a matter of doing more and more spiritual guidance and trusting more myself and the deepening of my own spiritual practice, I don't have that need to control the session as much. It lessened and lessened and lessened over the years.

In addition to this evolution in her ability to let go of control in spiritual guidance, Irene also experiences "more of an active presence of the Spirit happening now than ever did in my youth." She has confidence that the Spirit is working, "not just in the person and between us, but also very actively in me." She notices that increasingly, stories and pieces of information come to mind that speak directly to the directee's experience; she attributes this partly to her own growth in knowledge and experience of different spiritual traditions and practices. As she puts it, these experiences have allowed "a much richer, more fertile field for the Spirit to work with."

In her spiritual guidance work, Irene finds it easier to maintain her desired quality of presence when she is leading "a life permeated with balance and awareness." She elaborates:

There was a time in my life when I did much, much less spiritual work, and the reason was because my life was so intense. It just didn't have the kind of balance that I needed to have. So I just found that I couldn't do spiritual guidance as well. I just had this jabbering monkey in my brain all that time that was saying, "Oh, is this session almost over so I can go do those papers and get that budget in?" And then I just became aware that it's not a good time for me to be doing spiritual guidance. I need to be more in harmony and balance in my life. And I'd say that's the biggest thing for me. . . . When I sit with someone, I just don't find that gentle peacefulness, openness that I was describing that I find when, say, I'm in a more balanced life where I'm making sure that I'm doing my spiritual reading, I'm doing some meditation, maybe I'm doing walks in nature, and I'm working. . . . Eating well, watching that you do things in moderation. . . .

If I'm going out and I have five dinner meetings and drinking wine every night, I cannot get up the next day and do spiritual guidance. . . . So just learning to stay in my balance zone helps me a lot.

She finds that supervision is another important support for her:

I think the faith issue is a big one for a lot of people. Because certainly spiritual directors go through often their own dark night of the soul. And they may feel lost for a while and feel like they're in desolation. Where is God in my life? And here I am trying to help you. And what in the world is going on with me? And I think that because that's true, it's important to have a supervisor, if you can possibly, if you're lucky enough to find one.

For Irene, a way of living that cultivates balance and her own relationship with the Spirit is the foundation for bringing the kind of presence and attentiveness to God that best serves the people who come to her for spiritual guidance.

Ben

Ben is an Episcopal priest who has been practicing as a spiritual director for over 21 years. As seminary chaplain, he does both short-term spiritual guidance and group work, in addition to teaching courses in various models of group spiritual formation and guidance. He also has a private practice at his home.

For Ben, there are many ways to talk about being attentive to God. He views the role of the spiritual director as more than simply providing a "hospitable space for people to do their exploration of God within and around them." He adds:

My role is to be attentive to that sense that God already is present, already is acting, already is touching and moving that person. And so to be attentive to both the person and also that Holiness which is already present within that person is part of my desire in terms of being attentive to my directee during the period of time I'm with that person. So that, I think, is an overarching sense of a belief or a trust that I have as I sit with people.

As he sits with people in individual spiritual direction, Ben is attentive to three things in what he describes as "kind of a three-way consciousness." He attends to the other person, his own inner

experience, and “that awareness, that sense that this is a place where we meet the Divine One, both within the person I’m sitting with and also within me.”

First, his attention is on the other person in an act of deep listening and sacred hospitality. In order to “be fully present to that one particular individual,” he imagines that during the period of time that they are together, the other person fills the whole world, and is the only one in the universe. He says, “As I listen to all the particularities of what that person is saying and experiencing, in that process, there’s also a discovery of a sense of God present as well.” Ben believes very deeply that every person is a God-bearer, whether he or she is aware of it or not. He views himself as a witness to that truth.

Ben feels deeply grateful for the work of Morton Kelsey in forming his own “modern contemplative approach to the sense of engaging the Presence.” For the past 20 years, Ben has carried with him a pamphlet with excerpts of Kelsey’s writing on listening. He explains how Kelsey’s perspective has guided him in attending to the directee:

Listening in a deep way. That as we listen to another nonjudgmentally and deeply, that a whole world can open up. A whole world can be disclosed that includes our inner demons, and our dark side as well as those incredible places of joy and of light. And that ultimately, as we listen deeply, we are encountering the sense of these people, of the other as God-bearer. And the holiness of another person . . . [Kelsey] would have been one of my forbearers in the field that I want to say, although I never met him and I’m sorry that I didn’t, but he really helped, through his work, helped me move into the kind of, into this dimension of my vocation. I’m very grateful for that.

As Ben listens deeply to the other in this way, he is content to “invite a person to present, to speak about whatever it is they wish to speak about,” and together, they listen for what God may give them to “be present with and listen to.”

The second aspect of Ben’s “three-way consciousness” is attending to his own inner experience. He elaborates: “My attention is also within . . . being open and aware of that intuitive, listening ear within me. Noticing what emerges inside me as I am listening and

responding to the other, and trying to be open to that intuitive or receptive dimension.” Attending to what is coming up into his awareness helps Ben to notice possible hindrances in his ability to be “present to the other and present to the Presence.” For example, when the directee says something that ignites his own interests or passions, he sometimes finds himself slipping into a teaching role, rather than his desired role of “the listener and the encourager—my primary focus is to help a person explore their own deepest sense of truth and meaning.” He notices other temptations as well, such as “trying to help, trying to turn sessions into problem-solving sessions,” or a desire to relate to the other person’s story with a story of his own. He says:

Sometimes there are situations that a directee is dealing with that may touch in some parallel way some of my own stuff. And so that’s just something I need to be aware of as part of that listening and attending to what’s happening within me as well. So that that doesn’t become, “Well, I know what you mean,” and we’re off and running on working on our parallel stories. Sometimes that can be helpful if the primary focus is that it’s in support of the other, and that there’s something around the parallel that supports their own exploration. But other times, it’s something where I may just catch myself and realize, oh, okay, that’s one of my issues. I really need to take that, deal with that at another time.

In addition to listening to the other and to what is happening within him, Ben brings a third dimension to his attending: “listening for that which shimmers, that which catches the attention, that becomes the place where God, and the challenges, and the desires, and the possibilities begin to be revealed.” He draws on the Christian practice of *Lectio Divina*, or holy reading, to guide him in this listening. In *Lectio Divina*, one engages with a holy text, listening deeply and “expecting that there is some encounter with the Divine that is there for me or for us.” He is present with another person “as sacred text,” looking for “the place of engaging, not only the text, but the Holy One in the text, or that shines through in that.” He describes another similar guide that he uses:

Another image that I often will use with a person when I’m first meeting with them, as we’re exploring what spiritual direction might be like, is . . . Janet Ruffing, I think, used

this image . . . saying spiritual direction was like panning for gold. And so it's that sense of the two of us together in some ways listening to that person's narrative of the experiences of this past month or however it is, or whatever it is that they're bringing, and kind of sifting through that stuff and looking for that which might that nugget of gold to be able to look at. That's the place that we, again, might focus in on for a sense of where is God in that? How might that reveal more of God's presence in that person's life?

For Ben, this quality of attentiveness applies not only to spiritual direction, but also to life as a whole. If his life is too busy, with many distractions and little time for sitting “in quiet and in openness,” he finds that he is less likely to be as fully present as he intends to be with a directee. He explains that the practice of being present is something that necessarily needs to permeate his everyday activities:

I hope that I carry that kind of attention into my daily living. So that's it's not something that's reserved . . . I mean this is a practice that I try and carry into my life. Because I believe that there is nowhere where God is not. This is a way of life. And in this way of life, I have this wonderful and rare opportunity to be able to ask some people to share the depths of their own life experience with me.

When Ben holds this attentiveness in spiritual direction sessions, he experiences moments of feeling like he is “on holy ground” together with the other person. He describes what these precious and powerful moments are like for him:

It's felt as if every fiber of me has been engaged. That there's been a sense of being fully awake and fully aware, with my body, with the whole of who I am that has been present with this other person in whatever it is that we're exploring. There . . . can be even an awareness of that sense that surely, God is present with us right now. That our time has moved into, the exploration, the discovery together has led us to a place where, without formula or particular ritual, there is that sense that we are in a place that what is happening now is worship. Not in a liturgical way, but there's a sense of awe, of wonder. Awe and wonder. And often, a both highly energized and deep, deep sense of peace. It's kind of like there's a sense of crystalline clarity about that time. . . . Where we're deeply connected, and that this is the Spirit that's doing that.

He adds that “it's so wonderful to be able to share a moment like that.”

In order to prepare himself to be present and open to the holiness in his directees and their stories, Ben tries to set aside time before each session “for just being still, having that intent

and desire to be able to be awake, and aware, and open to them in whatever it is that they bring.” He feels that his directees have been given to him as companions on his life journey, and they remain in his awareness both during and after sessions: “I hold these people in my heart, so they’re part of my prayer life throughout the day or throughout the month. So that sense of being prayerful about them is not something that happens just during the session.”

In addition to being prayerful and taking some time in silence before a session, Ben feels that the environment he creates is a great help in cultivating attentiveness to God. He views his role as one of providing spiritual hospitality, and this means creating a time and place that “gets reserved, framed as sacred time.” He sets aside a quiet place for spiritual direction: “a wonderful sunroom at our house, and . . . as chaplain at the seminary, I’ve got a really nice, modest but nice space to be able to have people.” He begins and ends each session with intention, in order to acknowledge that “this session is, in some ways, a prayer. That we’re trying to respond to God with or without words.” Typically, he lights a candle to provide “a gentle focal point,” and then extinguishes the candle at the end of the session. He also asks people how they would like to begin their time together, “and if they would like prayer, or would they like some silence. Or if they feel ready to begin, to allow them to frame how . . . time is going to be meaningful for them in terms of this special time set aside.” These simple rituals create an environment in which both people can more readily listen for “that which shimmers.”

Ben feels that his own attentiveness to God in spiritual direction supports his directees “in their own desire to . . . encounter the Divine themselves, to be present to the sense that their life is sacred.” He comments further:

Also, I think the act of this kind of deep hospitable listening is not judgmental, and that’s a really important quality. As I do my work in looking at the darkness in my own life, as well as the light places, my wrestlings, as I’m aware of that, then I hope to be able to provide that place of freedom for people to do that kind of exploration and discovery in

themselves. And that can have a deeply integrative dimension. It can help people explore what their own sense of Shalom, their own sense of peace and wholeness, is about. It can integrate those parts of themselves that they maybe have a hard time owning, and how to help embrace that as part of, that that too can be part of . . . that there's no place within them that cannot be loved into transformation by God. So I think there can be an integrative, a making whole, an embracing, that attentiveness to the Presence in the session can bring about. And usually that's over time.

From Ben's experience, ongoing intentional prayerful exploration in the presence of God takes one on "a journey into a greater sense of wholeness," bringing the gifts of greater freedom of self-discovery and self-acceptance. Over time, directees grow to develop their own inner spiritual director, building an "internal wise one. The one who is in touch with God within."

Ben has experienced these gifts in his own life, as a directee, and is very grateful for the people who have journeyed with him and supported his own path toward wholeness. He tells the story of an experience he had in his youth, when he had not yet discovered spiritual direction:

I remember, at 19 . . . being caught one evening with a sense of being united with the cosmos, one of these unitive experiences that in some ways, I think I'd been being prepared for for several years in terms of more Eastern style meditation, which certainly my church would not have had any teaching on. And I remember going back to my pastor and trying to explain what had happened and, bless his heart, he didn't have—my folks nor my pastor—had a clue as to what had gone on. And that really set me on a journey, much of which was not healthy or helpful, but eventually I was able to come back to the Christian tradition, the Christian church, but with some other understandings too. One of the things that I realized was that, I wished, at 19, that I would have had someone that could have held me through those experiences, would have known enough about the mystical theological traditions to be able to help support me on that journey. That became one of those things that later on, with the emergence of spiritual direction, it was such a joy for me to know about, and to be able to find people who could hold me in my own spiritual life.

Ben is grateful for the gift of spiritual direction, and the fact that there are people who desire "to be present with people, hold people in their spiritual lives . . . but have knowledge too, out of that experience, that God is immediately present as well."

Sandal

Sandal is a member of a Catholic religious order, and has been practicing spiritual direction for 37 years. Her educational background includes the study of both theology and transpersonal psychology. She currently has a private practice at home.

Sandal's attentiveness to God in spiritual direction springs from her childhood experience of feeling God's presence. She explains:

That happened for me at a very early age, as a child. It just came naturally. So that attentiveness was always there. I didn't have to create it. I didn't have to make it happen. I find, as an adult, I make more significant efforts to bring my mind to that awareness, but the awareness has always been there. I feel it's a special gift. . . . And I know the reason now why that was so. I didn't know back then in childhood, but through a very difficult birth experience, I had a near-death experience myself as a neonate. And that has come to me out of the recesses of my own unconscious. And I've been able to paint a picture of it. And I can see from that how my consciousness, just boom! Opened up.

Sandal's spiritual attentiveness has continued to evolve throughout her life, and throughout all of her varied education and experiences, "there has always been that trust of the small voice within." When she was in high school, she read the work of the mystics and remembers "really deriving a lot from their lives." When she eventually entered religious life, the prayer styles taught didn't really make sense to her. She adds: "I thought, now I used to pray more readily, more effortlessly, more genuinely when I was a kid at home. So I'm going to pray that way."

This deep trust in her own "awareness of God [that] has always been there" has carried over into Sandal's work as a spiritual director. After 20 years in religious life, people started asking her to do spiritual direction with them, and she thought, "I'm not playing God with people's lives. If I'm going to do this, I really want to know what I'm doing." As a result, she embarked on various programs of study, and "the awareness grew. And it grew in facets. It grew in different ways, to see the same reality of God. And I really loved that multiplicity that began

to break open.” Although she gained a lot of valuable knowledge during her education, she still comes back to her inner experience as a primary guide and touchstone in her work. She explains:

In terms of awareness of the presence of God, it comes up from within. It comes up from my own center. And I trust that more than I trust the methodologies that I’ve learned. I’ve learned a lot of approaches to prayer, a lot of approaches to spiritual direction. But when I sit down with a person, it’s like this attention to that Divine Presence is stronger than anything. And I was thinking of that. I thought, now would I really make that claim? And when I think back on my life, I think back in terms of my mother’s cancer surgery, and my father’s death, and major things that happened in my life, and realizing even during those times, when I would sit down with a person, that somehow, this awareness of God’s presence would hold us—myself and the other person—in terms of consciousness. And so it was like having created a focus of consciousness, and where the focus-ness goes, there the energy flows. . . . So it’s kind of an evolution. And it still holds today that when I sit down with a person for spiritual direction, whatever else is going on in my life just kind of recedes. And this Divine Presence really comes to the fore.

Sandal’s attentiveness to God creates a focused intention for spiritual direction as well as a feeling of being held in a greater consciousness together with the directee. She adds: “The presence of God that I experience within myself kind of reaches out to embrace the other person. . . . The empty chair . . . was a great symbol for me in terms of the awareness of the Divine being present . . . that there are three of us.”

Sandal has several aids to this quality of attentiveness in her work with people. At the beginning of each session, she lights a candle to represent “the presence of the divine within each of us and in all reality.” She also takes the time to pray together “in whatever way people are comfortable. Some people just like to sit quietly, some like to pray with me.” She explains further:

And sometimes people will come, and out of their eagerness or out of their distress, they kind of jump right into what they want to talk about. And even with that, I will turn and light the candle, and bring my own consciousness, as well as whatever the person wants to get into, into that awareness. So it isn’t dependent on the prayer, and yet the prayer helps to facilitate it. So that’s my own unique fashioning of my response to something that is already there. The divine consciousness.

When we started our conversation for this research project, Sandal began our time together with a prayer typical of the way she might begin a spiritual direction session:

Creating God, thank you for this time, for this space, for the sacred opportunity to be together with Natasha. Allow your Self to be the focus and your Spirit to be the movement that we pay attention to. We are each important individuals, and yet we see that we are part of the greater whole. And that is the movement, the dynamic, the awareness that we want to pay attention to. And so bless our efforts. Be with us in this time, as we know that you are always. So help us to be with you. Help us to keep our awareness open to you and to be awake in this time. All of this I ask in the name of the Christ consciousness and in the power of Spirit. Amen.

After lighting a candle and praying together, Sandal holds her hands in a particular position during sessions, a hand mudra that expresses “the integration of the masculine and feminine energies flowing upward and downward.” She says, “This, for me, helps me to support my thought, or support my mind, to this greater consciousness.” She also occasionally glances at two pictures hanging on the wall behind the chair where her directees sit. They depict “the hand of the Buddha with the transforming flower and the awakened Christ.” These pictures further facilitate her intention to maintain a conscious awareness of the presence of God.

Outside of spiritual direction sessions, Sandal engages in spiritual practices that support her ability to be present in this way. She describes her daily prayer:

I try to make that a body prayer where I do tai chi and integrate that with the Hail Mary, and integrate that with the “I am” statements of Jesus, realizing that I am that. . . . And then I usually make an intention in the morning for what I really desire for the day. Then the spiritual direction itself becomes a spiritual practice. . . . I spend some days, hours compacted, four or five hours in prayer because of doing spiritual direction.

Sandal also feels strongly that the role of spiritual director necessitates ongoing preparation and nurturing. She says:

I try to take those opportunities to keep my own inner awareness stirred up and not let it go flat lined. So for me, a part of being attentive to the Divine is being enriched by those workshops or events or opportunities for in-depth work.

In addition to her personal engagement in spiritual practice and ongoing personal growth, Sandal finds that living her life in a balanced way helps her to bring her consciousness of the Divine to spiritual direction. This includes taking part in activities that are “very practical, very life oriented, very real, in the moment.” She teaches English as a second language, and for her, it is a way of sharing in a “where the rubber hits the road” kind of way. Although in this work Sandal does not directly mention God, she teaches the students “to have an open heart,” and for her it is “another way of spiritual practice.” She also mentors students at a graduate school, which challenges her intellectually and is another way to bring balance to her life. Achieving balance, for Sandal, also includes taking care of her health and making sure to set aside enough time for relaxation. She explains:

When I get overtired, the level of awareness isn’t to the same kind of intensity or the same kind of degree. It’s . . . not there with a lot of vitality, kind of on a flat line. Not a lot of sparkle. . . . It’s another challenge for me now as I’m getting older, to begin to integrate rest time and relaxation time into this whole equation of what facilitates the divine awareness in spiritual direction.

All of these practices, both in and out of the context of spiritual direction, help Sandal to use her attention in a particular way as she sits with her directees. She describes her experience as follows:

I try to divide my attention, divide my focus. Part of it in my own ground, part of it in the relationship that is going on, and then part of it in the consciousness of the larger whole that we are a part of. And I try to keep those levels of consciousness going, so to speak. I try to keep them going, so that I’m not just totally giving myself away by listening to the other person, and I’m not getting caught up in the story of the other person. And there is that attentiveness to where God is in the whole of things. Sometimes people will come in and talk and talk and talk. . . . So when they get done talking, I will say to them something like, well, having said all that, which really creates what’s happening for you right now, what is the intention that you want to bring to God as a result of bringing all of that here to this space and letting it be? And then, boom! It’s like the person travels to a deep place in that ending moment. But sometimes it’s like, trusting whether or not to intervene and to break their flow and to try to give it some focus, or to let it go on and then to ask them, well how does this refer to God for you? Or what is the intention you want to ask? I’ll write it down if you let it come to you, arise from within you. I’ll write it

down as you say it and then give it to you, and then you can pray it for this next stretch of time. . . . [Or] I very often prompt that with a question: what do you see as the jurisdiction, or the holding, or the space of spiritual direction? It's very interesting to see what people respond; if it's Church, if it's how they treat another person, if they include their dreams, if they include their work, their sexuality, if that includes social justice. . . . What is the scope of their consciousness? So that is very instructive for me, and I try to stay with where a person is until their own evolution opens it up more and more fully.

During spiritual direction, Sandal's attention is divided over several areas of focus at once. Over the years, her ability to maintain this quality of attention has grown, as she has gradually learned that "spiritual direction is an art form. It's more than just doing the technicality of it. It becomes an art form."

Part of Sandal's attention is focused "in her own ground," noticing what is coming up in her inner experience as the other person is talking. This helps her to notice the feelings or reactions within her that may hinder her ability to be fully present with the other. She also becomes aware of patterns or themes over time. She explains:

When somebody pushes buttons of mine, unconsciously, and I need to say, okay, what's going on inside of you, and respond to them in a way that doesn't project back onto them my stuff, that is a real hinderer for me. And one of the things that is the biggest thing for me is authoritarianism. So . . . when people come in and are into the . . . mindset of, the [institutional] Church says, or has all the answers . . . or we need to comply, that sets off my buttons like nothing else. And so either I say to the person, I am not the right spiritual director for you. I need to let you know that. It isn't about you, it's about me. Or I need to pay strong attention to my own buttons when they're going on. Because it's my own tangle, my own struggle with authority—that I think is imprinted right in my DNA—that flares up every now and again. And rather than projecting that back on the person, I want to hold that for a session that I do with my supervisor.

Paying attention to "what happens to [her] internally during the session" also opens up the possibility for new ideas to arise in Sandal's awareness. At times, unexpected thoughts or images will suddenly "come whipping in from the outside." These experiences feel to her like "somehow my consciousness gets fine tuned by some dynamic outside of it." She feels them in a bodily sense as coming from the right side of her head. She describes them further:

Very often, things will come in, and they come in from this right side. And they're amazing things that I would not know and that I trust. And so very often I will check out with the person, "You know, this just came to me. I don't know if it's for me or for you or for both of us, but I want to share it with you." And sometimes I just will notice that and put it like in a stew pot in the back of my awareness, and sure enough, it seems to come into play at some point during the session. . . . Some of the things that come that know that I'm in the presence of the divine awareness just come in the flow of reality and not due to my efforts.

If an idea comes to her for a directee, Sandal will sometimes tentatively suggest that the person test it out over the next month to see if it fits for him or her. In one case, an idea suddenly came to Sandal to suggest that the directee notice and shift how she was using her attention in daily life. Sandal experienced this as "a real grace," and was deeply grateful and amazed to witness the effect of this shift on the directee.

Sandal feels that her own attentiveness to God in spiritual direction fosters greater trust in directees. She elaborates:

I feel an incredible level of trust that arises between the other person and myself. And it isn't just trust in me, it's trust in the Divine, it's trust in the flow of things, it's trust in the greater picture of life, it's trust in relationships, it's trust in dreams, it's trust in their spiritual life, it's trust in what they may be doing for social justice, what they may be doing for the environment. So it's one-on-one, but it's huge.

She tells the story of a retreat day that she led for her fellow sisters: "It was like once it started, it had its own life and just went where it would. And people were deeply touched and deeply responsive." She had another experience in which she called together friends, acquaintances, and directees who had never met, and the level of sharing and mutual trust in the group was awe-inspiring. She adds, "I share that because, again, for me, spiritual direction is part of a bigger dynamic, a much bigger dynamic, and that was a tangible way to see it happen. So it was awesome and it was beautiful, and I still feel the level of awe and trust that happened." In Sandal's experience, being attentive to God encourages a deeper level of trust in oneself, others, and life itself.

Jana

Jana has been practicing spiritual direction as a Roman Catholic lay practitioner for the last 18 years. She has a private practice, and also teaches and offers spiritual direction at a retreat center.

For Jana, being attentive to God is a way of life. In order to bring this quality of attentiveness to her work as a spiritual director, she emphasizes that her own “contemplative preparation is essential,” and that this preparation touches every aspect of her life. During the week, when she meets with directees, she structures her days in a way that “anchors [her] in the presence of God.” She spends time in silence both before and after every session, as she explains:

I take the time, usually 10 to 15 minutes before a person comes, to be here. To let myself get grounded here. But it takes a little while to kind of sift through, the in and out kind of cluttering of my own mind, to that ground that has that sense of God being right here with us. That it’s a threesome, not just myself and the other. And so, for me, the anchoring that that offers me forms such a part of my own spiritual life. Because it’s consistent through the day. It’s all through the day. . . . And I notice that in between—I try to schedule so I have about 20 minutes in between—and I notice I never turn on the radio or the television. I’m able to maintain a fairly monastic kind of atmosphere, even in between, which is essential. And some quiet after. So the entire time, I mean to me, it feels like spiritual practice.

The physical space in which Jana works is also very important to her in cultivating contemplative presence. She feels fortunate and blessed to have a quiet, private room in her home reserved especially for spiritual direction. She keeps a third chair in the room as a reminder to herself and the directee “who the true director really is.” All of these conditions support her in staying focused and present with her directees. She says:

I always feel without prayer before, without the quietude of the ambience, or my house—I don’t live here alone—but without the quietude, of even in between [sessions], I would not be able to be at that level, because I’d be thinking about the phone calls and the grocery list. . . . And I know there are directors who don’t have those options, but I think it’s very difficult.

If she finds herself getting distracted, which she says happens “especially if a directee brings up an issue that for me has lots of resonance, or taps into my experience, or my own shadow issues,” she brings to mind the image of a cupboard door, “my own cupboard of my stuff.” It’s important to Jana to keep the door closed during sessions—both her inner cupboard door and her outer office door. This helps her to practice “being present and really listening with the whole being, which is not easy.” She adds: “It’s really hard work to be available mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically, and yet I think it makes such a difference in the directee to be heard in that way. That something does communicate.”

Jana’s private prayer practice is another part of her contemplative preparation. Her spiritual practices include awakening early in the morning, walking for about 90 minutes every day, and doing spiritual reading. To bring balance to her practice and her life, she takes part in a variety of other activities as well:

We have a vegetable garden growing, so that grounding in nature is just absolutely essential. And doing other forms of reading. That’s, I think, part of that balance. I’m reading a wonderful book right now called *Microtrends* about trends in the culture. And I think as a director, it’s really important to just be aware of the sociological and political. So I watch the news. I have to. I have to know and be in the world. So it is different. It’s lighter, it’s more recreational. It’s a little more earthy. But I find, for myself, I need that balance. Like the walking. . . . More physical, some yogic practice, breathing, to be in the body, and let my body be such an integral part of my spiritual life, personally. Really, really important. . . . Fun and friends, very, very important. Because it can be an occupational hazard. There are certainly occupational hazards in offering direction. And one is that you become such a listener, so attentive, that everyone, even friends, begin to just talk to you. And you don’t get a chance to talk. So having friendships, and reading material, and films that are joyous and happy and light. . . . You have to let everything off leash, in a way!

In addition to her prayer practice and finding balance in her life, Jana’s many years of experience as a spiritual director have made attentiveness to God a way of being for her. She elaborates further:

Over these 20 years of offering direction, it has made me so much more contemplative and aware of God in everything. The news, nature, people surfing, the waves. . . . I mean it's just been remarkable. It's been a great gift. Because it feels like you become saturated with that consciousness. It just becomes a regular state of being. . . . So even the parking ticket—I got my first moving violation last year—and I realized, you know, I was hurrying too much. Going too fast, and I needed to slow down. . . . The feeling of, oh, darn, now traffic school. And then thinking, what a great gift to have such a wake-up call. It's like, slow down. . . . I think it will continue as long as I offer direction. Because it feels like such a gift. Each directee just opens me more and more.

Through “the discipline of slowing down,” she has learned that taking life at a slower pace helps her to find God everywhere. She adds:

One of my favorite quotes is Julian of Norwich, she says, the fullness of joy is finding God in everything. And I love that. And I'm not always there, of course. But I notice that if I give myself time, if I slow down my thought, I can let myself kind of deepen, just sort of naturally. So if I sit in my favorite coffee house, I can start appreciating that I have some time to read and have great coffee, and then if I slow down enough, start looking around at just the beauty of the people in the coffee house. And how neat it is, and how wonderful that moment and the presence of God. But I need to slow down in order to do that, in order to have that gift be realized. And I think that's one of the great gifts of direction for people, too. I notice that as a directee too, when I go, it's an opportunity to slow down, in our culture.

Slowing down in the spiritual direction session itself is also important to Jana. She reminds herself to be “silent, stupid, and slow.” One of her favorite images is that of a ladder, which represents staying with the directee step by step. She says:

And that's all about presence, isn't it? How to stay present, like really stay right there and try not to go ahead. And to not be afraid to be stupid and to say, what does that mean? Can you say more about it? . . . Don't hurry the directee. Just stay right with them where they are, and take your time. Be slow.

Throughout spiritual direction sessions, Jana senses the presence of Christ. She also feels close to many maternal images of God, and displays a photograph in her spiritual direction room of an “incredible woman, one of the women that brought down the junta in Argentina. She too, is like a face of the divine for me. . . . So Christ, as almost like the son of the mother.” She adds:

Even though I see many Jewish people as well, and some people of Hindu persuasion, and Buddhist, there is a sense of that Christ consciousness with me, within me. And

certainly I find it with each directee. Each directee is another face of God. So it's an extraordinary experience.

Having “a gentle framework that [she] holds...kind of imprinted in the background” helps Jana to maintain her intention to be attentive to God. As her directees talk, her foundational assumption is that the “mystery of God is right at the depth of where we're going.” She takes great responsibility as a spiritual director to ensure that she is open to engaging those depths, because she could easily “stay right at the level of functionality and not go deeper. And yet I'm aware...that the reason someone is coming is for that dimension of the spiritual life.” The framework that she holds uses the image of a cone to represent the fact that all of the different facets of life are part of the spiritual direction experience. Jana adds: “And if we stay with it long enough, we go through the story, the feelings, right into the deepest mystery of God. . . . [This image] helps me stay on track and not get lost just, say, at the feeling level.”

Jana experiences spiritual direction as “a kind of sacrament,” or a mutual spiritual practice in which both people share “an experience of the presence of God.” She says: “An ambience of the sacred . . . is created by certainly quietude, attentiveness, presence . . . and a welcoming of the directee as being in themselves, in a sense, bringing that sense of presence too.” Jana views each directee as a great teacher and as part of her path. Because people come in “everywhere in the journey,” with their own unique personality, gifts, and relationship with God, Jana believes that spiritual directors need to adapt and “learn to be very supple, just like we do with our language of God, to the energy of the directee. . . . Because we don't know where we're going. . . . I find that it's like being in a different country with each person who comes.”

This attitude of humility and not knowing is an important aspect of contemplative presence for Jana. She considers being able to share “that intimate spiritual life” with another

person to be a privilege and a gift, and she enters into each session not knowing what it will bring. She offers another image that she loves to use:

I kind of see myself as a little sherpa in a hut on the side of the Himalayas. And each traveler comes and says, let's go up the mountain that way, or let's go this way. And it's like, okay! And you kind of have an idea of the territory of the mountain, but you really don't know specifically.

Thus, contemplative presence, for Jana, involves "leaning back into God." She is conscious of physically leaning back in her chair to remind herself to trust and "not have agenda." She explains:

Just letting it open to a real dialogue. So the word, the meaning, can come through. And not orchestrate. Just let it, let each of us be guided. . . . Trusting that it is the Divine in whatever form that is guiding, orchestrating. There's in a sense, then, no right and wrong. But just be, be with it.

When Jana is able to maintain this attitude with directees, she notices both physical sensations in her body and moments of feeling guided:

I remember when I first started offering direction. When we got deeper . . . I could physically feel . . . this kind of movement in my very gut level. Just kind of what I would describe as a fullness. Kind of a fullness. And I think, now, for me, what happens more—I mean that still happens—but sometimes when I'm in prayer before someone comes, a word, a phrase, will come to my mind. And sometimes when I'm with a directee, I'll hear the phrase or the word or the topic. So it's almost like it's underlined. It's like, oh! Almost like it's in neon, like a Geiger counter is going off. And what I think happens for me is I'm so in awe of the conversation. Because I certainly don't feel like I'm orchestrating it. It feels more, we're like jazz, like it's an improv. And so it's like I watch it come into form that seems to have meaning for the directee and for me. And there's a sense of awesome-ness and gratitude for that. . . . And sometimes in that leaning back into God, it's like there's almost this assurance of, here it is. This is it. Stay with this.

At times, the word or phrase that comes to mind may seem completely irrelevant until it emerges in the session. In one instance, Jana felt an inner nudge to read a particular Psalm before her directee arrived. Later, when the directee was talking about her prayer life, she spontaneously used an analogy that was identical to one of the lines from the Psalm. Jana describes her response:

For me inside there's this great sense of just gratitude, and sense of presence of God. But it doesn't happen all the time and I don't ask for it. . . . What I do usually in the prayer is just ask to be open to whatever ways God might guide both of us, because I don't know. I have no idea where we're going.

Most of the time, Jana decides not to share her experience with the directee, in order not to draw attention to herself. She says:

It's something I just simply keep to myself. Once in a while, I might say something if it feels relevant, but I tend to not even acknowledge that to the directee. That seems to be more of, how would I say it? Like a gift. Like a guiding gift that can help me stay more present.

Jack

Jack is a priest in the Old Catholic Church and practices spiritual direction as co-pastor of an interfaith community. His educational background is in philosophy and religion, and he currently teaches interfaith theology, world religions, and spiritual direction.

For Jack, being attentive to God in spiritual direction begins at the start of each session, when the first thing he does is to take a moment of silence to pray. Typically, he lights a candle to remind both himself and the client "that there are three of us here." Then, he suggests a moment of quiet time "to find our center." He prays for two things:

While we're finding our center, I'm asking God to help me to stay focused, not to let my mind wander but stay focused on the person I'm sitting with. And also to grant me wisdom to know the right thing to say to him or her.

Once the session is underway, Jack continually listens to three voices, which he describes as "rather like juggling three balls at all times." He explains further:

So I'm being attentive to the voice of the client. I'm being attentive to my own interior voices: "What am I going to have for supper? My back hurts. I have to pick up dog food." That kind of stuff, just the constant chattering . . . So I'm listening to my internal voices because that's also a source of wisdom. And then the third voice I'm listening to is the voice of the Divine. And that is, I would say, when someone is starting out, the hardest to discern. But I would also say that as you become more experienced in the practice, it becomes in some ways the easiest to discern. Because it's kind of always present. And often quiet unless it really wants to say something.

Jack has confidence that “when we invite the Divine presence into the space...the Divine is there and the Divine is going to make itself felt.” He names this as his “operating assumption,” or perhaps “a matter of faith,” but he believes that the Divine is always speaking, and there are only two possible points of resistance to that: in himself or in the client. He adds:

Resistance is always going to be in the client—that’s what we’re doing there. It’s the resistance in me that is my professional responsibility to remove. And I think that in any spiritual guide, the success of their work as a guide depends upon the degree to which they can remove that obstacle. And that’s why it’s so dreadfully important for all spiritual guides to always be in spiritual direction themselves, and in supervision.

Within spiritual direction sessions, the biggest resistance to Jack’s attentiveness to the Divine is the “tendency for my thoughts to run away with me.” He says:

If I allow one of my thoughts to intrude and take over, then I’m no longer listening to the client and I’m no longer listening to the Divine. If I’m truly focused on the client, then I’m hearing the Divine as well because I’m witnessing the relationship between them.

If he notices this obstacle happening, he says, “I will usually pray silently about it, ask for help, bring myself back to center, and exercise a little more discipline. You know how meditation sessions are. Sometimes they’re hard, sometimes they’re easy.” During the session he practices something like zazen, a Buddhist form of meditation. It helps him to acknowledge the thoughts that come up, put them aside, and come back to his focus on the client. He elaborates further:

Zazen is the practice of complete awareness of what is. So like I said, you’re paying attention to the three balls going on, but part of the second ball, my ball, is listening to my body as well as listening to the thoughts in my mind. Being able to set things aside. This is just straight zazen practice. So for me, a spiritual guidance session is an active form of meditation.

In this practice of noticing his own thoughts and feelings and setting them aside, Jack sometimes becomes aware of a thought that has a different quality to it, one that he knows “very clearly isn’t [his] thought.” He describes this experience:

I can usually tell my own thoughts because I can tell the source. Like I'm having this thought because I had this experience once. Or my ego wants to insert this because I want to be seen in this certain way. So I can usually discern these things because I can trace them back to its source in my own life. There's usually a reason why the thought is coming up. So those are always things that I can dismiss and set aside because they're not pertinent to the session. But it's the thought that comes from truly out of nowhere that I can't trace back, and it doesn't feel like shadow material, and again, it's kind of an alien thought. And that's when I know the Divine is speaking.

When this happens, Jack very often feels a nudge to say something in the session that he would never choose to say himself, and finds himself reluctant to act on it. He explains:

So usually when this thought arises, first of all I know, "Okay, this isn't me talking," and I usually just clamp it and wait for it to go away, because I do not want to say these things. But if it's a true nudge from the Divine, then the Divine is nothing if not persistent. . . . And it's relentless. So I usually give in, grip the arms of the chair, hold on for the ride, say the damn thing that I would not, do not want to say, and it is always the right thing. And that's just amazing, and I've watched this happen again and again and again and again. So I mean, the Divine isn't always controversial in this way, but it frequently happens.

In an example that represents a composite of client experiences, Jack tells the story of a client who is frustrated with her lack of intimacy with the Divine. When Jack asks about her image of the Divine, "she instantly goes to this transcendent place . . . it's all the sweetness and light and goodness." When he hears this, he feels suspicious because of the difficulties this person has faced in her life. Then, "this is where the little voice comes . . . 'Say this.'" Jack tells what happens next:

So this is a conversation between me and the Divine. And I'd say, "I am not going to say that. This is not a thing that you say to someone. This is not a nice thing to say. I am not going to say this." Nudge: "Say this." And finally I just gave in. And I said, "I don't think you're being honest with me about how you feel about God. Because it seems to me that God's been a right royal bastard to you in your life." And just like, shock. A moment of indignation. And then tears. So being able to confront God images that the person doesn't allow themselves to confront because "I'll go to hell," or "I'll be punished in some other way," or "I'm simply not allowed to have thoughts like that," or "I'm not allowed to confront God's shadow," or any of this kind of stuff. So to name the unnamable or unspeakable in the session, even against my own better judgment, can completely turn things around and allow us to go much deeper than we had before, and to confront real barriers between the client and the Divine. Because if the client is holding these ideas but

isn't allowed to confront them or even admit them to him or herself, then no real intimacy is possible. So let's talk about how God's a bastard, because God can handle that kind of talk. It's we that have trouble with it. And I typically encounter this a lot, to the point where I have become suspicious when someone's relationship with God is a little too easy. Because any real relationship is struggle. And if someone doesn't struggle with God, then I see that as a point of resistance. I could be wrong, I could be projecting my own struggle onto them, in which case I may need to discern—and I have done this in a couple of cases—that I'm simply not the right guide for this person. But in my experience, most people who have authentic and living relationships with Divinity, they are every bit as messy as human relationships, and rightfully so. That's intimacy.

An important part of being present in spiritual direction is trust. Jack trusts that “the Divine is going to have questions, or have things that need to be spoken that I am not going to think of myself. And I have to trust that process.” He believes that the client, too, needs to trust him: “So if I am trustworthy early on in the work, then as the work progresses, it can come through, basically. Then I think good work can be done.” One of Jack's students once said something that he loved: speak only when spoken through. Even though this guideline is “really, really good,” and “a nice thing to hold,” he acknowledges that it's not entirely true. In Jack's experience, “when the Divine speaks, the Divine speaks loudly. And it may happen once every other session or something like that.” The rest of the time, he is “kind of on autopilot,” focusing on the client and putting his trust in his own intuition and skills as a trained spiritual director. He explains:

I genuinely trust my intuition. When I see a red flag, when I see there's some resistance, when I see that there's stuff to be unpacked, then I think it's natural as a spiritual guide to say, “Well let's look more at that. What about that? Let's open that up a little bit more.” And so I think that's just part of the skill that you learn when you're learning to be a spiritual guide. And I trust that skill, but it has its limits too. And I think filtering out the information that's not pertinent to the session, this is just part of responsible practice, I think. You very often have thoughts, they really aren't pertinent to the client or to the matter at hand. They're our stuff. So that's the stuff that can be set aside. But I also have, as all spiritual guides do that have had training, some skills to bring to bear as far as exploration of things.

Jack emphasizes that as a spiritual guide, he puts his trust both in the Divine and in his own skills, while releasing any anxiety about his performance. Early in his practice, he realized that if he was concerned with his performance, he was not paying attention to the client, and not paying attention to the Divine. He says:

So I had to kind of set that aside and just focus. And then when amazing things happen, because they always do when you're able to get out of the way and the work is actually taking place, then it was much easier to trust the process. I'm not the one doing this work. I just get to sit there and watch.

He tells his students: "You're going to make mistakes and plenty of them. So get over it and learn from them when they happen. And it's basically okay. . . . Let go of agendas and just relax and trust your intuition."

I don't have an agenda, because I think agendas in spiritual guidance are dangerous. The client has an agenda, the Divine has an agenda, and if I can just be a receptive presence, a witness to what's happening between the Divine and the client, and act as mediator sometimes, then there's very little pressure actually. There's certainly no pressure to perform. I don't have to do anything but just be there, be attentive and be responsible. . . . Basically you have to get out of your own way. As Chuang-Tzu says, you have to empty your own boat. So part of emptying my own boat is letting go of anxiety and just trusting that the Divine is going to be present. I do not have to perform. And that I have the very small and basic skills needed in order to hold the space so that the conversation between the Divine and the client can happen.

In addition to letting his thoughts or anxieties intrude, another indicator to Jack that he is not being as present as he wants to be is a feeling of boredom. If he feels bored during a spiritual direction session, he questions whether or not the client is "showing some resistance." He acknowledges that people very often have fear or another form of resistance to having an intimate relationship with Divinity, and this underscores the importance of providing "safe space in order for that work to happen . . . then those resistances can be met and can be worked through." If Jack notices that he is feeling bored with a client, he often identifies the resistance and challenges the client. He says:

[Boredom] is a spur for me to refocus, to redirect the conversation. Usually the client has moved away from the point of the whole thing, because there's something they don't want to face, or there's an intimacy issue that needs to be dealt with. . . . Because if we're doing the work we're there to do, I'm never bored, because the interaction of the client with the Divine is always exciting. I mean pins and needles, edge of your seat exciting. Always, always, always. I can never be bored when the real work is being done.

At times, Jack has ended spiritual direction sessions or relationships with clients if they are not willing to work on the resistance. It is important to him that both he and the client have a mutual attentiveness to God in order for spiritual direction to continue. He adds:

So this is why it's important to be asking the client about their prayer life outside of the session. Or their meditation life, their own practice of presence and their willingness to be intimate. Intimacy is scary regardless of who you're intimate with, and when it's intimacy with God, that's what this profession is about, is helping people create intimacy with Divinity regardless of the myriad resistances that we have because of our wounding, or because of our culture, or because of our religious heritage.

In light of the fact that spiritual directors help others to create intimacy with Divinity, Jack feels a strong sense of professional responsibility to have "a rich spiritual life" and to cultivate his own intimacy with God, so that he can "practice effectively and responsibly." He practices both passive and active prayer in order to "be in contact with the Divine on a daily basis." He sits zazen for half an hour each day, as well as in five-minute breaks throughout the day and before every spiritual direction session "as part of our grounding." About passive prayer, he says, "it's also our responsibility to listen. We can chatter away, but if we're not listening, it's not really a relationship or a conversation." Usually before bed each night he prays the daily Office of Compline, which allows time for both personal and intercessory prayer. He prays for his clients, for the people in his life, and for himself. Jack describes what he views as the essential commitment for spiritual directors in their own active prayer:

You are basically committed to being in God's presence and committed to being naked and vulnerable before God with all your flaws and struggles and difficulties. And this isn't about asking God to fix anything, it's just asking God to be present with you in the mess. So I find that very important.

Jack elaborates on the close relationship between his personal prayer practice and his spiritual guidance practice:

Prayer is the practice of being in God's presence. And spiritual guidance is the practice of being in God's presence with another person. I think that the ability to be in that presence, the ability to be open and vulnerable and to listen, the skills in both contexts are almost identical. Which is why it's helpful to one's practice to pray outside of one's practice, because then you're practicing presence. And then when you're in the guidance context, it's so much more easy to enter into that space. But also I would say being in spiritual guidance as the guide is infinitely productive in my own relationship with Divinity. And this is one of the great paradoxes of spiritual guidance, that I get more out of the sessions than my clients do. I can't tell you how many times a client has left and I'm going, oh my God, why did they pay *me*? I learned so much! And I think that is an experience that most spiritual guides have. And so my own relationship with Divinity is infinitely enriched by the privilege of being able to listen to other people's conversations with Divinity.

“g”

“g” has been practicing as a spiritual director for 38 years. His educational background includes the study of psychology, counseling, and theology. He has a private practice and works with both individuals and groups. He is Roman Catholic but finds “soul food” in many different traditions.

When he reflects on the quality of his awareness and his attentiveness to the Divine in spiritual direction, “g” is aware of several essential truths or “grounding realities for the spiritual life” that form the foundation for his work as a spiritual director. He describes the first of these:

As a Christian, I believe that the deepest grounding is, when a person comes for spiritual direction, he or she looks in my eyes and hopefully will look in a mirror and see that he or she is Christ. And then when I first realized that that's the truth, then I thought, well, “g,” who are you to think that you're the Christ looking in their eyes? And then I realized, well, but I'm looking in their eyes to realize that *I'm* the Christ. So this is reciprocal in that...The whole thing is about waking up to the identity that we are Christ and we're not separate. We've never been separate, we never will be separate, and what spiritual direction is about is ultimately realizing that truth. . . . I am a receiver as much as a giver in this, and that's true every time.

“g” works with clients from various religious backgrounds and allows for the fact that people may feel comfortable using different images or language to express this process of waking up. He adds: “If they’re Jewish, and they wake up and they realize they’re Ruach, okay, that’s fine. Or whatever dimension of the holy in Judaism is fine. If it’s Buddhist, and it’s no-mind and emptiness, that’s fine.”

“g” explains another one of the foundational beliefs that ground what he does when he is present in spiritual direction:

The other mystical foundation of this is my belief in the omnipresence of God, that God is 100% everywhere at all times, so that there’s no secular anymore. Secular is a product, again, of ego mind that thinks it’s far from God or separate from God. So the sacredness is everywhere, and the work of spiritual direction is to wake up to that more deeply as we grow in our spiritual lives.

“g”’s beliefs are the “grounding places” that hold him as he holds the other person in spiritual direction. He points out that these beliefs may never be made explicit with the client:

Now, a client and I may talk about this and we may not. That’s purely a product of where they are in their own spiritual journey. And they may not believe some of these things, which is perfectly okay. They don’t have to. But I believe them, and that’s the place in which I hold them. And it’s not my job to get them there, it’s my job to attend to their unfolding the way the Holy is unfolding them in their own spirit, in their own goodness, in their own attentiveness, and in their own struggle.

For “g,” being present to someone means entering into their inner world and listening to their spiritual story with respect and reverence. He prefers to begin each session in the way the client wants to start, because he thinks, “it’s their time, they’ve got to do what they want with it.” With some people, he prays, with others he may read something, while others are ready to “dive in.” He usually asks a simple, open-ended question like, “How have you been since the last time we talked?” and lets the client decide what to talk about first. He elaborates further on what it means to listen deeply:

The other piece that comes to me is that people really hunger to share their spiritual story. So part of spiritual direction is this profound reverential listening to people tell their sacred story. And they may not even use much spiritual language, or any other symbols, but they're here to tell their sacred story in their language. And my job is to enter into their world, or as we used to say in training spiritual directors, "I'm on their farm, not on my farm." What's their world like? And it doesn't have to look like mine or any other kind of thing. We're here to make sense out of their hunger for God and their openness and their struggles and so forth. So it's a profound reverence, and really, for me, it's a delight in hearing people's stories, and to hear people's spiritual stories is even more of a delight. It's an endless fascination with the way the sacred presence is unfolding itself in their lives. So there's a quote from Ghalib—it's not a quote, I guess it's a paraphrase—"In the desire of the Holy to know its own beauty, we exist." And when I sit with somebody, what I'm listening to is the Holy unfolding and learning about its own beauty. That's a deeply moving quote to me. I believe it's absolutely true. Not that I'm always totally in tune with that, or the other person is, but it's what holds us. It's what grounds us.

In being attentive and respectful of another person's experience, it is important to "g" to acknowledge that each person is at a different stage on the spiritual journey. "g" views the spiritual director's role as one of helping people find clarity in answering three questions: Who is God, or the Holy, or the sacred? Where is God, the Holy, the sacred? And finally, what is my relationship with God, the Holy, the sacred? These questions may be addressed directly or indirectly, and they are answered differently at different stages in the spiritual journey. "g" explains:

The earlier one is in the spiritual life . . . Who is God? God is more other in the earlier stages. God is more out there, and the relationship is more separate. And then as one sinks more deeply into the sacred presence and into our true nature, our identity, then the questions get . . . it gets fuzzy. Well, who is God? Well, God is me. Not my ego but my deepest self. And where is God? Well, God is this conversation that we're having right now. And what is my relationship? Well, my relationship begins to disappear because the other, God as other, begins to disappear. So it's this full spectrum, and any person walking in our door can be anywhere along that process. And our job is to be really, really present to them where they are on their farm.

Being aware of the stages of spiritual growth, especially those articulated by Ken Wilber, helps "g" to be more fully present to his clients. He feels that this is helpful knowledge for spiritual

directors because it “gives us some clarity about what we’re attending to as people are unfolding. And when that intelligibility is not there, people really get off base and get stuck.”

When “g” is listening to a client in spiritual direction, his attention is pulled into the person’s story and he describes himself as “lost:”

I’m using the word lost here, not lost to my Self, with capital S. I’m being my Self, with capital S, or I’m at home in Self, with a capital S. But it’s lost to all the other stuff that floats around in my mind, and my environment, and all that kind of stuff. It’s like that’s not, in a way it’s not here with any kind of presence or focus. It’s around, but it’s not here. It’s not up in front.

He describes this experience of both being taken up by the person’s story and also attentive to what is arising in his own inner experience:

When I’m listening to someone—let’s see if I can describe this—this sounds a little strange, but it seems like I disappear. In the deepest listening, it’s like there’s an awareness of “g” sitting in this chair, but the awareness is turned mostly outward. And I do notice what’s going on inside me sometimes, but the focus is . . . it’s inside with this person, in his or her story. . . . So that I’m being taken by the story, and then things will pop up inside me about a question, or a clarification, or an affirmation, or whatever it is. I’ll be attentive to that. Sometimes I may follow that question, sometimes I may let it be. It just depends on discerning in the moment what seems to fit. And I think this is an empathic state. It’s not something I think of: “Oh, I’m being empathic now.” I think it’s just . . . it’s what Carl Rogers said about what he thinks the counseling relationship is. That applies here, which is an unconditional positive regard. They’re telling their story to someone, to me, and I’m receiving that with love, is what unconditional positive regard is. With love and trust and respect. So that I am *with* him or her, *with* underlined.

When asked where God comes into this experience, “g” answers:

God *is* that. No coming, no going. God *is* that. . . . It’s usually on reflection that I know that we’re most clearly in God when that’s happening. Conversations can go through many different levels, but the degree of ego is often in the background in that case.

There is no particular touchstone or experience that tells “g” that he is being present or attentive to God. Rather, it is simply a presence to whatever is arising in the moment: “It’s here, it’s just this. . . . It is what it is.” He adds:

The sensations in my body [at the time] are just what they are. . . . Which is, if I'm hungry, they're hungry. But most of all, it's sort of nonreflexive in a way. There's an openness and a presence to what's moving inside, but . . . the presence is just presence.

In contrast to the times when he “disappears” and is “in God” with clients, “g” notices other times in spiritual direction when “the ego is up and running.” This can happen when he realizes that the client is talking about something that makes him uncomfortable or afraid, or touches on an unresolved issue within him that he would rather avoid. As he puts it, “it’s all the stuff of life” that can get in the way of being fully present to someone. He may notice himself changing the subject or “moving off into [his] mind somewhere,” and sometimes this prompts clients to ask, “Do you know what I mean? Do you understand?” He says:

They never do that when I'm present. . . . Whenever I hear that question I know my mind's been off somewhere else. And they're going, knock, knock, knock! “g,” come back! And so it's amazing. And there are times when I'm aware that they're really not aware that they're asking that question. They're just calling me back.

When he finds himself getting distracted, “g” asks himself what is going on in him: “The awareness inside me will catch that and say, okay, “g,” you’ve got to pay attention to this because you’re avoiding something here. And then that’s my work to reflect on and bring to supervision.” His inner work during the session is to be present to what is coming up within and ask himself the following:

What does that have to do with this person's awakening to the sacred presence that they are? Or let's say my ego is up and it's yammering about something that my daughter and I are working through. . . . Well, then, I have to be present. Okay, this is stirring about Sarah [a pseudonym]. Then I have to put this over, just leave it and say, I'll be back. And then come to the presence here.

In the process of coming back to the presence in the moment, “g” finds it helpful to be compassionate with himself and his preoccupations. He cultivates an attitude of friendliness and humor in relationship to “the superego, the egocentric, the shadowy place, the broken me, the wounded me.” He elaborates further:

I love what Ken Wilber described—he describes the egocentric as a contraction. In describing it as a contraction, it takes all the moral heaviness out of the fact. Okay, I’m being egocentric now, so what else is new? I’m in spiritual direction and I’m all yammering in my head. Well, when I approach it like that, saying, “Oh, yeah, that’s you, “g,” contracting. It’s okay. Now, if you can be present here.” And that works most of the time. So it’s the willingness and the ability to see my own inner stuff along with the client’s inner stuff, and then to be open and to be present, and then come back to here and now. . . . [The ego] is supposed to critique and do its dance. But it’s waking up and seeing, “Oh, yeah, okay, that’s my ego trying to do this. And I’m trying aggrandize myself by critiquing.” So I look at that and kind of laugh, and say, “Oh, there it is again, that’s pride, okay.” And it’s awakening to make room for that and not going in a big war with it. Because if I push hard against it, it pushes back, and then we’ve got a thing going.

When “g” looks back over a session and reflects on it, sometimes he feels thrilled at what happened and thinks to himself, “Oh my God, what a blessing!” Other times he asks himself, “What the hell were we doing there? . . . I was not present, or the other person, or we weren’t connecting.” Again, his work is to be present to that, asking himself, “Okay, so now what do we do with that?”

As “g” is sitting with a client, he is listening deeply to his or her spiritual story, and at the same time paying attention to his inner experience. When asked what guides him in the session, he replies: “I hope that Spirit is guiding [the session].” There is, therefore, a third focus of attention for “g,” which is “listening, staying open to noticing where Spirit wants to move.” He explains:

Spiritual direction is finding the direction the Spirit is moving in each client. And then we direct our attention to where the Spirit is directing the person. . . . So how do I respond? Well, I respond to where it seems that Spirit would be moving the person in front of me to more intimacy, to more freedom, to more presence, to more openness, to live more deeply in his or her heart, to look more freely at the shadowy places inside that block their relationship to themselves and God and life, to where life wants to manifest. These are different ways of saying the same thing. So . . . I hope that’s what’s moving what we’re doing in the relationship.

Part of listening for the Spirit's movements also involves using discernment in taking the session in a particular direction. When "g" notices a question or comment coming to mind as the other person is talking, he does not immediately act on it. He says:

I may have to hold it and listen for more context, maybe. Is this something that really is important? And I've seen that over and over again. There will be something that will come up here, and really it's a minor issue compared to what the person gets to a little bit later. So it's like, well we could pursue it, it wouldn't be bad, but it wouldn't be right on the mark.

In his discernment process, "g" is guided by a poem by Wendell Berry (1987) that he learned about 30 years ago. It is called *Poem*, and "g" describes the meaning it has for him:

It is: "Willing to die, you give up your will. Keep still, until, moved by what moves all else, you move." All of discernment is in the poem. Willing to die. Willing to die to what? Willing to die to my egocentric take on things. You give up your will. Whose will? You give up the egocentric will. It's got to be this way, it's got to look that way, I've got to get these things out of it, no I won't give that up—whatever I've invested myself in in a false sense. Give up my will. And then I have to shut up, and be still and open and humble. And that creates the space that I can be moved by what moves all else.

In addition to his own discernment process, "g" also helps to "bring a clarity to people when they're discerning through confusing times." He views this as part of his role as spiritual director. Having been a Jesuit for 25 years, he is strongly influenced by St. Ignatius' rules for discernment, which he thinks "are very powerful in helping sort through the typical muddiness and obfuscation and cloudiness that we get caught up in when the egocentric . . . fills the space." He also uses four criteria, or spiritual qualities, from the work of Thomas Hora that are present "when we know something is of the sacred, is of Spirit." The qualities are peace, assurance, gratitude, and love, and together they form the acronym PAGL. "g" says, "When those are grounded qualities, the ego can't fake those." He explains further:

Let's say someone has discerned that they're called to do something, and this may have been a struggle, and they get clear about this. It does not mean that following this path is going to be filled with all sorts of delights and confirmations. People outside may raise hell about this. They may pay a price to really follow what Spirit is calling them to. The

peace isn't about the outside, it's about the inside. And so you've come to this clarity inside, as have I. You know, when you say to yourself, "I really have to make a shift here." And then it's really tough. And it may be tough on me in an egocentric way. My ego may not like what this call is, but I know I have to do it, because that's what Spirit is inviting me to. But in my heart, I have peace, assurance, gratitude, and love.

When one is "moved by what moves all else," an inner clarity emerges. "g" adds:

When it moves you, you know. The you that is the sacred knows. You just know. There's nothing to argue about in this. So sometimes when people are sitting in front of me, it's kind of funny, they will come to an inner clarity. It is absolutely clear inside. And I'll say to them, "Now, if I were to sit here and say to you, oh, I think that's all bullshit. Who are you kidding? Give me a break! That's nonsense! What would you do?" They say, "I wouldn't change a thing." I'll say, "You got it. That's it. You are moved by what moves all else." . . . It's like, here it is. This is it. You do it.

Being present to another's sacred story, attentive to what is emerging within, and listening for the invitations of Spirit are all part of contemplative presence for "g," and are all built on trust. If the trust is not there, "g" says, "then you're either working to get it or you're wasting your time." Sometimes "g" has to work on building his own trust, when clients "hit a pocket in me where the trust is hard for me to come by." Other times he needs to help clients to build that trust, "so that they can go to the places they need to go inside, the sacred and the wounded, and that I can accompany them there and they know that they're safe. And that they're beloved."

When "g" can accompany clients in being present to the depths of their own experience, new possibilities for grace and healing can take place. If a client is confused and struggling with a personal difficulty, for example, "g" may encourage him or her to be present to the feelings involved and open to them "as a physical, as a body feeling." He views this as the place where God is inviting the person to healing and wholeness around the situation. He elaborates further:

It's the honoring the sacredness of the body. That the body is the sacred body of Christ. . . . So when I turn and honor those feelings, especially the most difficult ones, when I actually feel them in the body, they're transformative. But I can run through sort of head-type feelings . . . and it can go on and on and on. They feel like they're feelings, but

they're not the body feelings. And by being present in that, the Divine can heal the wounds. And it's like lancing the boil and the pus comes out, and then the sacred presence is able to flow through easily. The energy that was knotted up in the boil comes home, and the bottom is alive and present and open, and so forth, or more than it was before. And there's a wonderful Rumi poem called *The Guest House*. That poem is a guide for part of what I want to do in spiritual direction. To welcome all the shadow places, because they bring a gift from beyond. Inside that shadow is a sacred gift, and work is for healing, so that life and grace can flow, in welcoming in all of these shadow pieces. . . . So these are the helps along the way. These are like artesian wells of divine grace that feed this presence to this person who is sitting in front of me, who is opening to the sacred presence. These are ways of tending to that and profound guides for it.

Leigh

Leigh is the director of a spiritual formation center, and also serves as a supervisor for spiritual directors. She has been practicing as a spiritual director for 17 years.

Leigh believes that it is “the most awesome privilege in the world” to be attentive to God for another person. She often finds herself in awe and asks herself, “How could I be so fortunate to have this be my life’s work?” She loves Mary Ann Scofield’s [founding member of SDI] phrase, “poised toward the Holy,” and she describes what it means to her:

I’m amazed, I’m already getting tears in my eyes just even speaking about this, but there’s something so immense about inclining with all senses and sensibilities. And it’s a body experience, and heart experience, and it’s an opening of perceptions and sensibilities that are beyond body, toward this shimmering Holy that I believe, that I trust, that I experience as saturating every moment of existence, of life. And to be able to tune with intention toward that, and poised toward that, is like food and drink. It’s just living, it’s living bread. And it’s living water, or wine, or however you want to language it. Those are some of the symbols of my tradition.

Leigh begins each spiritual direction session by inviting both the directee and herself “to be in silence in the presence of the One who has prepared the place for us that this might become a time of holy meeting.” During our time together, she added, “May wisdom and compassion be our guide.”

Leigh’s attention during a session is “poised toward the movement of, or the dimension of the Holy in [the other’s] life.” She likens it to noticing and pulling the golden thread that

weaves through the person's experience, "through the sublime and the mundane, whether they're aware or not, it's sort of like the breath. How often, truly, are any of us aware of the breath? But it's just there, nourishing us, feeding us in every way." Because the Holy is so present, Leigh does not always feel the need to address it explicitly, unlike in her beginning years as a spiritual director, when she would more often ask, "So where's God in this for you?" The Holy has a shimmering quality for Leigh that captures her attention. She elaborates further:

That does not mean that it's pretty, necessarily, or that it's a feel-good place. It can be a very dark movement at times, but still there's something in me that nods toward or recognizes it, and I want to move toward that, and linger and open and explore and see what's there. And so part of it is a willingness, I guess, to be surprised, and this profound trust in the One who keeps taking me out to the edges of my own knowing and who can never be contained in even the best boxes of my understanding or another's.

Leigh's experience of feeling drawn to that golden thread can happen regardless of what a directee chooses to bring to the session, as she explains:

I'm particularly drawn to their human experience, and so I really do trust that Spirit wants to incarnate. And so to the degree that I notice what I call these shimmerings in a person's story, and . . . whether they might be talking about a prayer experience, or they might be talking about an argument that they just had in their family, or something that's going on in the workplace, or the way they're disturbed by world events, it can be any sphere of life—but I might notice a new thing that I've never heard before. Or a longing or a desire, or a sense of, "There's something that's just rubbing here," because I think the Spirit can be present in what I call holy heat, a moment of friction. Spirit is present in the dance of draw and resistance—I call it the draw and the draw back.

The profound trust that Leigh feels in the Spirit's movements has developed over many years of practice as a spiritual director. She has noticed "developmental phases" in her work over time, as her own relationship with God has deepened. She says:

This work keeps growing me, and taking me to the edges of my own experience of God and holy meeting. And so as I continue to grow . . . it's amazing what opens up in my directee's lives! It was probably always there, or maybe it really is something that grows as we engage the work. . . . There are ways that the experience of God grows through community that isn't possible individually.

At the beginning of her spiritual direction practice, Leigh had a strong interest in being a good director. It was a time of recognizing that spiritual direction resonated with “a calling and a gifting” that she had, and undertaking a learning process that she says “really helped shape and open that and me.” During this early phase, she was active with directees, trying to be a good director by “sculpting and helping to happen like you do when you’re teaching.” She is also an effective teacher and enjoys that work in the right settings, and she needed to “tease apart” her roles as teacher and spiritual director.

Leigh describes how her practice unfolded next:

Then as my own prayer and experience began to change, there was a very silent period. I can imagine this would be different for every director in their own process, but my prayer became silent. It moved from word to silence, occasionally image. I needed to find another kind of spiritual director for myself. I actually found somebody who did sandplay . . . and often it was just sitting in silence before what would emerge as I played with my hands. I did that for a number of years, and said less and less with directees and developed more a sense of being present in the Presence. And then in more recent years a more active engagement has been coming out again, but very different from the way that it was initially.

With her directees, Leigh finds herself engaged in “a different kind of activity” that she cannot yet name or describe. She gives an example of how her practice has changed:

The directees that are attracted to me have changed over the course of time. I have a lot of long-term directees and so their own process is unfolding and maturing. Early on, I think I would have been more inclined to speak at the end of a session about what I’d noticed. Now I’m more inclined to ask them, because I’ve learned that it’s the way it works anyway: “Let’s take a moment to sit, and as you let yourself hold everything that’s been present here today, what’s most important for you, to carry with you into the month ahead? And what’s your intention?” Now, I’ll be the keeper of that intention and help remember if that gets lost, but I’m not active in the old way.

Leigh’s current way of being with directees is “the radical act of being present and trusting the Spirit to move, and being in that prayer with the other person.” In that trusting presence, a question may arise in Leigh’s awareness, or she may notice something new. She says, “I can’t even tell you where it comes from because it’s me but it’s also beyond me.” She

believes that her intuition “is shaped by [her] life experiences, and the assumptions that [she] builds, and the meanings that [she] adds to that . . . but it’s a channel in the same way that [her] physical senses can be a channel to receive.” She describes what happens when she is sitting with a directee and a question comes to mind:

What I do for a good while is hold the question, because that can be more about my own curiosity. It can be something unfinished in me. It can come from a lot of different places, and so I just hold that in my own prayer as I sit with the person. It feels like being in a prayer with them. So they’re in a sense praying their story, sometimes with intention, sometimes not, in the description that they’re bringing forward. I am praying the whole time for attunement toward what is the deepest or the deeper thing of God that might be moving here. And if my question continues to come up, then that’s a signal for me to explore, to offer. Not like, this is *the* word of God for you in this moment. But I’m noticing. I’m noticing a question that keeps rising. Let me offer it and let’s see if it fits and if it moves what’s present. And if not, that’s okay. And I often actually will say something like that because I really want it to be an authentic meeting and not something that I’m scripting. And so it feels like a dance with both of us with the Presence . . . with awareness that two of the parties are fully human as we sit there. And so hopefully whatever’s done is done with that recognition and humility.

When Leigh offers the question to the directee, it can “open up the whole session” for deeper exploration, and take them in unexpected and fruitful directions. Leigh is left feeling delighted, awed, and grateful, asking, “Who’d have thunk? . . . It’s, whoa, where are you taking us? And yet we are taken in places that feel amazingly right.”

Moments of feeling the presence of Spirit in a spiritual direction session feel like “a whole body experience” for Leigh. She shares what it is like for her:

I can be poised toward the person and the story, but there’s a sense that we’re not palpably in the Presence yet. But then there’s a moment where we’re in the prayer together and there’s a real opening, and it’s to the Spirit. And the presence of the Spirit is so attractive, it’s just like my whole body is awake. I feel it in every cell. And that’s my mind and my heart, and when it comes to the real heart of what’s going on, I will frequently get goose bumps. It’s actually like a chill response but it’s a very different kind of a response than one I get when I’m in the presence of something that’s really destructive or the presence of intentional evil. . . . That’s a different kind of chill response.

Leigh goes on to describe the feeling of oneness that accompanies this experience:

It's a shared prayer, but I'm there as a separate self, but there's a communion. . . . There's a profound oneness that holds us all in that moment. But I'm there as a witness. I'm not the same as the person or the same as their experience. And yet there is a way that kind of holy witnessing is a part of the community. . . . I don't know whether it evokes or allows or is just present to the experience. . . . [Being there as holy witness] brings me to my knees. And it brings me to tears, and that happens a lot. My eyes fill.

Leigh's trust in the movements of the Spirit has developed over time in her practice, as she explains:

It's an evolution both in the practice and in my own . . . personal practice of the presence. I've certainly done my share of resistance, and it's a part of that dance. There have been times it's felt more revolution than evolution, and my insides and outsides have screamed, "AAHH! I can't do this! Leave me alone!" And yet there's been a deeper yes that's always said, "But this is where life is."

Several practices help Leigh to develop her capacity to be contemplatively present in spiritual direction. She engages in different prayer forms that change over time, including journaling, writing, body prayer, silence, praying with Scripture, soul collage, and a faithful 30-year practice of dream work. In addition, community has become increasingly important for Leigh:

Finding the forms of community and the people that share the same depth of the desire that inhabits me and that wells from me is not simple. I think we're in a real passage in human consciousness at this point. I think that there's a rising in this way in a lot of different places, and yet a lot of the institutional holding places are really coming apart. I've been actively experimenting for a number of years, trying to form a Christian community. The Christian story is the one that grounds me and lets the ego structures be worked in a way that has integrity. It opens me to the deep universal, which is very different than the more syncretic or shallow universal. I live with a woman who also works with me, as an expression of Christian community. We pray together every day. I also have a number of small communities: a little Chi Gong community and another praying community . . . that meets weekly and prays the Gospels. Those are holding places where there's something beyond just the personal journey. In addition to the ongoing personal journey, there's something in that kinetic interaction that's very important for enabling that sense of presence to continue to grow and develop.

Because opening to the Spirit is a whole body experience for Leigh, spiritual direction demands a full engagement of all of who she is in the moment. She says, "in that way there's a

timelessness about it. Everything is there.” This is both a gift and a great challenge of being fully present in this way. She adds:

It both sweeps me beyond myself and it plants me most deeply in who I am, in kind of the same moment, and that’s a great mystery to me. And it’s true. And so in that acknowledgement, I find myself bowing before mystery a lot.

Traumatic experiences in Leigh’s personal life and spiritual journey have led to the awareness that in order to survive, she needs to connect with something beyond her. At the same time, she has learned that the connection with something beyond her will take her into the heart of what she is trying to survive. Bringing every part of herself into the work of spiritual direction can therefore be a “slippery slope,” because it brings together her heart’s desire, her life’s calling, or “the authentic invitation of God” with her “spiritual ego . . . a bind with this other really visceral, in-the-bones stuff that’s personal and familial, and probably human.” It is “like walking on a knife’s edge,” an ongoing work in progress that she is “attempting to be “open-eyed about,” as she puts it, “allowing grace to really meet me in the place of the authentic work.”

Leigh describes a very important dream image that was given to her 15 or 20 years ago that still lingers with her:

In this dream, I am stepping out into my garage, which is the place where, kind of like in real life and I guess in psychic life, I store the things that I don’t need every day. My garage has never been a place to store a vehicle. So it’s tools and boxes and that kind of stuff. And as I walk into the garage in this dream world, I notice that it’s been partitioned with this invisible force field that stretches diagonally across it. On the other side of this transparent force field is something like a wild nightclub scene. There’s somebody playing the saxophone and this woman doing a bluesy kind of song, and people clicking their cocktail glasses. It’s kind of dark, and I’m standing on my side of the barrier thinking, “Boy, I’d really like to just reach through there and touch the other side, just to see what it’s like.” So as I do that, I put my hand through the field, and when I withdraw it, it’s like I’ve created a hole, and a presence like a ghoul comes through the hole. It begins growing larger and larger, this huge-headed thing, that’s eight feet tall. It’s one of those dreams where I’m rooted and I can’t move, and it’s got this huge mouth filled with teeth and is leaning down over me. I know I’m going to be devoured alive by this thing. As I’m closing my eyes preparing for the worst, it leans down, mouth next to my ear, and whispers one word: “Human.” Human! Even in the dream, there was this sense of

indignation: “That’s it? Wait, aren’t we worth more than that?” There’s this way in which the knife’s edge, all of it, is about this . . . being human. Fully, fully human, including the missteps and the blocks and the falling off the edge, and continuing. It’s a journey into being ever more fully human.

Contemplative presence, then, is not simply about attending to the Divine, Leigh adds:

In a deep way, it’s contemplating the human, and the Divine. And I really do love the Christ story in that way. It’s fully human and fully divine. It’s like when Thomas Merton was walking on a downtown street in Kentucky, and all of a sudden this apprehension, this awareness that, “My gosh, they’re all, we’re all shining like the sun!” . . . It’s not about making myself or someone else God or God-like, but yet there is this transcendence that is incredible that is a part of that deep contemplative attitude and awareness. That makes possible things that would never be possible otherwise.

Leigh brings a similar “desire to be attentive to and available to the living Spirit” in her own prayer and in her directees’ lives and prayer. In her own prayer journey, however, she notices a split between her regard toward God and her capacity to receive the regard of God toward her. Similarly, she is more likely to have a loving gaze toward another than toward herself. This is a struggle that has been gradually healing over many years, and Leigh says, “Really allowing love to invade us changes everything, and there’s nothing riskier. . . . That’s definitely been a growing capacity and willingness over time. I don’t know that that work will ever be done, to tell you the truth, in this life.” Leigh describes how this growth has affected her presence in spiritual direction:

I think it greatly increases the intimacy. . . . For me, intimacy is a lot about being a revealed self before a revealed other. That was a lot of my fight with God for many years: “I’m glad to have you, God, become a revealed other, but I don’t know that I want to be a revealed self!” Knowing my own darkness and brokenness and shadowiness, and receiving the gaze of love even so was both healing and horrifying. . . . It set off a lot of cataclysms. . . . So it’s not, when I sit with a directee, that I’m revealing myself. I’m there in their service. But as I’m a revealed self, I guess maybe it does enable me to listen with a depth of peace and confidence, and wait as different things rise in me. Is this mine or is this of the Spirit, or is this a combination? Let’s wait and see. And it doesn’t matter. It matters what I select in the service of the directee, but there’s not as much, “Oh, how could I be thinking that, or wondering that?” There’s not as much anxiety about it, I guess. Or second-guessing. There’s a growing capacity to allow whatever is present to

arise, and to allow choice, and to be mutually exploratory, to see what the Spirit's doing with us, and to respond to how the Spirit's weaving with us that day and that moment.

Laura

Laura is a Presbyterian minister. She has been practicing spiritual direction for 11 years, and meets with directees in a room at her church.

For Laura, being attentive to God for another person is a sacred privilege, precious work “not to be taken lightly” because as spiritual directors, “we’re moving into people’s lives where they don’t talk to many people about these things.” She describes it as “giving over my self in some way to the Presence in such a way that I’m out of the way.” This is an experience that Laura knows well and has practiced in many different roles and areas of her life: as a dancer, as a preschool teacher, as a minister, and as a spiritual director, among others. She acknowledges the mystery of this quality of presence, and the challenge of articulating it in words, but she says:

I have a feel of it, I know what it is, I can sense it. I can’t describe it. I know what it feels like. I know what it feels like to be in the Presence and to be present to another. I have a sense of it in my body, I have a sense outside my body.

Being present in spiritual direction, for Laura, is not a single experience but a spectrum of experiences. First, there is a conscious effort to approach the session with a still, calm, clear, and ready mind, and a loving, compassionate heart. Laura continues:

We’re talking about gradations of experiences, I think. The one that is calm—you go into silence, and you’re there and present, ready; it would be a clear readiness—that’s one. But there is the experience of the numinous that may come over you, it might even tingle sometimes, or just have a fullness, or a rush, or something that you know is much different than just that clear readiness. There are gradations between those two kinds of experience. It’s not all the same, just like tastes have different flavors to them.

An important part of Laura’s development as a spiritual director has been learning how to be still. Years ago, she called herself a “Type A” person: very busy, active, and high-energy. She put a rocking chair in her room in order to help herself to “grow into quiet” and pray. She says,

“I rocked for a month and finally was able to become still.” She continued to grow from there, as she describes:

From then being able to be in Taize services and find that in the darkness, and in the candlelight, and the music, and the prayer, my mind was stilled. And that was the only time that I really had a still mind, was in that. Well, when you go into spiritual formation and programs for spiritual direction, you can extend that quiet mind. It develops and grows. It still goes back to what they call the monkey mind, but more and more you’re able to extend that attention span. . . . And when it’s at the service of another, it is as if my mind is clear. There’s nothing there that I am contemplating of my own self. And if there is, there are ways of learning to bracket that and put it aside, and come totally to presence again. For long periods of time, I can be totally present to the other. And that has been a learning experience, starting from very little capacity to growing larger, larger, larger. And in fact, I can be that attentive to [a whole] session for an hour or so. Sometimes! Most of the time. I can most of the time, but it gets interrupted, it’s not perfect.

Simple practices help Laura to cultivate a still mind in spiritual direction: arriving ahead of time, preparing herself to be with someone, lighting candles, beginning each session in silence, and allowing time between sessions. Because fatigue and body agitation hinder her ability to be present, she finds that getting enough rest and balance, paying attention to her lifestyle and not “working against my own life,” and “keeping myself in a harmonious way” all enhance her spiritual direction work.

In addition to being still and focused on the directee, Laura describes her mind as clear, “more and more out of the way with my own experience.” Laura elaborates further:

The heart is very present, I’m present, I’m embodied, my full presence is there of whoever I am, how God works through me to be that loving presence, nonanxious. But the clarity of mind . . . is not blank. If it were blank, to me that seems dull. Clear is also ready, in some way. . . . So that when the person speaks and tells their story, I can be right in them with it, imagine what they’re saying or get a sense of . . . It’s being ready in some way to follow the threads of what they speak without my preconceived notions of what I might think it might mean. Because I’ve had plenty of those. As you become a spiritual director and you sit with people, there’s been very many times—I guess maybe this has helped me out—where somebody will say something, and I have in my own mind what I think it means. Only to discover that’s not what they meant at all! But it’s from *my own* framework. So I’m noticing how my framework and my experience has

shaped how I see things. So I need to be clear of that so that I can really hear how their experience has shaped them.

Laura's experience has taught her to notice her own responses to what directees share and to be cautious about voicing her assumptions and personal meanings. Sometimes people's stories "touch [her] own story . . . and take [her] for a moment to [her] own experience of that," and then she has to bring herself back. She acknowledges, "I am who I am, and sometimes that serves me well. But I hold off to see if that's really where the directee is." Instead of immediately following her instincts and saying something that may be incorrect, for example, "Well, that must have made you feel this way," she waits: "I need to wait to hear, or at least ask myself a question if this needs to happen, or make a statement that allows *them* to say what it's about, not me. That takes a long time to learn, too." She may notice the thoughts and stories running through her mind, but simply ask the directee, "What was that like for you?"

Often, Laura notices that when she comes to know a directee over time and is "present to that whole person and their whole story," she does not need to focus on all the details of his or her story. She listens not only to what they are saying, but also to "the nuances that happen beneath the surface. Looking at the body postures, hearing something, letting my intuition and my sensitivity be available to the bigger picture than just the current concrete." She explains:

When you first begin spiritual direction, you're curious about stories, and you want to get the details right. Where was this, who was it, how . . . it doesn't even matter anymore. Because I don't need to know the full extent of their story. I just follow their feeling tone, what they're dealing with, the issues that are happening with this person and that, or the situation. And just ask the questions or make the comments, or say only a word that they have said, is all. For example, the directee may say, "When I left I was really frustrated." And then I may only need to say, "Frustrated." That opens up to the next thing. So I don't even need to explore what they're frustrated about. I just say the word and they do it. So those are things I have learned how to manage. . . . It's mostly an ongoing process that moves forward in their life. And it's good for me not to retain all these details, anyhow, so I don't. I don't keep notes, per se. I might keep one note, like if they ended in a certain place in a session, I might write down that they had an image of this or that, or they resolved something here, and that's it.

More important than remembering details of a person's story is being a compassionate, loving presence, according to Laura. She believes that the quality of presence necessary for spiritual direction "has as its core love." She elaborates further:

Love for another. It's not that gooey love, exuding out, but love held in me, to hold that other person with reverence and respect, compassion, care, and love, withheld in my body and yet it is who I am. And so my presence, with those things inside of it, must have some kind of an effect that builds trust. . . . I also notice there comes a time when a flood of warmth and love come over me as persons are trying to be with what's happening in their lives. It's like you fall in love with your directees . . . and I don't say that lightly. It's just like a rush comes over me now and then, and I think, "Oh, this person is so precious!" And I never say anything . . . it's not something that comes out of me to them in any words or spoken way, like reaching forward to give them a hug, or anything like that. It's just my own experience of the joy of this sometimes.

Another quality of Laura's presence that builds trust in directees is what she calls nonanxious presence. This is a calm, even receiving of what the directee is saying, in such a way that the directee feels free and safe to express whatever is emerging in his or her awareness.

Laura describes her experience of nonanxious presence:

It's like I can feel myself, as they're getting wrought with something, just kind of being very present and attentive to them, but in a manner and a mode that's very even, which allows them to be crazy! It allows them to go to their extremes. If I were to go along with them, energies could get revved up, but it's like if they can trust that I can be there and receive anything they give me, then they feel comfortable saying what needs to be said. And in actuality, I've had some things said to me that make me very uncomfortable, for me personally. And issues that come up that are very—for my own personal self—very uncomfortable. And, at the same time, I can be very much for that person, and allow them to try to work through what it is they're working through. Because I really trust that each person has it in them, the wisdom along with the Spirit, to come up with what's needed for them. Deep trust. So there is the trust in the More that's a part of my presence. It's not up to me. I can be there, I can be a witness, I can be a container.

Laura points out that sometimes it is more appropriate to "match energies for energies" and share in clients' emotion, or share her own response to their story, rather than approach them with an even presence. She lets herself be guided by each individual situation: "it's like a dance and there's a lot of intuition involved." She explains:

If somebody's been trying to have a baby for years and years and then suddenly becomes pregnant, to be in a calm, even place is not appropriate. I need to celebrate with that person, even as a spiritual director, and say, "Oh, I'm so glad for you," or something like that. Because we do have a personal relationship as well. So I think what I'm saying can't be just across the board, but has to be flexible with wherever the directee is in his or her story. And oftentimes when it's difficult material, they're uncomfortable too. For people to even say things, it takes such great courage to say aloud what's really going on. And I don't want to interfere with that courageous step. Once it's said, it no longer has power over them like it did before. So I need to be out of the way so they can do that . . . and then afterwards, when it's said . . . then there might be some more interaction differently. So I spoke of a dance. . . . There is an ebb and flow, and to be attentive to each one of those moments as you go through a session. . . . So I am using a part of myself, and them, and the Spirit in all of it. It's not devoid of me. I can't say that.

Laura's attentive, still, clear, nonanxious, and compassionate presence builds a deep trust in her directees. She reports that many of them comment that they cannot wait to come to spiritual direction, or say, "I have never said this to anyone," or "I never cry in my life except for here." Laura believes that trust is built because "they have found a place where they can be real...a place where they can say the real things that happen." She adds:

I think it's important for them to know that this isn't a counseling session. This has to do with more than that. It has to do with their spirit, and my spirit, and God's spirit working in them. And for some it's religious. Some have deeply held religious experiences and that is a part of what it is. They wouldn't be doing this unless they felt it was under the auspices of God. And of course there's others who don't believe in God, or are having trouble with that. So there's a wide variety of beliefs and experiences, but there's always something More. It just isn't a conversation between the two of us. There's all kinds of relationship going on. The way it was described to me when I was in training is that a person, the directee, has a relationship with God, so there's one relationship. I have a relationship with God, so there's another relationship. We come together and we have a relationship, and together we have this relationship with God, yet another. So there's a multiplicity of relationship with the More, in addition to ourselves that we bring to it.

Laura says that in her experience with directees, especially those she sees over a long period of time, "more often than not, there are experiences of God." She adds, "I don't know of any session where people have not experienced something of the Mystery before they've left. . . . It could be small, it could be huge. It could be the whole time, it could be just moving in and out." She describes it as follows:

Here comes the place where there's not words. It's a feel. . . . This has a big sense. It feels bigger, it's like it fills the room. It's palpable, almost, in some way, when something happens that affects both that person and me and whatever's going on . . . to a place where we just know God is present. It's a feel, it's a sense, it's bigger, you almost can touch it but you can't. And that's what I'm talking about, in being in the presence of God. Some people have a very hard time being there, being in that kind of Presence. It's almost like standing on holy ground, but it's so much bigger. . . . Sometimes there's a whole session, an hour, that is just . . . this room is filled with the Presence, and what they're moving through, and what they're coming to, and aha's, and the dips, and the anguish, and the joy. It's so big. . . . The only way to test this out with other people, the Presence, is for directees to say what their experience is, and there are times when we both have this sense of the Mystery that is there in the room with us. . . . They'll say, "Boy, God was really present!" I mean, it's so interesting, you go away with just . . . kind of this, Wow!

An important aspect of presence for Laura is to be able to develop one's "capacity to be with God experiences." She made a conscious choice to expand this ability in herself:

I decided when I could experience some of that with another, that I needed to learn how to do it longer. Because most often, spiritual directors will cut that off . . . because it's uncomfortable. People don't know how to stay in the joy of something that's wonderful. They can stay in the pain and the heartache, but to stay in exquisite experience, a God experience, is something that can be developed. At least it has been from my experience. And you do it a little at a time. . . . This time I was able to stay 5 minutes, next time 6 minutes. . . . And the capacity to stay with my own, of course, is easier than to stay with that of another. . . . Many [spiritual directors] are unable to tolerate staying with that experience long enough, mainly . . . maybe, it's because they haven't stayed with it in themselves. . . . For me, it's absolutely imperative that I don't go places with spiritual directees that I've not gone myself. . . . There was a point in my life that I decided I wanted to go for the joy, and see where it is. It is the joy that's hard. And joy isn't happiness. Joy has the deep pain as well as the happiness. It's much richer than surface happiness. So I needed to learn how to stay with the depths and the heights in order to do that. . . . So taking from my own experience, and then being able to stretch that capacity for being present to another . . . It has taken years to be able to extend that awareness and that consciousness, to be able to broaden. Even if my arms aren't extended wide, it's as if I am holding something really big. And to be able to stay. It's like Moses before that burning bush. How do you stay in the Presence and live? It's like you could die.

Laura has found many ways to expand this capacity to be present to her own and others' God experiences. She engages in a wide variety of spiritual practices "as [her] spirit calls," such as Centering prayer, Lectio Divina, dance, art, drawing mandalas, biospiritual focusing, or being in nature. She says, "I decided I was going to have as broad a spiritual experience as I could

have. Even though I'm in the Church, I'm a Presbyterian minister, I go outside those boundaries a lot! Just for my own depth of experience." She has felt the presence of God in churches, in large groups, and in her own spiritual direction, as she describes below:

In groups . . . often when things come together in ways that we can't explain. Two and two makes five, you know! Those kinds of things that are way beyond our ability to ever do it on our own, or even to make it happen together, when our wills are not involved but things happen. It's pretty extraordinary.

As a dancer, Laura choreographed, directed, and danced in churches with a group. They "danced in worship" and presented a piece from Scripture, a hymn, a prayer, or a sermon. She describes this practice:

It wouldn't be focused on us—me, Laura, you, Kate . . . —but it was the message that was to be presented. So it was a particular way of dropping into the background and yet using fully who you are in service of the message. So now that I think about it, that was probably great training for me to get out of the way. I'm fully who I am and yet I'm out of the way in order to be the presenter of worship. . . . So it was transitional and transformational. . . . It's a paradox. It seems like it can't happen. . . . So I've done that in dance, I've done that in worship, I think I do that in spiritual direction—be totally present, yet out of the way.

Being a dancer also helped Laura develop her presence in other ways:

This is going to sound odd, but a huge learning experience to stretch the capacity *to be with* was being present to the difference between sensuality and sexuality. And how I was able to develop my capacity to hold a larger sense of sensuality before it ever tipped over into sexuality. You know, in the beginning, one goes to the other immediately. But you can learn—and I've been a dancer, it's a very sensuous thing, to be a dancer—I was able to learn to broaden, both in male and female relationships, so that something that would cause someone to just kind of tip over into the sexual arousal, I could extend into the sensual, the enjoyment. I see that as a capacity that I've developed as well. . . . And I expect I will continue in that growth and development, of being able to be present with another. It hasn't ended. I'm still developing that.

Developing her capacity to be present to the depth of her own experience has also helped Laura's directees to be present to their God experiences. She explains:

Because I have expanded my ability to do that, I am allowing the directees to stay there too. Sometimes they actually will jerk themselves out of it because they're afraid to go into a place, because they don't know what it is or what it's about. But my . . . (again, if

we talk about an evenness or a nonanxious presence, or being able to hold this with love and care) . . . knowing that it's real, again it's the trusting. If I were fearful of that, they certainly would be, but the fact that I'm not and I've had these experiences, somehow that expands their ability as well, to stay with it.

Laura practices biospiritual focusing in her spiritual direction sessions, which is “an interior process where people move into sensing into their bodies.” When she senses directees “moving into really profound places,” her response is to open her hands. She says, “it feels like the presence of God is so huge and so big that all I can do is be present and open my hands, and receive whatever it is, and hold them.” During these times, the directee may be moved to tears, or “a new aha comes they've never thought of before.” Other times, images will come to Laura as directees are talking. She is careful to wait and ask permission before sharing her images or ideas with directees. She advises directors, “Set it aside, don't respond . . . if it comes up a third time, and it's still a propos . . . then you might just consider that God is working through you, perhaps, and you might say something at the end of the session.” Her experience has helped her to discern when the image or idea is coming from her own “willfulness or ego” and when it is not:

Early on in my training, when I was doing spiritual direction, trying it out, I'd come up with this grand idea, or a book, or a phrase, or an image, and then I'd tell them, and the directee would go right on to something else! Like I'd never even said anything! And so after you have a few of those experiences you say hmmm. . . . That certainly wasn't of the Spirit! So I guess, for me too, then, as I say that, I'm attentive to not only the person, but attentive to their response, attentive to my response to them, attentive to the Spirit, see if there's fruit. If there's not, then you kind of have to make instant assessments. Okay, that came to me this way, I had these feelings about it, the image was this, and it didn't work. Okay, what's that about? So constantly, for me it's a processing. Being a spiritual director is processing my own material, and who I am as well, who I can be for another.

Alan

Alan is a Roman Catholic priest who has been practicing as a spiritual director for 20 years. He completed his doctoral studies in theology with a focus on spiritual direction, and now serves as a teacher and supervisor for spiritual directors-in-training.

For Alan, the intention of the spiritual director is to help directees encounter what is deep at the heart of their human experience. He describes what guides his practice:

It's working on the assumption that there is this deep presence at work in the life of another, and how can I help this human being, who invited me to be part of their journey, to be deeply connected to that vitalizing presence that's within their human experience, regardless of what religious or otherwise title we give to that. So to me, it's like going beyond explicit religious language. That's not saying it can't be helpful, but it's like there's this deep, active presence in the world that is called by many different names. And the role of a spiritual director, I think, is to help a person deeply engage with that experience, trusting that if a person can engage that experience, that experience in and of itself will be profoundly transforming, in both very ordinary and extraordinary ways.

In facilitating a directee's learning to be present to his or her experience, Alan is aware of a dual process of attending taking place within himself. He is both developing a contemplative attitude to himself and taking a contemplative stance to the other. He adds, "Another way to talk about that would be learning to be spiritually present to my own experience, at the same time, endeavoring to be of service to being spiritually present to what is happening within the life of another." Each of these ways of being present will be described in turn.

Alan explains that being spiritually present to his own experience is "like double noticing" or "learning to attend to the interior movements within myself as a person, and learning to engage those interior movements within myself." In the first level of noticing, he attends to the concrete sensory reality of the world around him, and in the second level of noticing, he is aware of his spontaneous affective experience in response. If he stays present to his affective experience, he sometimes feels drawn down to another sense of interior presence at the core of

his being. It could be a moment of deep stillness or silence, for example. He adds that it “can often be a very simple or ordinary thing, and learning to be present to the richness of what’s embodied within my human experience and to be nurtured by that is, to me, the fruit of contemplative attending to myself.” He describes an experience of being present to his experience in this way:

I remember one day I decided to plant some tomatoes . . . and I had prepared the ground, and I had bought this small little [package] of seedlings. And as I was preparing the ground, I was just noticing my experience. And I was picking up these little tomato seedlings and putting them in the ground. And as I put them in the ground, I just noticed how fragile they were, just how limp they were. And as I put them into the ground, I was aware of this sort of experience inside myself of identifying with that, and I could just feel a sense of my own vulnerability as a human being. And then later on, when I was staying and reflecting on that more, and letting myself be present to that vulnerability, I’m aware of coming to a place of not so much being free *from* vulnerability, but coming to the place of being free *in* that vulnerability. And within that, finding a sense of peacefulness or stillness within that reality. So I would see just sort of feeling the plant and the texture of it and so on was like that simple first level of contemplative noticing, that’s in the concrete, sensory experience. Then being aware of that sense of connection to that and experiencing my own vulnerability was like that reflexive second level. And the third level of staying with that and just feeling the freedom—not so much being free from my vulnerability, but to be free in it—was that deeper level for myself. So it’s surprising how a tomato plant can lead one to conversion!

Alan draws upon Karl Rahner’s anthropological understanding in describing these three levels of noticing: the objective conceptual, the reflexive, and the deeper nonthematic level. He adds: “So it’s like journeying from what-ness to how-ness to is-ness, for me, if I put it in that very crude way.”

This presence to what is happening within himself is an important component of the work of spiritual direction. Alan says, “I have to listen deeply to my own experience, otherwise I can’t be with somebody else.” He adds:

I think the contemplative thing is not just learning sort of a set of tricky little skills to manipulate people into spiritual awareness, but it’s about becoming more grounded in attending my own experience, and hopefully being aware that in standing within that

grounded place in myself, hopefully I can invite somebody else to do that for themselves as well.

Alan describes his practice of being faithful to his own contemplative attending:

That may mean spending time in prayer, or just where I'm more conscious . . . I normally try to spend some time each day, where I just try and be contemplatively present to what's ever bubbling around in my little can of worms. And just trying to spend time attending my own experience. And also I realize that during the day, to try to bring that capacity to be contemplative in all that I do, whether I'm driving the car, or doing the washing. And to allow that sort of attitude of noticing to be something that slowly permeates all of my life. So it just becomes like a second nature capacity. There are times when I do it better than others, but I'm aware that it's like learning . . . like if I'm preparing a homily or doing something, to what degree can I bring this capacity to attend in this experience? And I think my capacity to grow in that awareness of my own contemplative attending prepares me well for attending the experience of others. Because I thought, "I just can't sit in the chair when someone comes in, and just switch it on. And then when they go out 60 minutes later, I switch it off." . . . So I'm aware of being more focused in doing it, but it's more like an attitude to how I live my life that simply is applied in this context.

Part of Alan's growth journey includes reading and learning about the art of contemplative attending. He completed a doctoral degree in the area of spiritual direction practice, and he believes that "learning to be intelligent about it" necessitates the intellectual study of contemplation as well as the practice of it.

Living a balanced life helps Alan to bring contemplative presence to his daily activities. He exercises, eats well, takes holidays, and works to develop a good social network of people outside of his professional relationships. He also limits the number of directees he sees per day and makes sure that he has his own reflective time. He explains:

I'm aware that I can get too busy or tired, or not respect my human limitations as a human being. Because I think it takes, to do it well, requires a sense of focus. . . . I've learned slowly over the years about this new Christian mantra, a prayer that you pray three times a day that is very salvific, you see, and it's the word "No." . . . So I've had to learn that unless I protect my boundaries of time and energy . . . I'm going to be so tired, I'll end up not being present to somebody.

Alan sums up the importance of being spiritually present to his own experience:

I think the heart of it really is, for me, on the long term, attending my own process, my own spiritual companioning myself. . . . I can companion other people to the degree that I can self-companion myself. Knowing that I don't have it all together, nor will have it all together, but be aware that I need to be on the journey, and if I'm not on the journey, I can't really be a companion to others on the journey.

In addition to becoming ever more grounded in attending his own experience in daily life, Alan is also present to what comes up within himself during the spiritual direction session itself. He strives to be aware of "the surfacing of countertransference-related issues as ongoing gems of discovery." He has "a short little list of things that are little red flags to me that I know that I'm off the mark." For example, he knows which topics he tends to avoid when people bring them up, and he also knows that when he starts giving advice to directees, it is a clear sign that he is tired and not attending their experience. He tells of a time when he had to set his own feelings aside in order to be more fully present:

When my father died some years ago . . . I'd been off work, and I'd come back, and the first three out of the five people I saw that day spoke about death. And the rawness in my own father's death was just sitting there with me. And I was aware of, "How do I respect what's happening for me, and also be present to the other person?" So that's where my friendly, neighboring chair came in handy. I thought, "Well I'll just put my experience there," giving myself permission that when the session was over, I would need to go and talk to somebody about what was happening to me. But it wasn't appropriate to do it then.

Alan's experience during a session serves as "a little bit of a barometer" that he has learned to trust. If he is feeling bored or disengaged, "just wanting [the directee] to go home, or waiting for the hour to be over, or looking at the clock too many times," he wonders whether he is tired or distracted. He asks himself:

Is it something within me that I'm needing to address for myself, or am I picking up their disengagement from their experience? . . . And so being aware of what my experience is, I think is very critical because if it's something that I need to address, well then I need to deal with that. But if the dissidence that I'm experiencing, is maybe I'm picking it up from them, it can be a cue that I need to do something in that area, or be more responsive, or address the resistance or something like that.

Alan's inner experience therefore gives him feedback not only about the obstacles to his contemplative attending, but also about the directees' degree of engagement with their own experience. When a person "is deeply in their experience," for example, Alan feels "very grounded in [his] gut." During the moments when a directee touches into a profound sense of deep presence within, Alan feels it in his own body as well:

I'm very aware that vicariously I engage that experience in myself . . . In terms of being present to what I'm experiencing in my own body, it can often be a very good indicator to me, subjectively, about where a person is in their experience. And so if a person touches that presence, in many ways I'm aware that I also meet that same experience in myself, in terms of the privilege of that. . . . I'm aware of often a place of deep stillness. It could be a very deep place of quiet. . . . Sometimes I might be aware of a sense of tears in myself, or a deep sense of joy. But for me, it's usually a lot of quiet excitement.

Whatever feelings come up for him during the session, Alan chooses not to share them with the directee. He asks himself, "Where is the focus of the conversation?" to ensure that the content of the conversation is exclusively focused on the other person's experience, not his own. He calls this "one of the poverties of the work," saying that "one could deeply attend the experience of four or five people a day, but not talk to anybody." He elaborates further:

I remember one time someone came to see me and said, "I've been seeing you for years and I know absolutely nothing about you!" And I said "Well, you're not supposed to! We're here to talk about you, not talk about me." . . . I might talk to somebody else in a supervisory context, but within the context of the session itself, to me that's not part of the engagement. Because as soon as I start talking about me, then that draws a person away from them attending themselves. And they come to be present to themselves in my company, not to listen to me.

Helping a directee to be more fully present to him or herself is what Alan refers to as taking a contemplative stance to another. In addition to being spiritually present to his own experience during a session, Alan brings a similar spiritual presence to the other. By listening and engaging the directee's experience, his intention is to help the person "learn to be present to their own experience, and hopefully in being present to that, to experience more deeply a sense

of God, or a sense of Mystery, or presence at the heart of their human experience.” He asks questions to “try to invite the person to engage those different levels of noticing:” the concrete sensory, the reflexive, and the nonthematic. He explains:

I often think spiritual directors are, if they’re good at it, they’re professional experience merchants, inasmuch as their role is to help a person enter more deeply into the depth of their human experience, and what is spirited within that. Now, some people call that God, or presence, but the naming of it is irrelevant. It’s more about helping a person have the experience which, in and of itself, will be transforming. They work on the assumption that if a person reaches that nonthematic level, it’s deeply liberating if people can spend enough time wallowing around there. . . . When it works, people can find a sense of freedom in their life, and then they begin to notice spotfires of freedom break out in other parts of their human experience.

Alan thus takes an incarnational approach, which assumes that by entering our humanity, we encounter God. As a spiritual director, Alan does not attempt to protect people from their humanity, but helps them to center themselves, to “engage their deeper sense of self . . . touch a place where they can be deeply anchored within themselves as a person.” He likens this work to being in a boat and learning how to put one’s anchor down into the bedrock of the ocean: “being anchored doesn’t stop the boat from being battered by the waves, but it holds it.” Directees learn to engage the intimacy with God by entering deeply into their experience, even when it is very painful. He gives an example in which a directee faced a traumatic experience from her past:

By taking the risk to contemplatively attend what was quite negative within her life, and the pain of that, rather than avoiding it, she came to a place, not so much free *from* [its] destructive influence . . . but she could come to a place of freedom *within* it, and find a God who waited for her within that experience . . . rather than a God who had abandoned her in that experience. . . . And that was quite a liberating moment for her, and that’s what I’d call touching that nonthematic level. Now, appreciate that didn’t sort of suddenly happen to her overnight. . . . So in one sense, this deep place of wounded-ness for her as a human person, it became a place of grace for her rather than this place of entrapment. Now, at the same time, she’s aware that the reality of how it affected her as a person, it was alive and well, but . . . she could find that there was a place of life and freedom within that that no one could take away from her. . . . And it was a privilege to be present while she engaged that place.

Alan points out that spiritual direction is different from other forms of psychological counseling in that it is not concerned with understanding nor working through experience. Instead, a spiritual director trusts that by simply being present to “the immediacy of the human experience, and entering into the unprotected element of that human experience, there’s a liberation that can come that understanding can never give.” While both counselors and spiritual directors attend human experience, spiritual directors are asking “How do I encounter what is at the heart, what is deeply spirited within this experience?” Alan adds, “That doesn’t mean the person always touches it each time they see the spiritual director, but . . . in the counseling, it’s not that people aren’t open to that, but not explicitly aiming for that within the engagement.”

When he was trained in counseling 30 years ago, he remembers being taught how to be skillful. While he appreciates the value of that, he has learned over the years that “contemplative companioning is more about learning to be powerfully powerless in attending another’s experience.” He uses the image of a midwife to convey his intention to be present to what is birthing within another, while at the same time acknowledging that he cannot do the birthing for that person. Rather than intervening or confronting the directee in an attempt to “nudge them along into awareness,” spiritual direction is a “nonviolent way of attending another’s experience.” Alan points out, “It’s like being so free to allow a person to engage their experience just as much as it is about helping a person avoid it.”

If a directee is struggling with a life decision, for example, Alan may invite him or her to let an image arise that holds the experience, and then simply be with that image as it is. Alan may also ask the directee, “Can you just allow yourself to be present to how much you don’t want to make this decision?” Alan has found that “by inviting the person to enter deeply and respectfully into the resistance, in time something shift[s] for that person.” He continues:

I'm aware sometimes other psychological processes quite legitimately would want people to sort of hire a bulldozer. . . . Whereas I'm aware spiritual direction is more about, can we just be with, but actively be with the [resistance]? . . . And I find that by inviting people to enter into that, something shifts in a way for them that doesn't happen when you bring in the explosive experts. Because to me it's violent. . . . I'm aware sometimes when someone leaves my office, if they're feeling resistant, I've thought, "Can I allow that person to leave my office more resistant than when they came in?" Because otherwise I can get myself caught in thinking how useful I was, or how productive I was, or "Did we achieve some outcome today?" And to me that's a dangerous trap to get caught into.

Alan is currently involved in training spiritual directors, and those who come from a counseling background learn to "attend human experience in a very different way . . . a way in which one tries not to be so skillful, or not involved in social engineering of the person's psyche." Alan says:

I've noticed over a period of time a number of people saying that in moving from, say, a professional psychotherapy approach to a spiritual direction approach, even though they might be quite skillful in many ways, appreciating that significant paradigm shift in attending human experience is a critical moment of transition. . . . And sometimes, some make the transition and some don't.

Although being present in this nonviolent way may be very still and can appear to be passive, Alan emphasizes that it is a vital, active, relational engagement in a person's life. He suggests using the term "contemplative presencing" rather than "contemplative presence" to communicate that this way of being is not a state but an active way of relating with another person's experience: actively passive, and powerful in its powerlessness.

Alan believes that contemplative presencing is core to spiritual companionship, but he is also aware that "it needs to be mediated by a growing awareness of so many factors that will shape how one is present." Contextual factors including, for example, individual or cultural differences, or where a person is on his or her spiritual journey, can help Alan to "fine tune [his] contemplative stance to that person." He adds:

An analogy that I've used that fits for me is . . . taking a contemplative stance is like holding a magnifying glass up to a person's experience, and looking through the magnifying glass at that person's experience. But being able to fine tune the focal length between the magnifying glass and the person is what adds sharpness to the contemplative attending.

Alan is "always learning more" about the contextual factors that influence his capacity to be present to directees:

Each time I meet somebody, even though I've been doing this work full-time for over 20 years, I start again. And I'm aware that they have to teach me how they need me to attend their experience...I need to be aware of what cues do they give me that will teach me how they need someone like me to be present to them.

Conclusion

This completes the presentation of my second set of Cycle 3 data, the participant interviews. In the following chapter, I will discuss how my understanding of the topic evolved after working with the interview data. A final set of lenses will be presented, along with a discussion of the implications of the findings for spiritual directors and transpersonal psychotherapists.

Chapter 6: Discussion

This chapter represents an integration of Cycles 4 and 5 of the intuitive inquiry process. After an overview of the study's objectives, I will present my final set of interpretative lenses. These lenses represent my current understandings of the topic of contemplative presence in spiritual direction. I will then explore each lens in turn, describing how my interpretations have evolved and changed over the course of the study. To better articulate the meaning of each lens, I will include the voices of the participants as well as relevant literature. Next, I will comment on the method and its strengths and limitations, and continue with a discussion of the implications and applications of this research for spiritual directors and transpersonal psychotherapists. Finally, I will conclude the chapter with suggestions for future research.

The initial goal of this study was to come to a deeper understanding of the experience of being attentive to the Divine within the context of companioning another person on the spiritual journey. I wanted to get a glimpse of the inner life of the spiritual director as he or she is sitting with a directee. I wondered, where is the director's attention focused? What is the quality of awareness that the director experiences? How does one cultivate contemplative presence, and what hinders it? Is it different from solitary prayer? How do spiritual directors know that they are being present in this way, and what effect does it seem to have on the process of facilitating another person's connection with the Divine? My personal wish in beginning this project was to find a way to be loyal to the underlying peace and perfection I felt in my own spontaneous spiritual experience several years ago. In my work with people, I wanted to ground myself in that truth rather than in a set of values, ideas, expectations, or theoretical formulations. This desire haunted me and compelled me during the long process of clearly formulating and articulating my research topic in Cycle 1 of the intuitive inquiry process.

My understanding of the topic of contemplative presence evolved and changed throughout this study and continued to deepen even as I completed this final chapter of my dissertation. The process of intuitive inquiry has shown me that there is never a final destination to be reached; my understanding is constantly shifting and transforming through all of my experiences, and will continue to broaden after I finish this project and transition to the next phase of my life. I have learned that I am continually cycling around the hermeneutic circle: identifying my values and assumptions in the forward arc, then modifying them through engagement with something new in the return arc.

Over the course of this study, I went through five iterative cycles of interpretation. After clarifying the research topic (Cycle 1), I wrote a formal literature review, which in addition to my own personal relationship to the topic, helped me to give voice to my preliminary understandings in Cycle 2. Next, I studied the writings of four selected Christian mystics who could bring light to the topic, and summarized their perspectives on contemplative presence (Cycle 3). This led to the articulation of a new, refined, and enhanced set of lenses, my interim lenses. I then collected another set of data and provided summary reports: the interview data from 12 exemplar spiritual directors. Now in this chapter, I will present the final set of lenses developed out of my engagement with the interview transcripts (Cycle 4). Finally, in Cycle 5, I will integrate the findings with relevant literature and evaluate the research process as a whole.

The greatest learning that came out of this study for me was that contemplative presence is more than an attitude one brings to spiritual direction. It is a way of being in the world and relating to experience, a profound stance to life that pervades all of one's daily activities. It is a journey that draws one into a transformative process that deepens over time and makes one more and more able to support others in their spiritual lives. Over and over again throughout this

study, I found myself wanting to reduce this experience to something that I could understand and replicate. I wanted to know: What does the spiritual director *do* when he or she is being contemplatively present? I realized, however, that contemplative presence is not something you *do*, but something you *are*. It is not a particular experience, nor a special state to be reached, nor an ideal to be achieved. It is already here and now, always, and we simply need to lean into it, be poised toward it, reach out to it. It is only by living one's life with this intention to attune to the Divine presence, and walking one's own spiritual path with integrity that, paradoxically, one can come closer in touch with who one already is at the deepest level of one's being.

My core understanding, or “central interpretation” (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2004, p. 413), then, is as follows: *Contemplative presence is a way of life that leads to transformation of the personality, and conscious involvement in this transformative process is the only safe foundation for the work of spiritual direction.* In addition to this core understanding, I formulated 10 other lenses after working with the interview transcripts from the 12 participants. These are presented in Table 2. As in Chapter 4, the lenses are presented in three categories: new, change, and seed lenses (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2004), from the interim to the final lenses. New lenses are unanticipated understandings. They are either entirely new and surprising for the researcher, or they are simply made more conscious and explicit through the researcher's encounter with the data. Change lenses evolve when the researcher's previous lenses are challenged and need to be modified to reflect a shift in the researcher's understanding. Finally, seed lenses have their beginnings in the researcher's earlier understandings, and need simply to be refined or elaborated to express a deeper understanding.

Table 2

Final Lenses

| Lens type | Description |
|---------------|---|
| New lenses | <p>Contemplative presence involves an embracing of paradox.</p> <p>The spiritual director's contemplative presence is in service of the directee's contemplative stance toward his or her own life experience.</p> |
| Change lenses | <p>Contemplative presence in spiritual direction is an act of will, a simultaneous attentiveness to the directee and his or her spiritual story, to what is arising within one's own inner being in response, and, most importantly, to the mystery of God's presence within and beyond all experience.</p> <p>Contemplative presence can feel scary and threatening or full of wonder and awe—being present to how it feels is more important than any experience that arises.</p> <p>The focus of one's contemplative presence in spiritual direction is on attentiveness to God in and for the directee.</p> |
| Seed lenses | <p>Central Interpretation: Contemplative presence is more than an attitude one brings to spiritual direction. It is a way of life that leads to transformation of the personality, and conscious involvement in this transformative process is the only safe foundation for the work of spiritual direction.</p> <p>The foundation of contemplative presence from a Christian perspective is a deep, abiding faith that God is present and active in every moment.</p> <p>To be contemplatively present is to be detached from self-will.</p> <p>Contemplative presence may open one to receive inspiration from the Spirit.</p> <p>Spiritual directors can affirm their intention to cultivate contemplative presence through rituals and other aids to contemplation.</p> <p>The inner orientation of contemplative presence must be chosen, again and again, in the immediacy of the here-and-now, in a constantly renewing, moment-by-moment process.</p> |

As I look back over the two transformations in my beliefs and assumptions about contemplative presence—the preliminary lenses, the interim lenses, and the final lenses—I notice that the topic has become clearer and better defined with each iteration. After working with the first set of data, the mystics’ texts, I came to a deeper acceptance of the inescapable mystery of this topic. I began to let myself relax into the darkness of it, and this allowed me to view mystery not as something that needed to be solved, but as a core element of contemplative presence. I also began to refine my understanding of how a spiritual director uses his or her will and awareness during a session, and how contemplative presence develops as one progresses on the spiritual journey. My idea of what it means to be attentive to God was clarified by reading the mystics’ various ways of understanding it, from simply gazing at God to listening for the intimations of God’s will in everyday events. The interim lenses are presented again in Table 3 in order to make it easier for the reader to view the changes from the interim to the final lenses.

After completing the interviews, my interpretations shifted once again, this time moving from a more individual way of viewing contemplative presence to understanding how it manifests when sitting with another person. After reading the mystics’ writings, I understood being contemplatively present as attending to whatever arises in one’s field of awareness as well as the mystery of God’s presence within and beyond that experience. During the interviews, I learned from the participants that it is a complex process of divided attention: to the directee, to one’s own inner experience, and to the Divine weaving through both. One of the most significant shifts in my own thinking came from the realization that I had been trying so hard to understand the *director’s* stance and intention that I almost missed the obvious fact that contemplative presence in spiritual direction involves a focus on attending to the Divine in the *directee’s*

Table 3

Interim Lenses

| Lens type | Description |
|---------------|--|
| New lenses | <p>Contemplative presence is an act of remembering, a continual redirecting of attention toward the mystery of God's presence within and beyond all experiences.</p> <p>Contemplative presence is an expression of love and adoration for God above all else.</p> <p>An ongoing practice of contemplative presence leads to transformation of the personality, and conscious involvement in this transformative process is the only safe foundation for the work of spiritual direction.</p> |
| Change lenses | <p>Contemplative presence involves remaining open to whatever arises in one's field of awareness, and at the same time keeping one's attention on the mystery of God beyond experience. It is, thus, a balance of mindfulness and concentration.</p> <p>Contemplative presence is an attitude of waiting and listening for God's will, and a profound surrender and willingness to do anything or nothing in response.</p> |
| Seed lenses | <p>Contemplative presence is an act of will. It is an inner orientation or personal stance that necessarily involves one's conscious choice and intention to cultivate it.</p> <p>To cultivate contemplative presence from a Christian perspective, one must have faith that God is present and active in every moment, despite and even through one's personal limitations, and whether or not one consciously experiences God's presence.</p> <p>Contemplative presence can only happen in the immediacy of the present moment. It is a close, intimate encounter with experience just as it is.</p> <p>Contemplative presence can be better defined by what it is not than by what it is. It is not self-preoccupation, nor an attempt at manipulation and control, nor analysis, nor seeking gratification of needs and desires, nor even personal caring for one's directee. It is a detachment from self-will and a deferring to God's will in all things.</p> |

| Lens type | Description |
|----------------------------|---|
| Seed lenses (continued) | <p>If one is able to maintain a contemplative stance of attentiveness to God in the moment, one may receive inspiration from the Spirit in the form of images, emotions, insights, or inner promptings toward action.</p> <p>These gifts of grace are spontaneous, surprising, fruitful, unique to each particular situation, and entirely out of one's personal control.</p> <p>Contemplative presence in spiritual direction can lead to experiences of deep connection with one's directee in which both people feel transformed and a part of something larger than themselves.</p> <p>The experience of contemplative presence can feel threatening or scary, like an experience of leaping into the unknown and letting go of everything one usually holds onto for a sense of safety and identity.</p> <p>The experience of contemplative presence can also feel liberating, spacious, grounding, and full of reverence, wonder, and awe.</p> <p>The inner orientation of contemplative presence must be chosen, again and again, in a constantly renewing moment-by-moment process. Although this takes effort, it is a gentle discipline rather than a forceful strain.</p> <p>Spiritual directors can affirm their intention and desire to cultivate contemplative presence through rituals with and without the participation of their directees, for example, prayer before a session, shared silence during a session, or the use of a word or phrase to harness attention.</p> <p>Contemplative presence is not reserved for the spiritual direction session alone; it is an important part of the spiritual director's life and is cultivated through formal and informal spiritual practices. These practices may differ for each spiritual director, including both apophatic and kataphatic approaches.</p> |

experience, not the director's. This includes noticing signs of the Spirit as the directee is speaking, as well as helping the directee to develop a contemplative stance to his or her own experience. Another characteristic of contemplative presence that was brought to light at this stage was paradox, an aspect of the topic that I will reflect upon further in my exploration of the new lenses later in this chapter.

Next, I will explore each of the final lenses in turn, weaving in the wisdom of the participants as well as relevant literature. I will reflect on how these lenses relate to the literature presented in Chapter 2, and also bring in new sources when appropriate. I will begin with the central interpretation, and then, for ease of flow in presenting the material, I will present the change lenses, followed by the new lenses, and finally, the seed lenses.

Central Interpretation: Contemplative Presence Is More Than an Attitude One Brings to Spiritual Direction. It Is a Way of Life That Leads to Transformation of the Personality, and Conscious Involvement in This Transformative Process Is the Only Safe Foundation for the Work of Spiritual Direction.

This lens was a new interim lens, and a seed lens in my final list. After reading the mystics' texts it became very clear to me that the practice of contemplative presence leads to spiritual growth and transformation. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Anonymous, 2004) explained that lifting one's heart to God naturally develops discernment and the virtues of humility and charity. For St. Teresa (Teresa of Avila, 1980), the prayer of recollection was the doorway to the interior castle, where one progresses inward, coming closer and closer to union with God. Along her path of prayer, one starts out working hard to maintain one's attention on God, then gradually one's garden of the soul begins to be watered without one's conscious intention. De Caussade (1966/1982) taught that by surrendering to God in the present moment,

one is transformed into the perfect tool in God's hands. Underhill (1956) emphasized that it is only by nourishing one's sense of awe and adoring love for God that one can grow in the holiness necessary for serving others.

In reviewing the spiritual direction literature for Chapter 2, I learned that it is essential for spiritual directors to be fellow travelers on the spiritual journey along with their directees. Judy (2004) writes that "in addition to areas of knowledge, a wisdom of the heart that is learned in the fires of personal transformation is essential to offering oneself as spiritual director" (p. 76). Scofield (2005b) states: "Like the commercials that warn, 'Do not try this at home,' we should not attempt the ministry of spiritual direction without first having been honed and humbled by years of prayerful waiting on God" (p. 53). In my interim lenses, I included: *Contemplative presence is not reserved for the spiritual direction session alone; it is an important part of the spiritual director's life and is cultivated through formal and informal spiritual practices. These practices may differ for each spiritual director, including both apophatic and kataphatic approaches*. I decided to subsume this lens within the current one, to acknowledge the spiritual directors' conscious involvement in the practice of contemplative presence as a path of transformation.

Indeed, 11 out of the 12 participants talked about their spiritual practices and the need to live a contemplative life in order to be able to be attentive to God in spiritual direction. Jack explains the importance of cultivating a rich spiritual life:

I think it's a need, it's a longing, to have intimacy with Divinity. But when you embark on the path of being a spiritual guide for someone, it stops just being, well it stops being about you, and stops being about your relationship with the Divine. . . . So I think it's a professional responsibility for the spiritual guide to be in contact with the Divine on a daily basis. So it's our responsibility to pray for our clients, it's our responsibility to pray for the people in our lives, to pray for ourselves.

Many of the participants structure their lives in ways that support their ability to be contemplatively present. Jana deliberately takes quiet time throughout the day to “let [herself] get grounded here,” as she describes:

For me, the anchoring that that offers me forms such a part of my own spiritual life. Because it’s consistent through the day. . . . It really anchors me, then, in the presence of God. And I notice that in between—I try to schedule so I have about 20 minutes in between [spiritual direction sessions]—and I notice I never turn on the radio or the television. I’m able to maintain a fairly monastic kind of atmosphere, even in between, which is essential. And some quiet after. So the entire time, I mean to me, it feels like spiritual practice.

For several of the participants, there was no separation between their contemplative presence in daily life and their contemplative presence in spiritual direction. For John, spiritual direction is a prayerful experience, and for Sandal, it is a spiritual practice. Lola says, “I’m pretty much aware of God a lot in my life, so it’s not like I have to make a huge switch.” Alan echoes this sentiment:

During the day, [I] try to bring that capacity to be contemplative in all that I do, whether I’m driving the car, or doing the washing. And [I] allow that sort of attitude of noticing to be something that slowly permeates all of my life. So it just becomes like a second nature capacity. . . . And I think my capacity to grow in that awareness of my own contemplative attending prepares me well for attending the experience of others. Because I thought, “I just can’t sit in the chair when someone comes in, and just switch it on. And then when they go out 60 minutes later, I switch it off.” . . . So I’m aware of being more focused in doing it, but it’s more like an attitude to how I live my life that simply is applied in this context.

Being attentive to God encompasses so much more than a stance to assume in spiritual direction. It is not akin to a warm bedside manner that one can turn on and off with directees. Rather, it is a profound calling to contemplative love that touches all aspects of a person’s life. Ben expresses it well when he says:

I hope that I carry that kind of attention [that awareness, that sense that this is a place where we meet the Divine One] into my daily living. So that’s it’s not something that’s reserved [for spiritual direction]. . . . This is a practice that I try and carry into my life. Because I believe that there is nowhere where God is not. This is a way of life. And in

this way of life, I have this wonderful and rare opportunity to be able to ask some people to share the depths of their own life experience with me.

Participants engage in a great variety of spiritual practices, including drawing mandalas, dancing in worship, journaling, dream work, being in nature, body practices such as yoga, tai chi, and walking, and formal prayer and meditation such as Centering Prayer, Lectio Divina, and zazen. These spiritual directors find many ways of feeding their spirit, weaving contemplative presence into the fabric of their daily life. In addition to their personal spiritual practices, the participants also receive support from others on the journey: in community, peer groups and prayer groups, retreats, supervision, continuing education, and spiritual direction. Irene points out that spiritual directors feel lost at times and go through their own dark night of the soul, asking “Where is God in my life? And here I am trying to help you. And what in the world is going on with *me*?” Having the support of others helps spiritual directors to be present to God within their own life experience, as they support directees in noticing God in their lives. As Lola puts it, “I wouldn’t be without a spiritual director. I think it’s very important to have somebody that can listen to you as you listen to others.”

Leigh describes the different forms of community in her life as “holding places where there’s something beyond just the personal journey . . . there’s something in that kinetic interaction that’s very important for enabling that sense of presence to continue to grow and develop.” Psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott (1992) used the term “holding” (p. 183) to refer to the empathic, nurturing, daily routine of care that supports an infant in developing the feeling that he or she exists. While a nonempathic environment forces the infant to shield some aspects of his or her experience from awareness in order to be loved, a “good enough” (Winnicott, 1992, p. 179) holding environment enables the infant to experience the full range of emotions and sensations in his or her awareness while feeling connected and held in relationship.

Psychosynthesis therapist Roberto Assagioli (2008) asserted that it is through such facilitating contexts—or “unifying centers” (p. 34), as he calls them—that one can experience one’s relationship with a deeper Transpersonal Self. According to Assagioli (1965), the feeling of personal existence or authentic selfhood flows from the Transpersonal Self, moderated by unifying centers of various kinds: “[They] can be either intrapersonal, such as inner symbols of significant others, a mandala, a wise person, the voice of conscience, or an inner light; or they may be interpersonal, as a caregiver, hero, community, social cause, or religious tradition” (Firman & Gila, 1997, p. 43). As we develop throughout life, unifying centers enable us to be present to more and more of our own authentic experience, thereby allowing us to be present to another’s experience as well. The participants in this study have found many unifying centers to hold them on their spiritual journey as they hold their directees. As Ben looks back over his life, he wishes he had known about spiritual direction when he had a unitive experience at the age of 19:

I wished, at 19, that I would have had someone that could have held me through those experiences, would have known enough about the mystical theological traditions to be able to help support me on that journey. That became one of those things that later on, with the emergence of spiritual direction, it was such a joy for me to know about, and to be able to find people who could hold me in my own spiritual life.

In their efforts to have a disciplined spiritual practice and find support in living a contemplative life, many of the participants extol the virtues of a balanced lifestyle. For some, this includes self-care and healthy habits such as eating well, exercising regularly, and getting plenty of rest and relaxation. For others, balance involves taking time for play, fun, and being with friends. Jana works in her vegetable garden, watches the news, and reads books about cultural and political trends. She says:

I have to know and be in the world. So it is different. It’s lighter, it’s more recreational. It’s a little more earthy. . . . I remember when I first started my training, we had someone

come and talk to us the first or second day, and they said, “Don’t be surprised if you start reading the National Enquirer. Because you need the balance!”

Sandal finds balance by taking on work that challenges her in new ways. She teaches English as a second language and says, “Being with the marginalized, for me, is a spiritual practice of ‘where the rubber hits the road.’ It’s a good balance—this is it for me—it’s a good balance to the spiritual direction.” She also mentors graduate students, which, she says, “really stretches [her] and continues to help [her] connect with people at the mental level . . . a place where the divine also is.” She adds:

I didn’t know that people lived their lives this way until I came to California. And it’s like, “Oh my gosh, people integrate lots of things into their life.” They don’t do one thing and that’s the whole of their ministry or the whole of their function outside of their own way of being. And so for me it was a delight to begin to see how these could integrate, and how that served me.

In order to find the balance they seek, the participants have learned to pay attention to their own limits as human beings. They are careful not to schedule too many spiritual direction sessions in one day or one week, for example, and they avoid being too busy to find time for quiet and stillness. Being too tired or too harried was often mentioned as a barrier to being present in spiritual direction. Irene says:

There was a time in my life when I did much, much less spiritual work, and the reason was because my life was so intense. It just didn’t have the kind of balance that I needed to have. So I just found that I couldn’t do spiritual guidance as well. I just had this jabbering monkey in my brain all that time that was saying, “Oh, is this session almost over so I can go do those papers and get that budget in?” And then I just became aware that it’s not a good time for me to be doing spiritual guidance. I need to be more in harmony and balance in my life. And I’d say that’s the biggest thing for me.

Alan describes the importance of setting boundaries:

I think it takes, to do [spiritual direction] well, requires a sense of focus. . . . I’ve learned slowly over the years about this new Christian mantra, a prayer that you pray three times a day that is very salvific, you see, and it’s the word “No.” . . . So I’ve had to learn that unless I protect my boundaries of time and energy . . . I’m going to be so tired, I’ll end up not being present to somebody.

Lola and Jana both mention the value of slowing down as an important part of the contemplative life. Lola emphasizes the destructive nature of the fast pace of life in today's society, saying that it does not give people enough quiet time to develop their intuition and spirituality. Jana points out that spiritual direction's gift to our culture is the opportunity to slow down:

One of my favorite quotes is Julian of Norwich, she says, "The fullness of joy is finding God in everything." And I love that. And I'm not always there, of course. But I notice that if I give myself time, if I slow down my thought, I can let myself kind of deepen, just sort of naturally. So if I sit in my favorite coffee house, I can start appreciating that I have some time to read and have great coffee, and then if I slow down enough, start looking around at just the beauty of the people in the coffee house. And how neat it is, and how wonderful that moment and the presence of God. But I need to slow down in order to do that, in order to have that gift be realized.

Several participants mentioned that living a contemplative life helps them to feel more honest and authentic as spiritual directors. Lola says, "I try to be a person of integrity and I try to walk my talk, as they say. I don't always do it, but it's important to me." In order to "sit with people authentically," Maureen feels that she needs to be "working as authentically on [her] own life as [she is] expecting the directees to be working in their own." John points out that doing his own spiritual work is foundational to being contemplatively present in spiritual direction:

The long-term helps [for being attentive to God] would be basically my own commitment to my own spiritual life and prayer life, and authenticity and honesty, and conversion of heart, and all of those kinds of things. . . . All of that being about heightening my own awareness of God's spirit in my own life, and my own freedom or lack of freedom to respond to that. So doing that kind of inner work, I think, changes me in subtle and deep ways that allows me to understand and hear somebody in a different way. So I think that's the bulk of it. Ninety percent of it has to do with that long-term work of almost like changing your personality, in a way, around spiritual values and spiritual ideas, and so forth.

Being committed to their own journey, John says, helps spiritual directors to listen and speak from their living experience and not just from rules or ideas. He recalls that in the Gospels, Jesus was said to speak "with authority."

Many of the participants talked about how their ability to be attentive to God has grown over the years. Laura remembers learning how to be still by rocking in a chair, and then gradually increasing both the amount of time she was able to concentrate without distractions and the range of experiences to which she was able to stay present. She says, “It has taken years to be able to extend that awareness and consciousness, to be able to broaden.” Jana describes her experience:

Over time, over these 20 years of offering direction, it has made me so much more contemplative and aware of God in everything. The news, nature, people surfing, the waves. . . . I mean it’s just been remarkable. It’s been a great gift. Because it feels like you become saturated with that consciousness. It just becomes a regular state of being.

The participants’ presence in spiritual direction has also evolved over time. As Sandal has grown in her ability to be contemplatively present, she has learned to enjoy the creativity of spiritual direction: “It’s more than just doing the technicality of it. It becomes an art form.” For Irene, learning to let go of controlling spiritual direction sessions has allowed “more of an active presence of the Spirit happening now than ever did in my youth.” She adds:

Now as I get older, and I think it’s just a matter of doing more and more spiritual guidance and trusting more myself and the deepening of my own spiritual practice, I don’t have that need to control the session as much. It lessened and lessened and lessened over the years.

Leigh has noticed “developmental phases” in her spiritual direction work. At first, she was more active in “sculpting and helping [something] to happen” in her sessions. She gradually moved into a more silent period, when she “said less and less with directees and developed more a sense of being present in the Presence.” More recently, she has shifted into a “more active engagement” again, but in a new and different way. She is less inclined to mention what she notices in a session, and more likely to ask directees to notice what is most important for them. Her experience as a spiritual director has given her more practice in trusting “the radical act of

being present and trusting the Spirit to move, and being in that prayer with the other person.” For me, hearing about this movement from technical skill to art for Sandal, and from control to trust for Irene and Leigh brings to mind something that all four mystics that I studied were reaching toward: a paradoxical effortless effort, a balance of the active and contemplative, a synthesis of method and grace. The author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* (Anonymous, 2004) taught that contemplative presence nurtures discernment far more effectively than trying hard to achieve it through careful vigilance and reflection. De Caussade (1966/1982) said:

It turns out then, that [those experienced in the skill and practice of sanctity] can do no better than to act on impulse, without spending hours of thought on what they are going to do beforehand as they used to. All they have to do is to act as though by chance, trusting only to the power of grace which can never be wrong. (p. 39)

Underhill (1956) held the ideal of “ministering to the world without in love and mercy; whilst inwardly abiding in simplicity, stillness, and utter peace” (pp. 133-134).

This mysterious way of being comes only after one has walked the spiritual path for some time; for St. Teresa (Teresa of Avila, 1980), it came as a supernatural gift:

Sometimes in this prayer of quiet the Lord grants another favor which is very difficult to understand if there is not a great deal of experience. . . . When this quiet is great and lasts for a long while, it seems to me that the will wouldn’t be able to remain so long in that peace if it weren’t bound to something. . . . The will, in my opinion, is then united with its God, and leaves the other faculties free to be occupied in what is for His service—and they then have much more ability for this. . . . This is a great favor for those to whom the Lord grants it; the active and contemplative lives are joined. (Teresa of Avila, 1980, pp. 154-155)

I have not personally had this experience, but it was my sense of the potential for it that called me to undertake this research project. As St. Teresa pointed out, I find it difficult to understand and articulate, and my effort to do so often makes me wonder if spiritual directors need to have a taste of this experience in order to be attentive to God for directees. If contemplative presence is

a way of life that leads to transformation, how far along in the journey should a spiritual director be?

Ruffing (1999) states her opinion that spiritual directors need to have experienced a spiritual awakening of their own. She summarizes the perspective of developmental theorists in making a distinction between conventional stages and post-conventional stages of psychological and spiritual development. Adults at conventional stages tend to locate authority in the norms and expectations of the groups to which they belong. Their image of God is external and often mediated by others, and they tend to have difficulty reflecting and talking about their inner experience. Adults at post-conventional stages of development are more able to gain insight from interior movements, can tolerate ambiguity and paradox, and have an experience of God that is “interior, intimate, and personal” (Ruffing, 1999, p. 19). Ruffing believes that people in conventional stages of development should be screened out of a spiritual direction practicum because of their presumed difficulty in supporting directees at more advanced stages. She states that directors in post-conventional stages of development, on the other hand, “will be both ‘supervisable’ and likely to undergo considerable development as a result of the effect of their more mature directees on them” (Ruffing, 1999, p. 19).

In her extensive research on ego development (the hierarchical stages of how human beings make sense of themselves and their experience), Susanne Cook-Greuter (1994, 1999) found that those in the highest post-conventional stages gradually realize that their self-definitions are the result of years of mental habits and conditioning. Instead of attempting to solidify their belief systems to find a predictable order, they strive to free themselves in a radical openness to their immediate experience of what is. She describes the highest stage of ego development in her theory, the unitive stage, as follows:

In this new self-balance, the continuous flux of changing perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and sensations is acknowledged. The immediate witnessing of the ongoing processes is found to be more satisfying than orienting oneself with maps of whatever level of complexity. . . . When one is aware of the subtlest shifts in one's self-experience from moment to moment, one is more attuned to what actually is (including one's inner life) than is possible through rational interpretation and reflection. Thus, one can act with greater spontaneity and harmony to the demands of any given situation. (Cook-Greuter, 1994, pp. 132-133)

Cook-Greuter refers to this way of being as a higher-order approach to knowing that is characterized by effortlessness, noncontrol, and nonattachment.

Cook-Greuter's (1994, 1999) findings suggest that as people grow in their self-understanding and view of reality, they become increasingly able to sustain a contemplative quality of presence. In in-depth interviews with 16 individuals determined to be in Cook-Greuter's two highest stages of ego development, Dane Hewlett (2004) found that they viewed life with awe and wonder, were preoccupied with present-centered awareness, and spoke of the "deep part within everyone, which has no personal qualities, but simply observes" (p. 147). They tended to see themselves as providing a safe container for transformative change in others, and to understand their personality as a tool in which a deeper, creative energy expressed itself.

In another intriguing study, Polly Young-Eisendrath and Carol Foltz (1998) measured the ego development of 115 adults and asked them to respond to open-ended questions about psychotherapy: the role of a therapist, client, and change. They found that the participants at earlier stages of ego development tended to expect psychotherapists to provide concrete services and direct help. Participants at later stages assumed that therapy involved talking about problems and finding solutions, and participants at the highest ego development stages emphasized growth, self-discovery, and the client's responsibility for change. Although these results relate to psychotherapy and not spiritual direction, they imply to me that the role of spiritual director, with

its focus on presence, surrender, and letting-be, seems better suited for those at the higher stages of adult development.

Although there is literature in the spiritual direction field that explores the psychological and spiritual development of directees (W. E. Conn, 1998; Liebert, 2000), there is very little on the director's level of development. Ekman Tam (1996) proposes that spiritual directors should have matured to James Fowler's (1981) stage of conjunctive faith, the sixth stage in Fowler's seven-stage model of faith development. At this stage, one has a felt sense of the complexity of truth and the need for multiple interpretations of reality. One is able to embrace polarities and paradoxes in life, and often experiences a new appreciation for the symbols and myths of one's own and other traditions as vehicles for expressing truth. Finally, a person at the level of conjunctive faith has a genuine openness to people, traditions, and communities outside of his or her own.

A qualitative study of 21 West Australian spiritual directors explored the developmental influences that shape the practice of beginning and advanced spiritual directors (Truscott, 2007). Stephen Truscott found that two key themes emerged: (a) the capacity to adopt a contemplative stance to their directees, and (b) the ability to be aware of contextual factors affecting their practice. Beginning directors were more focused on the first theme, while the second theme was more of an influence for advanced directors, although both themes impacted both groups.

Truscott (2007) defines contemplative stance as "the way a director notices and attends to the transforming engagement between a directee and what is Ultimate within a directee's life experience" (p. 15). In order to sustain the capacity to adopt a contemplative stance, Truscott recommends learning to attend to all dimensions of one's human experience, and having one's own experience attended to in relationships or groups: spiritual direction, supervision, therapy, or

peer support groups, for example. As directors advance in their practice, they grow further in becoming more aware of contextual factors that shape the spiritual direction process. Some of these factors include: the setting in which spiritual direction occurs (individual, group, or corporate), the psychological perspectives and theological frameworks guiding the practice, and the individual characteristics of the director and directee (age, personality, cultural background, sexuality, trauma history, and substance abuse history, to name a few examples).

After reviewing the literature and reflecting on the question of how far along in the journey a spiritual director needs to be in order to be attentive to God for directees, I realize that the question is still open for me. It seems clear that one's ability to be contemplatively present grows with psychological and spiritual development. Conventional wisdom calls for mature spiritual directors, and this is reflected in the age of the participants in this study (44 to 75 years of age). However, this question deserves further attention given the increasing number of younger people entering training programs in spiritual direction. More research is needed to explore the spiritual journeys and experiences of spiritual directors to determine how their psychological maturity and spiritual development impact their ability to be contemplatively present.

Certainly, there is room for growth for every beginning spiritual director. The participants in this project taught me that the practice of spiritual direction itself enhances one's attentiveness to God—several of them talked about the changes they noticed in themselves over their years as spiritual directors. I also acknowledge that contemplative presence can come as a gift at any time in one's life. Sandal's awareness of the Divine presence came naturally to her as a child, an experience that she feels emerged from a near-death experience she had as a neonate. She stated, "That attentiveness was always there. I didn't have to create it. . . . I feel it's a special gift." John

also sees his ability to listen and be present as a gift that he has had since his youth, and that others recognize in him:

People will open up in a way that's helpful to them. That seems to have to do with who I am or the context we've created together, not so much any particular thing that I say. And that's both mysterious but also powerful. It's as if something, someone, is working through us in that situation.

Again, I am struck by the fact that contemplative presence is not something that one can create of one's own accord; it emerges from one's very being—at any age. In conclusion, I believe that there is a place in the field for anyone who is genuinely called and who takes to heart the practice of contemplative presence.

Change Lenses

Contemplative Presence in Spiritual Direction Is an Act of Will, a Simultaneous Attentiveness to the Directee and His or Her Spiritual Story, to What Is Arising within One's Own Inner Being in Response, and, Most Importantly, to the Mystery of God's Presence Within and Beyond all Experience.

This lens is an integration of several interim lenses: (a) *Contemplative presence is an act of will. It is an inner orientation or personal stance that necessarily involves one's conscious choice and intention to cultivate it*, (b) *Contemplative presence involves remaining open to whatever arises in one's field of awareness, and at the same time keeping one's attention on the mystery of God beyond experience. It is thus a balance of mindfulness and concentration*, and (c) *Contemplative presence is an expression of love and adoration for God above all else*. During my reading of the mystics' writings, my exploration of contemplative presence focused on the individual's attentiveness to God in solitary prayer. After the interviews with my participants, however, it was obvious that the interpersonal element was missing, and that the spiritual director is also called upon to be attentive to the directee in addition to the Divine Presence. In

fact, several participants referred to practicing a kind of divided attention during their spiritual direction sessions. Alan called it “a dual process of attending” (to the client’s experience and his own), and John referred to his experience as “listening in stereo.” Others mentioned three foci of attention: self, other, and the movements of the Holy, or “that awareness, that sense that this is a place where we meet the Divine One, both within the person I’m sitting with and also within me” (Ben). Ben called this “kind of a three-way consciousness,” while Jack compared his experience to juggling three balls at all times. Sandal spoke of dividing her focus between “[her] own ground,” the relationship with the directee, and “consciousness of the larger whole that we are a part of.”

According to the participants, maintaining this quality of attentiveness requires clear, focused intention and concentration. The intention of the spiritual director is, first and foremost, to be “poised toward the Holy” (Leigh), willing and open to “what God needs to be doing in the moment” (Maureen). In this way, spiritual direction is a form of prayer for the participants. They referred to their sessions as an active form of meditation (Jack), a sacrament (Jana), a shared prayer (Ben, John, Leigh, and Maureen), and a spiritual practice (Sandal). For Jack, spiritual direction is a practice of being open, listening, and vulnerable in God’s presence with another person. During the course of this study, I learned a great deal about the nature of Christian spiritual practice and the quality of presence that is cultivated in contemplative prayer. Unlike other meditation practices that I was familiar with from the Buddhist and Hindu traditions, Christian contemplation is relational, inviting an intimate, living relationship with God (Washburn, 2000). As I discussed in Chapter 5, I also came to understand that contemplative presence involves both mindfulness and concentration. As one focuses on an object of concentration—whether it is an image, text, vocal prayer, a directee’s story, or simply the

unknowable God—one allows thoughts, emotions, and sensations to come and go naturally. John describes his attentiveness in spiritual direction as “a paradoxical relaxed attention” in which he is focused and alert, but in a relaxed, open way. He explains: “You’re not following one train of thought. There’s a certain looseness about that, and openness to letting in other feelings, other information, other imagery, to be guided or led along the way.”

After engaging with the different mystics’ writings, I struggled with the question of how to integrate their different approaches to contemplative presence. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Anonymous, 2004) took an apophatic approach, while St. Teresa’s (1980) prayer was more kataphatic; De Caussade (1966/1982) emphasized the present moment, and Underhill (1956) stressed the uniqueness of each person’s path to God. I asked myself: How can I bring these together—as well as the perspectives of my participants—into a coherent view of contemplative presence in spiritual direction? A model that I found helpful for understanding this comes from the ancient Benedictine form of meditative prayer called *Lectio Divina*, a Latin phrase meaning “study of the divine word” (Judy, 1996, p. 96). *Lectio Divina* is not as much a method of prayer as a model for the development of greater intimacy with God (Hall, 1988). Retreat director and author Thelma Hall (1988) says: “It is an organic process, which takes place over a period of time, both in the *microcosm* of a single prayer period, and in the *macrocosm* of a lifetime engagement with God in the lived prayer of faithful love” (p. 28).

Lectio Divina has four progressive stages: reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation (Hall, 1998; Judy, 1996; Keating, 2003). First, one reads a Scripture passage and chooses a short, inspirational phrase that stands out (reading). Next, one reflects on the phrase, turning the words over and over in one’s mind, desiring to know the particular meaning the phrase has for oneself (meditation). In the next stage, one begins to pray in a spontaneous manner, bringing oneself and

one's concerns before God and perhaps feeling one's longing for greater closeness with the Divine (prayer). Finally, in the last stage, contemplation, one experiences a letting go of the efforts of the intellect and imagination and surrenders into deep silence and peace, resting in the presence of the Spirit.

Ben draws on the practice of *Lectio Divina* in spiritual direction. He listens to the directee's story "as sacred text," engaging "not only the text, but the Holy One in the text, or that shines through in that." He listens with the expectation that there is an encounter with the Divine to be discovered in the person's narrative of his or her experiences. John, too, is attentive in this way, as he describes:

I'm listening to [the directee's] life experience and seeing, as I relax with it, "What's occurring to me around that? What seems to be happening here?" Or I may be just . . . letting all my judgments go and just trying to listen without words. Occasionally maybe there will be some association that comes in with some text, but that's pretty rare actually. Usually I stay close to the experience of the person. . . . I can listen to the Scripture text of someone else's experience of God and that's a prayer.

Lectio Divina serves as a guide for being attentive to God in spiritual direction because it models the practice of contemplative presence in the session itself as well as the transformative growth process within the life of the spiritual director. As the spiritual director practices being attentive to self, other, and the Divine, he or she may notice the different stages arising and passing away during the session, with times of listening, reflecting, prayer, and spontaneous moments of silence and letting go. "Like the angels ascending and descending on Jacob's ladder, one's attention was expected to go up and down the ladder of consciousness," says Thomas Keating (2003, p. 20) of *Lectio Divina* as it was practiced during the first Christian Centuries. Laura describes the range of experiences—from active to infused contemplation (Merton, 2003)—in her attentiveness to God in spiritual direction:

We're talking about gradations of experiences, I think. The one that is calm—you go into silence, and you're there and present, ready; it would be a clear readiness—that's one. But there is the experience of the numinous that may come over you, it might even tingle sometimes, or just have a fullness, or a rush, or something that you know is much different than just that clear readiness. There are gradations between those two kinds of experience. It's not all the same, just like tastes have different flavors to them.

Being attentive to God, therefore, can mean different things at different times during the spiritual direction session. The participants taught me that one notices the movements of the Spirit through one's attentiveness to both the directee's experience and one's own inner experience. Several participants described practicing a quality of deep listening to the directee. Laura describes being "present to that whole person and their whole story" in such a way that she listens to both the content of the story and the "nuances that happen beneath the surface . . . letting [her] intuition and [her] sensitivity be available to the bigger picture." Similarly, Lola listens to "the spirit of [what the directee is sharing]," attending to "what that person is saying, how they're saying it, what their body language is saying to me . . . those kinds of things." When "g" listens to directees' spiritual stories, he enters into their world with reverence, trying to make sense of their struggles and their hunger for God from their unique perspective. These participants are practicing *empathy*, which is generally described as "understanding and 'feeling into' another's world" (Hart, 2000a, p. 254). Although there are over 18 different kinds of empathy defined in the psychology literature (Bohart, 1991), Arthur Bohart and Leslie Greenberg (1997) identify three overall themes in their overview of empathy in psychotherapy: (a) Empathy involves making deep psychological contact with the other in which one is highly attentive to the other's unique experience, (b) empathic exploration includes immersing oneself in the other's experience, and (c) empathic exploration includes a "resonant grasping of the 'edges' or implicit aspects of a client's experience" (p. 5).

As one listens deeply to the directee in this manner, one is also attending to the Spirit within the directee, according to several participants. Jack says, “If I’m truly focused on the client, then I’m hearing the Divine as well because I’m witnessing the relationship between them.” For “g,” listening to a directee’s sacred story sparks an “endless fascination with the way the sacred presence is unfolding itself in their lives.” He adds:

So there’s a quote from Ghalib . . . “In the desire of the Holy to know its own beauty, we exist.” And when I sit with somebody, what I’m listening to is the Holy unfolding and learning about its own beauty. That’s a deeply moving quote to me. I believe it’s absolutely true.

When Ben listens in spiritual direction, he imagines that the directee is the only one in the universe: “As I listen to all the particularities of what that person is saying and experiencing, in that process, there’s also a discovery of a sense of God present as well.” He views each person as God-bearer, and believes that as he listens “nonjudgmentally and deeply . . . a whole world can be disclosed that includes our inner demons, and our dark side as well as those incredible places of joy and of light . . . and the holiness of another person.” Psychosynthesis therapists, teachers, and authors John Firman and Ann Gila (2002) described a form of spiritual empathy in which the transpersonal psychotherapist aims to connect with the client at the level of “I:” the human spirit at the core of one’s being. The “I” has consciousness and will, and is distinct but not separate from all contents of experience. In their theory, “I” is the direct reflection of Spirit, and if people can empathically connect at that level, it allows them to be present to the full range of their human experience, from the heights to the depths.

Psychologist Tobin Hart (2000a) uses the term “deep empathy” (p. 254) to refer to a higher-order empathic potential in which the split between subject and object, or self and other, is transcended. Deep empathy may lead to several phenomena, such as directly experiencing the client’s thoughts, emotions, or sensations, feeling a natural wellspring of love and compassion

for the client, or finding that one's "center of perception seems to occupy multiple perspectives simultaneously. One seems to become the field itself" (p. 261). Laura gives an example of an outpouring of love for a directee:

I also notice there comes a time when a flood of warmth and love come over me as persons are trying to be with what's happening in their lives. It's like you fall in love with your directees . . . and I don't say that lightly. It's just like a rush comes over me now and then, and I think, "Oh, this person is so precious!" And I never say anything . . . It's just my own experience of the joy of this sometimes.

At the deepest levels, information is received as if from another source, says Hart (2000a). For example, one may perceive images or understand subtle patterns influencing the client beyond his or her conscious awareness. The participants in this study spoke of feeling guided by the Spirit in various ways while practicing contemplative presence. These will be explored later in this chapter.

In my discussion of the current lens, I have clarified that contemplative presence is a simultaneous attentiveness to three things; so far, I have elaborated on two of these: the Divine Presence, and the directee and his or her story. The third is an attentiveness to what is arising in one's own inner being in response to what the directee is sharing. All 12 of the participants talked about engaging in a process of self-monitoring during spiritual direction sessions. They notice their own emotional reactions, including feelings of boredom, grief, discomfort, fear, or performance anxiety. They also pay attention to habitual patterns of thought and behavior such as a desire to solve the directee's problems, a distrust of authority, or a tendency to teach the directee. If they notice that their own preoccupations are getting in the way of being present to God and the directee, participants have different ways of setting them aside and coming back to the here-and-now. Jana imagines closing a cupboard door, Jack prays silently for help, Alan imagines placing his feelings on a chair, and "g" tells himself "I'll be back" as he sets his

emotions aside for the duration of the session. Attending to what is coming up inside also allows the participants to notice movements of the Spirit within their own experience, perhaps feeling led to say or do something in the session, or feeling touched by God's presence in the moment. This aspect of contemplative presence will be further elaborated later in the chapter.

Contemplative Presence Can Feel Threatening or Full of Wonder and Awe—Being Present to How it Feels Is More Important Than Any Experience That Arises.

In both the mystics' writings and the participant interviews, it was clear that people have a variety of different experiences while they are practicing contemplative presence. At times, they feel a profound sense of gratitude, awe, joy, or peace, or they may notice an insistent call to lead the spiritual direction session in a particular direction. Other times, they feel frustrated, bored, or anxious about what to say or do next. De Caussade (1966/1982) suggested that it can feel deeply threatening to surrender to God's will by simply being present to whatever is arising in the here-and-now, never knowing what the next moment will bring. He writes, "The soul cries out: 'Every moment I seem to be falling down a precipice'" (De Caussade, 1966/1982, p. 93). Although one may experience awe or dread while being attentive to the Divine, most of the time the experience is very ordinary, as John points out:

It's not like, "Oh, we're going along, now we'll sink into meditation and we'll be in this whole other deep unusual space." So maybe I'll take a minute or two at the beginning of a session, and when I come out of that silence, I can't say that I'm noticeably different, feeling different inside, or looking different outside. But I am maybe just a little more alert and present.

I came to understand through the course of this study that what I was searching for could not be found: contemplative presence is not a discrete, special experience that one can describe and categorize. After conducting my second interview, I wrote in my journal:

There is a wishing, striving to find the answer, the way, the “how” of it. How is presence done? In this interview it became clear to me that it is more of an outgrowth of a person’s transformation over time. . . . The person is aware of it but not the agent of it.

I noticed that this struggle to understand and articulate the nature of contemplative presence came up again and again. In my ninth interview, I wanted to know if “g” had a touchstone that told him he was being present in spiritual direction. I asked what sensations he noticed in his body, and he answered: “The sensations in my body are just what they are. . . . If I’m hungry, they’re hungry. But most of all, it’s sort of nonreflexive. . . . There’s an openness and a presence to what’s moving inside, but it’s . . . the presence is just presence.” When I mentioned my difficulty in putting this topic into words because it cannot be understood in terms of an experience, he commented: “You do it by analogy, I think. We have analogies, but then when you’re in the experience, it’s like, well, gee, I don’t know. It’s here, it’s just this.”

Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner (1983) conceived of God as the transcendent ground, source, and context of all things and experiences. As such, He is always present at the deepest level of our consciousness, but nameless and impossible to objectify or grasp with our usual ways of understanding. The images, concepts, and words that we use to try to speak about God are simply pointing to the inescapable Mystery, described by Rahner (1983) as:

The original, unthematic, silently offered and proffered, and graciously silent experience of the strangeness of the mystery in which, in spite of all the light offered by the everyday awareness of things, we reside, as if in a dark night and a pathless wilderness. (p. 78)

Author and professor of theology Michael Buckley (1995), in writing about Rahner’s theology, points out that Mystery is not that which we do not know, but rather that which we do know—as Mystery itself—and as a “permeating atmosphere” (p. 40) within and among all the things we see and do. Feminist theologian Anne Carr (1995) explained more about Rahner’s perspective:

This awareness of transcendence is not a particular experience, which we have alongside others of sight and sound, persons, events, relationships. As the ground of these ordinary

experiences, whether trivial or important, the experience of transcendence is more a constant way of being which is present in all other experience. Most important, it is not simply a concept of transcendence which we can try to think about as a topic to be studied. It is, rather, the openness to being which is always present and *which we always are* [italics added], within all the projects and plans, hopes and fears of our ordinary lives (Carr, 1995, p. 22).

Instead of trying to achieve a particular state or experience, contemplative presence in spiritual direction therefore means attuning to, being poised unto, or leaning into this way of being that is always present within oneself and the directee.

Leigh describes this as “inclining with all senses and sensibilities” toward the Holy. The Holy is ever-present for Leigh and, therefore, does not always need to be explicitly discussed in spiritual direction. It is like a golden thread weaving through one’s experience, “through the sublime and the mundane, whether they’re aware or not, it’s sort of like the breath. How often, truly, are any of us aware of the breath? But it’s just there, nourishing us, feeding us in every way.” I expressed this deeper understanding of contemplative presence by combining the following two lenses and adding to them: (a) *The experience of contemplative presence can feel threatening or scary, like an experience of leaping into the unknown and letting go of everything one usually holds onto for a sense of safety and identity*; and (b) *The experience of contemplative presence can also feel liberating, spacious, grounding, and full of reverence, wonder, and awe*. I added the qualifier that being present to whatever arises is more important than the experiences themselves. As the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Anonymous, 2004) asserted, one’s only focus should be on the impulse of love for God. As for all other “sweetnesses and consolations, sensible or spiritual, now matter how pleasing they are, no matter how holy, we should have a sort of heedlessness” (p. 111).

The Focus of One's Contemplative Presence in Spiritual Direction Is on Attentiveness to God in and for the Directee.

As I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, my personal desire in conducting this research was to find a way to be loyal to the underlying peace and perfection I felt during a spiritual experience I had. In my work with people, I wanted to somehow be true to the trust I experienced that all is well, and all is already as it should be. I was looking for a place to stand, a source of grounding and guidance as I sat with another person. Instead of being guided only by theory, or ideas, or values, for example, I wanted to be guided ultimately by my connection to the Divine in the present moment. During the course of my exploration of the spiritual director's quality of presence, I realized that I was too focused on the spiritual director; that is, I often neglected the fact that the director is attentive to God in and for the *directee*, not the director. Rather than being overly preoccupied with one's own state of consciousness or awareness of the movements of the Spirit within oneself, the spiritual director is primarily attending to God's call in directees' lives and experience.

When I asked "g" what guides his actions in spiritual direction, he replied:

I hope that Spirit is guiding it. And I've thought often about the term spiritual direction, because when I first started this, it was in college, and I started college 50 years ago this year. . . . And so I became uncomfortable with spiritual direction, because some people in those old days thought spiritual direction was, "I as a spiritual director get to tell you what to do." The authoritarian approach to it. That's of course anathema today. It's not about that. But why do we use the term direction then? And what has come to me is, spiritual direction is finding the direction the Spirit is moving in each client. And then we direct our attention to where the Spirit is directing the person.

In the context of spiritual direction, this is what provides the grounding and direction that I was searching for: Attentiveness to God in spiritual direction means attending to the relationship between God and the directee, and listening to where the Spirit wants to move within that relationship. This change lens emerged from the following interim lens, which did not explicitly

reflect that one is listening for God's will in and for the directee: *Contemplative presence is an attitude of waiting and listening for God's will, and a profound surrender and willingness to do anything or nothing in response.*

Several participants talked about noticing signs of the Spirit in the directee's narrative. These signs or qualities attract the attention of the director; in fact, two participants described them as "shimmering" (Ben and Leigh). Ben compares these signs to "nuggets of gold" which reveal more of God's presence in the directee's life. Scofield (2005b) teaches that one recognizes experiences of God in another's story by noticing "an unmistakable resonance in our own hearts" (p. 53). Leigh explains the attraction of the Holy:

That does not mean that it's pretty, necessarily, or that it's a feel-good place. It can be a very dark movement at times, but still there's something in me that nods toward or recognizes it, and I want to move toward that, and linger and open and explore and see what's there.

Some of the signs mentioned by the participants include directees' movements toward greater intimacy, freedom, joy, presence, openness, fullness of life, inner clarity and peace, and living more deeply in one's heart. Two participants (John and "g") are guided by the work of Thomas Hora (2001), who teaches that four spiritual qualities are present when something is of the Spirit: peace, assurance, gratitude, and love. The Spirit may shine through in other ways too, as John explains:

It might manifest in stumbling speech, trying to get a hold of something that's deeper than [the directee is] usually aware of. It might manifest in a sense of humility, or almost apologetic quality that they might have. Like wondering whether this could be true, or whether it could really be happening to them. There are many, many signs like that, I think, that are going on.

Leigh adds her perspective: "I might notice a new thing that I've never heard before. Or a longing or a desire, or a sense of, 'There's something that's just rubbing here,' because I think the Spirit can be present in what I call holy heat, a moment of friction."

Although Rahner (1983) wrote that transcendent experience is nonthematic and can never be directly experienced, he also explains that all things—though not God in and of themselves—refer to God and are symbolic of God. According to Rahner, we can therefore have experiences that implicitly “indicate that inconceivable mystery of our existence that always surrounds us” (p. 81). In her study of kataphatic religious experience, Ruffing (1995) found that her participants’ experience of God was mediated through an “amazing variety” (p. 238) of modes, including nature, music, symbols, imagery, dreams, relationships, and life events. As people deepened in their relationship with God over time, the number of different ways they experienced God increased for all 12 of her participants.

Rahner (1983) described two ways of experiencing the Spirit. The first way is through positive experiences of awe, joy, or gratitude in which we become aware of God’s glory and goodness. The second way of experiencing the Spirit happens when “the graspable contours of our everyday realities break and dissolve” (p. 81). These experiences happen when the structures on which we rely fail us and we feel lost in confusion and darkness. Rahner (1983) gave several examples, of which I quote two:

Here is a person who is really good to someone from whom no echo of understanding and thankfulness is heard in return, whose goodness is not even repaid by the feeling of having been selfless, noble, and so on. . . . Here is someone who discovers that his most acute concepts and most intellectually refined operations of the mind do not fit; that the unity of consciousness and that of which one is conscious in the destruction of all systems is now to be found only in pain; that he cannot resolve the immeasurable multitude of questions, and yet cannot keep to the clearly known content of individual experience and to the sciences. (pp. 82-83)

Rahner encouraged us be still, stop trying too hard to think complex thoughts, and look for these ultimate, deeper human experiences in our everyday lives. These are the experiences that spiritual directors listen for in directees’ stories and here-and-now experiences in the session.

Participants in this study also mentioned noticing signs of resistance, or obstacles to the Spirit's movement in the directee's life. Maureen is alert to situations, relationships, or choices that seem disharmonious and "incompatible with what brings life." John pays attention to fear, agitation, anxiety, or "a certain kind of resignation or despair," among other qualities. "g" helps directees to "look more freely at the shadowy places inside that block their relationship to themselves and God and life, to where life wants to manifest." These spiritual directors attend to both the signs of the Spirit and the blocks that emerge in response. Leigh believes that "Spirit is present in the dance of draw and resistance," which she calls the "draw and the draw back." John feels that his job is: first, to notice these two kinds of movements, then, to elicit more from the directee about them, and finally, to discern together where God may be inviting the directee. More about the phenomenon of resistance to God's movements will follow later in the chapter.

New Lenses

Contemplative Presence Involves an Embracing of Paradox.

The more I progressed in the study of contemplative presence in spiritual direction, the more paradoxes I encountered. Mystics and participants spoke of meeting the Divine at the heart of what is most deeply human, finding peace in the midst of calamity, finding joy within brokenness and vulnerability, and being fully present with all of one's being and yet somehow being out of the way at the same time. After much reflection, confusion, and deep engagement with the data, I understood that paradox is an unavoidable and essential characteristic of spiritual attentiveness. Hall (1988) puts it well when she says:

Contemplation is a strange new land, where everything natural to us seems to be turned upside down—where we learn a new language (silence), a new way of being (not to *do*, but simply to *be*), where our thoughts and concepts, our imagination, senses and feelings are abandoned for faith in what is unseen and unfelt, where God's seeming absence (to our senses) *is* his presence, and his silence (to our ordinary perception) *is* his speech. (pp. 49-50)

Indeed, I felt as if I were learning a new language over the course of this project. I found myself needing to read the interview transcripts and mystics' texts over and over again in my effort to understand contemplative presence. The more I read, the more I let go of my efforts and relaxed into the mystery and paradox of this topic which cannot be grasped or nailed down.

One of the paradoxes that came up again and again in various ways was that contemplative presence is not simply about attending to the Divine, but attending to the human as well. In the Christian mystery of the Incarnation, the human and the Divine are one in Christ, and thus "everything human in Christ is by that very fact divine" (Merton, 2003, p. 39). Alan takes an incarnational approach in spiritual direction, "working on the assumption that human experience is the gateway to the Divine, or what Meister Eckhart, a mystic, talked about, God became human in Jesus, and by entering our humanity, we encounter God." This paradox is a profound guide to what it means to be present in spiritual direction. Instead of trying to run from our humanity and everything that comes with it—by avoiding it, trying to fix it, worrying about it, resisting it, or going into war with it—one simply enters deeply into the experience without reservation. According to Alan, this engagement with the depth and immediacy of our human experience brings life, peace, transformation, and "a liberation that understanding can never give." Instead of being places of abandonment and entrapment, our wounds become places of grace where God waits for us within the pain. Alan likens this work to being in a boat and learning how to put one's anchor down into the bedrock of the ocean: "being anchored doesn't stop the boat from being battered by the waves, but it holds it."

"g," too, shares the assumption that honoring one's experience, especially difficult or painful feelings, is transformative:

By being present in that, [and by feeling it in the body,] the Divine can heal the wounds. And it's like lancing the boil and the pus comes out, and then the sacred presence is able

to flow through easily. The energy that was knotted up in the boil comes home, and the bottom is alive and present and open. . . . Inside that shadow is a sacred gift, and work is for healing, so that life and grace can flow, in welcoming in all of these shadow pieces.

When spiritual directors can support directees in being contemplatively present to their own experience, new possibilities for grace and healing can take place. Unlike other therapeutic relationships, which may be concerned with gaining insight, changing one's negative thinking, or solving problems, the spiritual direction relationship aims more explicitly at being present to what is. Keating (2003) explains that trying to change or control things by force of will strengthens the false self. Thus, the only act of the will required in contemplative presence is consent, not effort. Repeated patient acceptance of one's experience trains one to develop a deeper attentiveness to the ground of being, a mysterious presence within that is "completely intangible, refined, and delicate" (Keating, 2003, p. 60). Spiritual direction, then, is paradoxically "powerful in its powerlessness" (Alan).

Attending to the human and the Divine in contemplative presence brings to light another paradox: the spiritual director must be fully present in his or her humanity while at the same time free to respond to stirrings of grace from beyond the superficial self. Ben says of the moments of feeling "on holy ground" with the directee:

It's felt as if every fiber of me has been engaged. That there's been a sense of being fully awake and fully aware, with my body, with the whole of who I am that has been present with this other person in whatever it is that we're exploring.

Leigh puts it this way: "[Being present in this way] both sweeps me beyond myself and it plants me most deeply in who I am, in kind of the same moment, and that's a great mystery to me." As she has progressed in her spiritual journey, she has learned that connecting with something beyond herself takes her deeply into the heart of "this really visceral, in-the-bones stuff that's personal, and familial, and probably human." She likens the work to "walking on a knife's

edge.” Laura, too, has worked hard to develop her capacity to be present to the full range of human experience, which has helped her to “[be] fully who I am and yet I’m out of the way.”

There was a point in my life that I decided I wanted to go for the joy, and see where it is. It is the joy that’s hard. And joy isn’t happiness. Joy has the deep pain as well as the happiness. It’s much richer than surface happiness. So I needed to learn how to stay with the depths and the heights in order to do that.

In her intuitive inquiry into true joy in union with God in mystical Christianity, Carlock (2003) discovered that true joy can be ecstatic and full of peacefulness, gratitude, and delight, and it can also be experienced as a wound of love, estrangement from God, and annihilation. She describes true joy as “a chrysalis that holds, molds, and transforms our suffering into something unique and infinitely beautiful” (p. 262).

It is not easy to let oneself be present to one’s deepest wounds and suffering, but it seems that such intimacy with oneself and God is demanded of spiritual directors. Jack says:

Intimacy is scary regardless of who you’re intimate with. . . . You are basically committed to being in God’s presence and committed to being naked and vulnerable before God with all your flaws and struggles and difficulties. And this isn’t about asking God to fix anything, it’s just asking God to be present with you in the mess. So I find that very important.

Several participants mentioned bringing this quality of presence to the spiritual direction session itself; that is, being calmly accepting of whatever experiences arise within, letting them be before God without avoiding them, fighting them, or resisting them. This allows for a greater degree of choice and discernment about how to proceed moment-to-moment. Leigh calls this being “a revealed self.” She is careful to add that she does not reveal herself to the directee, but rather sits as a revealed self before God, which helps her to feel less anxious about what comes up in her, and to listen to the directee “with a depth of peace and confidence.” Both “g” and Irene talked about cultivating a welcoming, friendly attitude toward “the superego, the egocentric, the shadowy place, the broken me, the wounded me” (“g”) during the session. Irene says:

I do that check for myself every once in a while and say, “Oh, I’m noticing that I’m really getting tense, or I’m starting to get anxious . . . “ And it’s really wonderful because it reminds me. You can either make it your friend or your enemy. You can say, “Oh, I wish I didn’t have this, and maybe if I go for a run or walk around the block, I’ll feel better.” But in another way, it can be your friend because it can remind you. It’s ego. “Oh, I have to do something to help this person,” and really you don’t. What you do do is to create the sacred space.

John pointed out that he does not need to feel peaceful to be effectively present with someone. If he feels distracted or anxious, he notes it without worrying about it or trying to change it, and he reports that directees comment on how peaceful he seems. He adds, “Maybe the agitation is more on the surface and they’re picking up something deeper. . . . But it does seem to be affecting them or working on them in a certain way.” Keating (2003) would likely say that John is in interior silence, which he defines not as an absence of thoughts or feelings, but rather a state of not being attached to thoughts as they come and go. Any reaction of exasperation or resistance to one’s thoughts only interferes with interior silence. It is in this interior silence that one develops the capacity to be aware of two planes of reality, or levels of awareness, at the same time: one superficial and one profound. Keating says: “You can be aware of the noise in or around you, and yet you recognize that your attention is grasped by something at a deeper level that is impossible to define but is nonetheless real” (p. 54). This is what is referred to as attentiveness to God.

John suggests that directees are affected in some mysterious way by his interior silence—perhaps it awakens their own attentiveness to God and inner stillness. Jana, too, says: “I think it makes such a difference in the directee to be heard in that way. That something does communicate.” Paradoxically, despite one’s own agitation or anxiety, peace still shines through. In one of her letters to a directee, Underhill (1944) wrote:

As to what you say about Peace, Yes! I think too it is possible to be used as a channel without feeling peace, indeed, while often feeling on the surface in a tornado!

Nevertheless, the essential ground of the soul *is* held in tranquillity, even through the uproar and every now and then the soul perceives this. The real equation is not Peace = satisfied feeling, but Peace = willed abandonment. (Underhill, 1944, p. 204)

In Butlein's (2005) study of psychotherapy with purportedly spiritually awakened therapists, he identified a theme called "energetic transmission" (p. 122), in which the presence of the therapist is shared or transmitted to the client. One of his participants described energetic transmission as opening up in the client the place that knows the same truth that the therapist's words are coming from. This theme brings me back once again to the realization that such a phenomenon is not something that one can orchestrate, but something that naturally emerges from who one is.

Keating (2003) says, "When the presence of God emerges from our inmost being into our faculties, whether we walk down the street or drink a cup of soup, divine life is pouring into the world" (p. 63).

The Spiritual Director's Contemplative Presence Is in Service of the Directee's Contemplative Stance Toward His or Her Own Life Experience.

In addition to listening for movements of the Spirit in the directee's story (as described in a previous lens), the spiritual director's contemplative presence also serves to invite and support the directee's presence to his or her own experience. Alan says directees "come to be present to themselves in [his] company," while Maureen feels that spiritual direction is "at the service of the person's own self-awareness, really, and the person's own contemplative stance toward their own life." This is a new lens that only became clear in my understanding after I completed the interviews and started to notice prominent themes in the data.

Ben feels that his own attentiveness to God in spiritual direction supports his directees "in their own desire to . . . encounter the Divine themselves, to be present to the sense that their life is sacred." He comments further:

As I do my work in looking at the darkness in my own life, as well as the light places, my wrestlings, as I'm aware of that, then I hope to be able to provide that place of freedom for people to do that kind of exploration and discovery in themselves. . . . It can help people explore what their own sense of Shalom, their own sense of peace and wholeness, is about. It can integrate those parts of themselves that they maybe have a hard time owning . . . there's no place within them that cannot be loved into transformation by God. So I think there can be an integrative, a making whole, an embracing, that attentiveness to the Presence in the session can bring about.

From Ben's experience, ongoing intentional prayerful exploration in the presence of God brings greater freedom of self-discovery and self-acceptance.

Laura has worked hard to develop her own capacity to be present to "God experiences" in herself and others, and she believes that this capacity helps her directees to be present too:

To stay in exquisite experience, a God experience, is something that can be developed. . . . Because I have expanded my ability to do that, I am allowing the directees to stay there too. Sometimes they actually will jerk themselves out of it because they're afraid to go into a place, because they don't know what it is or what it's about. . . . If I were fearful of that, they certainly would be, but the fact that I'm not and I've had these experiences, somehow that expands their ability as well, to stay with it.

Irene, too, invites her directees to savor experiences of the Spirit during the session, times when "something is being born, or waking up within the person." She may notice a softness in her own heart, a deep bodily feeling of quietness and stillness, or a simple knowing that "there's something happening here." At these times, she often notices that the other person may speak about something very personally meaningful, begin to cry, or hold his or her breath for a moment. Irene underscores the importance of recognizing these moments when they happen, and not gliding over them by talking, changing the direction of the conversation, or asking a question. She encourages her directees to simply stay with the experience: "Those moments are really important to cherish and to not rush through. To just really sit and be present, and to be still. Let happen what's happening. And they're very rich. They're very full. And yet they're very simple."

As directees learn to be contemplatively present to their experiences of God, directors may notice fear and resistance to this quality of spiritual attentiveness. Scofield (2005a) explains that becoming more intimate with God challenges us and calls us to grow beyond our comfort zones, which can be experienced as very threatening. “When God draws near,” Scofield (2005a) says, “we may initially feel consoled, but soon we will discover that God is also a consuming fire, a hammer shattering rock” (p. 61). Laura describes the discomfort that spiritual directors often feel when a directee shares an experience of God:

Many [spiritual directors] are unable to tolerate staying with that experience long enough, mainly . . . maybe, it’s because they haven’t stayed with it in themselves. . . . Even if my arms aren’t extended wide, it’s as if I am holding something really big. And to be able to stay. It’s like Moses before that burning bush. How do you stay in the Presence and live? It’s like you could die.

Leigh describes her struggle with resistance in her personal practice of presence:

I’ve certainly done my share of resistance, and it’s a part of that dance. There have been times it’s felt more revolution than evolution, and my insides and outsides have screamed, “AAHH! I can’t do this! Leave me alone!” And yet there’s been a deeper yes that’s always said, “But this is where life is.”

The mystics studied by Underhill (1990a) often underwent vacillations in their spiritual and religious strivings before they experienced the awakening of the self. St. Francis of Assisi, for example, felt attracted to the worldly ambitions of war, pleasure, and artistic expression, but continually felt a sense of dissatisfaction with life. Although he sought out beauty, a growing part of his consciousness nevertheless led him at times to charitable work with people suffering from illness and poverty. Another mystic, George Fox, struggled with pain, sorrow, and temptations, along with intermittent experiences of great love, serenity, and clarity. He states: “I found that there were two thirsts in me; the one after the creatures to get help and strength there; and the other after the Lord, the Creator” (Underhill, 1990a, p. 178). These oscillations are

characteristic of the entire mystical path, as the transcendental self asserts itself more and more fully despite the attractions and distractions of superficial consciousness.

From the participants' reports, directees develop over time in their capacity to be contemplatively present—not only in spiritual direction sessions but also in their daily lives. Several participants notice growth in their directees' trust in God. Lola reports that her directees gradually understand that they do not have to earn God's love, while Maureen's directees seem to her to become more aware of God's love for them. Sandal notices that her directees have increasing trust in a variety of areas: in her, in the Divine, in the flow of things, in the greater picture of life, in relationships, in dreams, in their spiritual life, and in their social action.

Dougherty (2005) says of one of her directees:

He seems to be spending more time outside of our meetings praying about the significance of events in his life, noticing the God-connecting threads among them, whereas before he was waiting for our time together to do that. That prayer is becoming part of him. (p. 30)

She reminds us that “God and the person are already together” (Dougherty, 2005, pp. 30-31).

Spiritual directors' attentiveness to God serves to witness and encourage directees' conscious awareness of that fact.

Seed Lenses

The Foundation of Contemplative Presence From a Christian Perspective Is a Deep, Abiding Faith That God Is Present and Active in Every Moment.

This is a seed lens that was presented in my interim lenses as follows: *To cultivate contemplative presence from a Christian perspective, one must have faith that God is present and active in every moment, despite and even through one's personal limitations, and whether or not one consciously experiences God's presence.* All of the participants in this study talked about their trust and faith in the presence of God everywhere and always. Some participants expressed

this as an operating assumption (Alan and Jack), while others called it a framework (Jana and Irene), their deepest grounding (“g”), their context and foundation (Maureen), their deep trust (Laura), their expectation and anticipation (Irene), their awareness (Lola), or their overarching belief and experience (Ben and Leigh).

I noticed that this abiding faith emerged both from participants’ personal experience of God and from their belief systems or theological assumptions. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Anonymous, 2004) taught that one should prepare for his contemplative exercise by undertaking a committed practice of reading and reflection. Similarly, in her advice to priests and spiritual directors, Underhill (1956) included education and spiritual reading as an essential part of the inner life, second only to prayer in its importance. She suggests reading not only Scripture but also the lives and writings of the saints. She says, “They are to be read and re-read, incorporated into the very texture of our minds; thus building up a rich and vital sense of all that is involved in the Christian spiritual life” (Underhill, 1956, p. 123). Having a solid intellectual foundation for spiritual direction and attentiveness to God is a vital part of practicing and developing contemplative presence.

In his research on the development of spiritual directors, Truscott (2007) found that the ability to be aware of contextual factors affecting their practice greatly enhanced directors’ ability to adopt a contemplative stance in spiritual direction. One of the contextual factors that Truscott identified as beneficial was the identification of the theological, philosophical, and psychological frameworks that guide one’s spiritual direction practice. As Jana says, having “a gentle framework that [she] holds . . . kind of imprinted in the background” helps her to maintain her intention to be attentive to God. Maureen, too, points out that without her belief in “the

inexorable working of the Spirit in everything,” she would not have “a basis from which to be trusting of the work.”

To Be Contemplatively Present Is to Be Detached From Self-Will.

This lens had its beginnings in the following two interim lenses: (a) *Contemplative presence can be better defined by what it is not than by what it is. It is not self-preoccupation, nor an attempt at manipulation and control, nor analysis, nor seeking gratification of needs and desires, nor even personal caring for one’s directee. It is a detachment from self-will and a deferring to God’s will in all things;* (b) *Contemplative presence is an attitude of waiting and listening for God’s will, and a profound surrender and willingness to do anything or nothing in response.* “g” is guided in spiritual direction by a poem by Wendell Berry (1987) titled *Poem*. He describes the meaning it has for him:

It is: “Willing to die, you give up your will. Keep still, until, moved by what moves all else, you move.” All of discernment is in the poem. Willing to die. Willing to die to what? Willing to die to my egocentric take on things. You give up your will. Whose will? You give up the egocentric will. It’s got to be this way, it’s got to look that way, I’ve got to get these things out of it, no I won’t give that up—whatever I’ve invested myself in in a false sense. Give up my will. And then I have to shut up, and be still and open and humble. And that creates the space that I can be moved by what moves all else.

All of the participants engaged in a process of self-monitoring and letting go of preoccupations, preconceived notions, and distractions to their attentiveness to God and the directee. Participants talked about bracketing and putting aside assumptions (Laura), letting go of agendas (Lola), emptying their own boat (Jack), closing “my own cupboard of my stuff” (Jana), reminding themselves “It’s not me” (Irene), and keeping their ego in the background (“g”).

Giving up their will, as the poem says, meant different things to different participants. Some work on releasing performance anxiety, a desire to control the session, or a need to be useful and productive, and others are careful to let go of a habit of teaching or advice giving

instead of serving as a spiritual director. Maureen reminds herself that she does not know the right outcome for the directee:

You do have to keep an open stance and not think you know what the answer is. . . . And I'm only looking at [the directee] in this little tiny slice of their life. . . . Who am I to know which way this whole thing is going to evolve? So you have to have a little humility here too.

Lola says, "It's like meditation. . . . You cannot have your own agenda going on and also meditate. . . . I have this image of sort of emptying myself of whatever's going on in my life so that I can be as attentive as possible." The exclusive focus of the conversation on the directee's experience and not the director's is "one of the poverties of the work," according to Alan, who adds that "one could deeply attend the experience of four or five people a day, but not talk to anybody."

The detachment that is cultivated in contemplative presence is referred to in the Christian tradition as self-denial (Keating, 2003; Merton, 1950). Keating (2003) defines it as "detachment from the habitual functioning of our intellect and will" (p. 15), while Merton (1950) referred to it as the mortification of desires. Merton suggested that anyone wanting to be attentive to God present in his or her heart must withdraw the mind from anything that prevents this gentle attention, thereby developing "a strong resistance to the futile appeals which modern society makes to [one's] five senses" (p. 64). In the context of spiritual direction, this means cultivating an attitude of receptivity, humility, and not knowing. Jana refers to this as "leaning back into God." She adds:

Just letting it open to a real dialogue. So the word, the meaning, can come through. And not orchestrate. Just let it, let each of us be guided. . . . Trusting that it is the Divine in whatever form that is guiding, orchestrating. There's in a sense, then, no right and wrong. But just be, be with it.

It is important to clarify the difference between detachment and full ego transcendence. In detachment, one learns to compassionately witness one's own inner experience, including the intrusions of the ego. Ego transcendence, on the other hand, refers to divine union, the final stage of the spiritual journey—an exceedingly rare experience for most of us (Ruumet, 2006). In her model of mystical development, Underhill (1990a) discusses detachment as part of the process of purification of the self. Although this stage is often experienced as the death of the old self, full transcendence only happens in the unitive life, when even the sense of “I” is lost and subsumed in the whole.

Psychiatrist and researcher Arthur Deikman (2000) makes a distinction between “instrumental consciousness” (p. 303) and “receptive consciousness” (p. 306). Humans spend most of their time in instrumental consciousness, in which one sees oneself as a discrete, separate object acting on the environment. One's focus is on acquiring, controlling, competing, and defending. In receptive consciousness, on the other hand, attention is more diffuse and boundaries are blurred, shifting the emphasis to allowing, receiving, and aligning with the environment. Deikman (2000) suggests that service calls for a dominance of receptive rather than instrumental consciousness, in a type of service he calls “serving-the-task” (p. 313), or doing “what is called for” (p. 313). He elaborates further:

That guiding sense of what is needed is impersonal and may be resisted by my survival self, but it is there. It is not a compulsion but a recognition that tugs at me. When I surrender to it I get in touch with another dimension that is hard to describe and elusive to the grasp. This place, where I meet the task and merge with it, feels more important, more meaningful than personal desires. . . . Psychotherapists may recognize this as the “good hour” where everything flows and the therapist feels part of a subtle dance, one that carries as much as leads. Self-interest and self-concern subside and disappear as what-is-called-for takes over. (p. 313)

Deikman's description brings to mind De Caussade's (1966/1982) duty to the present moment, in which God's will is discerned by simply being true to the activities that are required of us in the here-and-now, moment by moment, while being self-forgetting in everything else.

Many participants mentioned that bringing their concerns to supervision helped them to "get out of the way" (Jack) and cultivate contemplative presence with directees. If they notice unresolved feelings coming up with a directee that create the temptation to either share their experience or avoid the topic altogether, they set the feelings aside and come back to the present moment. Sandal says: "When somebody pushes buttons of mine, unconsciously, I need to say, okay, what's going on inside of you? . . . And rather than projecting that back on the person, I want to hold that for a session that I do with my supervisor." May (1982a) suggested that both transference and countertransference can occur in spiritual direction and interfere with the directee's growth. He uses the term "transference" (May, 1982a, p. 125) to refer to situations in which a directee unconsciously invests the director with qualities of a significant childhood figure, and then acts as if the director were that person. "Countertransference" (May, 1982a, p. 129) happens when the director unconsciously responds to the directee's transference, or transfers some of his or her own unconscious feelings to the directee. Ruffing (2000) writes that spiritual directors often miss these dynamics because they may not have the skills to recognize the feelings evoked by directees and know how to respond to these feelings appropriately. She suggests regular supervision or psychological consultation, and referring directees to another director when necessary.

Contemplative Presence May Open One to Receive Inspiration From the Spirit.

This seed lens is a combination of the following three interim lenses: (a) *If one is able to maintain a contemplative stance of attentiveness to God in the moment, one may receive*

inspiration from the Spirit in the form of images, emotions, insights, or inner promptings toward action, (b) These gifts of grace are often spontaneous, surprising, fruitful, unique to each particular situation, and entirely out of one's personal control, and (c) Contemplative presence in spiritual direction can lead to experiences of deep connection with one's directee in which both people feel transformed and a part of something larger than themselves. This lens emerged during my literature review and continued to evolve throughout the study of the mystics and the interview transcripts.

When one is attentive to God in spiritual direction, detached from self-will and surrendered to the duty of the present moment, one may experience a feeling of being drawn toward or away from something, a sudden urge to do or say something, a chance occurrence, or an intuitive knowing. De Caussade (1966/1982) taught that these inner promptings are signs of the divine will, or God's living grace in the moment. Many participants in this study spoke of such occurrences in their spiritual direction practice. They notice images, words, phrases, thoughts, ideas, or questions coming to mind spontaneously and unexpectedly during sessions. For some, these promptings seem to come from a source outside of themselves. Leigh says, "I can't even tell you where it comes from because it's me but it's also beyond me." Sandal experiences thoughts or images as if they are suddenly "whipping in from the outside." Several participants mentioned feeling like a channel for the divine energy. Jack says:

I can usually tell my own thoughts because I can tell the source. Like I'm having this thought because I had this experience once. Or my ego wants to insert this because I want to be seen in this certain way. . . . So those are always things that I can dismiss and set aside because they're not pertinent to the session. But it's the thought that comes from truly out of nowhere that I can't trace back, and it doesn't feel like shadow material, and again, it's kind of an alien thought. And that's when I know the Divine is speaking.

Some of the qualities associated with these impulses are: an insistent and persistent nudge to say something or pay attention to a particular topic or feeling (Lola, Jack, John, and Jana); a

feeling of rightness, truthfulness, and trust (Lola, Jack, John, Sandal, and Leigh); a sense of something “deeper, more substantial” than ordinary ideas (John); a sense of perfect fit or uniqueness to the situation at hand (John and Irene); feelings of awe, gratitude, and delight (Leigh, Sandal, Irene, and Jana); and an accompanying sense of the Presence of God (Irene and Jana). Irene shares her experience:

When I feel like I’m really being guided by the Spirit of light, there’s a peace. . . . It’s just a very little, gentle, soft feeling of love and compassion and empathy and peacefulness, tremendous peacefulness. And it’s not forceful. So in other words, I don’t hear in my mind, or none of the pictures say to me, “You must do this.” Because that immediately would feel to me un-Spirit-like. But it’s like, “Here’s a possibility.” . . . With the Holy Spirit there is always freedom.

When the participants feel these feelings of being led or guided, they are very careful to practice discernment in deciding whether or not to act on them or share them with the directee. Almost all of the participants who had these experiences spoke of waiting, setting the thought aside or silently holding onto it, and humbly and tentatively offering it if it becomes relevant at a later time. Laura suggests waiting to see if it comes up three times, and only then consider “that God is working through you, perhaps, and you might say something at the end of the session.”

Leigh explains her process of discernment:

What I do for a good while is hold the question, because that can be more about my own curiosity. It can be something unfinished in me. It can come from a lot of different places, and so I just hold that in my own prayer as I sit with the person. . . . I am praying the whole time for attunement toward what is the deepest or the deeper thing of God that might be moving here. And if my question continues to come up, then that’s a signal for me to explore, to offer. Not like, this is *the* word of God for you in this moment. But I’m noticing. I’m noticing a question that keeps rising. Let me offer it and let’s see if it fits and if it moves what’s present. And if not, that’s okay.

Some directors mentioned feeling reluctant to act on the inner nudges because they are contrary to their habitual patterns of behaving (John and Jack), or because they are not necessarily relevant to the directee and come instead as a “guiding gift that can help [them] stay more

present” (Jana). Several participants shared stories of times they chose to reveal their idea or image to the directee. They reported that directees experienced new insights or emotional shifts, were able to engage in deeper exploration, or were challenged to confront barriers in their intimacy with God. Directors were left feeling surprised, awed, and grateful for this unexpected touch of grace.

St. Teresa (Teresa of Avila, 1980) offered guidelines for discernment that have relevance for spiritual directors. In the case of locutions, St. Teresa gave three sure signs they are from God: (a) The words are full of power and authority and have an immediate effect on the soul, (b) one feels great quiet and peace afterwards, and (c) one remembers the words for a long time. She adds that a person experiencing locutions hears the message suddenly and unexpectedly, but with perfect clarity and greater understanding than the words themselves could ever convey. She clarifies the difference between a message from the Divine and a thought from our own imagination: “The one locution comes as in the case of a person who hears, and that of the imagination comes as in the case of a person who gradually composes what he himself wants to be told” (Teresa of Avila, 1980, p. 376).

Many participants reported experiences in which they felt the presence of God in spiritual direction. They were overcome with a deep inner quiet, stillness, and peace (Irene, Ben, John, and Alan); feelings of awe, wonder, joy, and clarity (Ben, Laura, and Alan), and feelings of oneness, connection, or love for the directee (Leigh, Irene, Ben, and Laura). Often this was accompanied by physical sensations or movements such as goosebumps or chills (Leigh), tears (Alan and Leigh), tingling in the hands, lips, or head (Irene, Laura, and Lola), a softness in the heart (Irene), a fullness or grounded feeling in the gut (Jana and Alan), an opening of the hands (Laura), a falling to the knees (Leigh), or a feeling that every cell of the body is awake (Ben and

Leigh). In her study of kataphatic religious experience, Ruffing (1995) found that many of her participants experienced physical responses to God's presence. Many of these were similar to the experiences reported in this study, such as bodily peace and relaxation, feeling moved to tears, or a sense of union in one's gut. Other experiences reported by Ruffing included a sense of rising energy, a feeling of being held or caressed, God's voice felt or heard in the heart area, and God's healing power felt in the hands.

The participants in this study attributed their experiences to divine guidance or movements of the Spirit, although the terms intuition, inspiration, and grace were also used. Hart (2000b) makes a distinction between intuition and inspiration. He defines inspiration as a nonrational, transpersonal process of knowing (Hart, 2000b). Inspiration is characterized by a movement from self-separate observer to connected participant, and has the qualities of contact, openness, receiving, and clarity. Intuition can be defined as "a rapid, highly structured form of nonconscious processing" (Rea, 2001, p. 97) or "a cognitive function based on pattern recognition processes" (Welling, 2005, p. 20). Intuition is therefore also a form of nonanalytic knowing, but is not necessarily accompanied by the same alteration of boundaries, opening to a source beyond the narrowly defined self, and feelings of love, acceptance, trust, and appreciation.

Keating (2003) asserts that the contemplative state enables one to both rest and act at the same time, because it is rooted in the source of both. Full awareness and acceptance of what is occurring in the here-and-now—rather than reverting to one's usual habit of trying to control or change things—enables one to make clearer choices for action. One is attentive to God not as a static being but a dynamic, active, living presence in the moment. Tilden Edwards (1995) explains what he refers to as "givenness to God" (p. 5) in spiritual direction:

[It means] to leave the center of our soul-consciousness open, unknowing, bearing to God whatever comes from the directee's or our own minds. The center then becomes more permeable for whatever God may have in mind. In that free space we hope that the misty divine mystery will incarnate itself in some way, that it will illuminate the direction session in wondrous ways. (T. Edwards, 1995, p. 7)

Tilden Edwards lists some of the possible fruits of this quality of presence, many of which are similar to the experiences of the participants in this study: a particular scriptural passage, song, or image may come to mind, one may feel led to call for silence or prayer, one may suddenly laugh in a way that lightens undue heaviness, or one may feel a desire to ask the directee to draw a picture or begin a new spiritual practice.

Spiritual Directors Can Affirm Their Intention to Cultivate Contemplative Presence Through Rituals and Other Aids to Contemplation.

This lens was expressed in my interim lenses as follows: *Spiritual directors can affirm their intention and desire to cultivate contemplative presence through rituals with and without the participation of their directees, for example, prayer before a session, shared silence during a session, or the use of a word or phrase to harness attention.* Throughout this study, I learned about the power of ritual as a facilitator of attentiveness to God. The participants used various ways of preparing themselves before sessions as a way of focusing their attention and beginning with conscious intention and awareness of the presence of Spirit. Many participants begin their sessions with silence or prayer, “to shift out of [their] normal, everyday mind to a deeper type of listening space” (John). Jack, Sandal, Ben, and Laura light candles to represent the divine Presence. Some pray silently, while others pray aloud. They pray for help in staying focused (Jack), for wisdom and compassion (Leigh), for blessings in their efforts to pay attention to Spirit (Sandal), to love directees where they are and as they are (John), and to grow in awareness and gratitude (Lola).

In addition to beginning sessions with intention, participants use various means to maintain their contemplative presence. They make an effort to create sacred space for directees, which includes a quiet, uncluttered environment and clear, consistent boundaries of privacy and reserved time. Laura tries to arrive early and allow plenty of time between sessions. Jana cultivates a monastic atmosphere with no television or radio on the days that she meets with directees. Lola prays for directees before they arrive and offers them tea or coffee. During sessions, directors use various reminders of their attentiveness to God, including a candle (Sandal and Ben), an empty chair in the room (Jana and Sandal), pictures of Christ, Buddha, or other inspirational figures (Jana, John, and Sandal), a hand position or mudra (Sandal), and Scripture passages or poems by mystics (“g” and John).

In many religious and spiritual traditions, rituals are transformational processes used to enter an altered state of consciousness in which we can “go beyond the parameters that have described our perception of reality” (Beck & Metrick, 1990, p. 8). St. Teresa encouraged the use of our human capacities to turn our attention toward God, and therefore using imagination, visual images or other symbols, or spiritual reading can all serve in cultivating contemplative presence with directees (Teresa of Avila, 1980). Underhill (1956) also proposed a variety of aids to contemplation; for example, regular vocal prayer, repeating to oneself short phrases of worship, or moving and sitting in a way that expresses one’s adoration for God (e.g., kneeling, standing still and raising one’s mind to God before prayer). Underhill emphasized the value of simple ritual acts: “Many of these ‘acts,’ when we dwell on their meaning, are jewels of devotion . . . They give the mind something to hold on to, quiet it, . . . and gradually train our mental life to run, more and more, in the channels they mark out” (pp. 128-129).

In Hart's (2000b) exploration of inspiration, he suggests five ways of inviting this elusive gift that can never be achieved by force of will. The first way is to cultivate a conscious and deliberate intent or reaching out for something. He suggests the use of ritual for aiding in this gentle activity of keeping one's attention focused in a particular direction without grasping or compulsive striving for an outcome. The other four ways of welcoming inspiration are: (a) faith in a nonrational way of knowing, (b) letting go of habits of mind that keep us anchored in ego, (c) listening for the delicate voice of inspiration, and (d) embodying the inspiration by expressing the vision in form, word, act, or attitude. Although Hart is not writing from the perspective of Christian contemplation, his ways of opening to inspiration have much in common with the quality of presence cultivated in spiritual direction.

The Inner Orientation of Contemplative Presence Must Be Chosen, Again and Again, in the Immediacy of the Here-and-Now, in a Constantly Renewing, Moment-by-Moment Process.

This lens is a combination of the following three interim lenses: (a) *Contemplative presence is an act of remembering, a continual redirecting of attention toward the mystery of God's presence within and beyond all experiences*, (b) *Contemplative presence can only happen in the immediacy of the present moment. It is a close, intimate encounter with experience just as it is*, and (c) *The inner orientation of contemplative presence must be chosen, again and again, in a constantly renewing moment-by-moment process. Although this takes effort, it is a gentle discipline rather than a forceful strain.* Contemplative presence can only happen in the present moment. It is not a task that can be completed, but a relationship to being that must be renewed in each new moment. Although it may appear static and passive, it is ever-changing, fresh, vital, and dynamic. Alan refers to it as *contemplative presencing* rather than contemplative presence, to convey this active, living quality of awareness.

Many of the participants compared contemplative presence to their own meditation or prayer practice, saying that it involved the same work of repeatedly bringing their attention back to God after it wandered into distraction. John says:

Many, many times I may notice myself drifting off or following some other line of thought than [the directee is] taking, and realizing I'm losing touch right now with where they actually are and what God may be doing. So I call myself back to that.

Jack describes spiritual direction as an “active form of meditation.” When he gets lost in a thought, he says, “I will usually pray silently about it, ask for help, bring myself back to center, and exercise a little more discipline. You know how meditation sessions are. Sometimes they’re hard, sometimes they’re easy.” Jana and Lola find it helpful to slow down the pace in order to be present to what the directee is sharing, step-by-step along the way, staying in the here-and-now and not rushing ahead.

The mystics that I studied all taught that this effort of returning again and again to attentiveness to God should be calm, gentle, and accepting, not strained nor forceful. Keating (2003) calls the movement “the patient renewal of your intention” (p. 57) without exasperation, desperation, anxiety, or annoyance. He says, “No one cuts a lawn with a bulldozer. All you need to brush away a fly is a movement of your hand” (p. 57). St. Teresa’s term for prayer, recollection, brings to mind the act of remembering. St. Teresa’s recollection has a similar meaning to the Greek term “anamnesis” (Judy, 1996, p. 80), which means to remember again. We get caught in attachments and distractions and repeatedly forget the divine presence within. Contemplative presence thus calls us to remember again: “Each glance [toward God] is a remembrance, an emergence from forgetfulness” (May, 1991, pp. 141-142).

Reflections on the Study: Strengths and Limitations

As I reach the end of my inquiry into contemplative presence in spiritual direction, I am called upon to evaluate the value of this study. Certainly, the process of deeply engaging with this topic using the method of intuitive inquiry has been enormously valuable for me personally. Looking back to Cycle 1, I can see that my initial ideas about which topic to pursue were very unclear and unformed. The memory of my own spiritual experience and the desire to live out its sacred truth in relationship to others called and compelled me forward. It is deeply gratifying to be in Cycle 5 now, seeing how far I have come in my own journey of understanding. From a vague sense that this was something deeply important for me to understand, I formulated a clear and narrow focus, clarified my beliefs and values related to it, and engaged with many deep and varied sources of wisdom on the topic. Not only has my thinking about the topic been immensely expanded and clarified, but I have the satisfying feeling of having brought to vivid consciousness something that was dearly wanting to come forth and blossom. I now have a vocabulary for the topic that I did not have before, and a framework for understanding it that can be shared with others—this in itself makes the study worthwhile for me personally. I feel a greater sense of heart connection and belonging to the Christian contemplative tradition. I also feel empowered to practice contemplative presence in my own life, with a deep and rich intellectual foundation to add dimension and purpose to the momentary intuition I experienced years ago.

Transformation of the researcher strengthens a study's "efficacy validity" (R. Anderson, 2004, p. 333), which is defined as "the capacity of a study and its report as a whole to give more value to one's own life" (p. 333). It is hoped that the readers and research participants, too, will experience greater depth of understanding as a result of reading and/or participating in the study. Many of the participants that I interviewed provided feedback that they enjoyed the opportunity

to single out and articulate something that is a fundamental way of being in their practice. They thanked me for tackling this topic; for example, one person said, “I’m really thrilled that you’re doing this. It just feels like an important step.” Many said they gained clarity from answering questions about contemplative presence; one person told me she saved the transcript and summary because they are “a sweet source of reflection” for her. Another participant said:

You said in your paper [recruitment flyer] there that this might help the person being interviewed, and I can say that in my case it did. This has been an energizing process for me too, putting me back in touch with the core of what I think direction is about.

Other comments were: “I like repetition of things, so to be able to say what I’ve said helps me to reexperience what it is my experience has been, and that’s a good thing,” and, “I just think I’m enjoying talking about this. As you said in your little paper [recruitment flyer], it might—I don’t know what you said—but it was like, it might give you more awareness of how you do spiritual direction and what’s important for you in spiritual direction. And truly, it’s doing that,” and “Thank you for asking [about this topic], because you’re witnessing to an experience that I live a lot but I don’t stand outside and reflect on that often, and so it enlarges it.”

It is my first time conducting a study using the intuitive inquiry method, and on the way I have sometimes wondered if this subjective account of my own journey would have much relevance for others. I have gradually come to a deeper appreciation, however, that “knowledge is always personal, be it individually or culturally wrought” (R. Anderson, 2004, p. 329).

Because I have tried to honestly document my motivations, projections, realizations, and blind spots, the reader will be able to evaluate the study for himself or herself, and perhaps more easily than if I had hidden these personal factors. Perhaps readers can benefit not only from gaining a greater understanding of the topic itself, but also from reading about my subjective process of understanding it. For example, readers may relate to my struggle to put this topic into words.

Other beginning spiritual directors may identify with my journey of looking for the experience of contemplative presence, realizing that it is more of a relationship to experience than an experience per se, and then finally surrendering to the mystery of it. Trainers and supervisors of spiritual directors can facilitate trainees' learning about contemplative presence by not allowing intellectual exploration to overshadow the need for simple experiential practice. Rahner (1983) said:

Be still for once. Don't try to think of so many complex and varied things. Give these deeper realities of the spirit a chance now to rise to the surface: silence, fear, the ineffable longing for truth, for love, for fellowship, for God. . . . Allow such ultimate, basic, human experiences to come first. Don't go talking about them, making up theories about them, but simply endure these basic experiences. Then in fact something like a primitive awareness of God can emerge. (p. 63)

Another aspect of efficacy validity is the question of whether or not the research provides a new vision for the future or inspires people to new action in the world. Rosemarie Anderson (2004) points out that "often, what a researcher feels 'called' to study may be a call from the culture at large for change. A universal need is often disclosed by the particular and the personal" (p. 308). In my case, the intuition that initially sparked the beginnings of this dissertation may be shared by many others. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed Deikman's (2000) distinction between instrumental consciousness and receptive consciousness. Deikman suggests that we are all called to move from a dominance of instrumental consciousness, with its focus on self-preservation, achievement, and control, to a dominance of present-centered, service-oriented, receptive consciousness. In fact, he asserts that receptive consciousness may be needed for survival of the human species.

Contemplative presence from a Christian perspective is one expression of receptive consciousness; people in transpersonal psychology and other fields are exploring similar qualities of presence: healing presence (Phelon, 2004), therapeutic presence (Greenberg &

Geller, 2001), nondual presence (Belschner, 2002), spiritual empathy (Firman & Gila, 2002), unconditional presence (Welwood, 2000), deep empathy (Hart, 2000a), Being together (Prendergast, 2003), naked presence (Wellings & McCormick, 2000), embodied transcendental empathy (Macecevic, 2008), and being intimate with what is (Hunt, 2003). The vision and action that is inspired by this study is not a product or task, but a way of being in the world. This way of being has the potential to inspire a new way of acting based on the full acceptance of what is occurring and what is called for in the present moment. Although contemplation is not a new idea, the implications of Christian contemplative presence in companioning another person have not been explicated in this detail before.

The potential fruit of this study is to illuminate this way of being that I believe is relevant to all modes of human service. Each reader will be the judge of whether or not I have succeeded. Rosemarie Anderson (2004) proposes that an intuitive inquiry should have “resonance validity” (p. 331); that is, it should produce sympathetic resonance in another. A study’s resonance validity is evaluated by ascertaining whether the research findings are “immediately apprehended and recognized or reacted to with dissonance or neutrality” by readers (R. Anderson, 2004, p. 332). My hope is that readers in the spiritual direction field will be moved and inspired, as I was, by the wisdom of the participants in this study. The participant portraits add to the literature by providing in-depth descriptions of the experience of contemplative presence from each of their unique perspectives. I hope, too, that my interpretations bring greater clarity and insight to those searching for the meaning of contemplative presence in their own lives.

Another one of my goals for this project was to spark dialogue between transpersonal psychotherapists and spiritual directors. I made the choice to study contemplative presence from the perspective of Christian spiritual direction and not transpersonal psychotherapy or other

forms of spiritual guidance. I focused on the Christian tradition because it has a long history of spiritual direction, as well as writings on the topic by spiritual masters such as the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Anonymous, 2004) and St. Teresa of Avila (Teresa of Avila, 1980).

Although the lack of religious and spiritual diversity among the participants is a delimitation of this project, it allows for greater focus and depth of study, and the findings will potentially be of interest to practitioners in other fields. Rosemarie Anderson (2004) points out that one of the ways to ascertain the value of an intuitive inquiry is to ask whether it helped the reader ask good questions of the experiences they wish to understand. Hopefully, psychotherapists and spiritual guides of diverse traditions will gain insight from reading the findings of this study.

The lack of diversity in participants with respect to age, educational level, cultural background, and geographical location represents another limitation of the current study. Because I chose to interview people who have been practicing spiritual direction for 10 years or more, the participants were all past mid-life, ranging from 44 to 75 years old. All participants were highly educated, having completed at least a graduate degree. Seventy-five percent of the participants (9 out of 12) live in California, most in and around the San Francisco Bay Area. This is a preliminary study limited by the time and resources of a graduate student completing a dissertation. In future research, it would be interesting to see if the way people conceive of and experience contemplative presence differs across different groups of spiritual directors.

Another limitation of the study is that it does not contain any way to evaluate the generalizability of the findings. Esbjörn-Hargens (2004) says of her own intuitive inquiry: "I as the researcher can only see through that which is my life experience . . . Quite possibly, another person with a different set of lenses will come into contact with the data gathered and find entirely new interpretations" (p. 420). This subjective nature of intuitive inquiry makes it

unlikely that this study could ever be replicated. If I could expand this project, I would like to add another iterative cycle by using a resonance panel consisting of representatives from Christian spiritual direction, traditional psychotherapy, transpersonal psychotherapy, and spiritual guidance in traditions other than Christianity. By noting resonance, dissonance, and neutral reactions among group members, I may be able to ascertain how transferable and relevant the findings are across different groups. It is likely that many nonreligious people or those wounded by Christianity would be put off by the Christian language and the explicit assumption that “God is 100% everywhere at all times, so that there’s no secular anymore” (g). On the other hand, the use of such resonance panels would further clarify the similarities between presence in spiritual direction and presence in psychotherapy.

Another significant limitation of the study is the limitation of language itself for describing ineffable, paradoxical, and unpredictable processes and states of consciousness. The commonly used language in Christianity can also be a deterrent to obtaining rich descriptions of lived experience. Because contemplative presence is not an experience in itself, participants referred to it as simple and ordinary, or said things like, “It’s here, it’s just this. . . . It is what it is.” One person commented: “I wondered what we were going to talk about! I thought, gee, we could be done in 10 minutes!” I asked participants to begin the interviews in the same way that they usually begin their spiritual direction sessions, so most interviews started out with shared silence and intention. The purpose of this was to encourage participants to cultivate contemplative presence in the here-and-now rather than only speaking abstractly about it. In writing about contemplative presence, it helped to acknowledge the difficulty in articulating this topic as an inherent aspect of the topic itself, without struggling to master it or find just the right words to express it. Instead, I was called upon to repeatedly accept that this is what I understand

about it now, and that will continue to evolve and change. The choice of intuitive inquiry, a method that “is rather like chasing a moving target” (R. Anderson, 2004, p. 330), was therefore a good fit for expanding the possibilities of communication about this intangible and mysterious topic.

Implications and Applications of the Study

After I completed my data analysis, I found two further studies related to presence. The first is a qualitative study of therapeutic presence by clinical psychologists Leslie Greenberg and Shari Geller (2001). The authors interviewed seven experienced therapists on their experience of presence in therapy, and formed three overarching categories from their analysis: (a) preparing the ground for presence, which refers to preparing before a session and practicing presence in daily life; (b) the process of presence, which includes being receptive to the client’s experience, attending inwardly to one’s own experience, and expressing that inner resonance to the client; and (c) experiencing presence, which involves absorption in the encounter, a feeling of inner spaciousness, grounding in one’s self, and being with and for the client. The authors state:

The therapist brackets or suspends his own beliefs, assumptions, needs and concerns in order to fully attend to what is occurring in the moment and to respond to the other based on the experience of the moment. . . . It involves a ‘being with’ the client rather than a ‘doing to’ the client. (pp. 144-145)

I found this study very confirming of my own findings, although it did not include a transpersonal component to therapeutic presence.

The second study, by Julie Macecevic (2008), a doctoral student in clinical psychology, is a recent phenomenological study of “embodied transcendental empathy” (p. 2), or ETE. ETE is defined as “a holistic, relational approach to psychotherapy emphasizing the embodied experiences of the psychotherapist, and the deeply engaging intersubjective psychotherapeutic encounter” (Macecevic, 2008, p. iii). From her analysis of 8 interviews with psychotherapists,

the author discovered that extraordinary or transcendent phenomena occur when the therapist adopts a profound quality of being described as relaxed, calm, open, spacious, deeply intimate, and accepting. Therapists experienced a mutual field in which boundaries were less defined and they were able to directly experience their clients' experiences. Macecevic emphasizes the somatic element of presence, which refers to the therapist's ability to sense in his or her own body information that is helpful and relevant for the client and his or her therapy. Of her results overall, she writes:

The themes congeal into an experience in psychotherapy that involves the psychotherapist's stepping back from ego-driven, agenda-focused, therapeutic training. Ultimately letting go and settling into something much more expansive, something transpersonal or spiritual, something Bugental (1978) may have been identifying when he wrote about the God-potential of human beings. (Macecevic, 2008, p. 187)

Although transpersonal psychotherapy is not the focus of this study, it is encouraging to see similarities emerging in how presence is understood in spiritual direction and psychotherapy.

Clinical psychologist John Welwood (2000) writes:

The more I trained therapists, the clearer it became that the most important quality in a therapist was the capacity for unconditional presence—which, oddly enough, is hardly mentioned or taught in most therapy training. When therapists are present with a client's experience in this way, something inside the client can begin to relax and open up more fully. What I have found, again and again, is that unconditional presence is the most powerful transmuting force there is, precisely because it is a willingness to be there with our experience, without dividing ourselves in two by trying to “manage” what we are feeling. (pp. 117-118)

Welwood's insight brings to mind the paradox shared by the participants in this study, of finding healing grace and freedom *within* experience, not free *from* experience.

After my exploration of presence in both spiritual direction and psychotherapy, I have come to the conclusion that the most important element that distinguishes the two is intention. In contemplative presence in Christian spiritual direction, the intention is not simply to be present to the directee and to let go of one's preoccupations and assumptions; rather, one's intention is

primarily to deepen one's contact with God, the source and ground of being. I have learned that it is more intention than attention toward God—intention to love God, surrender to God, and grow in relationship and intimacy with God. The findings of this study will be most relevant to psychotherapists who share a similar intention in therapy. Much of the literature exploring the transpersonal qualities of presence comes from authors practicing Eastern forms of meditation (e.g., Epstein, 1995; Prendergast, 2003; Welwood, 2000). This study gives voice to the Christian perspective, providing a vision and concrete practices to Christian transpersonal psychotherapists.

For spiritual directors, the most important application of this study lies in their own personal spiritual journey and the profound integrity and commitment to which contemplative presence calls each person. Spiritual directors-in-training can learn from the participants the value of a balanced lifestyle, a rich prayer life, and the support of supervisors, spiritual directors, and peer groups. Instead of seeing contemplative presence as something that one turns on and off for directees, directors can instead view spiritual direction as another mode of practicing the way of life they already live. Keating (2003) says, "Divine love is not an attitude that one puts on like a cloak. It is rather the right way to respond to reality" (p. 103).

Trainers of spiritual directors can use the final lenses as a guide for exploring the different aspects of contemplative presence. For example, one class could focus on developing personal rituals and aids to contemplation for spiritual direction sessions. In another class, directors-in-training could practice noticing experiences of the Spirit in the stories of others. Students could also explore the various practices presented by the mystics, and choose one to focus on and practice regularly. Bowen (2005) uses a two-phase model in her teaching of contemplative listening. First, students focus on learning to recognize God in their own

experience. In the second phase, students learn to listen to the God-experience of others, “even as they attempt to continue to hear themselves and God” (2005, p. 35).

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could explore the relationship between psychological and spiritual development and contemplative presence. In this study, participants were nominated by others as exemplar spiritual directors. In future studies, participants could be given assessments of ego development or faith development, and then asked to complete questionnaires or interviews about their attentiveness to God. Alternatively, a longitudinal study could be conducted to see how directors’ practice of contemplative presence changes over years of spiritual direction practice.

Further studies could also investigate the directee’s experience of the director’s contemplative presence. Two groups of directors could be compared: one that practices attentiveness to God, and a second group that is deliberately focused on a particular goal or the content of the session. Directees could then be interviewed about their responses to the sessions, or full transcripts could be made and analyzed to see how the process of spiritual direction is affected by the director’s presence.

A few of the individual lenses could be expanded in future research. For example, a study could be done of moments of inspiration or feeling guided in spiritual direction. What are the fruits of contemplative presence? How does one discern movements of the Spirit? The results could be compared to literature on inspiration in daily life (Hart, 2000b) or intuition in psychotherapy (e.g., Rea, 2001; Welling, 2005). Other studies could explore the process of noticing experiences of the Divine in directees’ narratives, or facilitating a contemplative stance in directees.

Several participants mentioned the power of shared presence within group spiritual direction and other forms of community. The current study focused on individual spiritual direction, but further exploration could be done with groups. Another area that was only touched on in this study was the kinesthetic aspect of contemplative presence. Participants talked about noticing physical manifestations of God's presence, such as feelings of deep peace or being moved to tears. Further research could expand on these experiences by investigating the role of the body in being attentive to God.

Conclusion

Many of the participants talked about their deep gratitude for the gift of being a spiritual director. They referred to it as "precious" (Laura), "a gift" (Jana), a "wonderful and rare opportunity" (Ben), and "the most awesome privilege in the world" (Leigh). Lola and "g" mentioned that they are receivers as much as givers in their role as spiritual director. Jack said, "My own relationship with Divinity is infinitely enriched by the privilege of being able to listen to other people's conversations with Divinity."

This is the feeling that I am filled with as I conclude this dissertation: a profound gratitude for the gifts of this journey. Listening to others' stories of being attentive to God has sensitized me to Spirit's ways and nurtured my inner life immeasurably. I share the stories of the mystics and the participants in the hope that the reader's intimacy with the ground of being will also grow deeper as a result of reading them.

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Appendix A: Introductory Flyer

The Quality of Presence of the Spiritual Director

Looking for Nominations for Research Participants

I am a doctoral student at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, CA, and my specialization is in Spiritual Guidance. I am conducting research into the presence of the spiritual director. I am interested in learning more about the experience of spiritual directors as they are sitting with directees.

- **What quality of awareness do they bring to spiritual direction, and how do they cultivate it?**
- **What is it like to bring a moment-by-moment attention towards the Divine when sitting with another person?**
- **How does the spiritual director's presence affect the directee and the overall process of spiritual direction?**

These are some of my research questions. I am looking for nominations for spiritual directors with at least 10 years of experience who practice from a Christian perspective, and who would be willing to share their thoughts and feelings about their personal experience of presence in spiritual direction. If you would like to nominate someone who demonstrates an exceptional quality of contemplative presence and attentiveness to God in his or her practice as a spiritual director, please e-mail me.

Thank you!

Natasha McLennan Tajiri, M.Sc.

email@yahoo.com

Appendix B: Introductory Letter

[Date]

Dear [Potential Participant],

I am a doctoral student at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, CA, and my specialization is in Spiritual Guidance. I am conducting research into the quality of presence of the spiritual director. You were nominated by _____ as a potential participant in my study because you are viewed as a spiritual director who demonstrates exceptional presence.

I am interested in learning more about the experience of spiritual directors as they are sitting with directees.

- What quality of awareness do they bring to spiritual direction, and how do they cultivate it?
- What is it like to bring a moment-by-moment attention towards the Divine when sitting with another person?
- How does the spiritual director's presence affect the directee and the overall process of spiritual direction?

These are some of my research questions. I am looking for spiritual directors with at least 10 years of experience who practice from a Christian perspective, and who would be willing to share their thoughts and feelings about their personal experience of presence in spiritual direction.

If you choose to participate, you may benefit by gaining deeper insight into your spiritual direction practice, both as a director and a directee. My hope is that an open discussion of presence will help you to deepen your own attentiveness to the Divine through the process of articulating the qualities associated with it.

If you are interested in participating, or if you would like to nominate someone else for this study, please e-mail me.

Thank you for your interest in this project.

Sincerely,

Natasha McLennan Tajiri, M.Sc.

email@yahoo.com

Appendix C: Screening Questionnaire

1. What drew you to want to participate in this study?
2. Are you currently practicing as a spiritual director?
3. Do you hold a Christian perspective in your work?
4. How long have you been practicing?
5. Are you currently in spiritual direction yourself as a directee?
6. Do you engage in any spiritual practices?
7. (If a woman) Are you pregnant? (It is a federal guideline for me to ask you this.)
8. Do you have any health concerns that might limit your ability to participate in this study (such as a recent serious illness or surgery)?
9. Please tell me briefly what it is like for you to be attentive to God.
10. Are you willing to talk to me more about it in an interview? It will take between 1 and 2 hours.
11. How do you feel about talking over the phone? (if applicable)
12. What is the best way to reach you? (phone or e-mail) When are the best times to reach you?

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

To the Participant in this Research,

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research project. This consent form will give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about anything mentioned here, or information not included here, please feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

You are invited to participate in a research study that explores your experience of contemplative presence as a spiritual director. You will be asked to share your thoughts and feelings about what it is like to be attentive to the Divine during a spiritual direction session.

This sharing will take place in a one-on-one interview, either over the phone or in the Spiritual Guidance Office at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, California. The interview will be approximately 1 to 2 hours in length, and will be arranged at a time that is convenient for you. I have prepared a few questions to ask you, but our time together will hopefully feel more like a conversation than an interview, in order to give you the chance to share what is most salient for you.

I will audiotape and transcribe the interview, and you will be asked to review the transcript for accuracy. In addition, I will write a summary of the transcript and ask you to review it for changes, omissions, additions, or clarifications.

For the protection of your privacy, all information received from you will be kept confidential as to the source and your identity will be protected. The audiotapes of the interviews will only be heard by me and a professional transcriber who will sign a confidentiality agreement before transcribing. All tapes and transcripts will be kept in a locked file box to which only I have access, and all transcripts will be shredded 3 years after completion of the dissertation. Each tape will be erased at the end of the study, when the dissertation is complete. While I may choose to quote parts of the text of the transcript in the final manuscript, your anonymity will be protected by a pseudonym of your choice. Your name and any information that might identify you will not be disclosed in the dissertation or in any presentations or publications that may result.

You may benefit from participating in this study by gaining deeper insight into your spiritual direction practice, both as a director and as a directee. My hope is that an open discussion of contemplative presence will help you to deepen your own attentiveness to the Divine through the process of articulating the qualities associated with it.

This study is designed to minimize potential risks to you. If for any reason, distressing personal material or issues arise, I encourage you to seek assistance from your spiritual director. I will also be available to provide a referral if you prefer. If at any time you have any concerns or questions, I will make every effort to discuss them with you and inform you of options for resolving your concerns.

Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so please feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. If you have any questions or concerns, you may email me at email@yahoo.com or call me at XXX-XXXX, or call Dr. Genie Palmer, Ph.D., Chairperson of my Dissertation Committee, at (650) 493-4430, or Dr. Fred Luskin, Ph.D., the Chairperson for the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, at (650) 493-4430. The Institute of Transpersonal Psychology assumes no responsibility for psychological or physical injury resulting from this research.

You have the right to refuse participation for any reason and/or to refrain from answering any specific questions at any time during the research process without penalty or prejudice. The researcher also has the right to ask for participant withdrawal at any time.

You may request a summary of the research findings by providing your mailing address with your signature. Thank you for your participation.

I attest that I have read and understood this form and had any questions about this research answered to my satisfaction. My participation in this research is entirely voluntary and no pressure has been applied to encourage my participation. My signature indicates my willingness to be a participant in this research.

Participant's Signature

Date

Participant's Printed Name

Please use this pseudonym in place of my real name in the study (please print clearly):

Researcher's Signature

Date

Mailing Address (please include if you would like a summary of research findings):

Appendix E: Interview Questionnaire

1. What is your in-the-moment experience of being attentive to God for another person? Where is your attention focused during a spiritual direction session? What thoughts do you notice? Feelings? Sensations in your body? [I will encourage the participant to speak from his or her experience in the here-and-now.]
2. Please describe a time when you were particularly attentive to God during a session. What happened? How did the directee respond?
3. How do you prepare yourself to be attentive to God in a spiritual direction session? What helps you to bring this kind of awareness to your work?
4. What pulls you away from your intention to maintain that quality of presence?
5. How does this quality of presence compare with your experience during spiritual practice, for example, prayer, or meditation?
6. What do you perceive to be the effect of your sense of attentiveness to God on the directee and the process of spiritual direction?

Appendix F: Demographic Information

1. Name: _____
2. Address: _____

3. Phone number: _____ E-mail address: _____
4. Age: _____
5. Gender: (Please circle) male / female / transgender / _____
6. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Please circle)
 no formal education / elementary school / some high school / high school /
 some vocational college / vocational college / some university / university /
 some grad school / graduate degree / some postgrad / postgraduate degree
 (If applicable) In what field did you earn your degree? _____
7. What religious or spiritual tradition(s) were you raised in, if any? (Circle all that apply)
 Nonreligious/secular / Buddhism / Christianity / Hinduism / Judaism / Islam /
 Wiccan/Pagan/Druid / Unitarian Universalist / Spiritualist / Native American Religion /
 Baha'i / Sikhism / Scientology / Humanist / Deity (Deist) / Taoist / Eckankar
 If not listed, please add: _____
8. What religious or spiritual tradition(s) do you currently practice? (Circle all that apply)
 Nonreligious/secular / Buddhism / Christianity / Hinduism / Judaism / Islam /
 Wiccan/Pagan/Druid / Unitarian Universalist / Spiritualist / Native American Religion /
 Baha'i / Sikhism / Scientology / Humanist / Deity (Deist) / Taoist / Eckankar
 If not listed, please add: _____

9. What is your Christian denominational affiliation? _____

10. Number of years practicing as a spiritual director: _____

11. On average, how many hours per month do you spend practicing spiritual direction?

_____ hours

12. Number of years in personal spiritual direction as a directee: _____

13. Where did you receive your training in spiritual direction?

14. Where do you practice spiritual direction?

15. In what context do you practice spiritual direction? (Please circle all that apply)

As an ordained minister / As a member of a religious order /

As a chaplain or other religious professional / As a lay practitioner

Please specify if needed: _____