

presence

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Spiritual Direction Response to Violence • Opening the Lens of the Heart
Do No Harm: A Case for Professional Boundaries and Supervision in Spiritual Direction
Come, Holy Spirit: Spiritual Direction and the Eucharistic Epiclesis

Contemplation Is Essential for a Fully Human Life

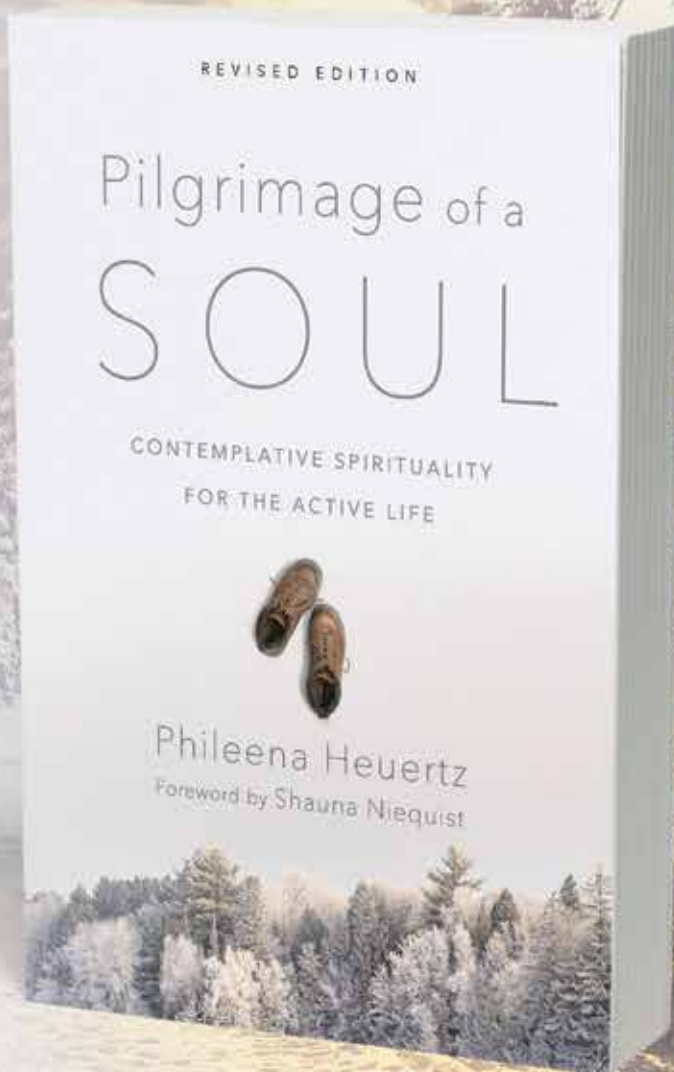
You can only go so far for so long before you find the limits of yourself. Including extended spiritual practices in this revised edition, Phileena Heuertz offers her story and helps us see that contemplation is not just a luxury—it is essential.

Tracing seven movements **from a kind of sleepfulness to a kind of wakefulness**, Phileena shows us that life is a journey that repeats itself as Christ leads us deeper and deeper into our true selves and a truer knowledge of God.

"The astounding book you hold in your hands has the potential to change you in unimaginably deep ways. Read it slowly, paying as much attention to the things that arise within you as you do to the words on the page."

DAVID G. BENNER,
founding director of Cascadia Living Wisdom School,
author of *The Gift of Being Yourself*

PHILEENA HEUERTZ is a spiritual director, yoga instructor, speaker, retreat leader, author, and founding partner of Gravity, a Center for Contemplative Activism.



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Spiritual Directors International Mission Statement

Throughout human history individuals have been inspired to accompany others seeking the Mystery that many name God. SDI is a learning community that educates and supports this service around the world and across traditions.

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A world of many colors

I went running on one of those days when the spirit was willing but the flesh was weak. It took some effort, but once I was outside, running under a cerulean sky, my flesh caught up with my spirit a bit. I knew the sky was “cerulean” because that was one of my favorite crayons when I was a kid. As I headed through my neighborhood toward the park, it seemed as though the color gods (or the crayon manufacturers) had been busy overnight trying out some of the hues that weren’t included in my 24-pack box. Dandelion, Inch Worm, Royal Purple, Scarlet, Raw Sienna, and Forest Green were all on display.

It was May, and we’ve had a lot of rain this year. So the colors were perhaps more vivid than usual. But in the part of California in which I live, we have crayon-colors all year long. I was reminded of this when I read Diane M. Millis’s article, “Opening the Lens of the Heart: Looking Out at the World, Seeing Inside Ourselves” (22). She describes the gusts of wind that “assailed” her on a frigid December morning in Minnesota. I used to live in Minnesota, and I could feel the bite of the wind as I read her description. In the time I lived there, I met many people who, like Millis, saw the beauty in the winterscapes of denuded trees standing in feet-deep snow drifts. But for the life of me, I never understood why “white” was a color in my little box of crayons, and it made even less sense to me to go out walking in it.

Even so, Millis’s winter walk and what she saw that day led her to invite a group of retreatants to compose “heart-awakening” questions based on a photo she took of a hillside of sapling plantings. The question she chose to reflect on was, “What is your plan to protect more hillsides?”

The question is a metaphor for how to accompany people within a community in contrast to one to one spiritual companioning. I think, however, there is also value in asking the question a bit more literally. This year, Australian scientists reported that hundreds of miles of the Great Barrier Reef are dead, killed by overheated seawater. More southerly sections are likely to die soon as evidenced by their bleached-white lack of color.

The world’s coral reefs are not just a colorful tourist

attraction. Hundreds of millions of people in some of the poorest parts of the world live off the fish that are supported by the reefs’ biosystems. “What is your plan to protect more hillsides?” is a question we have to ask about all the areas of the world that are threatened by climate change.

The World Council of Churches said, “When creation is threatened, churches and Christians are called to speak out and act as an expression of their commitment to life, justice and love.”

The Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change states, “We call on all Muslims wherever they may be... to tackle habits, mindsets, and the root causes of climate change, environmental degradation, and the loss of biodiversity...and bring about a resolution to the challenges that now face us.”

Four-hundred-twenty-five rabbis have signed a Rabbinic Letter on the Climate Crisis, which says, “We call for a new sense of *eco-social justice* – a *tikkun olam* that includes *tikkun tevel*, the healing of our planet. We urge those who have been focusing on social justice to address the climate crisis, and those who have been focusing on the climate crisis to address social justice.”

The Global Buddhist Climate Change Collective said, “When the Earth becomes sick, we become sick, because we are part of her.... We have a brief window of opportunity to take action, to preserve humanity from imminent disaster and to assist the survival of the many diverse and beautiful forms of life on Earth.”

Pope Francis wrote, “We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the underprivileged, and at the same time protecting nature.”

As spiritual people, we cannot simply accompany individuals or communities without also accompanying the world in which they live. When the earth becomes sick, we become sick. Our challenge today is to ask ourselves and each other: What is your plan to protect more hillsides? ■

—Nick Wagner



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Do No Harm:

A Case for Professional Boundaries and Supervision in Spiritual Direction

Maria Tattu Bowen

Spiritual direction is a relationship in which we have the temerity to welcome encounters with Divine Mystery. We surrender ourselves to the Spirit, sensing her fiery aliveness in us. We lean into our deepest desires. We discern our call, not infrequently at considerable personal cost. Sometimes, we even take the greatest risk of all: letting ourselves be truly loved and transformed by God. Clearly, engaging in spiritual direction is not for the faint of heart.

Into the complexity and grace, the beauty and fecundity of a relationship with Divine Mystery, spiritual director and spiritual directee alike bring their personal backgrounds, their unconscious assumptions, their wounds, and their gifts.

What has long remained hidden may spring into awareness at any moment. We may race through periods of rapid spiritual transformation. When one person's feelings are suppressed, the other may feel them instead, leaving ambiguity about what belongs to whom. Mysticism may bloom. Mental illness may emerge. Old traumas may reassert themselves. Within this sacred relationship, both parties experience again and again opportunities for growth and healing.

Considerable differences between spiritual director and spiritual directee in culture, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, health status, personality, theology, age, and the like add further intricacy to the process. Sometimes, these differences may feel dynamic and transformative for both parties. In other cases, the clashing of differences may threaten to overwhelm the possibility of a productive relationship.

Conversely, an abundance of similarity in background may give rise to parallel processes that baffle even as they stir compassion.

I feel awestruck at the power and beauty, the grace and healing potential inherent in the spiritual direction relationship. I also have a healthy respect for its dynamism and the frequency with which it triggers spiritual directors in places of wounding.

Amidst spiritual direction's regenerative chaos, creating and maintaining clear professional boundaries and receiving regular supervision allow us to negotiate the spiritual direction relationship safely. Underestimating our need for these proactive measures is tantamount to underestimating the powerful processes at work in spiritual direction.

This article makes a case for establishing and maintaining professional boundaries. It explores the boundary between what spiritual direction is and what it is not. It defines the terms *boundary*, *boundary crossing*, and *boundary violation*. It offers examples of both typical and recommended professional boundaries for spiritual directors drawn from a Western, Christian context and invites readers to adapt them to fit their own setting.

Finally, it acknowledges that sometimes prudence dictates the crossing of a professional boundary, detailing a discernment process to help spiritual directors negotiate boundary crossings and offering a hypothetical case study as an illustration.

A Case for Professional Boundaries

In the North American Christian context where I minister, professional counselors are typically licensed and professional ministers ordained. However, most spiritual directors and supervisors are neither licensed nor ordained.

A wide variety of opinions exist among spiritual directors about whether or not they consider themselves professionals. While some do proceed as professionals, others insist that what they offer is more casual spiritual friendship.

Formation programs for spiritual directors certify not so much the skills of graduates, but the completion of a particular program or internship. Graduating from such a program makes one a trained spiritual director, not a certified one.

The fact is, among spiritual directors and supervisors, there are no formal, widely agreed-upon standards as to what constitutes adequate training. In addition, there is no agreement about which skills must be demonstrated for proficiency. Clearly, this does not help us much with the question of professionalism.

However, we do have the blessing of a document that



supports professional standards, the *Guidelines for Ethical Conduct*, written and published by Spiritual Directors International (SDI). I feel grateful for the wisdom reflected in this document and for its call to integrity.

The frequency with which spiritual directors choose to ignore selected aspects of this document makes me wonder, though, about whether the word *guidelines*, as applied to the ethical conduct of spiritual directors, carries with it a strong enough imperative.

The *Oxford Dictionaries* website defines a *guideline* as “a general rule, principle, or piece of advice.” Contrast the title *Guidelines for Ethical Conduct* from SDI with the American Psychological Association’s *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct*.

Unlike the generality implicit in the word *guidelines*, *Oxford Dictionaries* notes that a code is “a set of rules and standards adhered to by a society, class, or individual.”

The title *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* feels solid and mandatory to me, and I wonder whether for some spiritual directors the title *Guidelines for Ethical Conduct* feels, by comparison, a little wispy and optional.

That said, the generality of a word like *guidelines* in SDI’s *Guidelines for Ethical Conduct* allows room for interpretation by people from across spiritual traditions and social locations. While this fits for an international, interreligious organization like SDI, it is important that spiritual directors not use the flexibility built into the *Guidelines for Ethical Conduct* for the purposes of inclusion as an excuse for ethical laxity.

I have trained spiritual directors and supervisors for many years, in addition to having the privilege of maintaining spiritual direction and supervision relationships for decades both within the United States and internationally. This experience has taught me that, in general, those who behave as professional spiritual directors treat SDI’s *Guidelines for Ethical Conduct* as if it were indeed a code, rather than a set of guidelines. They carry with them a sense of ethical accountability that spiritual directors who describe more casual spiritual friendships do not necessarily share.

Apropos of this, I feel heartened that the Australian Ecumenical Council for Spiritual Direction (AECSD) has created its own statement about ethics standards. The name of this document? *Code of Ethics for Spiritual Directors*.

Further, the AECSD’s *Formation Guidelines* (2015) “encourage directors to practice professionally by companionship their directees within a safe space protected by ethical boundaries” (Auer, 53).

Considering oneself a professional spiritual director has nothing to do with the number of spiritual directees one has; rather, that designation rests on the spiritual director’s willingness to adhere to professional standards.

Personal boundaries between friends differ significantly from professional boundaries for spiritual directors. If in rejecting professionalism, spiritual directors free themselves from the ethical standards that inhere within a professional status, then they do so at their own peril and that of their spiritual directees as well.

The discussion that follows assumes that *every* spiritual director is a professional when it comes to the ethical imperative to establish and maintain professional boundaries and to receive regular supervision.

The Boundary That Defines Spiritual Direction

Because there is no certifying board for spiritual directors that delineates the shape of our practice, considerable confusion swirls around the boundary between what spiritual direction is and what it is not.

Consequently, before entering into spiritual direction relationships spiritual directors must, in conversation with their own formation programs and supervisors, define for themselves and their spiritual directees the ministry or services they offer.

If you have not already done so, consider taking time to contemplate the beautiful, evocative descriptions of spiritual direction on SDI’s website. Drawn from Buddhist, Christian, Eastern-Philosophical, Islamic, and Jewish perspectives, these definitions may help us distinguish what best defines our own practice of spiritual direction.

Listening and responding within a specific definition of spiritual direction create a clear boundary that reminds us to practice with integrity. Upon such a definition, we may build a covenant to share with spiritual directees. Such a covenant may not only guide our practice, it can, if need be, call our spiritual directees and us back to our shared understanding of our relationship and its reason for being. In our desire for accountability, we may even bring our covenant to our supervisor for review.

I define spiritual direction as a healing ministry both



“Indian Summer” — Ginny Piech Street

similar to and different from counseling. In spiritual direction, we listen and respond to the invitation of the Holy Spirit in all dimensions of being (body, mind, emotions, and intuition) and in every arena of life (intrapersonal, interpersonal, systemic, and environmental) with the

intention of participating in the reign of God. That is my definition of spiritual direction, and I am sticking to it.

Professional Boundaries Typical in One North American Spiritual Direction Context

Below you will find a list of professional boundaries typical in my North American spiritual direction context. Some readers may disagree with what I have included here and others may notice that I have overlooked a boundary essential to their context.

My intention in sharing this list is to start a conversation that I hope you will continue with me on Shutterfly: <https://httpsprofessionalboundariesspdir.shutterfly.com/>. This will be similar to the discussions that follow SDI webinars. After signing up for a free Shutterfly account at shutterfly.com, go to the above URL. There you can request membership to the discussion site. Once it is granted, we can continue our conversation, and you will be able to download free materials relevant to this topic.

Definitions Related to Professional Boundaries in Spiritual Direction

Boundaries: A series of formal, mutual agreements between spiritual director and spiritual directee designed to keep both parties grounded and safe while navigating the spiritual direction relationship.

Boundary crossing: The preferably discerned, sometimes unavoidable, traversing of a boundary.

Boundary violation: A crossing of one or more boundaries that harms the spiritual directee, the spiritual director, or both. ■



- ◆ **What spiritual direction is and is not:** Typically the spiritual director's personal definition is formed in conversation with SDI and in the context of the spiritual community(ies) in which the spiritual director practices.
- ◆ **Reason for meeting:** Typically spiritual direction is offered alone, and sometimes spiritual direction is offered along with another practice like psychotherapy, energy healing, or body work, but then only with explicit agreement by both parties.
- ◆ **Duration of meeting:** Typically an hour.
- ◆ **Frequency of meeting:** Typically once a month.
- ◆ **Contact between meetings:** Typically none or rare, meaning few if any dual relationships.
- ◆ **Physical contact:** Typically none or only at the initiation of a spiritual directee and even then only if the spiritual director is comfortable hugging the spiritual directee.
- ◆ **Gift giving and receiving:** Typically no expensive gifts given or received by either party, and few if any inexpensive ones.
- ◆ **Self-disclosure:** Typically extensive self-disclosure by spiritual directee and infrequent self-disclosure by the spiritual director, with spiritual director's self-disclosure tending toward sharing a feeling or image, rather than sharing a personal story.
- ◆ **Clothing:** Typically simple and devoid of sexual innuendo for both parties.
- ◆ **Place:** Typically a quiet location of the spiritual director's choosing that protects the spiritual directee's confidentiality.
- ◆ **Confidentiality:** Typically spiritual directors share nothing about the spiritual directee outside of the relationship, barring an emergency that requires disclosure (such as a state-mandated reporting to protective services).
- ◆ **Size of practice:** Typically spiritual directors attend to their own limits of time, energy, and attention and restrict their practice accordingly.

Though professional boundaries appropriate to my context may not fit your ministry environment, perhaps this list may spark your own consideration of which boundaries would work for you.

Once we have established a set of professional boundaries, it is imperative that we make space for the fact that

situations arise infrequently in which it may do less harm to the spiritual direction relationship to cross a professional boundary than it would to maintain it. Having a plan in place for discernment around boundary crossing is crucial for spiritual directors, and you will find such a plan below.

Examples of Boundary Crossing in Spiritual Direction

Sometimes the crossing of professional boundaries happens outside a spiritual director's control. For example, a spiritual directee may join his spiritual director's religious institution, creating a dual relationship. Or perhaps a spiritual director habitually maintains a specific boundary throughout her practice, only to realize that in one particular relationship this boundary begins to create more problems than it solves.

At these times context-specific professional boundaries provide a starting place from which to discern a way forward when conditions change. This new way forward can, on occasion, travel across a boundary.

Just as the typical boundaries proposed above do not fit every context, the boundary crossings examples below must be discerned and would not be appropriate in every spiritual direction relationship.

- ◆ **Crossing a time boundary:** Agreeing to extend the session by five minutes if the hour ends at a critical moment.
- ◆ **Crossing a relationship boundary:**
 - Participating in the same spiritual community as a spiritual directee.
 - Shopping at a market where a spiritual directee works.
 - Running into a spiritual directee outside of a session and having a short conversation.
- ◆ **Crossing a frequency boundary:** Meeting twice a month for a couple of months during a stressful passage in a spiritual directee's life.
- ◆ **Crossing a gift boundary:** Receiving a small token of gratitude such as baked goods, a book, or a symbolic item to mark a religious holiday.
- ◆ **Crossing a confidentiality boundary:** Submitting, at a spiritual directee's request, a reference letter to a spiritual direction training program the spiritual directee is applying to.



Discerning Boundary Crossings

Because one person's boundary crossing is another person's boundary violation, care must be taken in discerning when it is appropriate to cross a professional boundary in spiritual direction. Here, the field of psychotherapy can offer assistance.

Written for psychotherapists, Ofer Zur's *Boundaries in Psychotherapy: Ethical and Clinical Explorations* encourages the weighing of four types of factors when discerning a boundary crossing: the client factors, setting of therapy, therapy factors, and therapist factors.

Analogously, spiritual directors might consider the following four factors adapted from Zur: spiritual directee factors, setting factors, spiritual practice factors, and spiritual director factors.

Spiritual Directee Factors

Spiritual directee factors that Zur suggests considering when discerning a boundary crossing may include culture, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, health status, personality, theology, age, and past experience, including history of trauma (chapter 3).

For example, with regard to health status, a spiritual directee's extended hospitalization may provide an opportunity for discernment between spiritual director and spiritual directee about whether the spiritual director will visit, and, if so, under what circumstances. A visit without payment would cross a boundary regarding dual relationships. A discernment might be made that, under the current circumstances, such a visit would be appropriate.

Or perhaps the discernment is to cross the boundary of place instead, changing the regular setting of the session from the spiritual director's office to the spiritual directee's hospital room, in which case the spiritual directee would pay her usual stipend.

This example illustrates the insidious nature of boundary crossings and the fact that one often flows from another. Imagine that the spiritual director crosses the dual relationship boundary or the boundary of place and is now sitting in the spiritual directee's hospital room. Soon, the spiritual directee's partner arrives unexpectedly, occasioning some awkward moments in which the spiritual directee tries to explain the presence of an unfamiliar person in this intimate setting. Now the confidentiality boundary may be crossed as well.

Another example of spiritual directee factors that could influence boundary crossing occurs when hugging or gift-giving are regular and exuberant practices in a spiritual directee's culture. In such cases, significant meaning may be attached to a spiritual director's refusal to receive a hug or a gift.

Further, if an introverted spiritual directee sees his spiritual director on the street, he may choose not to acknowledge her. Conversely, an extroverted spiritual directee might cross the street to say hi and introduce the spiritual director to her family as well. In this way, a spiritual directee's personality can factor into discernment around boundary crossing.

In addition, spiritual directees who have experienced traumatic boundary violations such as physical violence may respond in surprising ways to the crossing of certain boundaries. This alone provides an excellent reason for spiritual directors to avoid initiating hugs, which have the potential to produce a post-traumatic stress response in people whose physical boundaries have been violated.

Further, it is not only the crossing of physical boundaries that may feel troubling to spiritual directees who have had their boundaries violated. They may feel safest when all professional boundaries are kept clean and clear and boundary crossing is avoided entirely.

Conversely, for some spiritual directees, previous boundary violations may have left them feeling unaware of their own personal boundaries, which may leave them unclear about a spiritual director's need for professional boundaries as well. Not infrequently in such cases, spiritual directors may find themselves reminding spiritual directees about the start and stop times of sessions and reiterating the need for minimal contact between sessions.

Setting Factors

Setting factors to consider when discerning the appropriateness of a particular boundary crossing include the characteristics of the place where we meet spiritual directees, like churches, religious communities, schools, home offices, small towns, and big cities. Zur refers here to the frequency of unavoidable encounters and dual relationships that may occur in places like small towns, religious communities, school campuses, and the like (chapter 3).

In certain seasons of my own practice, I have chosen to meet spiritual directees in my home. This crosses a



boundary around self-disclosure, requiring a great deal of it from the very beginning. The moment the spiritual directee arrives for a first session, he encounters one's pets or lack thereof, one's style of decorating, taste in art, quality of housekeeping, and perceived economic status. The spiritual directee may use the bathroom, perhaps noticing along the way a collection of family photos in the hallway or an open door to a child's bedroom, or perhaps seeing a hazardous waste container in the bathroom used by an ill family member.

Seeing spiritual directees in one's home introduces more data and curiosity about the spiritual director into the relationship than a spiritual director might normally prefer. For example, the things a spiritual directee notices in your home might influence discussions about stipend. They may give rise to questions about your relationship status, the ages of your children, or even whose birthday occasioned the balloons in your living room.

For spiritual directors, meeting spiritual directees at home might lead to a sense of their presence and influence on the spiritual director's personal space, even outside of sessions. Imagine, for example, that a spiritual director with a home office has a family member who takes life drawing classes and likes to display this work at home. Though the spiritual director may otherwise appreciate this art, she may be faced with replacing drawings of nudes on the wall before each spiritual directee arrives.

In addition, a spiritual director might grow concerned about the presence of a loving cat who sits on her lap during sessions at home, even as a spiritual directee talks about how distraught he feels at the death of his beloved dog. Or she might feel a subtle pressure to display Christmas decorations in her home even during a season when she is in mourning and might not otherwise do so.

Because meeting a spiritual directee at home is itself a significant boundary crossing, extra care must be taken to maintain the rest of the professional boundaries in the relationship so as not to slide into a multiplicity of boundary crossings that once added together might cause harm.

Spiritual Practice Factors

According to Zur, spiritual practice factors to consider when discerning the appropriateness of a professional boundary crossing include factors around the particular

type of spiritual direction one offers and the characteristics of the spirituality that provides the context for the spiritual direction relationship (chapter 3). It also includes the quality, intensity, mutual respect, and duration of relationship with a particular spiritual directee.

For example, imagine a small spiritual community that exchanges hugs as a matter of course during worship, then shares a meal together after services. A spiritual direction relationship that exists in the context of such a community would involve a significant dual relationship, giving the spiritual director and spiritual directee alike cause for careful discernment. It might also tend to feel normal to one or both of them to hug one another or share a meal together, given the shared context of their shared spiritual practice.

Though this sense of normalcy may seem to indicate that this dual relationship is not a boundary problem, I have learned to be curious about a sense of normalcy when it comes to boundary crossings and encourage directors to make use of their supervisors, even—and especially—when the boundary crossing they are contemplating feels normal.

Another example of spiritual practice factors includes the spiritual director who practices spiritual direction along with another healing modality. For example, a spiritual director who covenants with a spiritual directee to offer Reiki is crossing at least two boundaries: one between spiritual direction and Reiki and the other regarding physical contact in spiritual direction.

As noted earlier, boundary crossing can be insidious, so spiritual directors who design a practice that spans boundaries would do well both to make especially careful use of supervision and to avoid crossing additional boundaries if at all possible.

Spiritual Director Factors

According to Zur, spiritual director factors to consider when discerning a boundary crossing mirror the spiritual directee factors noted above, including culture, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, health status, personality, theology, age, and past experience, including history of trauma (chapter 3).

For example, I am an introvert and find that clear professional boundaries support me in my need for quiet, uncomplicated listening space. For this reason alone I find myself more reluctant to cross certain boundaries than



some of the more extroverted spiritual directors I know.

Further, my personal history leaves me most comfortable with professional boundaries that tend toward the strong side. As noted above, this may not always be a virtue. However, as a spiritual director, I have to take seriously my preference for strong boundaries. If I am squirming with discomfort because I have crossed a professional boundary in deference to a spiritual directee's wishes, I may find it far more challenging to maintain the grounded spacious presence I need to listen to this spiritual directee and sense the Spirit's invitation.

Weighing the Four Factors to Discern Appropriate Boundary Crossings: A Case Study

Zur invites therapists to conduct a risk-benefit analysis (chapter 4) in light of his four factors when considering whether or not to cross a boundary in therapy. I find this risk-benefit analysis useful for spiritual directors as well and I approach it as a contemplative discernment.

Further, when faced with more complicated discernments, we can bring them to our supervisor, who ideally is both an expert in helping us see factors that dwell outside of our consciousness and richly resourced with decades of experience in spiritual direction and supervision.

The following hypothetical case study illustrates a boundary discernment and highlights the weighing of risks and benefits in light of the four factors proposed above. At issue in this discernment: crossing a dual relationship boundary to attend a spiritual directee's wedding.

Spiritual Directee Factors

Imagine that Alex is a self-described gay man in your spiritual direction practice who is deeply engaged in his own spiritual life and community. He has been partnered for many years with Adrian. Alex belongs to a church that has not embraced marriage for same-sex partners and lives in a place where the law only recently allowed him to marry.

Alex had spoken at length during spiritual direction about the ongoing anguish he had experienced over his inability to marry Adrian legally, especially now that he is getting older and his health is deteriorating. In this session, Alex rejoices at the change in the law allowing him to marry Adrian. He lets you know that he has engaged a minister in a different denomination to preside at the wedding and invites you, his spiritual director, to his wedding.

Setting Factors

You meet Alex in your office on the property of a church whose pastor regularly presides at LGBTQ weddings.

Spiritual Practice Factors

Alex has been in your spiritual direction practice for the last ten years. Your shared relationship feels to you honest, mature, grounded, and mutually respectful. You sense that Alex shares this assessment. You both belong to Christian churches, yet Alex's is more conservative than yours.

Spiritual Director Factors

As Alex's spiritual director, you too have felt anguish over his not being able to marry either legally or in his own church. As a member of a church whose pastor presides at LGBTQ weddings, you have found it especially hard to bear witness to Alex's pain around church. You rejoice that this big impediment has been removed for Alex and Adrian and sense the grace that is flowing here.

In addition, the thought of attending any spiritual directee's wedding makes you extremely uncomfortable. You are an introvert and will not know anyone. You dread negotiating confidentiality while engaging in typical wedding conversations about how you know Alex. You feel concerned about the wedding gift for reasons both financial- and boundary-related.

Risk of Attending the Wedding

In this case, you do not see a particular risk with either spiritual directee factors or setting factors.

While considering spiritual practice factors, you realize that sessions preceding or following the wedding might be more taken up with talk of wedding details than they would if you didn't attend the wedding and wonder whether this might be a distraction.

The spiritual director factors are among the most problematic to you, because you notice a growing discomfort with negotiating a social setting that is complete with strangers, dual relationships, confidentiality issues, and pressure around choosing and purchasing a wedding gift.

Risk of Not Attending the Wedding

Here, you sense the greatest risk around spiritual directee and spiritual practice factors. You wonder what it would be like for Alex if you were to decline his invita-



tion, especially given your long relationship; your many conversations about his painful history of being denied the right to marry; and his sharing with you that your compassionate acceptance has helped him sense God's love for him during a period when he felt devastated by his church's judgment. You also wonder whether declining the invitation would leave Alex feeling disappointed or even damage his trust.

Spiritual director factors come into play here as well, because in addition to your reservations you also sense a potential experience of personal loss and regret if you decline the invitation.

Benefit of Attending the Wedding

When considering spiritual practice and spiritual directee factors, the benefit of attending the wedding seems clear and undeniable. It brings an arduous, painful journey to completion for Alex and Adrian personally and for Alex in his spiritual direction relationship with you as well.

What is more, when considering spiritual director factors, you find yourself beginning to feel excited about attending the wedding to witness and celebrate the completion of this leg of Alex's journey with Adrian, with God, with the church, with the government, and with you. The start of a whole new journey feels nigh.

Benefit of Not Attending the Wedding

Not attending the wedding would reduce boundary challenges considerably and decrease your tension around spiritual director factors. It would also protect Alex's confidentiality and allow you to listen to Alex's experience of the wedding without holding your own potentially conflicting impressions of it.

Supervision Visit

Having gotten this far with the risk-benefit analysis, perhaps your discernment is not yet clear. I imagine that bringing the case to your supervisor might yield an increased sense of the benefit of attending the wedding, or a stronger invitation to consider your own needs. It also may open a third way that maximizes benefits of accepting the invitation while minimizing risks, such as attending the wedding but not the reception.

Closing Remarks

Inherent in this discussion of professional boundaries is a most important fact to consider: The inequality of power that exists in the spiritual direction relationship. Even the words *spiritual director* and *spiritual directee* emphasize this power differential, framing spiritual directors as leaders and spiritual directees as followers.

While in practice, power dynamics in the spiritual direction relationship may appear far more subtle than these words imply, the fact that we continue to use them to describe what we do communicates something important to us and to our spiritual directees about the power differential in the spiritual direction relationship.

I notice that some spiritual directors attempt to shrug off discussions about power by asserting that "the Holy Spirit is the spiritual director." This troubles me.

I agree wholeheartedly that the spiritual director's ministry involves exploring the Holy Spirit's movement in the life of a spiritual directee and inviting the spiritual directee's response. However, I have too often encountered beginning spiritual directors whose insistence that "the Holy Spirit is the spiritual director" allows them to dismiss from consciousness the power they wield—and with it their own potential to cause harm.

We do this to the spiritual directee's detriment. To underestimate our own power in this relationship is to underestimate our spiritual directee's vulnerability and to minimize our own responsibility to do no harm. In addition, to pretend that the power differential disappears because the Holy Spirit is the spiritual director is to begin any discernment around boundaries with a flawed interpretation about the nature of the spiritual direction relationship.

While an examination of the power dynamics in the helping professions is beyond the scope of this article, many excellent books have been written on the subject, some of which are referenced in the bibliography below.

In closing, I urge us as spiritual directors and supervisors to take seriously the challenges inherent in the creative, regenerative, grace-filled, and sometimes challenging spiritual direction relationship; to behave as professionals who adhere to ethical standards; to acknowledge the power differential we have with spiritual directees; to create professional boundaries appropriate to our setting; to exercise caution and discernment around crossing the boundaries we establish; and to receive



regular supervision so that we have a second pair of eyes on our spiritual direction practice.

Specifically, we would do well to choose a supervisor who has rich experience with both the challenges and possibilities in spiritual direction; one who supports us in creating boundaries that ground our practice; one who anticipates and names potential boundary issues that may lie outside our own awareness; and one who does not hesitate to intervene with us to prevent harm. ■

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Debate

Alone above the gods decry
we made you all
you live or die
but by our hand.
Believe and you exist.

Below the clouds, the voices rise
if we believe
you cannot die
we feed your immortality.
Exist in our belief.

Creator and created be
each to the other bound.
It is in learning to be One
that sacredness is found. ■

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