

Frequently asked Questions and Answers (Q & A) New website proposal for MSMC

Q 1. What is the difference between Spiritual Direction and Pastoral Counseling?

A 1. Spiritual Direction: The practice of Spiritual Direction/Companioning is designed for strengthening one's relationship with God and one's ability to listen to the Holy Spirit's nudgings. The Director or Guide is trained to listen for the presence of or evidence of God's work in a person's life, in the past and in the present; and to bear witness when the seeker feels abandoned by God or others. The Director may introduce the Directee to new spiritual practices that may be helpful, based on their learning style, Enneagram type, and circumstances in the present chapter of their lives. Prayer and silence are important aspects of spiritual direction. The Director may share scripture passages or books to read as prompts for further reflection. The primary focus in spiritual direction is not problem solving, it is "walking with" persons on their life's journey and is meant to be an ongoing part of a person's spiritual life. The Director refers persons for counseling or therapy if unresolved issues keep presenting themselves, especially deep trauma. Meetings occur monthly.

Pastoral Counseling: Pastoral Counseling is *"a unique form of psychotherapy which uses spiritual resources as well as psychological understanding for healing and growth. It is provided by **certified pastoral counselors**, who are not only mental health professionals but who have also had in-depth religious and/or theological training."* (Counselingcenter.org) This counselor may be a pastor, a licensed social worker, or chaplain.

Pastoral Counseling promotes healing and empowerment of individuals, couples, families, and congregations/communities by nurturing and supporting the faith journey, sacred experiences, and the spiritual life during oftentimes overwhelming daily lives. A Pastoral Counselor offers spiritual support, emotional prioritization and soul tending amidst practical life issues— including but not limited to job loss, financial crisis, relationship struggles, death and loss, faith crisis, ethical dilemmas. Pastoral counseling honors each person's unique culture, values, philosophy, spirituality, and faith journey while addressing the deeper soul issues of faith, forgiveness, purpose and meaning. Pastoral counseling may be short term or long term.

Q 2. Spiritual Direction and Pastoral Counseling both involve a lot of listening on the part of the director/companion/pastor. Why is listening so important?

A 2. Deep listening is key to understanding the other. *"Listening is not a passive response to the crisis we now face. It is, rather, an urgent and necessary action, and one of the most potent tools at our disposal to begin a process of remediation, change and healing. It can provide the wisdom and understanding to see a way forward through taking action that may rectify, rather than intensify, the divisions in our societies."* (Cynthia Bailey Manns, Chair of Spiritual Director's International Coordinating Council. July 2020.)

Q 3. How will I know if the Spiritual Director or Pastoral Counselor is trustworthy?

A 3. Both the Spiritual Direction organization affiliation and Pastoral Counseling or Social Work Code of Ethics will be included with their contact information on the MSMC website. Their training will be included as well. Spiritual Directors and Pastoral Counselors are supervised by peers based on their respective Code of Ethics. Each counselor on our list will be expected to keep up to date on Healthy Boundary training. Reporting abuse of power in these relationships would be like reporting congregational pastors who break Healthy Boundaries. The conference has a specific process for reporting and dealing with such violations.