

Significance of Spiritual Direction in Diocesan Priestly Formation

Jesu Lourdu Wilson

Institute of Formative Spirituality and Counselling DVK, Bengaluru

Abstract

Priestly formation plays a vital role in the training of Catholic priests. Spiritual direction offers great assistance in priestly formation towards one's personal, spiritual and pastoral life. In the priestly formation, spiritual development has not received the attention it deserves. Today, it is a challenge to find a suitable, trained director for spiritual direction. There are studies that affirm that seminarians complained of a lack of effective spiritual guidance and prayer experiences during the formation period. Many seminarians do not show interest in spiritual direction because they are not aware of its usefulness. A spiritual director can be an invaluable resource for a person seeking to grow in holiness and knowledge of the spiritual life. Many diocesan clergy today face difficulty helping people with prayer and spiritual life. In this background, there is a need for a study on the significance of spiritual direction for the diocesan priestly formation. The present article aims to provide guidelines for a spiritual director to be implemented in diocesan priestly formation, including an understanding of spiritual direction, its needs, goals, and challenges. The relevance and recommendations of spiritual direction for the diocesan priestly formation are discussed.

Keywords: Spiritual Direction, Spiritual Director, Discernment, Spiritual Maturity, Priestly Training, Priestly Formation, Counselling, Confession, Pastoral Ministry

Introduction

Spiritual direction is a term rooted in the collective wisdom and legacy of the Catholic Church for an effective spiritual life. Spiritual direction encompasses the ways, methods, and processes of maturing in Christ consciousness to live a life of Christian authenticity. It is the faith-praxis handed down by the Christian ascetic and monastic communities, further developed by eminent religious leaders, theologians, and spiritual writers. Spiritual direction helps the priestly candidates relate personally to God, allowing God to relate to them and enabling them to live the consequences of that relationship. Spiritual direction has always been held in prominence for effective diocesan priestly and religious formation and maturity. Spiritual direction offers great assistance in priestly formation towards one's personal, spiritual and pastoral life.

Understanding of Spiritual Direction

Spiritual direction is a historic, practical and classic ministry of the Catholic Church. St. Gregory the Great, in his *Book of Pastoral Rule*, acclaimed that spiritual direction is the “art of arts and science of sciences,” and the care of souls is the art of all arts (*ars artium regimen animarum*). The term spiritual direction is used alongside multiple terms, such as spiritual guidance, spiritual mentoring, spiritual accompaniment, soul accompaniment, soul care, soul friendship, spiritual advice, spiritual counselling, pastoral counselling, or religious counselling. Etymologically, spiritual direction comes from two words, spiritual and direction. The term spiritual originates from the Latin words *spirare*, meaning to breathe; *spiritus*, meaning the soul; and *spiritualitas*, meaning the state of being spiritual. So, spiritual is defined as “the state of being dedicated to God, religion, spiritual things and values” (Nemeck & Coombs, 1985, p. 25). The word direction comes from the Latin word, *de-regere*, to guide and *directio*, which means to make straight. So, direction is defined as “the activity of directing someone, or the experience of being directed” (Barry & Connolly, 1982, p. 10). The term “direction” can be confusing sometimes. Direction does not mean a person is forced to make a decision; rather, it is a “collaborative act” between a director and a directee. Mannath states, “Spiritual direction is not what the name tends to suggest. It is not that A directs B and A suggests what B should do in his/her life. It is more of a ‘spiritual accompaniment’” (Pai, 2018, p. 50).

In classical spirituality, spiritual direction is also known as soul care (*cura animarum*). The word soul care means the care and cure of the souls. Cure is meant, “to restore the well-being that has been lost” (Moon & Benner, 2004, p. 11). Care means supporting someone's well-being. So, soul care aims at the well-being of the soul. The following definitions may bring out the meaning of spiritual direction. Bary and Connolly define spiritual direction, “It is a help, given by one Christian to another, which enables that person to pay attention and respond to God’s personal communication, to grow in intimacy with God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship” (Barry, 1992, p. 91). Chatfield defines spiritual direction as “two people meeting regularly to focus on the spiritual life of one of them, with an agreed boundary of time, place and subject matter” (Chatfield & Rooms, 2019, p. 3). Malloy defines, “It is about what we really, deeply and truly desire in life and what God wants and desires from us, and it is a balance between life self-determined and led by the Spirit” (Malloy, 2017, p. 35). Therefore, spiritual direction is seeking guidance for life directed by the Holy Spirit. Spiritual direction is today understood as spiritual accompaniment for various reasons. Pope Francis insisted on the need for the “art of accompaniment” in *Evangelii Gaudium* (Francis, 2013, p. 132). Pai affirms, “Spiritual Accompaniment is a better term than Spiritual Direction” (Pai, 2018, p. 50). The word accompaniment comes from the Latin word, *cum-panio*, which means to walk along with, or the one who has the bread in common (Kannamundayil, 2011, p. 56). Spiritual accompaniment is a process in which one person, namely the guide, walks with another, the person guided and helps him to respond more fully to God. In the field of education and formation, the word accompaniment has greater significance today. Many laymen and women of non-Christian faith and non-believers feel discomfort with the term spiritual direction, because it is seen as an explicit term of the Catholic faith. The word direction also implies a “hierarchical mindset and authoritative advice” (Thorne, 2012, p. 331). So, many people prefer the term spiritual accompaniment. Spiritual direction differs from counselling and confession. The primary difference arises because spiritual direction can take place only in a shared religious or faith context. Spiritual direction is seen as a “charism and a gift from God” (Tayler, 2014, p. 120). While counselling addresses psychological well-being, spiritual direction fosters a relationship with the Divine, and the sacrament of confession focuses on the acknowledgement and forgiveness of sins.

Biblical Foundations of Spiritual Direction

Though spiritual direction is specifically a monastic contribution to Christian spirituality, its elements are found in both the Old and New Testament traditions. The word spiritual direction is not found in the Old Testament. The primary reason is that the Jewish community counted primarily on *Yahweh* as their director and guide, “You guide me with your counsel” (Ps 73:24). The people of Israel did not choose any man to be the director, but God himself as their “sole director” (Ashley, 1995, p. 75). Next to God, the Scripture and the statutes of God were the counsellors for the Jewish people, “Your decrees are my delight; they are my counsellors” (Ps 119:24). Though the people of Israel considered *Yahweh* as their supreme guide, they listened to the priests, elders, wise men and women and *rabbis*, teachers of the law. The book *Wisdom of Sirach* invites people to stand in the assembly of elders and cling to their wisdom (Sir 6:34). Spiritual direction was conveyed through models such as prophets. The prophets explicitly guided their people: Moses led the Israelites, and the prophet Nathan admonished King David (2 Sam 12:1-15). There is a beautiful direction between young Samuel and priest Eli (1 Sam 3:1-9). Another beautiful direction is found between Prophet Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 19:19). The New Testament portrays “Jesus as the supreme spiritual guide” (Kuttianimattathil, 2014, p. 12). The spiritual direction of Jesus was a liberation process, involving “*metanoia*,” a “new creation” (Nariculam, 2004, p. 342). Jesus supported the twelve in their difficult times (Lk 6:1-5). Jesus gave the experience of God and taught them to pray (Lk 11:1). Jesus prayed for the twelve to the Father to sanctify them in the truth (Jn 17:17). Jesus entrusted his mission to the twelve (Mt 28:19). Jesus initiated, built upon and released his friendship with the twelve and the seventy-two followers. He knew them, walked with them and “watched their life” (Kreider, 2008, p. 114). St. Paul was closely associated with spiritual direction. St. Paul got direction from Ananias, which was a spiritual guidance (Acts 9:10-19). Ananias helped Paul to understand what his blindness was and made him realise God’s call for a new, “transformed way of life” (Barrette, 2004, p. 57). Later, Paul himself presents himself as a spiritual father (1 Cor 4:15-16). Paul’s letters to Philemon, Timothy, and Titus are filled with spiritual advice for becoming adults in faith. The early Church found guidance from the apostles and the Church fathers. The Church members were formed and guided through the liturgical, sacramental and community life.

Historical Foundations of Spiritual Direction

The history of spiritual direction dates back to monastic times. The practice of spiritual direction began with the early Christian ascetics who fled to the deserts of Egypt, Syria, and Palestine in the third century. Monasteries became “spiritual centres where numerous men and women sought spiritual direction” (Kannamundayil, 2011, p. 46). In Egyptian deserts, abbas (fathers) and ammas (mothers) became known for their holiness and spiritual wisdom. The *Pneumatikos pater*, the spiritual father, is a concept of monasticism. St. Antony the Great became the first desert hermit. Many Christian men and women followed his example and started monastic life. Monasticism had the characteristics of spiritual direction. The first wave of monasticism considered God as the only spiritual director, with spiritual direction focused on “quietness” and remaining silent in prayer. The second wave of spiritual direction was guidance in the cell.

The newcomer to the desert had to build a cell for himself. One of the earlier texts states, “Go, sit in your cell and give your body in pledge to the walls of your cell, and do not come out of it” (Byrne, 1990, p. 7). Texts written by great monks characterised the third wave of spiritual direction. The texts contained the practical sayings of the monks for the hermits and coenobites. The sayings directed the dos and don'ts of a monk in the cell. The scriptures guided the fourth wave of spiritual direction. The thought of a monk was shaped by constant reading and by learning the Bible by heart, in particular, the repetition of psalms. Epiphanius of Cyprus urged the monks to read the scriptures to safeguard against sin.

Coptic monks considered the scriptures the bread of heaven to satisfy their hunger. The fifth wave of spiritual direction was the guidance from the desert fathers. “Speak a word to me,” was the request of the newcomers to the experienced monks (Leech, 1994, p. 37). The newcomer imitated a master and followed his instructions without any questions. Even after the father died, the disciples remained his sons forever, and the relationship was permanent. In medieval times, spiritual guidance was offered to individuals and groups. From the eleventh century, the custom books, known as constitutions, became the source book. After the Council of Trent, spiritual direction became more widespread. Joseph Guibert (1877-1942) described three types of direction. Sacramental direction is carried out in the sacrament of reconciliation; pastoral direction takes place through catechising and

homilies; and spiritual direction is meant for people who strive for higher perfection. Pope Pius XII, in *Menti Nostrae* (1950), insisted that without spiritual guides, a Christian cannot duly respond to the impulses of the Spirit.

Historical Models of Spiritual Direction

In the history of the Church, many models of spiritual direction have evolved, such as the Ignatian, Benedictine, Carmelite, Franciscan, and De Sales models. The Ignatian model was offered by St. Ignatius (1491-1556) through his *Spiritual Exercises*. There are four phases for four weeks. The first week is an invitation to the purgative process, with an awareness of “to realise one’s sinfulness” (Tayler, 2014, p. 61). The second week invites the illuminative process to learn and to imitate Jesus. The third week is the invitation to surrender the choices to Christ through his passion and death. The fourth week starts with the unitive process. It is time to wait for the resurrection of Christ to experience joy and hope. The Benedictine model was offered by Augustin Baker (1575-1641), an English Benedictine, who stressed the need for spiritual guides for those who aspire to perfection. He advocated that a person be more open to God and become less dependent on human support in spiritual direction. St. Francis de Sales wrote extensively on the importance of direction in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*. He spoke on the necessity of a guide to progress in spiritual life, as a sick person calls on a doctor: “As the physicians discover the health and sickness of a man by looking at his tongue, so our words are true indicators of the qualities of our souls” (Kozlowski, 1997, p. 34). He speaks about a holy, sacred, spiritual and divine friendship between a director and the directee. He calls the office of the spiritual director an angelical office. He suggests the director be the regular confessor. St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) and St. John of the Cross (1542-1591) are the acclaimed saints known for Carmelite spiritual direction. They insisted, “All do not travel by the same road, and God leads each one by a different way” (Leech, 1994, p. 62). *Interior Castle* by Teresa describes, in terms of progression, the spiritual journey through different rooms or mansions, culminating in “spiritual marriage” (Sheldrake, 2007, p. 130).

Ascent of Mount Carmel by John of the Cross adopts a metaphor of climbing a mountain for a spiritual journey. The spiritual experience leads a person into deprivation of light, into nights, into spiritual darkness, and into purification, and finally to the summit of

transformation. The Franciscan model was offered by Francis of Assisi (1181-1226). Clare of Assisi declared that Francis was her spiritual guide. Francis confessed, “After the Lord gave me brothers, no one showed me what should do” (Vadakkekara & Vattakuzhy, 2011, p. 23). He was convinced that only God was his spiritual guide. John Bosco (1815-1888) suggested a word in the ear, meaning that the spiritual direction can be done informally, even in the playground.

Qualities of a Spiritual Director

Barry states the need to equip oneself to be a spiritual director: “Ordination does not automatically give a person the kind of gifts needed to be a spiritual director” (Barry, 1992, p. 91). A spiritual director needs certain spiritual, human, moral, and educational qualities to become one. Teresa of Avila emphasised the importance of “learning in spiritual life” (Acklin & Hicks, 2021, p. 234). A spiritual director should first of all, “be a man of God, having his own God experience and spiritual life and be in his own process of spiritual direction” (Acklin & Hicks, 2021, p. 233). A spiritual director needs qualities such as personal prayer, familiarity with the word of God, and a basic knowledge of theology, spirituality, and psychology. Thomas Merton also adds a quality of a director as a person, being possessed by the Spirit, a man of charisma and holiness. For a good spiritual director, sanctity alone does not suffice, but he should be a person of charity, knowledge, prudence and of human qualities. Certain moral qualities are demanded of a spiritual director. They are piety, good character, humility and equilibrium. Spiritual directors need God’s grace and training. The Church emphasises the importance of training in spirituality and competence in the psychological sciences. A counsellor needs interpersonal communication skills.

Qualities of a Spiritual Directee

Spiritual direction, in a sense, is “self-direction” (Manalel, 2005, p. 34). The direction can be fruitful if the directee prepares himself through solitary prayer, with a desire for truth, openness to outcomes, and a willingness to wait in patience. The relationship between the director and the directee is a “spiritual friendship” (Vallipalam, 2023, p. 79). They focus primarily on God rather than themselves. A directee needs to possess the capacities of sincerity, obedience and discretion. Sincerity helps a person to open up their sins and imperfections to the director. Obedience helps a person to progress towards growth; otherwise, the spiritual direction remains just an awareness. Discretion

helps a person, “to preserve the secrecy and sacredness of the spiritual process” (Nemeck & Coombs, 1985, p. 115). Perseverance sets the direction of one’s spiritual progress. Often, changing the director can lead to confusion. Perseverance cannot come from one’s willpower; it is a “God-given ability” (Manalel, 2005, p. 34). True direction may not render clarity and precision at times. Only the perseverance and sincerity of the directee lead them to spiritual growth and maturity.

Challenges in Spiritual Direction

Spiritual direction is an interpersonal process between two people. The working relationship lasts a fairly long time. This relationship may lead to resentment and misunderstanding. Difficulties can arise from any personal relationship, especially in a spiritual direction, because it aims at a person’s growth. The directee can resist because of the director’s personality, characteristics, and methods. The broken relationship with the director can have “repercussions on the relationship with God and spiritual growth” (Barry & Connolly, 1982, p. 156). The director needs to strike a balance between the tension to reach the ideals and the slow progress of a candidate. The challenge can come from transference and countertransference. A distortion of perception can arise through transference, a psychological term coined by Freud, which means an inappropriate reaction based on the assimilation of the director to an image “derived from the directee’s childhood” (Nemeck & Coombs, 1985, p. 141). It can be a positive or negative transference. A directee can become fearful of a director for no reason, and this may stem from a fearful childhood experience. A positive transference may support spiritual direction, and a negative transference may hinder spiritual growth. The resistance can be taken into contemplative prayer and can reveal more for personal growth. Countertransference is also possible on the spiritual director's side towards the directee, and that is to be taken care of. Another challenge can arise from issues of incompetence. A genuine spiritual direction requires a normal and spontaneous human relationship. Human relationships are never stable; they can grow or weaken. There can arise some emotional attraction between a mature director and an immature directee. The best way to overcome these difficulties is to seek supervision. Supervision is done in many disciplines, such as counselling and social work. As the spiritual directees need the help of a spiritual director, so also, “a spiritual director needs a supervisor” (Barry & Connolly, 1982, p. 177). Supervision can help a spiritual director work in alliance with a supervisor on a difficult issue and mutually enrich spiritual growth.

Group supervision can also be encouraged if it assures privacy, trust and confidentiality. Moreover, a spiritual director must maintain confidentiality by protecting the directee's privacy. A director must respect the directee's autonomy to make his own choices regarding his spiritual and moral life. A spiritual director faces another challenge: beneficence, that is, acting in the best interests of the directee to promote their mental health and well-being. A spiritual director faces the risk of cultural competence, in which they are expected to respect diverse cultural backgrounds and values.

Catholic Priestly Formation

A Catholic priest plays an important role in the Catholic Church. Catholic priests are set apart from the people of God by their vocation and ordination. A Catholic priest is a male person, juridically distinct from the laity by reason of the sacrament of orders, to build up the people of God. "Only a baptised man can validly receive sacred ordination" (Can.1024). The Catholic priesthood constitutes a permanent, lifelong commitment in the service of the Church. Those who are called to the Catholic priesthood are selected through the sacrament of holy orders and become permanently associated with the hierarchy of the Church, "in communion with all the members of the presbyterium" (Lendakadavil, 1989, p. 7). The ministerial priesthood in the Church is a participation in the priesthood of Christ, exercised in various degrees by bishops, priests and deacons.

Formation comes from the word '*formare*', meaning forming, being formed or the way in which something is formed. The adjective, formative, means giving form or helping to shape. Formation is defined as the harmonious development of all faculties and abilities of a candidate for priestly or religious life. Van Kaam defines, "Formation is the developmental dynamic essence of human life" (Anatharackel, 2001, p. 218). The integral formation means the harmonious development of all the faculties of a candidate for priestly life. A seminary is an ecclesiastical institution that prepares candidates for the priesthood. It is a place of formation which equips oneself for priestly ministry. *Vita Consecrata*, no.65 states, "The primary objective of formation is to prepare people for the total consecration of themselves to God for the service of the church's mission" (Paul II, 2014, p. 97). The formation provides the necessary qualities and training to fulfil the priestly ministry. All priestly formation tends towards two goals: "ontological to relate the priest to Christ and pastoral to relate to the

ministry in the Church” (Lendakadavil, 1989, p. 161). The formation process has four dimensions. The Gift of Priestly Vocation states the purpose of the four dimensions of formation. “Human dimension represents the necessary and dynamic foundation of priestly life, spiritual dimension, which helps to shape the quality of ministry, intellectual dimension, which provides the rational tools needed for a pastor and pastoral dimension, which makes possible a responsible and fruitful ecclesial service” (Congregation for the Clergy, 1982, p. 89). The priestly formation is required for all priests, whether secular, religious, or of every rite, because of the unity of the Catholic priesthood.

Need for Spiritual Direction in Priestly Formation

The need for spiritual direction arises in priestly formation for the following reasons. There is a difference between secular guidance and Catholic guidance. The seminarians look for personal help from the available secular sciences to scrutinise the true way of Christian life because of the shared worldview within the Church. Seminarians are in a “dilemma to choose between the available secular ideologies of spirituality,” which the Church does not approve of (Edwards, 1980, p.99). Some opt for an extreme liberal position, and some opt for an extreme orthodox position. The seminarians need someone who can ascertain the true Catholic way of life. Spiritual direction will be of great use in choosing the right Catholic guidance compared to other secular guidance today.

There is a difference between academic knowledge and spiritual knowledge. There are limitations with the current educational guidance and professional psychological therapies, because they lack spiritual influence. Public and private education are increasingly dominated by technical knowledge. The seminarians can also be easily carried away by pure academic knowledge, “ignoring or neglecting the religious and philosophical foundations of any knowledge” (Edwards, 1980, p. 126). Seminarians seem to find liturgical celebrations and other spiritual activities boring because they lack knowledge of the great spiritual foundations. Spiritual direction can help to clarify the difference between academic and spiritual knowledge. There is a difference between the written and oral guidance. Today, everyone in the world depends on books and scholarship to understand the depths and nuances of one’s interiority. The seminarians are also no exception to this trend. Spiritual guidance from the written sources can be useful for

many, but it can be too impersonal. The seminarians can miss the faith-grounded, tested, long-term person-to-person conveyance of the heart of Christian experience.

Regular, direct, oral and personal spiritual guidance will create accountability to the director. There is a difference between the social self and the personal self. Spiritual direction helps the priestly candidates to gain the “true identity and to dethrone the false self” (Moon & Benner, 2004, p. 18). Spiritual guidance becomes all the more important in a context of social activism. The seminarians are sometimes caught up too much in the concept of social sin. The personal self is often forgotten in the search for the social self. The seminarians may lose their personal souls when they are preoccupied with the social self. In the personal vacuum, people can turn to other secular ideologies. Spiritual direction can remind people to pay attention to their personal self rather than their social self, and it can help them regain their true self and become beloved children of God.

Importance of Spiritual Direction in Priestly Formation

Spiritual formation is the “core of the seminary formation programme because it gives meaning and animates the activities of seminarians” (Keating, 2025, p. 1). Spiritual life is the life “directed towards God” (Vattakuzhy, 2020, p. 143). It is the formation of life according to the Spirit.

In line with the Church’s documents, the Second Vatican Council placed great emphasis on spiritual direction for the spiritual formation of priestly candidates. *Optatam Totius* (1966, p. 713), no.8 insists, “Spiritual formation should be carried out with the assistance of the spiritual director in particular.” *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992) recommends that seminarians learn the art of spiritual direction to make use of it in their future pastoral ministry. It further suggests using psychological support in spiritual direction with due discretion (Paul II, 1992, p. 124). *Vita Consecrata*, no.64 states, “The religious vocation is nourished greatly by spiritual direction in becoming disciples and apostles of God’s kingdom” (Paul II, 2014, p. 95)—the Code of Canon Law, 1983, no. 239/2 states, “In every seminary, there is to be at least one spiritual director, though they are free to approach other priests, who are deputed by the bishop” (The Code of Canon Law, 2013, p. 51). Thus, spiritual direction plays a vital role in the holistic formation of a priestly candidate.

Theology of formation considers the “Word of God or the Sacred Scripture as the primary source” of Christian and priestly formation (Purayidom, 2010, p. 138). The Word of God forms, reforms and transforms those who are open to the Spirit. The future priests are expected to read and practise the Word of God. Secondly, the sacred liturgy plays a powerful role in spiritual formation. A Christian is formed in the school of the liturgical year. A commitment to the sacred liturgy gives a new understanding of Christian life. Among the sacraments, the celebration of the Holy Eucharist holds a prominent place in priestly spiritual formation. Thirdly, the magisterium plays an important role in spiritual formation. Ecclesial doctrines are held in high respect in the journey of spiritual wholeness. Fourthly, the writings of spiritual masters complement the wisdom of Scripture, liturgy and Church doctrines. Fifthly, spiritual maturity or integrity is achieved through the time-tested truths from natural and social arts and sciences.

Practical Implementation of Spiritual Direction in Priestly Formation

Spiritual direction in priestly formation helps with priestly vocational discernment, spiritual perfection, the formation of priestly identity, and growth in discipleship. Discernment is called the “core of spiritual direction” (Vallipalam, 2023, p. 81). Spiritual direction helps discern God’s will in the “priestly vocation” (Downey, 1993, p. 913). The spiritual disturbance can come from a changed understanding of one’s relationship with God or a transition in faith perspectives, which may result in decreased interest in the prayer life during the formation time. It may come from one’s interior inadequacy for the priestly life and insecurity in priestly ministry, or from external environmental challenges in culture and society. In the face of temptations, God empowers his ministers with his grace. Spiritual direction helps face temptations and grow in grace.

The stage of discernment starts with a prayer experience. St. Ignatius showed certain methods of prayer for discernment. It is important to choose the right physical posture, place, and attitude for prayer. The second step is choosing a prayer theme based on a biblical text, an image, a verse, or any spiritual classic. The third step is being “open to the Holy Spirit in order to enter into conversation with God” (Rupnik, 2013, p. 72). The fourth step is to take up the proper text and begin reading it meditatively. The feelings aroused can be written down in a

notebook. The fifth step is thanking God for the time of prayer, ending with the Lord's prayer and a short dialogue with a saint. The sixth step is examination of prayer, which is the evaluation of the promptings from God and from an unknown origin. It is written in pairs, comparing and contrasting the thoughts and feelings inspired by the Holy Spirit and by the unknown enemy. The seventh step concludes with surrendering to the will of God.

Spiritual direction helps candidates to grow in spiritual perfection. The desire for spiritual perfection involves three persons. The first desire comes from God. The second desire comes from the directee, who responds positively to God's initiative and develops a desire to be guided. The third desire comes from the director who opts to guide a person towards spiritual perfection. In the context of seminary formation, there are three kinds of groups. The first group of people has no desire for spiritual perfection. The second group has a desire, but not a strong desire. The third group desires spiritual growth, but they want to achieve it quickly. Growth in spiritual maturity involves a formee's ardent desire and strong commitment to grow in holiness.

Spiritual direction helps the priestly candidates to mature in priestly identity. The priestly identity enables priests to understand who they are to themselves and to convey that identity to others. The priestly identity is complex. The identity of priests can be understood in three ways: "as human beings, as believing Christians or as disciples of Christ and as a sacramental person, as part of the order of presbyters" (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2001, p. 13). From the three dimensions of identity, being human, Christian and sacramental gives rise to four types of formation, human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral. The new sacramental identity demands that a priest be conformed in Christ, be in communion with the bishop, and lead a life of celibacy. Thus, all Catholic priests possess two identities. The interior identity is achieved through the sacred ordination. It is a configuration of Christ. The exterior identity is presbyteral, involving sacramental, ministerial and fraternal connections with the bishop and the presbyterate. The maturity of the priestly identity helps future priests evolve as ministers in the pastoral field.

Spiritual direction helps the seminarians to grow in the spirit of discipleship. From the early years of the Church, holy men and women practised celibacy, poverty and obedience to follow Christ. Discipleship demands that future priests develop a positive attitude

toward celibacy, obedience, and poverty. Formation in celibacy is not just a renunciation of marriage but facing directly one's sexual life and growing in freedom in appropriate expressions of celibacy. The rationale for celibacy lies in the sacredness and the commitment between a priest and Christ and the Church, like the conjugal commitment between a husband and wife. Celibacy is Christological because it is the way to follow Christ, and "Celibacy exists for the sake of service" (Anatharackel, 2001, p. 173). Priests need to keep on learning and refining the strategies for celibate living. Formation in obedience is another expression of discipleship. Jesus became obedient to the point of death (Phil 2:8). Priests' obedience has a Christological foundation. The Word came down because of obedience to the God the Father's will. Obedience is not only making a promise but growing in obedience. Growing in obedience implies a genuine relationship with the bishop, marked by honest and direct communication. It includes a prayerful submission to God's will. Formation in simplicity of life is an additional expression of discipleship. Jesus became poor for our sake (2 Cor 8:9). It implies a "regular and prayerful scrutiny of identifying whatever hinders their life and ministry and eliminating them" (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2001, p. 34). It also implies the Gospel's generosity in sharing material resources with others, especially the poor.

Models of Spiritual Direction in Priestly Formation

There are different kinds of spiritual direction, formal and informal, individualised and collective and corresponding dimensions that help for effective priestly formation. Formal individualised spiritual direction is a one-to-one personalised spiritual journey. It involves regularly scheduled, formal meetings with the seminary director. Each person has unique conditions, temperaments and grace received from God. Not everyone is called to follow the same path (Laplace, 1967, p. 135). A spiritual director should not force any specific pattern but allow the individual seminarian to choose his spiritual growth under formal and regularised direction. There is informal or occasional individual guidance. The spiritual director should take every opportunity to guide a person in spiritual growth.

Every occasional conversation, or the spiritual conversation in a retreat setting, is to be considered a chance for occasional or temporary direction (Chatfield & Rooms, 2019, p. 3). This type of direction is not an alternative to the regular direction, but it can still offer a different

perspective, consolation, and hope in the occasional direction style. There is a collective or group direction. Direction is not accomplished only through personal dialogue but also through collective style. Common spiritual meetings, retreats, and life reviews are to be considered collective direction (Laplace, 1967, p. 144). The spiritual director encourages collective spiritual talk for any large meetings and liturgical programmes in the seminary. Collective help is offered according to the group's needs and nature. There is a spiritual direction by correspondence. Some people prefer to continue spiritual direction, even after leaving the seminary formation. Direction by correspondence has its own difficulty. The distance has to be considered positively, but at least occasional direct conversation is necessary for spiritual direction. De Guibert warns of the danger of direction by correspondence, for the fear of letters falling into a stranger's hands (Leech, 1994, p. 71). Direction by correspondence can be an occasional necessity, and it already requires an intimate knowledge of the soul.

Future Directions of Spiritual Guidance for Effective Priestly Formation

Two recommendations are proposed based on the present study: the need to improve the quality of spiritual directors and to update spiritual direction in line with new trends in Catholic spirituality. There are many qualities required of a spiritual director, but above all, a "personal spiritual commitment is highly inevitable" (Edwards, 1980, p.126). A spiritual director is the healer of the soul, and he serves as a midwife, providing an environment for total healing. The spiritual ministry of direction flows out of the conviction of one's vocation. The conviction and commitment equip a person to help the souls entrusted to their care by acquiring the qualities of charity, knowledge, and prudence. The present structure of the seminary does not allow any seminarian to choose any spiritual director. It means that every seminarian is assigned a general spiritual director, or a formator, as their spiritual director. The fundamental question is whether the spiritual directors have received any training and whether they fulfil all the "criteria of the qualities expected of a spiritual director" (Edwards, 1980, p. 129). People in authority should pay attention to the selection of spiritual directors, evaluating them based on their training and human and moral qualities. Unlike before, there are education centres that offer training in spirituality, counselling, and spiritual direction, and these opportunities can be used. The Catholic Church is not a new institution;

it is guided by the spiritual wisdom of two thousand years. Hence, every spiritual director needs to keep up with the variety of trends in Catholic spirituality and select the right one for a directee's needs. After the Second Vatican Council, the Church has emphasised the spirituality of politics, social justice, the ecological crisis, and concern for human growth and development. Further research is needed on how to integrate the new social teachings of the Church into practical spiritual direction, alongside the traditional ones.

Conclusion

There is a need for efficient spiritual directors today in the context of diocesan priestly formation. Spiritual direction has a long tradition in the Catholic Church. Spiritual direction has a strong foundation in biblical, historical and theological background. There are different models of spiritual direction from different prominent schools of spirituality in the history of the Catholic Church. Spiritual direction plays a significant role in the priestly spiritual formation. Spiritual direction is highly necessary today, offering Catholic, spiritual, and oral personal guidance in the context of growing secular, academic, and written guidance. The Catholic Church emphasises the centrality of spiritual direction in priestly formation through its official documents and teachings. Spiritual direction is highly useful in priestly formation for priestly vocational discernment, spiritual perfection, the formation of priestly identity, and the formation of discipleship. Spiritual directors can play a great role through formal, informal, and collective styles of guidance. There is a need for ongoing training, periodic updating, and conviction on the part of spiritual directors to become effective in priestly formation.

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