



## Integrating Work and Spirit: Spiritual Direction and Orlando Regional Healthcare

Kenneth L. Nolen and Julie Harper

“Have you ever lost your faith?” an Orlando Regional Healthcare team member asked Ken Nolen, hospital chaplain and coauthor of this article. Not waiting for an answer, she began to describe the difficulties she was having with her church and how they were affecting her family. She had lost the respect and honor that she previously held for her pastor and her church. Yet, she wanted to remain in fellowship with other believers and to continue her spiritual journey toward God. While spiritually “walking” with her and her question, Ken realized that although he had not previously considered himself a spiritual director, they were engaging in spiritual direction. This conversation began the birth process for providing spiritual direction at Orlando Regional Healthcare (Florida, USA).

### Initial Steps

Orlando Regional is a seven-hospital, secular, not-for-profit health-care organization that also houses a Level I trauma center. The system employs approximately twelve thousand individuals including ancillary non-medical employees as well as technicians, nurses, and doctors. Orlando Regional is a public institution that has a corporate culture of caring for the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of its employees, patients, and the community that it serves.

“Help!” was our first reaction when George Geans, the corporate manager of the Spiritual Care Department of Orlando Regional Healthcare, asked us to set up a task force to begin processing the integration of spiritual direction as a spiritual care initiative within our hospital system. Members of the initial spiritual direction task force included Ken (chaplain and educator, Spiritual Care Department), Julie Harper (licensed clinical social worker, Orlando Regional Healthcare Behavioral Health Department, and coauthor of this article), and Jeanne Miller-Clark (manager, Orlando Regional Healthcare Mind/Body/Spirit Center). Later, George Geans (manager, Spiritual Care Department) and Andrea Henson (registered nurse, Orlando Regional Healthcare) joined the task force. Because the spiritual direction initiative

is a pilot program, the task force decided that the initial spiritual direction offering would be limited to Orlando Regional employees. In the near future, if the program is successful, the task force anticipates offering spiritual direction to other interested individuals throughout the community.

As the task force began developing the spiritual direction project, members recognized the need for input from various sources to ensure accuracy, validity, and consistency in the process. Initially, the task force members researched several spiritual direction formation programs to advise and to serve as guides as they developed the spiritual direction program. This search culminated in an official partnership with Audire, a spiritual direction formation program at San Pedro Retreat Center in Orlando. Audire’s program and the suggested *Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Spiritual Direction* developed and published by Spiritual Directors International will be the standard to which all Orlando Regional spiritual directors must adhere.

Although there is collaboration between Audire and Orlando Regional, this relationship is not an endorsement by Orlando Regional of any religious organization but recognition of the professional and experienced history of Audire as a non-sectarian formation program for spiritual directors. In addition, this collaboration is not an endorsement by Audire for any health-care organization but recognition of the value of spiritual direction for persons in the workplace.

An important first step in introducing the spiritual direction initiative to the Orlando Regional community was to present an introductory workshop. Audire was a contributing partner in the workshop and provided invaluable assistance. The title of the workshop was “Spiritual Companionship: An Introduction to Spiritual Direction.” The purposes of the one-day workshop were to introduce spiritual direction to the attendees who were unfamiliar with spiritual direction, to generate awareness for the need of spiritual direction, and to demonstrate the value of spiritual direction to all attendees. The target audience, consisting of individuals



from hospital staff and community members interested in spiritual direction, included chaplains, nurses, social workers, licensed mental health counselors, educators, and spiritual care providers. Approximately seventy individuals attended the workshop during one of the worst hurricane seasons in recent Florida history. Although developed from a Christian perspective, the seminar was interreligious in nature to accommodate spiritual care providers from different denominations and faith traditions.

The task force wants to say a special thank you to Diane Fransico, one of the staff members of Audire who assisted and guided us with this initial workshop. We realized the need for the continued guidance and wisdom as this initiative unfolded. Two task force members and three of Audire's staff, Linda Beauregard, Carol Ludwig, and Diane Fransico, met once a month. Following long days of work and travel for Diane and Carol, these meetings stimulated ideas, advice, creativity, and visions for the future. As one of the task force members, Julie can testify to the energy, power, and presence of the Spirit during the meetings. What evolved from these meetings was the partnership between Orlando Regional Healthcare and San Pedro Center's Audire program.

### Describing Spiritual Direction

Because of the success of the initial workshop, as evidenced in the feedback presented by the attendees, the spiritual direction task force is planning an annual spiritual direction workshop. These workshops will continue to be a collaboration of Audire and the Orlando Regional Spiritual Care Department.

Based on feedback from the workshop attendees and directees, the task force decided that it is essential to develop a dedicated brochure for the spiritual direction program. This brochure provides information about spiritual direction, the opportunities for receiving spiritual direction, and the procedure necessary for scheduling. The brochure addresses the ongoing chal-

lenge of describing *spiritual direction* by appealing to individuals' longings and their encounters with life's mysterious questions. Using the brochure should result in an increase in appropriate referrals for spiritual direction.

In developing the spiritual direction initiative, one challenge for the members of the task force was to develop an interreligious description of *spiritual direction* that would be acceptable and useful in a not-for-profit, secular hospital setting. Based on several different descriptions in current spiritual direction literature, our initial description of *spiritual direction* is "the art of listening for the Divine or the Holy in the context of a one-to-one trusting relationship." The task force members acknowledge that this is a working and dynamic description, and we are receptive to making modifications as circumstances and experience dictate.

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The lack of information and studies on spiritual direction in the workplace contributed to our challenges. However, there appears to be a deepening hunger for things spiritual in the corporate world. Organizations and their leaders exemplify this hunger as they struggle

to find ways to increase employee commitment and performance in a rapidly changing and insecure work environment. Eric Klein and John B. Izzo write that, along with this struggle, there is an awakening of the "Corporate Soul" within traditional businesses. This awakening of the Corporate Soul is a movement that reclaims spirituality in the workplace. It is about individuals wanting meaningful work and engaging workers at their deepest levels of capacity and desire (p. 4).

It is exciting to see the beginnings of the recognition of spirituality in the workplace, but the natural inclination and training of the task force was to follow the corporate model of developing mission and philosophy statements as well as policies and procedures. Although documentation is an important factor of hospital life, spiritual direction does not lend itself easily to this corporate model. Our hearts' desire was to not document our sessions with notes and maintain files on the



Rachelle Oppenhuizen

directees. After all, how does one document the work of the Spirit? Our final decision was to gather limited demographic information needed to schedule sessions and to demonstrate to the administration the number of staff participating in spiritual direction.

Related to the issue of documentation, the task force designed a two-page form, which emerged from the passion all the task force members have for spiritual direction and from our eagerness for participants to be informed. The form also arose from the organization's need to provide informed consent for services provided.

The first page was a covenant letter similar to the sample covenant letter designed by Spiritual Directors International. The second page listed various descriptions of *spiritual direction* and related concepts and presuppositions. This form ended up eliciting confusion and questions from the directees who received it; therefore, the task force decided not to provide any further written information to directees.

In August 2005, Julie attended the conference "Chaplaincy in the Workplace" at Yale University.

Conference presentations focused on different ways to integrate spirituality into the work environment. Some of the topics included legal issues, interfaith and ethical issues, and the impact of chaplaincy on corporations. Liz Budd Ellman, executive director of Spiritual Directors International, presented a breakout session on spiritual direction as a way to integrate spirituality into the work environment. Her material was helpful and affirming. The energy and interest of the presenters and attendees affirmed the task force's position that there is an increasing awareness and desire for integration of spirituality in the workplace.

### Future Challenges

As spiritual direction matures at Orlando Regional, the task force must revisit several issues. Our next challenge is the drafting of policies and procedures that will reflect the lessons learned and how best to provide spiritual direction. The policy and procedures will also need to address the issues of acquiring trained spiritual directors and the processing and storage of documentation. In addition, the task force must develop



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job descriptions for spiritual directors that identify required experience and qualifications. The task force must also work with the corporation to determine how we will classify and reimburse spiritual directors.

Another challenge is that the task force must continue developing ongoing relationship with members of other Orlando Regional departments. These relationships are necessary to educate individuals in those departments about spiritual direction, the benefits to directees, and the referral process. These relationships will also help the task force gain insights as to how spiritual direction can be helpful to individuals in their differing departments. Someone recently asked a member of the task force to what he or she attributed the forward movement of this initiative of bringing spiritual direction to a secular hospital. The first response was “God.” However, after contemplating the question, the respondent realized that many factors were at work. What clearly stands out is the importance of gradually building genuine, authentic, individual relationships within the corporation. Relationships of mutual respect, honesty, and trust will foster collaboration and bridge-building between departments, all for the sake of our employees, patients, and the community we serve.

However, the utmost challenge is that of professionalizing and institutionalizing spiritual direction. As the task force strives to integrate the necessary institutional requirements and professional expectations, we must balance those requirements with an openness to hear and be directed by the Spirit of God.

Currently, spiritual direction sessions occur in a dedicated office decorated by the directors to be conducive to spiritual direction. The room is painted a soft, light green color. A large window allows ambient

light to flow into the room but also provides a view of plant life growing on the outside. A freestanding floor lamp and a desk lamp with shades also provide soft light. Although there is a desk in the room (the room is also used as an office when spiritual direction sessions are not held), the chairs used by the directee and the spiritual director are facing each other for increased intimacy. Several pictures adorn the walls and a clock is unobtrusively located so that the spiritual director can monitor the session timing. The décor includes a candle and a large concrete bowl filled with pebbles and water, creating an inviting but not distracting environment.

Members of the task force have met formally with hospital staff from the departments of human resources, employee assistance program, nurse managers, spiritual care, and behavioral health. The task force selected these specific departments because they have direct contact with all staff. Thus far, these departments have been open and receptive to spiritual direction. One of the task force members who met with human resources came back to the office overjoyed and eager to share how well it went. It seemed so many of these individuals in their work with staff longed to be able to offer employees something like this. Each could give examples of individuals who would have benefited from spiritual direction. Some of them felt having spiritual direction to offer staff allowed them to do their job and better meet the needs of those they serve.

### **Serving the Needs**

With the positive response from the above departments, the next question we face is how to serve the potential needs of our employees. The partnership with



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Audire is helping provide the answer. After meeting with all of the staff and assistants of Audire, informing them of our work and vision, twelve of them agreed to volunteer some of their time to provide spiritual direction to our Orlando Regional Healthcare employees. The challenges currently before the task force include developing job descriptions, orientation, a roster of directors, and a process to monitor, coordinate, and schedule sessions, as well as locating a space in each hospital location.

### Reflections

Now that we have shared the organizational strategies and stages and challenges of introducing and growing spiritual direction within Orlando Regional Healthcare system, let us close with a more personal, heartfelt reflection. Julie shares her experience of spiritual direction in this corporate setting: “This journey has touched my soul and deepened my faith. I feel like I have witnessed firsthand the moving, shaking, and shaping of God. Participating in our first workshop, despite my terror of speaking to crowds, I presented for over an hour! I remember my tears when I finished, as I heard the applause of those present. It has been an honor, an honor with tremendous and frightening responsibility, to be a part of a group continually discerning the Spirit as we walk in new territory. I have discovered a deeper trust in God, patience with God’s timing and a deeper compassion and concern for all of us who work for and make up Orlando Regional Healthcare.

“As a practicing spiritual director outside the corporate world, I have a different feeling about spiritual direction in a corporate setting. It is a different feeling, a feeling I am still trying to name as I reflect upon being a part of a group and an organization that is offering spiritual direction to a large and diverse group of people, who most likely never have had this opportunity. This alone is testimony to the works of God. I am blessed to work for an organization that is willing to make this happen. To hear and to hold the sacred stories of those I work alongside gifts me with a more intimate and soulful connection to them, to our shared mission at Orlando Regional, and to God. The following quotation from Henri Nouwen expresses one

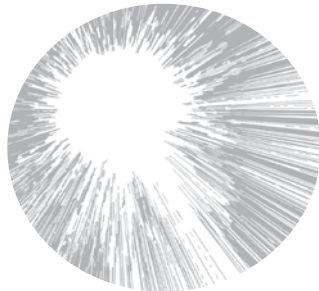


of my learnings on this journey: ‘What needs to be guarded is the life of the Spirit within us. Especially we who want to witness the presence of God’s Spirit in the world need to tend the fire within with utmost care.... Our first and foremost task is faithfully to care for the inward fire so that when it is really needed it can offer warmth and light to lost travelers’ (p. 54).”

In closing, the task force knows that spiritual direction at Orlando Regional Healthcare would not have occurred without the support of its administration, especially of the manager of the Spiritual Care Department. The task force appreciates the corporate culture of Orlando Regional, which is open to the risk of exploring spirituality in the workplace. The task force appreciates the guidance and wisdom of individuals representing Audire at the San Pedro Retreat Center. Finally, the task force applauds the first three spiritual directors at Orlando Regional, as well as their directees, who have demonstrated courage and insight by participating in spiritual direction within a corporate workplace setting. ■

#### References

- Klein, Eric, and John B. Izzo. *Awakening Corporate Soul: Four Paths to Unleash the Power of People at Work*. Gloucester, MA: Fairwinds Press, 1999.
- Nouwen, Henri. *The Way of the Heart*. New York, NY: The Ballantine Publishing Group, 1981.




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