

A Brief History of Spiritual Directors International Part II

BY CAROL LUDWIG

Regional Representation: The Expanding Network

Post Vatican II growth in spiritual direction training centers was mirrored in the early origins of Spiritual Directors International.

The people who comprised SDI's original "discernment circle" came from a wide geographic range of training centers across the United States: the Center for Religious Development in Cambridge, MA, the Shalem Institute in Washington, the Institute for Spiritual Leadership in Chicago, Mercy Center in Burlingame, CA, the Upper Room Spiritual Life Center in Neptune, NJ, and the Center for Spirituality and Justice in the Bronx.

Other early leaders came from academic institutions such as New York's Fordham University and the Washington Theological Union in Washington, DC,

USA, where spiritual direction training programs were developing. Still others represented religious community centers in Baltimore and Philadelphia. In many of these centers, significant numbers of spiritual directors were being trained from countries around the globe, most notably, CRD, Shalem, ISL, and WTU.

From this initial geographic cross section, there began to develop a wider, expanding network of regional coordination. The current 119 SDI regions throughout the world include sixty-six countries on five continents. In some cases, a region is subdivided into eight or nine sub-regions. The state of California alone is divided into ten SDI regions, two with sub-regional divisions.

Janet Ruffing describes the original rationale for the regional representative system this way:

The idea was that the regions should be small enough to actually meet in person. Some regions are huge geographically and some are smaller metropolitan areas.

We hoped to plug into existing networks and local groups and organizations where things were already going on. Each region could make its own arrangements according to its needs. We asked that regional representatives send information to the organizing committee on its activities.

Australia asked to form a region early on. Regional members received a questionnaire. I met with regional contacts at the conferences, did updates, and circulated information. We allocated a budget to cover postage, paper, and copying when reimbursement was possible. Interestingly enough, some regional directories came out before the SDI organization directory. We encouraged the formation of peer support groups for supervision and ongoing growth. And many training programs began to offer in-service learning days (New York especially) in the fall and spring to which they invited all regional SDI members.

National spiritual director's networks and organizations exist in several countries around the world. Some of them predate the establishment of Spiritual Directors International. Jack Mostyn notes that, "the Australian spiritual directors' organization, the Australian Network for Spiritual Direction (ANSD), is the oldest and was the first such organization ever founded. That happened because for eight or nine years, Madelaine Birmingham and William Connolly went out to Australia to follow up with individuals who had originally trained at the CRD in Cambridge, MA, USA. The circle of spiritual directors out there continued to widen, and eventually, they formed the first national organization."

National groupings in the United Kingdom, Canada, and New Zealand also have flourished. Regional meetings with spiritual directors from across Europe were held in 2000 and 2001. This loose amalgama-

tion is quickly becoming known as "SDI Europe." Spiritual Directors in Canada have formed the Spiritual Directors of Southern Ontario network. Several of these organizations have sent representatives to the annual SDI Symposium and Conference events. This type of cross fertilization helps build understanding of the many forms this ministry takes in diverse cultures around the world.

The rich regional network also promotes dialogue, gets training and publication resources known, and promotes new developments in spiritual direction within and between regions. Leslie Hay, a Texas, USA, regional representative, notes that, "A highlight of our nine meetings and annual retreat this past year is serving the community by helping to provide a hospitable environment where spiritual directors can come together to share their gifts through in-service programs; to nurture, support, and empower one another through conversation; and to grow together through 'holy listening.'"

Many regions publish a periodic newsletter. They hold monthly or quarterly meetings, and sponsor an annual retreat for their membership. These meetings allow time for prayer, support, ongoing study, supervision, and fellowship. "Each region decides what they want to do based on the expressed needs of the group. Thus, activities vary tremendously from place to place," says Mary Ann Scofield.

Regional representatives often participate in a special workshop held for them at annual SDI conferences. (Some regions have considered pooling resources to send a representative to the SDI conference and/or symposium.) Judy Spenner, Missouri, USA, regional representative remarks, "I feel so blessed to be able to organize and participate in the regional meetings! The networking opportunity to gather with others who have in common the joy of companioning others is similar to a homecoming—a coming home to share what is so deep in our hearts with people who have also experienced the 'sacred space.'" Representatives also serve as information channels between the SDI

headquarters in San Francisco and members in their region. They often let SDI know about additional needs within their area.

The networking within and between regions points toward the sharing of speakers and other resources. It is especially helpful for directors in more isolated areas and for those moving into a new area. New graduates of training programs find the system helpful as they seek

collegial relationships in a new ministry. It is hard to overestimate the impact this grass roots regional movement has had on the growth of Spiritual Directors International. Moreover, it has encouraged and fostered an international awareness among spiritual directors that is unusual among professional organizations.

Ethical Standards and the “Certification” Crisis

Even prior to the establishment of SDI’s office and the engagement of an Executive Director, the young organization reached one of its most difficult moments. At the 1994 Atchison Conference, the issue arose as to whether or not spiritual directors should be certified. Dorothy Whiston describes the perceived impasse as “a reflection that from the very



THE SDI COORDINATING COUNCIL, JANUARY 2002: (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) GORDON SELF, SANDRA LOMMASSON, JIM KEEGAN, CAROL LUDWIG, AND GATHY MURTHA.

beginning the network was inclusive of people who held very different views, training, and visions about the charism and work of a spiritual director.”

Pressure was building up prematurely among some members, according to Ruffing, for the association to set standards to begin to certify spiritual directors. The Episcopal Church had just developed guidelines setting the conditions for

their practice, because of insurance company criteria for spiritual directors among their clergy. “Using the Baltimore Symposium discernment model with lawyer Bill Creed, SDI’s leadership decided that the membership would hold training program directors responsible for dialogue on what constituted the best training for Spiritual Directors,” says Ruffing, “since they were not going to let insurance companies dictate what SDI would do.”

Realizing the need for some generally agreed upon standards, the Coordinating Council put forth a proposal at the 1994 Atchison Conference to form an Ethics Task Force. Scofield notes that Janet Ruffing drafted the proposal overnight. Ruffing recalls that, “Betsy Caprio and Thomas Headberg had already done a first draft for the Culver City/Los Angeles program as a service to SDI, which was published through Pecos, NM, USA. The regions agreed to review and amend the original document.”

Lucy Abbott Tucker chaired the task force and was asked to develop a document for presentation to the membership. Bill Creed served as the attorney; and Richard Gula was the ethicist. Other Task Force members included: Andrew Dreitcer, Joyce McFarland, and Dorothy Whiston. Gula and Dreitcer left the task force after the first draft was completed. Near the end of the process, ethicist Timothy O’Connell joined the Task Force.

Whiston recalls that, “the group worked for more than four years to develop a text which would be acceptable to the widening range of people—now nearing 3,000 directors—who had joined SDI. Of particular concern were issues raised by SDI members in countries and cultures outside the United States, where much of the American terminology did not fit their context for offering spiritual direction. The Code of Ethics idea was a well received compromise or starting place to deal with accountability issues in SDI.”

At the 1996 Kanuga, NC, USA, Conference, the Ethics Task Force presented a Draft Code of Ethics. Symposium participants worked in small groups with the draft for an afternoon, generating feedback for task force members. The proposal was made to Symposium participants (which had initially established the task force) that the organization would “live with” the draft for two to three years—during which time training centers, regional groups, and individuals would be asked for comments and recommendations. The membership unanimously accepted the proposal. The following three years were spent soliciting and incorporating membership recommendations.

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“The organization discerned its way through the conflict until they could reach consensus as a group,” Ruffing says. “What we noticed was that leaders had not been talking to each other, and there was a lot of rumor and misinformation going around. At symposiums, we worked through this in dialogue among the various groups and centers. We wanted every program to have central components in their training mix.

We were seeking a criteria of adequacy in training programs without becoming prescriptive. Symposiums led to this and helped us work through many incorrect assumptions that had developed.”

At the 1999 Glorieta Conference, the *SDI Guidelines for Ethical Conduct* that had been adopted by the task force in March 1999 and recommended by the Coordinating Council were unveiled to the gathered members. There was great rejoicing at the task force’s labor, which had developed a set of standards high enough and broad enough for a membership which now encompassed more than 3,700 people from thirty-four religious traditions and fifty-four nations around the world.

Steve Wirth remarked that, in hindsight, “the desire was to improve the quality of the practice. Members wanted to raise the public respectability of it, since in the early days many people didn’t know what it was. Some people with very little training were calling themselves spiritual directors. There was a desire to separate the professionals from those who were doing direction on their own. Today most training programs use the Ethical Guidelines in some form and regional SDI groups revisit them periodically.

There's an ongoing tension between directors' preferences for describing their work as a 'gift' that is unique in each person, and between those who seek to speak also of the 'skills' and competencies we'd hope directors develop. Often this is perceived as a movement toward 'certification' with the [unwelcome] overtones of outside bureaucratic control."

Many spiritual directors have picked up on Executive Director Jeff Gaines' suggestion in a *Connections* article that they provide directees with a copy of the guidelines to make clear the high standards to which they aspire.

Publications

In Fall 1990, Donald Schell volunteered to edit the first *Connections*, which was sent to all members. An editorial board was established to assist Schell. SDI's leadership was also looking toward the day it would be able to afford to provide a spiritual directors' journal to members around the world. Janet Ruffing observed that "a journal was the key to being able to offer a benefit to members outside the U.S. In October 1990, our membership was 400 members," she recalls. "By Spring of 1991, it had grown to 800." Clearly one way to maintain communication with such a geographically diverse and swiftly expanding membership was through publications.

"From the beginnings of SDI, we set aside funds to eventually develop a journal," says Scofield. After a national search, Susan Jorgensen was selected as the founding editor of *Presence: The Journal of Spiritual Directors International*, which debuted in January 1995.¹ (In 1997, Jorgensen was awarded the first SDI Creative Achievement Award.). John Mabry succeeded Jorgensen in 1997. His assistant editor is Elizabeth Stout.² Today, the journal is in major theological libraries and training centers around the world.

An early journal board member, Jim Keegan, reminds readers that:

... the journal was intended to reflect the values we espouse as spiritual directors. We wanted it to include articles not only about the practice of spiritual direction, but about training directors, and about the wider world in which we do this work. We called that 'Contexts and Cultures,' in a way to remind ourselves that spiritual direction is not confined to two individuals talking. If 'contemplative' means attending reverently to the reality before us, then the journal would have to include arenas of God's activity that stretch us and our practice, places we don't traditionally attend to in spiritual direction. Values like that get fleshed out, as well, in how the finished piece looks and feels in your hands.

Keegan adds that, "*Presence* is consciously published with ample white space and little clutter, so that a reader will not feel rushed, but be able to stop and think or pray about what's on the page."

SDI's *Membership Directory* began publication in July 1996. The SDI Website <www.sdiworld.org> was launched in March 1997, making seminal information available to the membership on line. The website carries information on SDI activities and events. It also has electronic links to more than 250 spiritual direction training programs, retreat houses, and spirituality centers worldwide.

Interfaith Dimension

From the outset, Spiritual Directors International has been an ecumenical organization. Its original Mission Statement noted broadly that its grounding is "in the Christian community." One of the founding organizations, the Shalem Institute, was intentionally ecumenical. This dimension has proven to be a growing edge for SDI over its ten-year history. Statistics from 1996 indicate that twenty-three denominations were already represented in SDI. Today that number has

grown to forty-one different denominations. Interestingly, 878 SDI members did not specify a religious denomination on their application forms.

At the 2000 conference in Holyoke, a Jewish rabbi and a Buddhist teacher offered a workshop on interfaith spiritual direction, in which they examined the difficulties and gifts of working in spiritual direction across traditional denominational lines. Elizabeth Stout's May 2000 *Presence* article on the Parliament of World Religions in Cape Town, South Africa, may be a portent of things to come as the interplay between the world's religious traditions increases in the 21st century.

Membership Growth and Diversification

SDI has grown from the original 400 members who expressed interest in a network of spiritual directors in 1990 to more than 4,675 members worldwide. "Within its first year," according to Janet Ruffing, "membership reached 1,000. It hovered between 1,200 and 1,500 for several years. By the Burlingame conference in 1998, it had reached 3,000."

Jack Mostyn had already identified seventy-five training centers by the late 1980s. "Among those organizations," says Ruffing, "were two prior organizations, the WASD seminary training group" mentioned by Mary Ann Scofield, "and Retreats International, an organization comprised of directors of retreat centers. SDI's impetus was to connect people who were not served by those existing networks, namely, lay people and interdenominational people. The hope was that spiritual directors would not find themselves practicing in isolation."

SDI membership originally was predominantly Roman Catholic. Although Roman Catholics are still the largest single denomination represented in SDI, their percentage has declined from fifty-five percent in 1996—the first year for which statistics included

this break-out—to forty-two percent today.

The organization has become more inclusive as the number of religious denominations has increased from a handful to more than forty today. The number of countries represented in SDI has continually increased.

Even though SDI founders intended it to be as inclusive as possible, SDI also was originally almost exclusively United States-based, with an occasional member from outside the country. Many of the early American members of SDI had worked overseas in various ministries.

Today more than twelve percent of SDI's membership comes from outside the United States and includes people from sixty-six countries on five continents. While much of this growth has come from training centers in the United States which welcome participants from around the world, it has also resulted from increased development of workshops and training programs overseas.

Future Directions

Only a few examples serve to highlight the unlimited possibilities of growth and evolution SDI and the practice of spiritual direction might experience in the coming decades.

Spiritual directors at Mercy Center in California, USA, Mary Ann Scofield among them, are currently working with local Hispanic and Jewish communities to expand their traditional model and facilitate its usage among communities less served to date by spiritual directors. Spiritual directors trained at Mercy Center are also working in innovative ways with residents of San Quentin, a prison outside San Francisco, CA, USA, offering spiritual direction and Centering Prayer.

Both Jack Mostyn and Gary Becker are working with

CEOs and corporate leaders on new models of spirituality in the workplace. Steve Wirth of the Yardley Group has worked with health care providers in developing corporate spiritual goals and alternative corporate structures that take into account the spiritual dimension not only of employees' work lives and careers, but of the corporation as well.

In Louisville, KY, USA, spiritual directors are working with homeless people

and with mentally disabled men and women. Bill Creed has done follow-up spiritual direction work with people he encountered while giving weekend retreats to homeless persons.

Relationships developed at the 1999 World Parliament of Religions in Cape Town and with new members of SDI who come from diverse faith traditions could open doors to deeper interfaith exchanges and lead to a wider representation of non-Western spiritual paths in SDI.

As we move further into the 21st century, one might envision using advanced communications technology to make current SDI regional and international linkages even stronger. Online listserves and chat room technologies are bringing people together electronically and expanding information sources in widely diverse geographic areas. Still in its infancy, the "sditalk" email list is helping build relationships



THE SDI STAFF JANUARY

2002: (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT)

JEFF GAINES, LYLE KESECKER-DOTSON,
MAGGIE TAYLOR, AND JOHN MABRY.

across the miles that separate spiritual directors from one another. In a recent conversation, Steve Wirth used his experience with the Thomas Merton project as an example of the possibilities offered by the internet and new and less expensive satellite transmission facilities. Perhaps SDI will one day hold its annual Conference and/or Symposium on line and include participants in real

time from around the world.

Plans are underway to hold the 2003 Conference and Symposium in Toronto to include more members from Ontario and a wider representation of membership of the Canadian Spiritual Directors of Southern Ontario organization. Perhaps worldwide or multi-regional SDI events might eventually be held in Asia and Europe, Africa and Latin America, gathering spiritual directors from countries around the world to discuss our similarities as well as the cultural and linguistic differences which enrich and diversify SDI.

In his presentation to the 1992 Baltimore SDI conference, "Discernment for the Third Millennium," Shaun McCarty discussed dynamic memory and creative imagination in the context of SDI. He spoke of the need for a vision, imagination, and a dream based on remembering our past in order to move into the future. McCarty said:

Without a vision for the future, both groups and individuals become moribund. Every lasting society, culture, or tradition needs its Utopia. No civilization has survived without its corporate dream. Every group and individual needs a dream of the future that lures us forward and leads to meaning. We are energized by our dreams. We are enervated without them. It's a question of either dream or die!

Mary Ann Scofield's dream and the years of hard work that grew from it have made Spiritual Directors International a robust reality. But a larger and more challenging dream is required to guide us into the coming decade. Prayerful reflection about the ground we have traveled thus far will lead us to a larger vision of the role of SDI in today's world and on into the future. To read the signs of the times will require intentional efforts by the widest possible range of members around the world. The internet chat rooms and listserves mentioned above might well prove instrumental in developing prayerful reflection and discernment groups to provide the necessary signposts and maps.

In McCarty's words:

Remembering is a way of finding the pattern or design of our lives. It enables us to string the beads of past epiphanies. We need to know our own stories. Our personal [and institutional] stories take on new and deeper meaning as part of the larger and longer story of our faith tradition[s] which are a memory of God's graciousness Savoring these memories of our core faith experiences (individual and corporate) in the past provides us with touchstones by which we can assess the authenticity of movements of the Spirit A rich ecumenical dimension is a possible, probable, preferable, and plausible future! As the new vision emerges, the

dynamic memory of Jesus' own dream expressed in his farewell prayer may be coming closer to fruition, "that all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you . . . that their unity may be complete" (John 17:21-23).

May this brief history of the beginnings of Spiritual Directors International serve to re-ignite the dialogue and re-energize our membership to develop a wider, more expansive dream for this organization in the years to come. These rich memories from our past inspire confidence and hope for the future of SDI. ■

Carol Ludwig, a member of SDI's Coordinating Council, co-founded the Center for Spiritual Care in Vero Beach, FL, USA. She teaches on the Audire spiritual direction training team at the San Pedro Spiritual Center in Winter Park, FL, USA. She is a graduate of the Shalem Institute and has done advanced studies at the Washington Theological Union.

Footnotes

1 Her editorial board was composed of Bob Gardenhire III, James Keegan, SJ, Felicia McKnight, Sharon Plankenhorn, Elizabeth Stout, and Richard Woods, OP, with corresponding editors in Australia, England, Guatemala, and South Africa. Jean Sheridan served as Book Review Editor.

2 The current editorial board includes Wilkie Au, Marian Cowan, Susan Schenck Izard, Lois McAfee, Graham Standish, Dorothy Woods Whiston, and corresponding editors in Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Africa, Spain, Russia, and the United States. Elizabeth Stout also serves as Book Review Editor.

SYMPOSIUM & CONFERENCE HISTORY

(C) = conference theme or keynote, (S) = symposium theme or keynote

2002: Wilsonville, OR, USA; Namasté Retreat Center

(C) New Paradigms in Spiritual Direction—Diarmuid Ó Murchú

(S) Maintaining the Prophetic Edge—Mary Ann Scofield

2001: Atchison, KS, USA; Heritage Conference Center

(C) Living Justice—Edwina Gateley

(S) Issues in Supervision—Steve Wirth

2000: Holyoke, MA, USA; Mont Marie Conference Center

(C) Seeking the Mystery: Stories of Our Practice —Marian Cowan, Bill Creed, Jim Keegan,
& Renée O'Brien

(S) Exploring the Mystery: Visioning in Open Space—Anne Dwyer, Carol Marrozi & Bill Creed

1999: Glorieta, NM, USA; Glorieta Conference Center

(C) Spirituality in the Workplace & Daily Life—Rev. Dr. Joe Driskill & Debra Farrington

(S) Eliciting the Corporate Charism—Ellen Morseth, BVM

1998: Burlingame, CA, USA; Mercy Center

(C) Spiritual Direction & the Whole Person—Rev. Howard Rice & Flora Wuellner

(S) A Guided Dialogue on Spirituality & Sexuality—Donald Bisson, FMS & Janet Ruffing, RSM

1997: St. Louis, MO, USA; Archdiocesan Pastoral Center

(C) Spiritual Direction: Crossing to Freedom in Self & Society—Gil Bailie

(S) Training Spiritual Directors: Social Dimensions—Miriam Cleary, CSU, Tish Bulkley
& Ann Dwyer, CND

1996: Hendersonville, NC, USA; Kanuga Conference Center

(C) Honoring Diversity: Spiritual Direction in a Global Community—Robert Wicks

(S) Supervision as Radical Grace—Steve Wirth

1995: Burlingame, CA, USA; Mercy Center

(C) Embracing Diversity in Spiritual Direction—Jack Mostyn & Elinor Shea

(S) Reverencing Our Coat of Many Colors—Dr. Lily Quintos

1994: Atchison, KS, USA; Heritage Conference Center

(C) Opening to the Mystery in Spiritual Direction—Tilden Edwards

(S) Divine & Human Intimacy

1993: Atchison, KS, USA; Heritage Conference Center

(C) Holistic Spiritual Direction

(S) New Wind in the Sail—Tad Dunne & Suzanne Toolan

1992: Baltimore, MD, USA; Loyola College

(C) Discernment for the Third Millennium—Shaun McCarty

(S) Attending to the Holy—Margaret Guenther

1991: Philadelphia, PA, USA; Chestnut Hill College

(C) Directing Compulsive Persons: Discernment—Tom Weston, SJ & A Paradigm for Spiritual
Direction for Persons in Recovery—Bridget Clare McKeever

(S) Spiritual Direction as a Work of Art—Mary Ann Heib, RSM

1990 Burlingame, CA, USA; Mercy Center

(C) Contemplative Experience in Spiritual Direction—Brian McDermott, SJ, & Robert Egan, SJ