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About the cover: “In the Beginning was the Tao.”
For information on the artwork, see page 4.
Members throughout the SDI network cite Mary Ann Scofield as the midwife at the birth of Spiritual Directors International, an ecumenical association of colleagues grounded in the Christian faith. The site of the delivery was Mercy Center in Burlingame, California, USA. The occasion was the 1990 Mercy Center Conference, where spiritual directors gathered to reflect and pray about the need for a network to support spiritual directors and trainers. Since then, the organization has grown to more than 4,650 members across the United States and around the world. Mary Ann Scofield tells the early story:

“In the mid to late ’80s, I was a board member of the Western Association of Spiritual Directors (WASD). WASD was the West Coast portion of the National Federation of Spiritual Directors who worked in Roman Catholic seminaries. I was working in a seminary at the time, and was elected to head WASD. Our annual conference drew upwards of 100 spiritual directors, but they didn’t all teach in seminaries. In fact, most didn’t.

“By 1989, there were no longer enough seminars to warrant a separate West Coast WASD, so we were merged with the Midwest region. Yet I was still aware of all those spiritual directors out West who felt they needed their own group for support. There were people from states like Nevada who had no gathering place. I felt a nudge from God to help provide a networking opportunity for them.

“With consultation, I gathered a national committee—a ‘discernment circle’—to talk about this kind of networking. Every person we approached agreed to be on the committee.1 For months, committee members interviewed people in their own geographic areas about what they felt was needed. We put the results of our survey together and they indicated the need for a larger, national network.”
Scofield’s committee members surveyed spiritual directors in their local areas for nine months in 1989 and 1990. They asked in what settings spiritual direction was being done and what kinds of people were coming for direction. They probed for specific needs the directors felt. Would a formal network of peers be helpful? How might a national association for spiritual directors support them in their ministry?

Their findings were presented at a conference of spiritual directors at Mercy Center in February, 1990. Scofield says, “About ninety people from all over the United States came for the weekend. Our Sunday morning agenda offered the opportunity to present our survey findings. We asked the group to pray together for discernment. People went off in their own spaces and prayed, and there was an overwhelming endorsement from the assembly to develop a national network.”

A volunteer Steering Committee was commissioned to develop this vision. “We called it that,” says Scofield, “because we didn’t want officers and a bureaucratic structure. We didn’t want a board of directors or a hierarchical structure. We wanted a loose organization, more of a supportive network.”

Janet Ruffing recalls the operating principles in those early days: “We were honoring the movement of the spirit in our midst and acknowledging that present times call for new responses. We had an attitude of service. We envisioned contributing and enriching the community of spiritual directors. Discernment circles brought issues and ideas to larger meetings. We had a totally open forum for decision making and approval by the membership, demonstrated by general affirmation at our large gatherings.”

Scofield recalls that the Steering Committee was infused with “a high awareness of wanting to be ecumenical. We were three Catholics, a Methodist psychiatrist, and an Episcopal priest.”

Later, in August 1990, letters to spiritual directors across the country announced the establishment of Spiritual Directors International and invited them to join the new organization. “We started with all the various lists we had,” says Scofield. “There was an overwhelmingly positive response. By November 1 we had received more than 400 membership applications.” The Steering Committee met in Washington, DC, in October 1990 to work further on the fledgling organization.

For several years, Scofield served as SDI’s de facto executive coordinator. She worked out of her small office at Mercy Center, soliciting funds from her community to underwrite initial mailings to prospective members.

“We encouraged people to share the Connections newsletter with other spiritual directors they knew,” she says. “The fall 1990 newsletter membership list included people from seventeen countries and five continents. Many from abroad had trained or were currently studying in the United States at the Shalem Institute in Bethesda, MD, the Institute for Spiritual Leadership (ISL), Chicago, IL, or the Washington Theological Union, Washington, DC.”

Scofield found the international dimension “very important, because it could keep us from overfocusing on the United States and becoming parochial.” “And,” she adds, “we wanted to be of service to spiritual directors wherever they were. We needed to have a different, larger understanding of spiritual direction if we were to really be of service. I think this international dimension has helped enlarge the vision of our membership over the years. But it was there from the beginning. I worked on getting funding from our dues-supported budget to include foreign voices in the original conferences and symposia.”

Ruffing recalls this international aspect as “a desire to build on what was already in place in some countries overseas. The Institute for Spiritual Leadership, Fordham, Maryknoll, Duquesne (with Susan Muto
and Carolyn Gratton), the Mission Society, Mercy Center, the Center for Religious Development (CRD), and Washington Theological Union all had international people coming through their programs. These program directors had become attentive to working in the international dimension. Many relationships had been established through social contacts. But the models didn’t necessarily translate. One of our [Fordham University] graduates worked at a retreat house in Ghana for many years. A graduate this year will go out to staff that same program.”

The first edition of Connections included enthusiastic responses to SDI’s invitation letter and quotes from members in Australia, India, and the United Kingdom. Respondents from Bolivia, Canada, Colombia, Germany, Indonesia, Ireland, Japan, Kenya, Korea, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Africa, and Thailand agreed to participate in SDI activities.

Jack Mostyn recalls another early international dimension of SDI:

“Many of the early adherents to SDI were graduates of CRD. People like Miriam Cleary and Jack Shea and myself had worked in the Jamaica CRD extension program. This was a starting point for many of us in international linkages. Mary Ann Scofield and Frank Sherlock were part of a Kenya retreat team under the Mercy Center umbrella, and also in the Seychelles.

“Many CRD trainees would go back home and be the only trained spiritual director. They called on classmates to help them with new training programs, in Australia, especially. People would go over to work. Shalem developed an international connection. There were also Jesuit-designed training programs in England. In more recent years Mary Ann Scofield and Lucy Abbot Tucker have done work in Lithuania. And Jim Keegan was in India on a Jesuit training experience before he trained as a spiritual director.”

Many of these connections among training program directors had been fostered at the 1989 Burlingame Symposium for Spiritual Direction Trainers. At that meeting, organized by Jack Mostyn (who was then working at Mercy Center), a now legendary “conversation in an elevator” between Mostyn and
Tilden Edwards, Shalem’s Executive Director, helped move the concept of a spiritual directors network along.

**Annual Events**

SDI’s annual events were slowly developing into the formats we recognize today. Maureen Conroy, a member of the original organizing committee, took an active role in the planning and development of the SDI symposium in the early days. Conroy agreed to coordinate the 1991 Symposium on the East Coast of the United States, in Chestnut Hill, PA.

Jack Mostyn recalls that, “in the early years there were three separate groups: the SDI steering committee, the annual conference committee, and the annual symposium organizing committee. And they were all headed in the same direction as we moved to our fourth annual meeting in Baltimore, MD, USA and the formation of one organization.”

Conroy’s work on the 1991 events established a pattern for SDI. “Since then,” Mostyn notes, “SDI has held two major international events each year: a three-day Conference for Spiritual Directors and a three-day Symposium for Trainers of Spiritual Directors at the same site.” At these gatherings, members learned of new work in the ministry of spiritual direction as well as opportunities to help hone their skills and practice this art.

After 1991, organizers decided to move the annual conference and symposium from the East to the West Coast and to hold every third year’s session in a Midwestern location to better accommodate members’ geographic diversity. A continuing problem with this annual rotation is the need to find a space large enough to accommodate several hundred people in a retreat-type setting.

Steve Wirth, who has participated in all but one symposium, observes that “the mood around them has changed over the years. In the early days, spiritual direction was the new ministry. It was not well known or supported. People connected with spiritual direction programs felt sometimes as though they were involved in a guerrilla effort. There was a feeling that we were all in this together and were changing the world.”

As programs began to grow and more funding became available, lots of people who wanted to start their own training programs came to symposium. “Then the question became ‘What to do with all the new people?’” says Wirth. “The different needs of old timers and new participants affected the symposium experience. Often, an experienced trainer wound up in a group with all new people, and became the ‘expert’ giving advice, but not getting anything for his or her own growth.”

At times separate tracks were offered or intentional groups were set up so new trainers or non-trainers would not be placed in situations beyond their experience level among veteran directors of training programs. “In some of those early years, we also had not only a symposium but a colloquium and a conference as well. Now, it seems the workshops and half-day/full-day institutes have replaced what we used to call the colloquium. I even recall when there was a pre-Symposium day for new trainers in which experienced trainers presented workshops especially to work with them. It started Wednesday morning, and the symposium started Wednesday evening,” says Wirth.

Some training programs evolved from initial training models like ISL, CRD, or Shalem. But a “second generation” of trainers who were trying to figure out how to start new training programs began to arrive at the symposia. “We noticed that some who were starting programs didn’t even have a model,” says Wirth. “Different strains surfaced because there were so many new things happening all at once.”

It was sometimes confusing to SDI newcomers to
distinguish between colloquium, symposium, and conference. Wirth simplifies: “Symposium used to be more the heart of SDI, like the Senate, if you will. It represented the institutional members, those people who had the greatest impact on new spiritual directors. Conference was more like the House of Representatives. People who attended conference were generally not as experienced and, in many cases, depending on where the conference was held, might not be there again next year. With the geographical shifts in conference and symposium sites over the years, there was often a sixty to seventy-five percent turnover in conference participants from year to year. The other twenty-five percent, the constant participants, were trainers. The two events worked together very well. Each played its own specific role.”

Organizational Structure

When SDI filed for its 501(c)3 not-for-profit status, the Internal Revenue Service required a board, by-laws, and statutory annual meetings. Janet Ruffing took responsibility for drafting the new organization’s by-laws. In April, 1991, the Steering Committee evolved into the organization’s current governing body, the Coordinating Council.

Scofield carried the administrative load in the early years with assistance from the Coordinating Council and other volunteers. Donald Schell served as the first Treasurer and did all of the financial work. In 1994, Ruth Blacksea volunteered to become SDI’s Administrative Assistant and Secretary. Dorothy Whiston volunteered to serve as Events Coordinator to help organize the annual conference.

That same year, Jeff Gaines was interviewed for a part-time position as Executive Director. He accepted, and assumed his current position in 1995. SDI’s San Francisco office opened soon thereafter. By 1996, the need for an Office Administrator was overwhelming. Lyle Kesecker-Dotson was hired part-time to perform those duties. In August 1998, when Maggie Taylor was hired as SDI’s first full-time employee, Kesecker-Dotson became Events Coordinator, replacing Dorothy Whiston.

The first Coordinating Council members selected by an SDI membership preference poll were recognized at the 1995 conference at Mercy Center in Burlingame, CA, USA.

In the interim, a network of regional groupings coordinated by Regional Representatives was developed. Regional Reps assumed responsibility for contacting spiritual directors within their region, facilitating information exchange, arranging local meetings, and

“We wanted to be of service to spiritual directors wherever they were. We needed to have a different, larger understanding of spiritual direction if we were to really be of service.”

—Mary Ann Scofield, RSM
providing names of directors to those seeking a spir-

itual companion.

The Yardley Group’s Steve Wirth, formerly with the
Louisville Archdiocesan Spiritual Directors training
program, comments:

“Mary Ann Scofield really held SDI together at
the beginning and she built a framework for the
organization. It would not have survived with-
out her. Once the structure was in place, Jack
Mostyn came along and began to take steps to
expand SDI and help make it more inclusive.
During the early years and Mary Ann’s chairing,
the organization emphasized recruiting individ-
ual spiritual directors as SDI members (because
the main training centers were the foundation on
which it was built); during Jack’s chair, the
emphasis began to shift to trainers and the exist-
ing and growing number of training programs.”

Mostyn remembers “the most significant contribu-
tion of SDI, without a doubt, was the networking
with people about what it means to be a spiritual
director—that people had a place and were willing
to resource, talk, study, and learn with each other
how to practice the art of being directors.”

At the same time, Mostyn says today:

“I think that graduates of spiritual direction pro-
grams need to become an integral part of SDI,
and that the existing training programs need to
be more central in our organization. We need to
develop a directory of training programs. How
do program graduates keep nurturing them-
selves? Are graduates routinely invited to join
SDI? Some recent figures I saw indicate that
more than one thousand people graduate each
year from spiritual direction training programs
in the US. If even half of those graduates joined
SDI, in any given year we would grow by 500 or
more members.

“We need intimate and fruitful connections with
these training centers and programs. In 2000,
the Coordinating Council formed a task force to
contact all the training centers in the world and
to network with them. We have an information
packet which has been put together. On gradu-
ation, those packets [are] mailed to each graduate
[in select programs], inviting them to join SDI.

“And we need to develop some agreed criteria
for a good training program. Just as we have
Ethical Guidelines for individual spiritual direc-
tors, we need criteria for training centers and
programs.”

Spiritual Direction Training Programs

The involvement of trainers and training centers
soon provided a structural foundation for SDI.
When the organization was in its formative stages, it
was they who provided resources such as access to
knowledge, volunteers, and contact with potential
members. Most of the trainers were also paid to
work in full- or at least part-time capacities. This
helped assure continuity and committed time for the
development of SDI and its programs.

The danger of attempting to write history is that
from the vantage point of the present, important ear-
lier influences are too often distorted or forgotten.
We easily recognize the institutions that exist cur-
rently and tend to credit them for all that went
before. Yet even in its earliest years, SDI involved a
rich tapestry of directors representing diverse tradi-
tions and histories of spiritual direction. They
ranged from the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises to ecu-
menical training models that included elements from
Quaker, Presbyterian, and Asian religious traditions.
They encompassed contemplative models as well as
variations on the Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)
model, including the use of “verbatimis” and the
desire to insure that practitioners were qualified
professionally. Some trainers advocated setting professional standards and establishing a national certification body. (Further discussion of the controversy this caused follows in a later section.) There was involvement by large and recognizable training institutions at which many directors have been trained. But equally important were the voices of smaller training centers working in diverse settings.

Although similar in many dimensions, each training program had its unique orientation. The differences made some early meetings less comfortable than had members come from a single unified, traditional model. But the richness we see in SDI today developed from the blend of so many different approaches in the early years. Program directors were experimenting with effective ways to provide training in rural and urban locales. They explored both academic and nonacademic settings, and worked with economically disadvantaged communities, striving to reach those not adequately served by traditional ministries. Various emphases were also present as trainers sought to provide directors with a firm foundation in the practice of spiritual direction while at the same time highlighting different aspects or starting points for the ministry.

Of those times, Janet Ruffing observes, “Each program had its own integrity. Shalem had the Quaker model; CRD the religious experience model; each program had its own theories, themes, and program emphasis. Each had a supervisory component.” The diversity of models seemed to serve the organization well as SDI opened more widely to other faith traditions, reaching forty-one distinct denominations by the turn of the millennium.

A common bond uniting those involved was that all were passionately working to see that such a vital ministry was not lost or stillborn. They felt that this ministry held a unique power to consciously connect people to the experience of God. Though often unarticulated, trainers shared a deep sense of responsibility that the most essential elements in this work should not be lost. Moreover, the desire to share it with all people was always a part of the conversation.

The combined qualities of passion for this good work and a sacred sense of responsibility had the unintended consequence of making it sometimes difficult to adequately talk together about the work. Just as directees bring particular personal language and imagery, so too did training communities bring culturally distinctive idiom and metaphor to describe what was most essential in the work of direction, and how they might best pass it on to new generations of directors.
An organizational structure like the United Nations in many ways reflects the institutional service SDI offers training centers. Not merely a place to come and talk together, it is one in which efforts can be combined for the common good and future development. The annual symposium for trainers offered a container for this developmental conversation. Over the years it served to educate, stimulate dialogue, and offer new trainers the opportunity to draw on the experience and wisdom of others working in the field.

Settings for Spiritual Direction

As the SDI circle has widened, the conversation among spiritual directors has begun to shift to the classical spiritual direction paradigm. Members have offered variations on the standard one-on-one model of direction which had earlier focused on the inner realm or, at most, interpersonal relationships.

Shalem’s Rosemary Dougherty pioneered a method of small group spiritual direction based on Shalem’s peer supervision format. Dougherty’s adaptation offered spiritual direction for a broader circle of the laity as well as spiritual directors. Her approach spread widely in less than a decade, and is being used in many situations far removed from the traditional monastic or church-based model.

Marian Cowan, Bill Creed, James Keegan, and Renee O’Brien described innovative spiritual direction work settings with youth, homeless, and disabled people at the 2000 SDI Conference in Holyoke, MA, USA. In the case of each, the shift in the spiritual director’s sense of this ministry was deeply affected. Their work moved the traditional boundary of spiritual direction out further into an examination of social and economic structures that require transformation.

Liz Budd Ellmann pioneered a variation on spiritual direction with corporations and office workers. Her “Soul Tenders” ministry in Seattle, WA, USA, meets in lawyers’ conference rooms and downtown office complexes. Shalem has developed a “Soul of the Executive” program.

Jack Mostyn, Shaun McCarty, and Ellen Morseth have used spiritual direction methods and approaches in parish, diocesan, and religious community settings for group discernment.

At the 2001 Atchison SDI conference, keynoter Edwina Gateley led assembled directors toward an examination of spiritual direction, one might say, from the outside in. She used examples of social justice issues that cried out for an inside look at the hunger for God in all human beings. She then linked these two realms, pointing out countless early Christian and medieval precedents for the fruits of prayer and silence overflowing into compassionate works.

Steve Wirth is pushing the spiritual direction envelope even further in his examination of how major corporations and organizations affect our economic, political, social, and spiritual environment. This environmental/cosmic model will be developed more fully at Conference 2002 in Portland, OR, USA, where Diarmuid Ó Murchú will examine a paradigm for spiritual direction informed by New Science and quantum theory. Wirth describes this paradigm shift in the settings and foci of spiritual direction:

“The grid we used in Louisville, KY, USA, distinguished different arenas of attention and activity in spiritual direction. There is the individual, inside your own skin. There is the Jungian personal reflection, body relationship versus the interpersonal arena focus. Then there is the structural/communal focus. And finally the environmental arena, the largest scale systems, the cosmos, nature, history, and culture.

“Originally, spiritual direction focused on the individual or the interpersonal arena. It didn’t do well with the structural arena or the heads of
organizations. Experiences of God were tougher to find. The environmental arena was not really addressed. Today, a sensibility exists to move toward the marketplace—the structural or environmental arena/component of the grid. The working assumption is that contemplation and discernment look different in these two arenas; that the application of an individual arena focus doesn’t really help the directee address his or her own organization and his or her role in it.”

Wirth continues, “The paradigm hasn’t shifted yet. In fact, there is resistance to it. We are beginning to engage it, but some spirituality people have rich individual experiences and are not drawn to the rough and tumble of the organizational world. They approach it with fear and trepidation. This slows them down, and they are resistant to exploring new systems. Greater curiosity is developing, but a whole set of tools and processes for discernment need to be learned. It’s understandable that traditional directors who are excellent within the old paradigm don’t want to start over. It’s a real personal challenge.

“The way of processing experience is different, too. Out in the woods with a sense of the sacred, there’s less interpersonal talk with Jesus, and more inclination to let the person stay in the broad experience of a small creature in a huge ancient place relating to the Creator. The ways of working with that experience are quite different. God looks different and feels different in each arena. In an institutional setting, one asks questions like, ‘Where is this organization going?’ rather than ‘Where is God with me?’ In the new paradigm, there are different nuances all around. The experience is both/and, and it is very powerful.”

Carol Ludwig, a member of SDI’s Coordinating Council, co-founded the Center for Spiritual Care in Vero Beach, FL. 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. They included William Barry, SJ, Boston College; Jeannette Bakke, Bethel Theological Seminary, St. Paul, MN, USA; Maureen Conroy, RSM, Upper Room Spiritual Life Center, Neptune, NJ, USA; Gerald May, MD, Shalem Institute, Washington, DC, USA; John [Jack] Mostyn, CFC, Mercy Center, Burlingame, CA, USA; Janet Ruffing, RSM, Fordham University, New York, USA; Jean Marie Sullivan, Mercy Center, Frontenac, MO, USA; Ann Marie Wallace, Archdiocesan Spiritual Life Center, NY, NY, USA.

2. The group was composed of: Lucy Abbott (Tucker), Institute for Spiritual Leadership, Chicago, IL, USA; Gerald May; Janet Ruffing; Rev. Donald Schell, co-pastor, St. Gregory Nyssen Episcopal Church, San Francisco, USA; and Mary Ann Scofield.

Coming in Part II:

- Regional Representation
- Ethical Standards and the “Certification” Crisis
- Publications
- Interfaith Dimensions
- Membership Growth and Diversification
- Future Directions
### SDI Coordinating Council

*indicates first year of service

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(Ann and Carol were the first members to join the Council after consulting the membership for their preference.)
**SDI COORDINATING COUNCIL, continued**

* indicates first year of service

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