Called to Prophetic Action
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In her article “Friends of God and Prophets: Transformation for Justice,” Sister Mary Ann Scofield, RSM (of blessed memory) proposes a triune paradigm for spiritual direction formation that leads us to the prophetic edges of our calling.

I want to explore how God’s action in our lives first creates friendship, then transforms us to the point where we see the world as God sees it, and how this necessarily moves us, willingly or not, into a prophetic stance with the poor and against the unjust structures of our world. In that context, we can look together at how our training programs encourage or impede this threefold transformation.


Over the past year as we have witnessed a series of violent assaults on communities around the world. Increased terrorism, racial profiling, hatred, and xenophobia have awakened us anew to our responsibility as spiritual directors to inhabit the prophetic edges in which we find ourselves, and perhaps more importantly, where God has placed us.

As soul friends, teachers, and mentors in the spiritual direction community, we have turned to each other for compassionate listening, soul sanctuary, and encouragement on the front lines of spiritual activism. We have had frequent early morning phone calls during which we have shared our grief, fear, tears, and wonder. We know we are not alone in struggling to find safe places to share our souls.

We have been wondering together about which prophetic edge God is calling us to at this moment in our collective lives. And by us we mean more than just the three of us; we mean all of us. Inspired by Sister Mary Ann Scofield’s loving insistence, we began to talk about our responsibility as spiritual directors to attend to the suffering of our world beyond simply serving as “friends of God” to seekers. In 2005, she wrote that we need to examine whether spiritual direction training programs are stopping at this first level of the triune paradigm, “namely helping individuals to feel good about themselves—a sort of therapy with spiritual trappings—that does not go any further.” (p. 202). We asked ourselves where and how we might be holding back in our own lives, in our sessions with directees, even in our congregations and communities.

Over the past few months we listened together for how God is nudging us into the consolation and teshuvah (returning) of social justice, of the healing and repair of the world, right now. “How were we inviting the mystic and supporting the prophet” (to borrow a phrase from the book of the same name by Katherine Marie Dyckman, SNJM, and L. Patrick Carroll, SJ)? We feel a sense of moral and ethical responsibility to create spaces in which we as a spiritual direction community can be together at this moment in
our shared history. How are we as a global community being called to prophetic action while continuing to serve as “friends of God” to seekers?

In our conversations, we prayed, talked, cried, and dreamed together about how we are being called to prophetic action in the service of democracy. We specifically discussed issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, economic class, age, disability, nationality and geography, religion and faith tradition; in other words, nearly every unique manifestation of the Divine Image.

Cynthia shared with us a slideshow she’d created for a workshop on the topic of Faith, Race, and Politics. Four years later, the content is perhaps more important than ever:

“Reluctant Companions: Faith, Race, and Politics—each word alone can cause one to hesitant to enter into conversation with another. Yet, we are all accompanying each other on this journey we call life.”

She also drew on Parker Palmer’s Five Habits of the Heart, rooted in chutzpah (knowing that one has a voice that needs to be heard and the right to speak it) and humility (accepting the fact that my truth is always partial and may not be true at all). These five habits include:

1. Understanding that we are all in this together.
2. Developing an appreciation of the value of “otherness”.
3. Cultivating the ability to hold tension in life-giving ways.
4. Generating a sense of personal voice and agency.
5. Strengthening our capacity to create community.

(Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit)

Sister Mary Ann suggests in her chapter that we examine our training programs with discerning eyes, minds, and hearts to assess if and how well we are training spiritual directors for social consciousness at the prophetic edge. Undoubtedly we have some inner work to do in our own training programs, religious institutions, and sacred communities.

The world is calling us right now to know what has to be done as partners with God in ongoing co-creation. As Mary Ann Scofield reminded us, “our task is to pay attention and to nurture the in-breaking of the prophetic among us.” (p. 209) We are, every one of us, the prophetic among us. Current political events, global demagoguery, and encroaching violence, oppression, and suffering have created an in-breaking in our consciousness, our hearts, and our daily lives.

Spiritual Directors International is our shared spiritual home (virtually). We are connected as a global community by our service, our ministry, and our calling. When the world cries
out in pain, we not only hear the cries; we cry with the world. We respond not only with our hearts; we “pray with our feet” like Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel.

As Rabbi Josh Feigelson wrote recently,

> When I say prayer, I mean an act of making room: allowing another voice—the voice of another person, the voice of the divine, the still small voice of our own souls—to be heard.

> We have witnessed violent images, so many violent images. And we have heard violent words, uttered by angry souls with angry mouths beneath angry eyes. In the face of such anger and violence, we may resist the quiet for fear of what we might hear. But I would suggest that now, especially now, is a moment to be quiet. It is a moment to listen. It is a moment to pray. (Feigelson, Rabbi Josh. 2016. "Praying". Blog. Ask Big Questions.)

We offer these reflections to draw on our collective wisdom as spiritual directors. Although SDI members are scattered across the globe, we have several formats through which we connect. These include the SDI Blog, Facebook group, Connections newsletter, and our annual conferences. There are also informal networks among us, soul friends and affinity groups such as the Spiritual Directors of Color Network, the Jewish Spiritual Directors network, regional groups, peer supervision groups, and more. We know how to create a safe container for wisdom to emerge, and we offer the following questions to draw on your experience and suggestions for the next steps.

How can we as a global community of spiritual directors connect and collaborate in the following ways:

- Discern our call, in community, to prophetic ministry
- Encourage sacred conversations locally and globally
- Participate in the best use of social media, the SDI Facebook page, and blog, to share our stories of sacred activism
- Provide leadership, ideas for SDI conferences and Leadership Institutes, publications, and other formats to foster dialogue. Can we create an SDI Learns from … video about the connection between spiritual direction and social justice?
- Foster conversations, leadership, and sacred activism that build bridges across lines of age, race, religion, gender, economic class, geographic boundaries, and affiliation
- Share resources on best practices in our formation and training programs around this topic

In these troubled times, we need each other perhaps more than ever. Together, and with God’s grace, we can transform our world.