



San Francisco Theological Seminary

Programs in the Art of Spiritual Direction and Formation
San Francisco Theological Seminary
Dr. Wendy Farley, Director

Program Vision

“How to live with some joy in your mouth. How to put your hands gentle on where the wound is and draw out the grief. How to urge some kind of mercy into the shock-stained earth so that good will grow.” Rosemarie Freeney Harding

Spiritual direction has played a role in Christian formation since Jesus sat at Martha and Mary’s kitchen table. It has emerged relatively recently in Protestant settings as a way to deepen the spiritual journey and to accompany others as they explore their relationship to the Beloved. It is a joy to participate in this work and to meet the people who find themselves called to these practices and to this vocation. People find themselves called to this path from many directions and many stages of life – young people still engage in their MDiv studies, retiring pastors, lay counselors, chaplains, retreat leaders, people called to serve LGBTQ+ people, those who identify as trans-religious, evangelical, black church, Catholic laity – and more. Whatever path you have walked to get here, we welcome you as friends on a shared spiritual journey.

“The first duty of love is to listen.” Paul Tillich

No program can certify another person as a spiritual guide. This program grants a certificate or diploma that indicates that you have undertaken serious study and practical training as a spiritual director or as a guide for individuals and communities seeking spiritual formation.

- Our program emphasizes that spiritual guidance is founded in your personal commitment to your own spiritual formation and spiritual direction during and after your participation in our programs.
- Through classes, practice, and additional readings you will explore a variety of spiritual texts and practices representative of many sources of Christian spiritual wisdom. Our roots are in the Protestant tradition, but it is important to us to the insights of many cultures and traditions.
- We are committed to the inter-connections between interior transformation and compassion for the world.

It is our hope that participation in our programs will deepen your faith and that you leave with a deeper thirst for the goodness of God and for justice for God’s beloved creation. But the work

you do is between you and the Holy Spirit. Please pray always for the guidance, open heart, and spontaneous wisdom that lie at the heart of spiritual direction.

Certificate vs Diploma

SFTS offers both a certificate and a diploma in spiritual direction and formation. There are two primary differences between the two options – number of classes and academic credit:

- Certificate students are required to participate in **four** classes. Certificate students do not have to fulfill academic requirements, but they are expected to do assigned readings and write brief reflections on the readings. This kind of writing is more informal than academic writing, but it can help integrate new ideas and ways of thinking.
- Diploma students are required to take **five** classes.
- Diploma students will also satisfy **additional academic requirements**. Each session offers 1.5 academic credit hours. Typically, diploma students will satisfy the academic portion of the session with additional reading and an academic-style paper due in the weeks after the session.

Structure of Program

Our Program in the Art of Spiritual Direction includes three primary components: **classes**, a **practicum**, and **additional reading and on-line training**.

- **Classes** are offered on the campus of the San Francisco Theological Seminary. Students can commute to class or make arrangements for on-campus housing.
- The **practicum** is your practice of spiritual direction with 2 or more directees under the supervision of an experienced spiritual director appointed through our program. This occurs during the year from your own location.
- A **bibliography** with recommended and required readings will be available upon your acceptance into the program. You will be expected to work through the required readings on your own before graduating from the program.

In addition to these core components, all participants are expected to be in **spiritual direction** and encouraged to maintain spiritual disciplines of your choice.

Classes:

The certificate requires 4 classes and the diploma requires 5 classes. Two sessions will be offered each January. Students can take these at their own pace, but they cannot begin the practicum in spiritual direction until they have taken both Contemplative Listening and Fundamentals of Spiritual Direction.

All students are required to take the class in Contemplative Listening and Fundamentals of Spiritual Direction before taking other classes or beginning the practice of spiritual direction.

Three additional classes are offered on a rotating basis:

- Discernment
- Spiritual Practices for Spiritual Direction
- Multi-cultural Issues in Spiritual Direction

Practicum:

A distinctive strength of SFTS's programs in spiritual direction and formation is the depth and integrity of the practicum component. This includes the practice of spiritual direction or other relevant practice, supervision, and being in spiritual direction.

Students focusing on the art of spiritual direction:

In addition to course-work, you will complete two cycles of spiritual direction under the supervision of a mentor assigned by our program. Each cycle lasts approximately one year. After completing "Contemplative Listening" and "Fundamentals of Spiritual Direction," students will locate 2-3 people with whom they will practice spiritual direction. Your directees should not overlap with other close relationships – i.e. they should not be close friends, students, people you work closely with and so on. As boundary lines can sometimes be confusing, your supervisor will help you assess whether someone is an appropriate directee.

Supervision:

This is a period of apprenticeship in developing knowledge, skill, confidence, and one's own style of spiritual direction. Like all apprenticeships, this one occurs through the guidance of a mentor or, in this case, a supervisor. SFTS will match you with a supervisor who will work with you until you complete the program. You are always welcome to contact the director of the program with any concerns, problems, or questions, but for many things, your supervisor may be the first person you contact with a question.

Supervision is meant to provide support and guidance. Even directors that have been working for many years usually work with supervisors with whom they can discuss their directees and their own questions and problems. It is entirely fitting for you to bring your vulnerabilities, "failures," confusions and uncertainties to your supervisor. Her or his job is to help you become the best director you can be. This means that in supporting you, they will also indicate places where you need growth or to attend to an issue that is hampering your ability to be a good director. Sometimes this will include a recommendation that you seek therapy or some other support beyond what the program can give. It may be that in the course of supervision you and your supervisor begin to discern that this work is not an ideal fit for you. Your supervisor will be dedicated to your well-being and the well-being of your directees and will support you as you go through the program, becoming an ever more confident and wise director or – occasionally – discerning that another path suits you better.

Your supervisor is a member of a supervision team. This team will check in with each other and with the director two or more times a year and support one another in the work with their supervisees. Here as elsewhere in the work of supervision, the work is held in strict confidence.

Students Focusing on Spiritual Formation

Students whose focus is formation rather than direction will enter with a wider variety of vocations in mind. There is therefore not the same kind of set curriculum to the practicum in spiritual formation. Students will be assigned a supervisor and will work with this person to

design a project on which you wish to work as the practicum component. You will design the project, schedule check-ins, and discern what criteria are appropriate to assess progress.

Spiritual Direction:

All students are required to be in spiritual direction. Typically, people meet once a month with their director. The fee for spiritual direction must be negotiated between you and your director and is not included in the price of the certificate or diploma.

Naturally, since this is a program in spiritual direction and formation, we are committed to the value of this process. In the Christian tradition (and other spiritual traditions), work with an anam cara (spiritual friend), director, or confessor is considered an essential element of the spiritual path. "There is safety in much counsel" as Dorotheus of Gaza puts it. The spiritual journey takes us on a difficult and sometimes confusing journey. We encounter the difficult mental patterns that shape us, we may surface hidden patterns that direct us like secret and not always kind puppeteers. We may find ourselves triggered by the people we work with in ways we do not understand or even recognize. We may become unnecessarily self-doubting or overly uncritical of our abilities and experiences. It is essential to have a close guide in this work.

It is crucial that this guide be a skillful one and one with whom you enjoy good rapport. If you're your experience with your spiritual director is not fruitful, it is important to find someone else with whom you work better. This might be a topic you raise with your supervisor if you are confused about how your own spiritual direction is going.

Schedule to Complete Requirements

All requirements must be met in order to receive the certificate or diploma.

If you are seeking a certificate, it is possible to complete the course requirements in 13 months. If you are seeking a diploma, you will be able to complete the course-work over 3 January terms.

The practicum will take two years to complete, as you will need to complete two cycles of supervised spiritual direction.

Not everyone can take two weeks off at a time. The program is designed to accommodate various patterns of work and family so that can people move through the program at their own pace.

"Though indeed, dear, I can understand how a person's faith can at times flicker; for what is the mind to do with something that is the mind's ruin: a God that consumes us in His grace. I have seen what you want; it is there – a Beloved of infinite tenderness." Catherine of Sienna