

## **Frequently Asked Questions: Spiritual Direction Training Program (SDTP)**

### **What is the objective of the Training Program?**

Our program is a discernment and formation process for people wishing to become Franciscan spiritual directors.

### **Is this an academic program?**

There is an intellectual, academic component to this program. More significantly, since this program is a process for discernment and formation, we have designed it to embrace experiential learning, contemplative knowing, and group wisdom.

### **What kind of person is best suited for this program?**

We are looking for maturity and a readiness to do one's own spiritual work and to be of service to others. We recognize the importance of openness to a Franciscan spirituality and methodology as well as a capacity for respectful dialogue and learning from your peers.

### **Do I need to be in personal spiritual direction?**

Being in an active spiritual direction relationship (monthly) is a requirement of the program. Spiritual direction is what we're training you to do. It is also a means for the process of becoming.

You are free to arrange your own relationship with a spiritual director. Additionally, the Franciscan Spiritual Center has directors available. You should plan for this as an additional cost in addition to tuition. The Franciscan Spiritual Center does provide student rates for those in the application/discernment process and enrolled students in the training program.

### **Do I need prior experience in receiving spiritual direction?**

You do not need to have prior experience in receiving spiritual direction, but we encourage you to begin as soon as you are able because it will support you in your discernment process. Being in an active spiritual direction relationship during the training program is a requirement.

### **Do I need to have theological training?**

Theology will be examined and applied in this training program, but you do not need a degree or other prior background in theological studies.

### **Do I need to be Catholic?**

You do not need to be Catholic. Many of your peers in this program will come from different faith traditions and practices. It is important, though, to be ready and open for a training program which is Franciscan and Christo-centric. We will use insights from Francis, Clare, Bonaventure, Scotus, and mystics of other faith traditions. We also aspire to use and learn

from emerging voices and perspectives that are postcolonial and not from a dominant world view.

**At the end of the training program, will I be able to provide spiritual direction to others?**

The program is one of discernment and formation and aims to provide you with a solid basis to begin a ministry of spiritual direction.

**What does asynchronous mean?**

Asynchronous learning is designed to allow you to learn on your own schedule, within a certain timeframe. You will be able to access lectures, recorded dialogues, readings, homework, and other learning materials at any time during the 4-week period between online group gatherings.

This methodology provides you with freedom to manage your time between gatherings and puts the responsibility on you to come prepared to discuss, apply, and integrate when we gather as a group.

This methodology also is well suited for students who are working or have multiple commitments as well as those living in other time zones.

**How often will we meet? And how do we meet?**

We will gather monthly for a five-hour session from March 2027 to November 2028 apart from August and December, which will allow for planned breaks. (18 sessions). All of these live, real time gatherings will be offered in an online format via zoom. Depending on the geographic locations of our next student body cohort, we also strive to support in-person meetings outside of the cohort gatherings.

Outside of the cohort gatherings you will be assigned to a small learning group facilitated by a mentor. A significant amount of the integrative learning each month takes place within these learning groups. Groups will meet once per month outside the cohort gathering.

During the second half of the program (starting March 2028), you will be asked to meet monthly with two volunteer directees and participate in supervision. Meeting with volunteers will be scheduled at your discretion. Supervision will primarily take place during the cohort gatherings.

**Outside of the cohort gatherings, how much additional time should I plan for during the program?**

We encourage you to plan an additional 15-20 hours per month for viewing and engaging online materials, occasional reading and writing assignments, mentor and supervision meetings and sessions with volunteers (described above).

You are also asked to plan a personal silent retreat for 2 days each year.

### **Are the monthly cohort gatherings mandatory?**

Yes. While we have designed this program to feature an asynchronous learning model, which gives students significant freedom in completing their monthly learning assignments independently during the course of each month, an important component of this program is the live, real time gathering on the second Friday of the month. It is there that we integrate, practice, form community, and learn from one another.

These sessions are not recorded or designed to be viewed after the fact. We ask all students to clear their calendars for the 18 Fridays when the entire cohort will meet.

An important component of becoming a Franciscan spiritual director is found in community. We need to learn how to create intimate and safe space for others and we do so by learning how to do it for ourselves and for our fellow students.

### **What are the technology requirements for this program?**

You will need intermediate computer proficiency and access to a reliable high speed internet connection to download online materials and video as well as to meet online via Zoom for regular gatherings and small group meetings. You will be accessing all learning materials from an external website. All assignments will need to be submitted online via the learning website.

Our online learning platform is accessible via a smart phone app, which can assist in viewing and engaging online material. Laptop or desktop computers provide a better online experience for cohort, mentor, and supervision groups with others.

### **Is this an English language program?**

Yes, the teaching, conversation, and reading will be conducted in English.

### **Is this an international program?**

This program has been designed and is used by students in other time zones and countries. It is our hope and prayer to support the ministry of spiritual direction as it takes hold in other regions and contexts.

With that said, we are also mindful of the challenges that can be faced by international students, including internet bandwidth challenges, the necessity to apply and adapt the teachings and contexts in other cultural contexts, and financial challenges caused by the different levels of income available in different parts of the world.

### **What does it mean that this is a Franciscan training program?**

Becoming formed as a Franciscan spiritual director means becoming steeped in the Franciscan tradition of God's abundant and compassionate love, contemplative practices, dignity of the human person and care for all of creation. Based in what Richard Rohr calls "an alternative orthodoxy," a Franciscan spiritual director is grounded in the primacy of Christ, with a demonstrable openness to the validity of other faith traditions and expressions of spirituality. Students are trained in contemplative practices that promote an active and compassionate faith that is of service to the world.

### **Will there be an opportunity for in-person gatherings with fellow students?**

There will be limited opportunities for in-person gatherings at our center in Marylhurst, Oregon (near Portland) particularly for those who live in the area. In-person gatherings and traveling are optional.

### **What are the essential components of "how we learn together"?**

Asynchronous learning means that students will engage with the foundational "information" components of their formation between the gathering times. Students will then attend in real time both large-group hybrid and small-group gatherings once a month. Students will be placed in mentor-facilitated small groups to process and integrate what they are learning.

The first half of the program will be focused on forming a foundational and experiential understanding of spiritual direction and its skill sets. The second half of the program will continue to expand those understandings while engaging in a practicum with two volunteers; students will be supervised and supported by trained spiritual direction supervisors.

### **What is the cost of this program?**

Tuition costs have been designed to allow different pricing options based on a student's financial ability. It is our desire to make this program accessible to as many students as possible. Please see the pricing sheet on our website for the most current tuition rates.

Additional costs for the program include personal spiritual direction fees, an overnight silent retreat each year, books and [optional] travel or accommodations if you wish to attend in person.

### **Are scholarships available?**

The Franciscan Spiritual Center does not have an endowment or dedicated scholarship fund. We rely on the pricing tiers to make this program as accessible as possible.

Partial scholarships may sometimes be available through designated charitable donations or based on student enrollment. Please contact us to discuss this if you are unable to meet the lowest tier tuition rate.

**When may I review a syllabus and reading list?**

A sample syllabus and reading list are available on the website.

**Who may I contact if I have other questions?**

Contact Program Manager Ann Steigerwald at (503) 794-8542 or via email at [ann@francisspctr.com](mailto:ann@francisspctr.com)