

# Focus and linger

By [Sandra Lommasson](#)

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*In our December 27*

*issue, Amy Frykholm [describes](#)*

*the rapid development of the spiritual direction movement, and Daniel Schrock [reviews](#) Angela Reed's book on the subject (subscription required). There are currently*

*more than 6,000 spiritual directors working in conjunction with Spiritual Directors International. Spiritual directors often turn to this model after other forms of spiritual and religious leadership fail them. In an earlier post, Ruth Workman [told the story](#) of the reinvigoration of her ministry through spiritual direction. Below, spiritual director Sandra Lommasson tells of her quest to find that "something missing" in the church.*

*For information on*

*finding a spiritual director, see [Spiritual Directors International](#). For questions to ask a potential spiritual director, see [Anam Cara](#). --Ed.*

At

age 29 I cried out to an empty universe in the first authentic prayer of my life: "God, if you are, I need help!"

The

help came in ways I couldn't imagine. Most significant was my involvement in a self-help

process for family members and friends of alcoholics, and I drank from that well like a woman dying of thirst. God became real, a palpable and living presence, and I found practical ways to live this relationship, gradually finding my way into a congregation with which I could share the story that was becoming central to my life.

By

the early '80s I became a lay staff member of a Presbyterian congregation. I

was hired to do family ministry, but I was still puzzling over the fact that the Pentecost I had experienced as a member of the 12-step group was missing in my congregation. I suspected something beyond conventional Christian education was needed: *formation* rather than information.

Surely

there was a practice that both awakened us to the work of the Spirit already in our lives and helped us to live Spirit-filled lives! I read widely in search of this kind of practice. In Catholic literature, I read of a process called spiritual direction that was less about sharing a mutual story and more about serving as an evocative witness to another's sacred story. I wondered if this was what I was looking for.

I

entered the three-year program at Mercy Burlingame, a center run by Catholic sisters, and began to practice "holy listening" to individuals, church staff teams and governance groups. As I listened to the stories of ordinary people I learned to recognize the golden threads of the Spirit: perhaps in a desire to repair a broken relationship, or in the courage to let a program die in trust that death is never the final word, or in noticing a new thing arise as a possibility in an organizational mission.

Focusing

on and lingering in those places where the Spirit is moving changes us. Most of us benefit from a witness who helps us notice what's already present--to enter it, explore it and respond to it as a prayerful practice.

Mark

Nepo says that to listen is to lean in softly with a willingness to be transformed by what we hear. In this kind of listening, Pentecost becomes an almost daily experience. Ordinary life is extraordinary life.