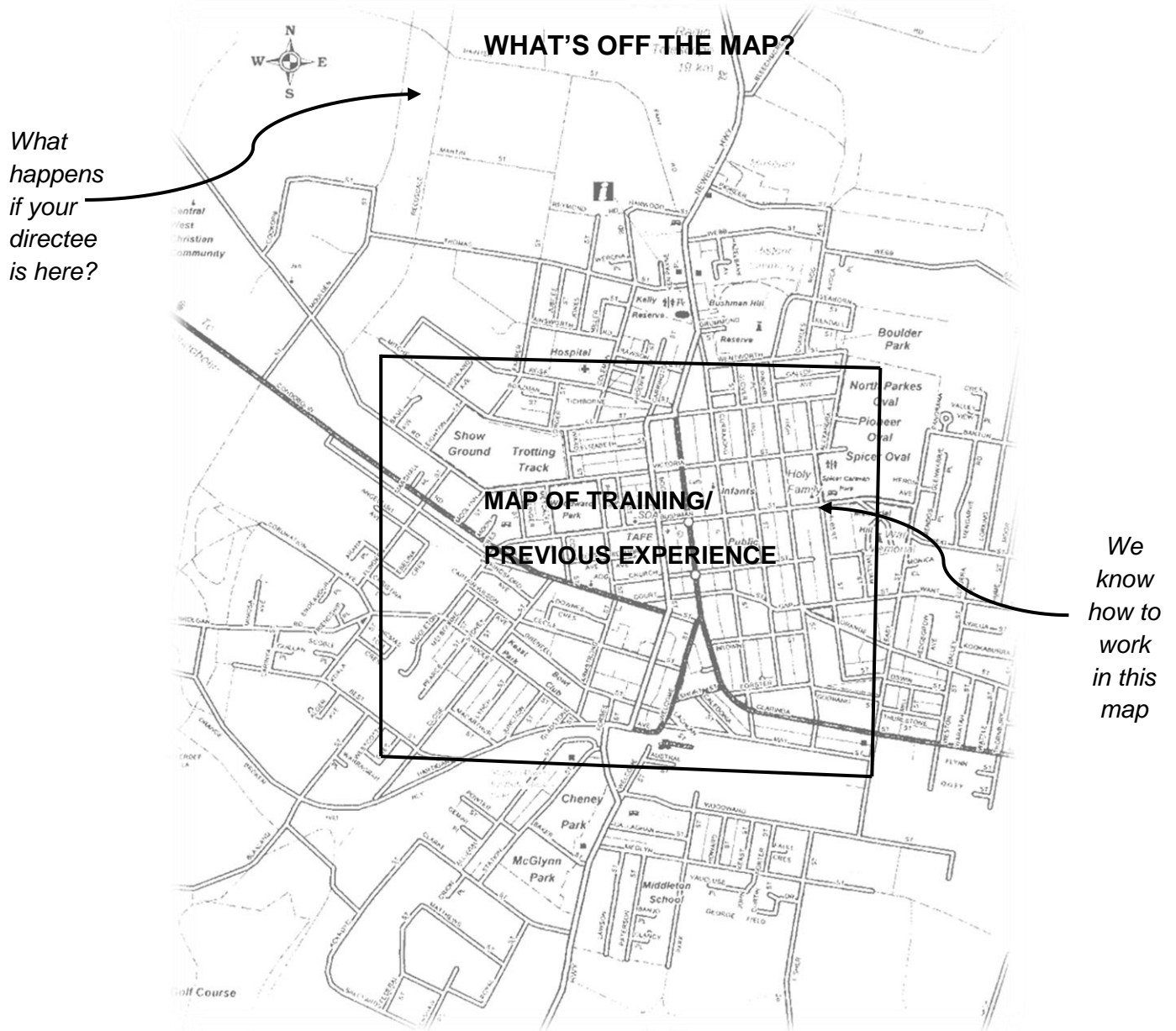


Map Quest

Directing those unfamiliar with the Inner Journey



As spiritual direction becomes widely known, more people are coming to direction who are unfamiliar with the interior journey – from dedicated church goers to those outside any faith tradition. Together, we will reflect on our practice and share our wisdom to develop some tools for beginning the journey with these folks as well as exploring some the dilemmas and pitfalls.

WORKSHOP PRESENTER:

Sue Dunbar

Introduction

This workshop arises out of my personal experience. As I reflected on my own training, the training offered in a standard/traditional spiritual direction training program and the variety of people who come for direction, I see a gap. Using the metaphor of the map, many people who now come to spiritual direction are not on the map that we traditionally use to assist people in navigating the interior journey.

This raises a few questions:

- What has changed in our environment?
- What issues or difficulties arise from these changes?
- What assumptions do we need to re-assess?
- What pitfalls do we need to be aware of?
- What new skills do we need?

My hope is that together we might develop some answers to these questions as I suspect that this is an area of interest and perhaps concern, for many spiritual directors.

Spiritual Direction in 2012

The landscape of spiritual direction in 2012 is a larger and more diverse environment than existed previously. We have people coming for spiritual direction from many different faith traditions or perhaps no tradition. We have people from religious backgrounds where promoting the inner journey is not part of their experience and people who are alive to the spiritual dimension of life but with little framework in which to explore this.

If we go back about 35 years or so (1975) we see a vastly different landscape. Most of the training programs that are more than 20 years old were started by Roman Catholic religious and staffed by Roman Catholic religious. We owe a great debt to these people who have kept the spiritual direction tradition alive for us.

These training programs have developed and changed over the years however, the basic map/landscape has not broadened all that much even though the people attending such training programs are now much more diverse. So we find ourselves in 2012 with excellent training to assist those who begin their journey somewhere on the map that we have been trained to navigate however there is now a large number of people that are somewhere outside of our known map.

As spiritual directors we are invited to expand our awareness to these new places, explore the edges of the map and discover ways to assist these people on their inner journey.

The metaphor of a “Map”

Let me pause for a moment and talk a little bit about what I mean by a “map”.

“The idea of a map ... is our internal understanding about how things ought to work and the habits and practices we develop over time based on these inner understandings”¹

¹ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making*, (Jossey-Bass, 2010) xi

“The inner story one lives ... shapes our commitments. It gives us a map for what life is about and how to live it in a particular time and place.”²

These cultural maps use metaphors, images, symbols and stories that enable us to navigate our worlds ... The maps lie so deep in our imagination and reach so far back in our earliest memories and education that we find it difficult to recognise them as our cultural maps. Instead we perceive them as the taken-for-granted descriptions of the way the world works, and our culture rewards us for adhering to them.”³

“The maps in our imaginations tells us who we are; they provide for us the geography of our identity as a culture and inform the ways we act. They’re part of who we are, but they are also so pervasive in our imaginations that we don’t notice them.”⁴

Characteristics of those starting out

There are a number of different categories of people starting out in spiritual direction today.

1. Religiously devout people.
2. Spiritual Seekers
3. Good church-goers
4. People from other faith traditions
5. All the rest in between ... (Fill in with your experience)

Look at *“The continuum of directee’s capacity to experience God”*. Maureen Conroy’s schema

For your directee

- What is God like?
- How do they pray?
- How do they express their feelings?
- What is their behaviour like in spiritual direction?

Assumptions Re-assessed

As we navigate new places on the map, some of the assumptions that have served us well in the past may need to be re-assessed.

Assumptions like:

- People can recognize interior movements
- People have a benevolent image of God
- People have a strong enough self image to engage in the process
- *Add in your own...*

² Ibid, xi

³ Ibid, 6

⁴ Ibid, 8

Rules

We carry with us, somewhere in the backs of our minds, many of the mantras and underlying assumptions from our training programs or well respected books we have read.

Now we find, out on the edges of the map, that we do something differently and it is very helpful to the directee but somehow we feel we have done something wrong.

Perhaps some of these rules need to be re-examined?

Such as;

- If I am doing more of the talking something is wrong
- I shouldn't be working harder than the directee
- Don't guide/lead the directee rather work with what they present
- Don't answer their questions rather help them find their own answers
- *Add in your own.....*

Of course I would counsel caution here. I am not suggesting that we throw out the accumulated wisdom of the tradition and past experience of the wise ones in our field.

Pitfalls

One of the major pitfalls that I suspect we encounter is discouragement and self doubt. Not only are we breaking the rules but also the little glimpses of God for the directee can be very slow in coming.

Questions like:

- Am I the right director for this person?
- Am I missing something?
- Could I have done that better?
- Did I insert my own agenda?
- *Add in your own*

Regular supervision is essential as we navigate this new part of the map.

New Skills and Tools

We need a range of skills that assist people at the beginning of this journey. Ways to promote self awareness, to invite a broader understanding of God, to develop trust in their own experience and so on.

Some tools we might use

Presence of Director

- Build trust through heart hospitality, genuine care, patient listening and non-judgemental presence

Language

- Develop a language that is familiar and non-threatening for the directee
- Listen carefully for how they name God/The Sacred Other/ ‘the Nudge’

Invitation

- Invite them to tell their story or a story that is important to them
- Ask them to share about an experience of happiness, sadness, fear or anger
- Ask them to share about an experience of beauty or a time of loss
- Ask them to share an experience of being loved and accepted for who they are.
- Ask them to talk about their passion

Education

- Explain why you ask something
- Explain why feelings are important– coming into the “Now”
- Explain processes before you begin ie what to do in a time of silence, body sense, exploring an image ...
- Suggest what kinds of things they might be looking for as they go within ie body warmth, feeling in a particular spot, an image, a memory, a surprising/unsummoned thought ...
- Invite them to select a symbol from a selection and then talk about the symbol – what caused them to choose this symbol, what does it say to them or about them ...
- As a subset of symbols you may have some photos for them to choose from or use photo language – again ask them to select and share

Approach Tangentially/through Metaphor

- Work with dreams, children’s stories
- Use experiences of nature, creation
- Ask “What is it like?” with the use of metaphor, colour, shape, flower, animal, weather condition, season...
- Find out what works for the directee ie. Art, music, drawings, nature, sacred texts, poetry, films ... and use this in the sessions

Stay Real

- Feedback what you notice
- Check after a few sessions what has been helpful

Remember they still keep coming to spiritual direction!