

# CONFERENCE OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS AUSTRALIA

Newsletter March 2026

## From the National Chair

### A Shared Journey Ahead

A very warm welcome to our first newsletter of 2026, and my first as Chair.

I extend my deep thanks to each of you for your support, encouragement, and trust in me. I step into this role with a profound sense of humility and gratitude. I am keenly aware that the heart and strength of CSD Australia does not rest in any one role or voice, but in each of you. In your wisdom, your integrity, and your faithful commitment to walking alongside others with attentiveness and reverence.

As we begin this year within the reflective season of Lent, we are invited into a time of deeper listening, renewal, and openness to transformation. There is something deeply life-giving about belonging to a community that honours the sacred movements of the Spirit in the ordinary and the extraordinary moments of life. It is this shared calling to listen deeply, to accompany gently, and to foster spaces of transformation, that continues to shape who we are together.

As we move into 2026, my hope and commitment is to support the work of CSD Australia in increasing awareness of the sacred role of Spiritual Direction. Highlighting its significance within our wider communities and ensuring we continue to grow in excellence, integrity, and responsiveness. This includes strengthening and advancing our processes, nurturing best practice, making systems where directees can connect with directors more efficiently and fostering formation that supports spiritual directors in an ever-changing world.

At the heart of this vision is a desire to deepen connection: connection with one another, connection with those we walk besides, and connection with the sacred presence that guides and sustains our work. I look forward to listening, learning, and walking this path with you. Attentive to where we are being called as a community, and open to the new possibilities that await us.

May this year be one of renewal, courage, and hope for us all.

With every blessing on your ministry  
Karen Englebretsen  
National Chair

# CSD Australia News

## Welcome Ruoru (Ring) our new Communications Coordinator

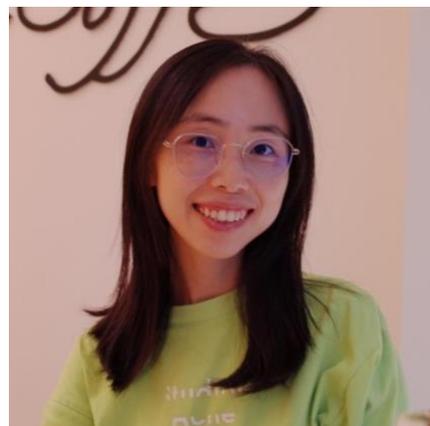
We extend a very warm welcome to our new Communications Coordinator Ruoru Lin. Ruoru's English name is Ring. We look forward to introducing her to you all. Here are a few words from Ring:

Originally from China, I recently began my journey in Australia as a Master of Social Work student at Curtin University. Before moving to Australia, I spent nearly ten years working in journalism, communications, and digital content strategy. Most recently, I led content and campaign initiatives for Ant Forest, a global environmental program recognised by the United Nations for inspiring collective action toward sustainability.

Throughout my career, I have been drawn to work that connects people through meaningful stories and shared purpose. My transition into social work reflects a deepening commitment to listening, ethical practice, and creating spaces where individuals feel respected and supported.

As Communications Co-ordinator, I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute my skills in writing, storytelling, and digital engagement to support the mission of CSD Australia. Over the past months, I have been learning more about spiritual direction and have been deeply moved by its emphasis on presence, attentiveness, and compassionate listening. It is a privilege to support a community devoted to accompanying others with care and wisdom.

Outside of work and study, I enjoy films, good food, and quiet moments with a book. I am grateful to be part of this community and excited for the journey ahead.



## Recent Article featuring Michele Toussaint and Dora Ghaitidis

At the beginning of the year, an article published by the Archdiocese of Melbourne beautifully explored spiritual direction as the ancient art of accompaniment. The piece featured two of our own members, Michele Toussaint and Dora Ghaitidis generously sharing their wisdom, experience and unique expressions of this sacred ministry. Their reflections offered rich insight into the depth, attentiveness and grace that shape the practice of spiritual direction. If you haven't had a chance to read this inspiring article yet, please find it [here](#).



5 min read

Spiritual direction, the ancient art of accompaniment

## Connection with SDI

Recently, we connected with Spiritual Directors International (SDI) to explore a connection and learn more about their formation opportunities and global community. Next month, we look forward to meeting Rev. SeiFu, SDI Chair and members of their support team to get to know one another and explore how we might collaborate and support each other's communities.

We trust in the Spirit's guidance in this unfolding relationship and will share updates in the next newsletter, watch this space.



## Expressions of Interest in Reference Group

Over the past few years, CSD has had a small group called the *Reference Group*, which meets monthly to connect, hear updates from the Chair and Communications Co-ordinator, and engage in conversations in response to needs arising within CSD and the wider Spiritual Direction community.

We would like to extend this invitation to anyone who wishes to join. This group offers a chance to gather together and enables those of us employed by you, CSD members, to be guided by the wisdom and representation of the community. It is an opportunity to hear different voices, reflect together, and work collaboratively to create opportunities that grow and nurture our CSD community.



The requirement is simply an hour meeting once a month. We hope to gather for our next meeting in March. Please reach out to [Karen](#) for more details.

## CSD Australia Phone Contact

Following a review of our communication processes, we have made the decision to discontinue the dedicated CSD Australia mobile phone, as it has not been in use over recent years.

We will continue to use personal contact numbers, which are available on our website and on the first page of the newsletter footer. The Chair's number will remain the primary contact point, with Karen responding to all phone enquiries. No action is required, we simply wish to keep you informed of this change



## Melbourne in Person Gathering

Planning is underway for our Melbourne Gatherings for 2026. The dates are:

**Monday 6 July**  
**Monday 12 October**

**Time:** 1.45pm cuppa, with the gathering beginning at 2.15pm

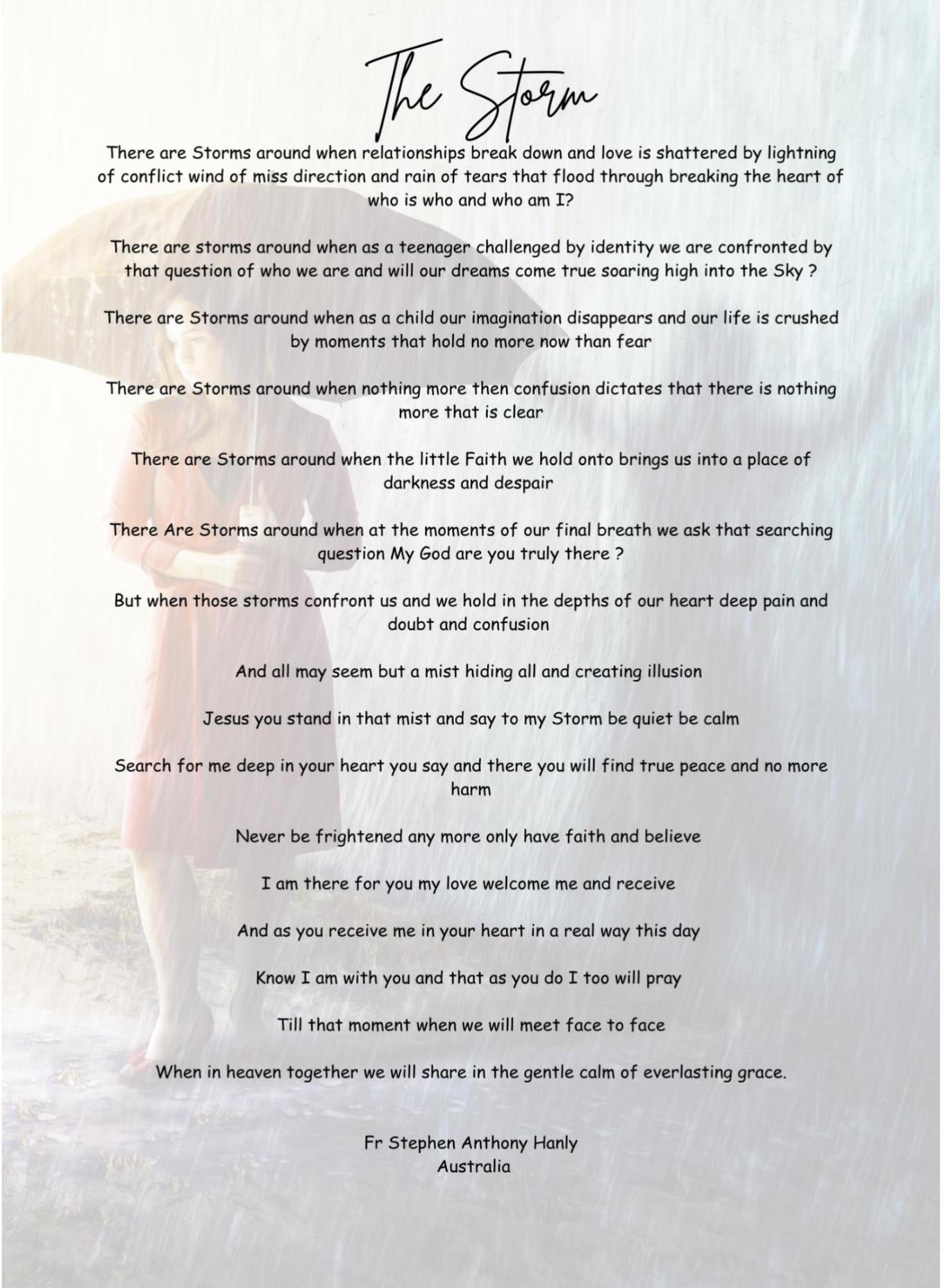
**Venue:** Mary MacKillop Spirituality Centre, 362 Albert Street, East Melbourne

*Parking is available, we simply need to notify the centre in advance.*

At our most recent gathering, it was affirmed that these meet-ups are not formal professional development sessions, but rather opportunities to connect, build relationships, share in conversation, and support one another in the ministry of spiritual direction.

If you are located outside of VIC and would like to explore forming a group in your state, please reach out to the CSD team, we would be delighted to assist in bringing this to life.



The background of the page is a soft-focus photograph of a woman in a red dress holding a black umbrella in the rain. The rain is visible as white streaks against a greyish-blue background. The woman is looking down, and the overall mood is contemplative and serene.

# The Storm

There are Storms around when relationships break down and love is shattered by lightning of conflict wind of miss direction and rain of tears that flood through breaking the heart of who is who and who am I?

There are storms around when as a teenager challenged by identity we are confronted by that question of who we are and will our dreams come true soaring high into the Sky ?

There are Storms around when as a child our imagination disappears and our life is crushed by moments that hold no more now than fear

There are Storms around when nothing more then confusion dictates that there is nothing more that is clear

There are Storms around when the little Faith we hold onto brings us into a place of darkness and despair

There Are Storms around when at the moments of our final breath we ask that searching question My God are you truly there ?

But when those storms confront us and we hold in the depths of our heart deep pain and doubt and confusion

And all may seem but a mist hiding all and creating illusion

Jesus you stand in that mist and say to my Storm be quiet be calm

Search for me deep in your heart you say and there you will find true peace and no more harm

Never be frightened any more only have faith and believe

I am there for you my love welcome me and receive

And as you receive me in your heart in a real way this day

Know I am with you and that as you do I too will pray

Till that moment when we will meet face to face

When in heaven together we will share in the gentle calm of everlasting grace.

Fr Stephen Anthony Hanly  
Australia

# CSD Australia Members

## Voice of New Members

### Anna Schlooz

Trained spiritual director in the Ignatian Tradition, and is also a giver of the Spiritual Exercises. Anna completed her training at Kardia Formation. Her ongoing desire is to accompany others as they explore their journey with the Divine through spiritual direction and giving of Ignatian based retreats including the arts.



### Magdalen Mather

After practicing as a spiritual director for many years I am aware of a growing desire to be part of a wider spiritual direction community within Australia. Membership also meets the need for spiritual directors to be accountable and responsible in our practices.



### Sarina Sherring

I joined CSD Australia to remain connected to a trusted, prayerful community that offers ethical support and ongoing formation for my ministry of spiritual direction. Being part of this community helps sustain and enrich my practice as I accompany others.



### Karen Penn

I did my training in Spiritual Direction through Kardia Formation. I'm excited about being a part of a body of like minded people in similar ministries and am looking forward to growing and learning more through the PD and my involvement here in the group.



## Kym Dixon

I have just completed my formation with the Listen into Life Program and I am interested in exploring and connecting with others in the Spiritual Direction community of Australia.



## Leigh Macpherson

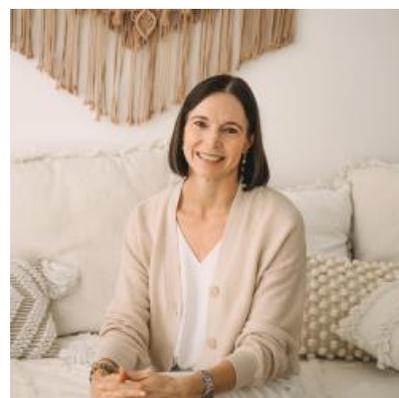
I completed my spiritual formation through Wellspring and having just started my own practice, I am looking forward to the opportunity to network with a wider family of Spiritual Directors.



## Profile of a Member

### Mandi Els

I am a fellow pilgrim of faith, a spiritual director and a soul friend. I have been rescued out of despair into a deep union with Jesus. As a published author and speaker, I enjoy crafting stories to tell the truth in beautiful and creative ways across various continents and in diverse contexts. My greatest adventure involves my lifelong discipleship journey being apprenticed to Jesus. I am passionate about prayer, captivated by nature and hungry for anything holy. I am a prodigal of grace and my love language is dark chocolate and anything salted caramel. I have been married to my best friend for almost 25 years and I am a proud mamma of two young adult children. My aim is to help many find the maturity and the wholeness that is only available through union with Jesus and by the power of His Cross.



**Favourite Scripture:**

“Christ in you, the hope of glory” - Colossians 1:27

**Favourite Book:**

Listening Prayer by Leanne Payne

**Favourite Movie:**

The Painted Veil

**Memorable Moment:**

Being ambushed and awed by a sculpture in Verona, Italy in a small hidden church.

# CSD Australia Professional Development

There is no cost or need for members to book. A zoom link will be sent to all members in the preceding week. If you would like a friend to join, who is a non member - please see the trybooking link below or on our website for upcoming PD

## Presence in Practice: Accompaniment and Cultural Awareness

### Guided by Erick Niyiragira

Saturday March 14th 9.30am - 11.00am (AEDT)

This Professional Development session invites participants into a reflective space exploring the role of spiritual accompaniment and cultural diversity in practice. Erick is conscious of working at the intersection of counselling frameworks and spiritual accompaniment, and warmly welcomes conversation about the relationship, boundaries, and mutual enrichment between the two approaches.

**Erick Niyiragira CP** is a Passionist priest living and ministering in Australia. Born in Burundi, Erick's life has been profoundly shaped by lived experience, including displacement, refugee life, and resettlement. These experiences have formed in him a deep sensitivity to suffering, resilience, and hope, which continue to ground his vocation and pastoral presence. Recently completing a Master of Counselling, Erick brings together faith, professional formation, and lived experience in his ministry. His deep appreciation of cultural diversity and his capacity to hold individuals with dignity, compassion, and attentiveness inform his approach to accompaniment.



Non members are welcome to join and book through [trybooking](#). Cost is \$20 for non members.

## Save the Date

### Heading Westwards: Faith-filled Accompaniment in Liminal Space

#### Guided by John Kleinsman

Saturday May 9th 9.30am - 11.00am (AEDT)

**John Kleinsman** is a New Zealand bioethicist and the Director of The Nathaniel Centre for Bioethics, the Catholic Church's national bioethics centre in Aotearoa New Zealand. He brings a broad background in community service, including work in disability support and drug and alcohol rehabilitation, alongside deep academic training in moral theology and ethics. John's work focuses on the ethical dimensions of life, care and dignity, particularly in relation to end-of-life choices, palliative care, and the ways societies understand sufferings, vulnerability and human worth. He regularly contributes to public and professional conversations on these issues, advocating for approaches that uphold compassionate care, protect the vulnerable, and foster thoughtful responses to loss and grief in communities.



## Book Review

### Dark Night of the Soul by Gerald May

Reading *Dark Night of the Soul* feels less like studying a text and more like entering a sacred conversation about the hidden movements of God in the human heart. Gerald May offers spiritual directors a language and framework for understanding experiences that often resist explanation, spiritual dryness, loss of meaning, disorientation, and the painful stripping away of certainty that so often emerges in the lives of those we accompany.

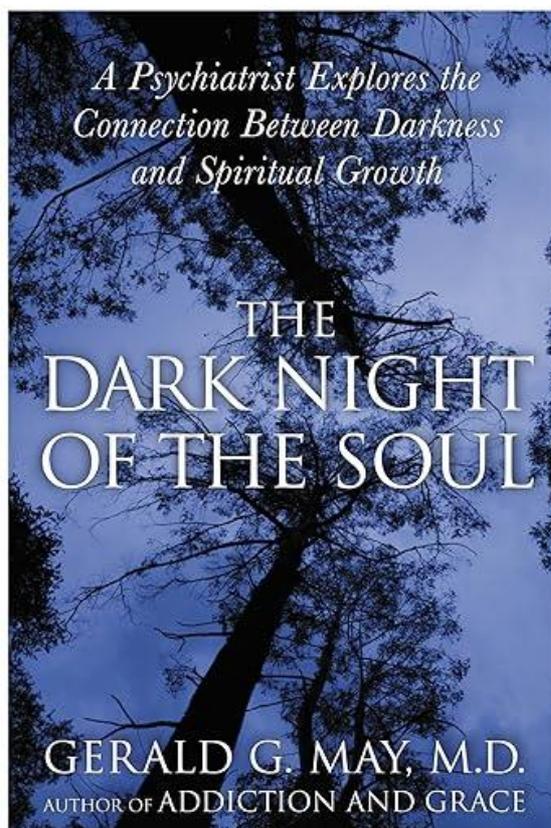
Drawing deeply from the wisdom of St. John of the Cross, May presents the 'dark night' not as a problem to be solved but as a mystery to be revered. For those engaged in spiritual direction, this shift in perspective is profoundly liberating. It reframes seasons of struggle not as obstacles to spiritual growth, but as sacred movements of grace, invitations into deeper freedom, surrender, and love.

As spiritual directors, we often sit with people in spaces where God seems absent, prayer feels empty, and long held images of faith begin to dissolve. May's work gently affirms that these experiences can represent not spiritual failure but spiritual transformation. The book encourages directors to resist the urge to 'fix' interpret too quickly, or restore consolation prematurely. Instead, it invites us to cultivate a posture of trust, trusting the slow work of God in the soul.

This insight reshapes the ministry of accompaniment. The director is not one who provides answers but one who holds space for mystery, honours the process of unknowing, and recognises the divine presence even in apparent absence.

May's background in psychology brings a valuable clarity to the discernment required in spiritual direction. His careful distinction between clinical depression and spiritual desolation provides helpful insight, equipping directors to respond with both compassion and wisdom. He offers a language that honours the psychological reality of human suffering while recognising the possibility of profound spiritual transformation within it.

The book ultimately calls spiritual directors to a posture of humility, compassion, and contemplative attentiveness, to accompany others through darkness not with answers, but with presence, trust, and hope.



## Other News

### Stillpoint Brisbane

#### Women's Silent Retreat March 6-8th 2026

An opportunity to come aside for solitude, silence and prayer. Taking time away to seek the ancient paths. Includes 2 nights at Lake Moogerah, lunch and dinner included. Individual Spiritual direction, group contemplation and individual solitude.

[For more information](#)

### Contemplatio - Apophatic Prayer and the Awakening of the Apophatic Self

Tuesday 11th and Wednesday 12th August 2026

Santa Casa Spirituality Centre, Queenscliff, Victoria and Online

This course is led by Kerrie Hide for spiritual directors and people interested in contemplation. In this Mystic Heart formation offering, we will continue the theme of being pregnant with nothing, focusing on how we awaken the centre of nothingness in the ground of our heart through apophatic prayer. Through beholding communally, we will enter into the depthless depths of apophatic metaphors, into the evolutionary flow of how the prayer of the author, the writing, the reading, and the prayer of the reader, one together unfold and awaken ever revealing apophatic wisdom.

[For more information](#)



### Santa Casa's 40 day Sabbatical Program

19th September - 30 October 2026

**A few spots left!** This is a sacred time for you to stop, rest, explore, reflect, be nourished and emerge anew. A balanced timetable of input, personal reflection, free days and electives.

[For more information](#)



### Marist House of Welcome

Retreat Centre, NSW

Open for private retreats

In the heart of the Northern Rivers, the Marist House of Light in Lismore offers a tranquil space for prayer, solitude, and renewal. With private retreats, spiritual direction, and a nurturing environment, it's a place to rest and encounter God's presence.

[For more information](#)



## Heart of Life

### Professional Development Opportunities for Spiritual Directors

Heart of Life is running a series of professional development opportunities next year for Spiritual Directors.



Heart of Life

Centre for Spiritual & Pastoral Formation

#### *Returning to the Heart: Contemplative Refresher Course for Spiritual Directors*

Facilitated by Apryl Huglin, Leslie Hanger, and Kathleen Ward

Wednesday 6, 13, 20 May 9am – 4pm – online only

Monday to Wednesday 21, 22, 23 September, 9am – 4pm – in-person at Heart of Life Centre (repeat of the days in May)

Over three transformative days we invite spiritual directors to step away from daily demands and immerse themselves in renewal and deepening practice.

#### *The Examen for Deeper Spiritual Direction,*

Thursday 16 April 6.30pm – 9pm online only

Facilitated by Apryl Huglin

This session invites spiritual directors to apply the ancient prayer practice of The Examen to their own work, fostering deeper self-awareness, discernment, and presence with directees.

#### *Sacred Presence in Wounded Places: Trauma-Informed Spiritual Direction*

Friday 24 July 2026, 9am – 4.30pm, in-person at Heart of Life Centre

Facilitated by Apryl Huglin

Enhance your spiritual direction ministry with trauma-informed care. Join us for “Sacred Presence in Wounded Places,” a comprehensive professional development day designed specifically for spiritual directors. Learn to recognize trauma and its impact on spiritual life and create genuinely safe sacred spaces.

[For more information](#)

## Kardia

### Pierre Teilhard de Chardin Retreat

*9th September - 29th October 2026*

The Pierre Teilhard de Chardin Retreat is intended to engage the kardia

(head and the heart) in ways that were the hallmarks of the work of

Teilhard de Chardin. As you read and reflect on the Divine Milieu in

which we live, you might find distractions, obstacles, choices and blessings, all of which are opportunities for growing awareness and interior freedom. The Retreat is based on the book Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

from the Modern Spiritual Masters Series edited by Robert Ellsberg and runs for eight weeks 9th

September - 29th October 2026. It includes scriptural quotes, prayers for what you desire, music and

poetry to support your reflection on Teilhard de Chardin’s material. Each week your sharing group will

meet for one hour with your facilitator who is also a spiritual director.

[For more information](#)

