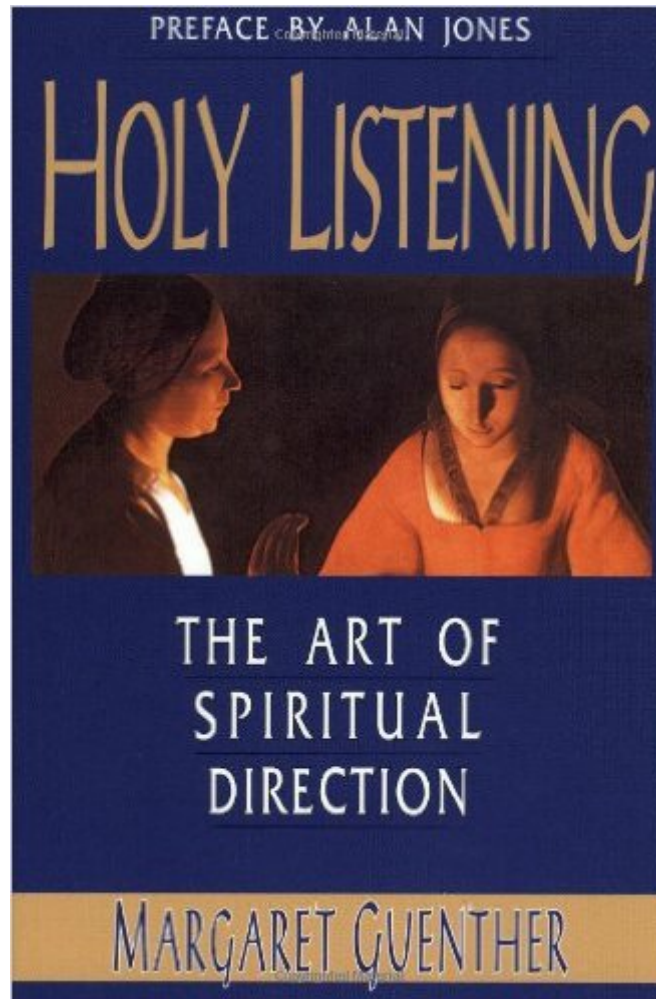


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# Holy Listening: The Art Of Spiritual Direction



## Synopsis

Guenther uses the images of the spiritual director as host, teacher, and midwife to describe the ministry of spiritual direction today. She pays particular attention to spiritual direction for women, and addresses such down-to-earth questions as setting, time, and privacy. The stories of real people bring the practice of spiritual direction alive. In the pages that follow, I will attempt to describe the shape that spiritual direction might take for people of our time, aware that the subject is an elusive one. I am speaking to the beginner, those persons lay or ordained, with or without formal theological training, who find themselves drawn to this ministry. Perhaps they feel the stirring of their own unacknowledged gifts. Or perhaps they wonder about receiving direction, whether it is a ministry available to 'ordinary people' or reserved for the especially holy. I hope some dark corners will be illuminated and some questions answered.

## Book Information

Paperback: 146 pages

Publisher: Cowley Publications; Sixth Printing edition (February 28, 1992)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1561010561

ISBN-13: 978-1561010561

Product Dimensions: 5.7 x 0.5 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars See all reviews (52 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

In her slim volume *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction*, Episcopal priest and spiritual director Margaret Guenther has provided a jewel of a book for those interested in spiritual direction, and more particularly, for those who are interested in becoming spiritual directors. Spiritual direction is rather difficult to classify. It is part art, part science, part skill. It bears relations to pastoral care and psychological therapy, but there are important differences. `Spiritual direction is not psychotherapy nor is it an inexpensive substitute, although the disciplines are compatible and frequently share raw material. Spiritual direction is not pastoral counseling, nor is it to be confused

with the mutuality of deep friendships, for it is unashamedly hierarchical.' This hierarchy is one of the stumbling blocks for many, ironically particularly for those in the clergy. One must have trust in the spiritual director. To be a spiritual director, one must inspire trust, the kind of trust that enables the directee to understand that it is for that one's good that all effort will be focused. 'What a gift to bring to another, the gift of disinterested, loving attention!' Guenther's first chapter talks about this aspect of trust and attention by likening spiritual direction to a journey. Many spiritual writers have used the metaphor of the journey in the past, so frequently perhaps that it almost becomes an inside joke among some. However, Guenther's exploration of the importance of hospitality toward the stranger on a journey sets a good foundation. For the spiritual director and the spiritual directee, many aspects of preparation are the same. A respect for silence, an importance placed on attention, and an openness and willingness for questioning are shared aspects.

¶ In this hospitable book of just four chapters, Margaret Guenther, professor and priest by profession welcomes us into her academic office -- transformed into sacred space by an icon here, a candle there, and a homey plaid rug in the middle of the room -- and introduces us to her amateur vocation, that of spiritual director. Her gifts as a good teacher prompt her to explain to us carefully and patiently what spiritual direction is ("holy listening"), what its purpose is ("to help people discover how to define themselves, not only in relation to the world, but also to God) and how she has learned over the years to go about it. In contrast to Alan Jones, who seems intentionally to avoid the "how-to" question in his *Exploring Spiritual Direction*, Guenther's book is packed with practical explanation of how she goes about the task of directing. Drawing on her experience with hundreds of directees over the years, she offers vignettes drawn from actual experience, which shed light on the process of direction, its pitfalls, and its benefits. Yet, however laced the book is from beginning to end with practical advice, it is not a "how-to" manual. For all of these practical tips are shared in the course of a free flowing meditation on key portions of scripture which have given shape to her understanding and practice of direction over the years. From Abraham's welcoming of strangers in Genesis 18 we come to appreciate that direction, too, involves hospitality. From Jesus' encounter with the rich young man in Mark 10 we are invited to consider what it means for the director to be a "good teacher" in the sense that Jesus was.

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