

Spiritual Directors at the Franciscan Renewal Center

Contact Cathy Olds at spiritualdirection@thecasa.org to have one of them contact you.



Ruth M. Baker, MA

My ministry emphasizes prayer to a loving God of the seeker's belief. Contemplative prayer and "centering prayer" are at the core of my ministry. I help people deal with transitioning into the second half of life as well as discernment questions around God's "will" and direction in life. This requires an intimate, felt sense of God's presence and goodwill towards all of us in this world that has become so uncertain and fearful. I facilitate the Ignatian Exercises with individuals and groups. I am intimately involved with 12 Step Spirituality for all addictions. Guided meditation and compassionate listening are an integral part of the process. I have training in trauma sensitive spiritual direction and welcome all who seek healing of spirit, especially those struggling with sexual abuse. I am available during the weekdays. I will also meet via phone, Skype, Zoom or FaceTime at the client's convenience. I will also design and facilitate a Private Directed Retreat.



Mary Bencomo, MA

Mary spent fifteen years in deep prayer and study in the spiritual life during her youth.

In addition, she has about thirty years of experience as an educator, psychotherapist, and consultant, all of which included about 20 years of Enneagram work in the narrative tradition. Over the last five years, she has participated in a twice-monthly spiritual development group studying and practicing

Christian esoteric spirituality. Mary draws on these areas in her work with individuals as they explore deeper levels on the spiritual plain. At this time her focus is on the areas of contemplative prayer, elder spirituality, and Enneagram. Further interests lie in mystical spirituality, the practice of presence and women's spirituality. She is Roman Catholic and AEISD certified. Available weekdays: morning and afternoon; in person, by phone or face time. All religious dispositions are welcome.



Fr. Bill Faiella, CSC

Fr. Bill is a Roman Catholic priest of the Holy Cross Order. He has advanced degrees in education, theology and pastoral counseling. Fr. Bill focuses on inner healing and general spirituality. Fr Bill is available weekdays, evenings, weekends for meetings at his central Phoenix office.



Ron Friesen

For over 40 years I have accompanied individuals on their spiritual journeys as a pastor, a chaplain for the ill, the dying, the grieving and those experiencing homelessness. In the last 20 years I have also been a mental health counselor. In my desire to deepen my skills in spiritual companionship I completed the Spiritual Direction program at Christian Formation and Direction Ministries – Arizona. It is my desire to journey to explore the God within each of us, regardless of faith tradition. This belief has drawn me to spiritual companioning with those experiencing losses of any kind as well as those seeking discernment for the next steps in their lives while exploring wherever the Divine may appear bringing healing to their soul and finding purpose.



Sheila Howe, MA

Sheila is one of the founders of AZ Ecumenical Institute for Spiritual Directors completed her own training in Spiritual Direction at the Kino Institute. Her primary focus includes the mental, spiritual and physical well-being and transformation of those who seek her help and listening heart. She is a certified trauma therapist and welcomes those seeking healing of spirit, especially those struggling with the trauma of sexual abuse. Sheila offers individual and couples spiritual direction via Zoom or Skype.



Milly Johnson, MA

Seeking a new way forward this year? Let's meet: no preparation needed... Just a time for sharing your story and your desires for the days ahead... Spiritual Guidance is a listening time... I'll be at your side ~ listening along the way.

Milly Johnson completed spiritual guidance formation at The London Centre for Spirituality and holds a MA in Christian Spirituality from University of London. She has met with individuals for many years. She supports each person's journey - whatever life holds. She listens and stands with you in times of seeking and transition.

Milly has ongoing interest in spirituality and art - civic and cultural affairs; always open to embracing more within our everyday lived experience. She studies early Christian writers - especially Ignatius of Loyola, John of the Cross and Julian of Norwich. She will happily journey with you through the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. She has trained others in this way of ongoing support and discernment as well. Millie has training in trauma sensitive spiritual direction and welcomes all who seek healing of spirit, especially those struggling with sexual abuse. Milly also offers sessions with individuals each month in person or online via FaceTime, Skype or Zoom.



Dr. John Konicek, M.Div., S.T.L., S.T.D.

My approach to spiritual direction is deeply incarnational- that God earnestly desires to meet us where we are. The role of the director then is often one of assisting the directee with carefully looking and listening for how God is speaking to us: sometimes in very comfortable, familiar ways and sometimes in ways that open us to new insights and deeper faith. My own path has been profoundly shaped by Ignatian Spirituality, with influences from many other spiritual traditions and prayer practices that draw us closer to God's abundant love. The formal training for my ministry in spiritual direction took place first through the Mercy Center in Burlingame, CA and then at The Jesuit Spirituality Center in Grand Coteau, LA.

I have offered spiritual direction and retreats in all parts of the US- east, west, north, and south with many wonderfully varied individuals and communities, through retreat centers, parishes, and college campuses. I continue to carry with me all of their creative ways of praying and then share them with new directees I encounter.

In addition to listening to God's voice in the personal/individual experience of prayer, because I have a doctorate in Liturgical Theology, from time to time I will also help directees look for the equally important communal prayer qualities of our faith journeys.

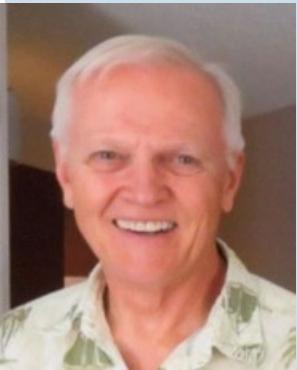


Bonnie McCulley, MA

Bonnie is a Board Certified Chaplain (BCC), Licensed Spiritual Counselor (LPC) and Certified Spiritual Director (AEISD). She brings 30 years of experience from her ministry in healthcare and hospice. Bonnie has helped many through major life transitions: i.e., illness, trauma, and the emotional and spiritual distress experienced in loss and grief.

As a Spiritual Director, Bonnie provides a strong listening presence and safe, open space to share your sacred story. You can explore your deepest questions, grow in your ability to discern, and open the door to your heart and true self in God.

In her DMin studies in Transformational Counseling/Spiritual Direction, she focused on the "Art of Discernment" through Ashland Theological Seminary. She is practicing Roman Catholic with studies in Ignatian, Franciscan and Carmelite Spiritualities along with mystics and other global spiritualities/faith traditions. Bonnie is available via Zoom and in person at the CASA - weekdays, Saturdays, and a few early evenings.



Gene Meiergerd, MS, RN, CSD

Recently retired, after careers as a registered nurse, an Air Force officer, a massage therapist and a counselor, working with patients in a variety of settings facing physical, mental and emotional challenges, I was drawn toward looking at the spiritual aspects of healing. This led me to acquiring a counseling degree and certification as a Spiritual Director through Christian Formation and Direction Ministries. Throughout my life's journey I remain drawn to the embrace of the Divine in the beauty and healing of nature. And more than ever I find God in each of us, regardless of their faith tradition. This belief has now drawn me to spiritual companioning with special interest in helping veterans, anyone wrestling with grief to help them peer into the subtle nuances of daily life, awaken the Divine within, heal their soul and find purpose. Gene has training in trauma sensitive spiritual direction and welcomes all who seek healing of spirit, especially those struggling with the trauma of sexual abuse.



Cathy Olds, MA

I have been a spiritual director since 2005 and have a love for the "Celtic Spirit" which celebrates God in the rhythms and blessings of nature, in community and sacred place. I believe it is a privilege and blessing to companion others on the spiritual journey. Spiritual direction is a gift that allows us to name the constant presence of God in our lives and I am continually humbled by the way grace leads us and holds us. I have worked as a lay minister in the Catholic Church for over 40 years, received a Master of Arts in Theology from the University of Dayton and a certificate in Spiritual Direction from the Arizona Ecumenical Institute for Spiritual Directors. I have training in trauma sensitive spiritual direction and welcome all who seek healing of spirit, especially those who struggle with the trauma of sexual abuse. I coordinate the Spiritual Direction Ministry at the Franciscan Renewal Center as a staff member and am happy to meet with you in person or online.



Diane Owens

Everyone can benefit from a safe place where they can feel seen and deeply listened to. I provide such a place virtually or in person at the Franciscan Renewal Center for people to share what's truly on their minds and in their hearts. I completed the Hesychia School of Spiritual Direction's ecumenical and interfaith program in 2013 and have been a member of the Casa's faith community for several years. As a writer and nature photographer, I honor the intersection of spirituality and creativity. Because of my own journey through grief after the loss of my daughter to brain cancer, I am comfortable walking alongside others through grief, health challenges, and life's other twists and turns. Ignatian Spirituality, whose principle is finding God in all things, is the lens through which I see the world, and this influences my style of accompanying people on their spiritual journeys. Through conversations about God and what really matters, I help people notice God's presence in their daily lives and throughout their life stories. God meets people where they are, so I try to do the same.



Mauro Pando, MC

Mauro's training and faith journey have taken him on a path of interfaith spirituality. He is more comfortable with the term "companioning" than direction and I co-facilitate the Grief and Loss Retreat. He is a Roman Catholic and is involved in the Faith in Action Ministry at the Casa. Available weekday mornings at the Casa.



Rene Perreault, Jr. SFO

Rene is a certified spiritual director and a member of Spiritual Directors International, ministering for 17 years. He received his education in Spiritual Direction in the graduate school of theology at Sacred Heart University, and is retired from Rhode Island College, member of their professional staff for 35 years. Roman Catholic by choice as a Spiritual Director is nondenominational. He practices this Ministry of Presence with men and women of all different backgrounds, some in recovery, members of Religious communities, clergy and folks who identify as LGBT. Rene developed Spiritual Direction for folks living with AIDS while at the Miriam Hospital in Providence, R.I. Before moving to AZ seven years ago he ministered with the Franciscans in Boston in the Spiritual Direction Center and with the men in formation for the local Franciscan Province. Rene is available any day of the week or evening as is needed and will meet via Zoom or at the FRC or where it is most convenient for the person.



Sharon Taszarek, MS

Sharon worked in the Programs Ministry at the Franciscan Renewal Center for 14 years which offered her the opportunity for ongoing spiritual growth, opening her mind and heart to the love and presence of God in all things. She has facilitated classes in Centering Prayer, Spiritual Friendship, and Spiritual Spa Weekends at the Casa. Sharon is a graduate of St. Louis University and the Arizona Ecumenical Institute for Spiritual Direction. Her focus in spiritual direction tends toward listening, contemplative living, Franciscan spirituality, discernment, and 12 step spirituality.



Cheryl Thomsen, MA

When I met my first Spiritual Director in 1990, my life was painful and broken. I knew I needed someone to guide my soul through grief and several major life transitions I was experiencing. This was a spiritual crisis - not a psychological crisis. As my companion, she gently guided me into a deeper relationship with

God and allowed me to see God's hand in all of life. Later my journey led me to a MA in Theology in 2006 from the University of San Francisco. Further discernment led me to be certified in 2008 by the AEISD program in Spiritual Direction. I then began my practice at the Franciscan Renewal Center. My focus now is to help others to listen to their soul, throughout personal and professional life transitions, including times of grief, loss, or the search for purpose. Other areas for spiritual growth include exploring how to live a contemplative life, the integration of East-West Spirituality, Franciscan Spirituality and 12 steps. How can I help you discover and embrace God's weaving in your life? I am Roman Catholic and available weekdays, evening and weekends



Ria Tokkie

Ria is Roman Catholic and received her Certification as a Spiritual Director through Christian Formation and Direction Ministries. In addition, she is a certified hospice volunteer who is passionate about creating a sacred space for families and their loved ones experiencing life-limiting illnesses and grief. However, her interests are not limited to this work. Ria's training has prepared her to walk with people of different faiths and concerns, as they seek answers and direction for their lives. Ria's goal is to listen to the needs of your searching heart. Her desire is to help you to discern where the Holy Spirit is leading you; to listen to His Voice; and to recognize God's Love in life's challenges, difficulties and blessings, so that you can find inner peace and claim the truth of your belovedness. Ria is available mornings, weekends, in person, via phone, and via FaceTime.



Elizabeth Ursic, M Div

Dr. Elizabeth Ursic holds a Masters of Divinity from Yale University, and a PhD in Religious Studies from ASU. She has been a member of Spiritual Directors International for over 20 years. She leads national and regional retreats on spiritual faith development. Her book, *Women, Ritual, and Power: Placing Female Imagery of God in Christian Worship*, has been used in retreat settings and seminary classrooms. Locally, Elizabeth is a professor of world religions and is committed to interfaith work. She is also a pianist, cellist, and composer. She teaches classes and leads retreats on contemplation, world religions, spirituality, imagination, and the arts. “Being a spiritual director is one of my greatest joys. I love to companion those who are exploring, wrestling, and deepening in their relationship with God. I seek to create a safe space where everything can be shared with love and without judgement. I am in awe of how God works in our lives. It is a privilege to serve as a soul friend with those on their spiritual journey.” Availability is afternoons and evenings during weekdays, via phone, and via Zoom or Skype.



Virginia Vollmer, OFS

Virginia has been a resident of the West Valley since childhood. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Humanities from Northern Arizona University. She is a practicing Roman Catholic, a professed Secular Franciscan, and received her spiritual direction certificate through the Arizona Ecumenical Institute for Spiritual Directors. Virginia focuses her spiritual direction on life transitions within general, interfaith, and Franciscan spirituality. How do we live in this moment, this place, here and now, joyfully with God. She is available weekdays and Saturdays, morning and afternoon, in person and via phone or Zoom.