



Evangelical Spiritual Directors Association

A resource of ECSW

Preparing for the Unexpected: "In case of my death..."

by Monica Romig Green

In Susan Howatch's novel *Glittering Images*, the narrator, Dr. Ashworth, goes to see his long-time spiritual director Father Reid. Upon arriving at the monastery, he discovers that Father Reid has since passed away. He meets instead with the new abbot, Father Darrow.

'I'm extremely sorry that you weren't informed of Father Reid's death,' [Father Darrow] says, 'but unfortunately he kept no list of those he counselled so it was impossible for me to write to you.' He made the omission of a list sound like evidence of an unpardonably inefficient administration...

While the author intended for this scene to give the reader a glimpse into the character of Father Darrow, I instead began to think of the administration of my own spiritual direction ministry.

Like Father Reid, I had not made any arrangements for my directees to be informed in the event of my own death, or even if I was just somehow incapacitated. Training programs and codes of ethics focus on caring for our directees and keeping our directees personal information confidential. But, I had not heard discussions on how to prepare for this specific circumstance.

Yet, I had personally seen the effects of not having a plan like this in place. A dear friend of mine was grief-stricken to find out over a month after the fact that her spiritual director had died. No one had known to inform her. Not only was it a shock for her to find out second-hand, but by the time she had heard, it was too late for her to attend the funeral. Had she been informed earlier she could have processed her grief in community and formally paid her respects to her director and their relationship.

As spiritual directors, we owe it to our directees to have a plan in place. While our direction relationships are confidential, they are also often important and cherished as well. Preparing to have someone contact your directees when you are ultimately not able to do so is a loving and thoughtful way to bring closure to a relationship that ends in an unexpected way.

So, how does a spiritual director respect directees' confidentiality and simultaneously prepare for an event like this?

With just a few steps, I believe that you can make all the appropriate arrangements and simultaneously honor the confidentiality of your direction relationships.

1. Make a list of all of your current directees and their contact information (phone and/or e-mail). Include anyone else with whom you have a similar kind of confidential relationship, such as your own director, supervisor and/or therapist.

I recommend listing only first names, as that gives another assurance of confidentiality and should be enough information for the person who will be contacting them.

2. Ask another spiritual director you know if they would be willing to contact your directees in the case of your death or incapacitation. Put the name and contact information of this director clearly on your list, along with instructions to send the list to them.

Another spiritual director will not only know how to lovingly inform your directees of what happened, but will also be able to offer appropriate support and possibly referrals. Their actions will also be a gift to your close family members, who will have so many other difficult things to deal with at that time. (I have actually asked 2 director friends to be my go-to people, just in case one is unavailable. They have, in turn, asked me to do the same for them.)

3. Put your list in a secure place, and inform someone close and trustworthy of its location.

If you keep the list on a computer, make sure to protect it with a password that only you and the other person know. Personally, I have printed out my list and placed it with my other important papers, in a sealed and marked envelope. My husband knows exactly where it is and he knows the directors to contact.

4. Make sure to update the list occasionally, particularly when you begin with a new directee.

It may not be something we like to think about, but there will come a day when we will be unavailable to our directees. By taking a little time and effort now to set a list like this in place - and by keeping it updated - you are not only being responsible to your directees, you are also preparing a loving gift for them for a potentially difficult time.