

Prayer dialogue

By [Ruth Workman](#)

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In our December 27

issue, Amy Frykholm [describes](#)

the rapid development of the spiritual direction movement, and Daniel Schrock [reviews](#) Angela Reed's book on the subject (subscription required). There are currently

more than 6,000 spiritual directors working in conjunction with Spiritual Directors International. Spiritual directors often turn to this model after other forms of spiritual and religious leadership fail them. Below, Ruth Workman tells the story of the reinvigoration of her ministry through spiritual direction.

For information on

finding a spiritual director, see [Spiritual Directors International](#). For questions to ask a potential spiritual director, see [Anam Cara](#). --Ed.

After 12 years serving

Presbyterian congregations as a church educator, I realized something was missing. I could write a curriculum, offer a Bible study, train VBS leaders, lead youth groups. But I felt like nothing was happening below my head. I had no language to describe what I longed for, but I lived with a sense of emptiness, like I was going through the motions of faith without any substance.

I began to share my

unease with colleagues, and a friend invited me to a spiritual direction group. As we gathered in the library of a convent, we sat in silence. I discovered that silence shared with companions was not awkward but open and inviting.

Next we were introduced

to an Ignatian practice, a prayer of imagination. I was asked to read the passage where Jesus says, "Take up your cross and follow me." I was then told to engage my senses. What did I see in that scene? How did it smell? What sounds did I hear? Were there any taste or touch sensations? I was then to

imagine myself in that story, participate in it as it was revealed in the Bible, and then allow my imagination to continue to unfold the action and dialogue of the story.

Until this point in my life, my prayer had been filled almost entirely with words. I had been taught the ACTS of prayer--adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication--as a teen and had continued to use this as my model of prayer, along with devotional reading. Suddenly in this Ignatian practice, Jesus and I were having a dialogue rather than my doing all the talking. I had felt like a flower that had been parched in the desert. Suddenly I was showered with sweet, refreshing water.

Each week as I met with my new companions, we sat in silence, were introduced to contemplative practices and then shared our prayer experiences. As I heard how God was active and inviting in their lives I was showered with more living water. Since then my passion has been to share this living water, this direct experience of God's loving presence, with any and all.