



POLICY COMMITTEE
Position Paper

**THE DEFINITION AND LIMITATIONS OF
"SPIRITUAL COUNSELING" AS IT PERTAINS
TO THE TRES DIAS WEEKEND**

ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE: June 4, 2019

POSITION PAPER

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PURPOSE: The most basic requirement for someone to qualify as a Spiritual Director in the Tres Dias ministry, as noted in Section 3.2.2 of the Essentials is that they be “*qualified to teach and counsel in spiritual matters...*” However, to our knowledge the definition and possible limitations of “spiritual counseling” on a Tres Dias weekend has never been formally addressed.

In addition, the “*Tres Dias Glossary of Terms*” does not provide any significant insights or reference other than as is noted in the Essentials.

This has left it to individual communities and Spiritual Directors to determine the definition, parameters and qualifications related to being “qualified to teach and counsel in spiritual matters.”

This Position Paper will address those issues by providing a formal definition and applying reasonable limitations.

DISCUSSION: “Counsel” is defined by several different English dictionaries as “advice that is given as the result of consultation.”

- The term “Spiritual Matters” refers to things related to/concerning spirituality.
- “Spiritual Counsel” has often been referred to as “Biblical Counsel.
- The Association of Biblical Counselors defines Biblical Counsel/Counseling as a fluid event and process of a Spirit-empowered Christ-follower providing face-to-face ministry of the Word to others.”
- The Tres Dias publication entitled “*Comprehensive Guide for Spiritual Directors*” (Nov, 2017 revision) includes the following text as related to the role of a Spiritual Director on a weekend: “*Spiritual formation, conversion and growth are the purposes of pastoring, just as they are the purposes of the Spiritual Directors’ teaching and witnessing. Candidates and team members will seek out a Spiritual Director for private advice and counseling, to make confession and seek reconciliation (Penance in the complete sense). The intensity of thoughts and feelings at the weekend experience tends to break down resistance and inhibitions. Old anxieties, questions, alienations, and heartaches will surface.*” ... “*Primary concern should be for listening, connecting the gospel, opening doors, making referrals and contacts following the weekend with Christian counselors, Spiritual Directors, pastors, and friends in the candidates’ home churches.*”

DEFINITION: For Tres Dias purposes, the meaning of the phrase “Counsel in Spiritual Matters” as referenced in the Essentials is: “**Advice that is given as the result of a face to face consultation on matters related to or concerning the Christian Bible and/or a person’s personal walk with Christ Jesus as displayed on the Tres Dias weekend.**” Clearly it is outside of our role to provide formal counselling services. Instead, the role of the Spiritual Director is to provide biblical-based advice with the guidance of scripture and the Holy Spirit and in keeping with the concept of “What Would Jesus Do” in regard to emotional and personal issues that may arise as a result of the person’s encounter with the Holy Spirit.

LIMITATIONS: It is our determination that this counsel/advice should be strictly limited to this definition and, more specifically, as it relates to matters that are directly related to the Tres Dias weekend itself. Additionally, while the Tres Dias weekend addresses many areas of the candidates’ walk with Christ and life, there are obvious limitations and constraints related to the Tres Dias weekend. These limitations include, but are not limited to:

- Scope of contact
- Knowledge of the individual and situation,
- Limited time frame in the weekend for extensive counseling
- Lack of expertise and/or credentialing in specific areas

The Spiritual Director must refrain from attempting to deeply explore discussions in matters that are best suited for handling by individuals who are more qualified to do so based on their credentials and/or standing-relationship with the individual. For instance, the person’s own pastor will likely have significantly more insights into the person’s personal situation. Licensed counselors and therapists are positioned and trained to provide long-term focused counseling compared to a Spiritual Director with limited history and insight into the person, as well as a very limited timeframe.

If the Spiritual Director encounters someone with serious enough issues to affect the person’s life or health, or the life or health of others, every effort should be made to refer that person to the appropriate care provider; very likely their own pastor would be a good starting point.

These limitations mean the encounter should be brief, to the point, rooted in God, exalting of Jesus Christ, enabled by the Holy Spirit and offered in Love, and in line with the “Tres Dias Statement of Belief.” The Spiritual Director should end this brief time by offering to pray with the individual about the issue and any recommended follow up that may occur after the weekend concludes.

SUMMARY: To be very clear: We are NOT formally counseling these individuals. Instead we are offering biblically sound advice within a very limited scope.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Mehl

Jeff Mehl
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