

# Are You a “Certified” Spiritual Director? Probably Not. Here’s Why

*by Monica Romig Green  
Written for ESDA’s Dialogue, April 2016*

“Spiritual directors represent themselves appropriately in public. They do not misrepresent their qualifications or affiliations.” - ESDA’s Code of Ethics

I’ve noticed a growing trend among spiritual directors—both ESDA members and others—where they refer to themselves as “certified spiritual directors.” This worries me, as I’m concerned that by using this term, we may be unintentionally and unwittingly misleading others about our qualifications.

I know full well that communicating to others about our ministry and its legitimacy is often a challenge. Frequently, we are met with ignorance, confusion, or even suspicion when we try to describe who we are and what we do. We’re all looking for simple and effective ways to communicate the legitimacy of spiritual direction and our abilities to offer it. And in our expert-oriented culture, tapping into professional language can be a way to bridge that gap.

However, I believe that when we use the term “certified” when describing ourselves, we may be accidentally misrepresenting ourselves. With a little more understanding of what the term “certified” may be actually communicating to others, I think we can come to better represent ourselves with integrity and clarity.

I hope the following Q & A will help explain what I mean.

*When I completed my training/formation program in spiritual direction, they gave me a certificate. Doesn’t that mean I can refer to myself as a “certified” spiritual director?*

Well, you can, but I would recommend that you don't. When you use the word "certified" to describe yourself, the hearer may think you're referring to something other than simply completing a training.

You see, in most fields, there is generally a difference between possessing a certificate of training and being "certified." I know... that's really confusing and it might seem like I'm nit picking. But I believe that it is important to understand exactly what we're communicating to others.

***So, what's the difference between having a certificate from my training/formation program and being "certified?"***

Generally, when someone uses the term "certified," it communicates to the hearer that the person has been given a certification as opposed to just a certificate. It usually means that they possess an official designation from a qualifying professional organization that affirms they meet and uphold specific standards of their profession.

To become "certified," one must show evidence to a certifying organization that they meet or exceed continuing professional standards. Additionally, as a professional designation, certification is usually something that can expire over time and must be renewed occasionally in order to affirm that someone is still practicing their work at a competent or high level of quality.

Contrastingly, receiving a certificate or diploma from a training program usually means that you have successfully completed your specific program's educational requirements. It does not mean that you have met the practicing standards of a particular profession.

Regarding spiritual direction, there is, in fact, no specific and official standard for training/formation. That means that one person's certificate of training could mean something completely different than someone else's. For instance, I know of a program that gives a certificate after someone has spent 2 weeks studying spiritual direction, while other programs require that their students spend two to three years studying and complete hundreds of direction hours before they receive their certificate. With such variation in training, it's easy to see why our training certificates would not automatically indicate meeting some kind of general standard.

Additionally, obtaining quality training is almost always one of the criteria for receiving an official certification for a professional, but it is not the only requirement of being “certified.”

*So my certificate of training does not make me a “certified” spiritual director. But I did pass ESDA’s minimum standards to be a Spiritual Director member and I’m listed on the website. Doesn’t that mean I’m a certified spiritual director?*

Actually, it doesn’t. While ESDA is a professional membership network of spiritual directors, it is not an official certifying organization. Our criteria and process for membership is not as rigorous as it would be if we were a certifying organization.

Our hope is that your membership in ESDA will indeed lend you credibility in your work as a spiritual director, but mostly because we desire to help you communicate well the legitimacy of spiritual direction to an evangelical audience.

*Then is there any way to become an actual “certified spiritual director?”*

Actually, there is. The Canadian Council of Professional Certification ([CCPC Global](#)) has created two certifications in our field: one to become a [certified spiritual director \(CSD\)](#) and one to become a [certified spiritual direction supervisor \(CSDS\)](#). This certification was created by folks from Tyndale Theological Seminary in Toronto, and their requirements for certification are based on that training program. Therefore, most of their certified directors and supervisors are graduates of that program, but the certification is open to whomever would like to apply.

CCPC Global’s criteria to obtain a CSD designation include: a master’s degree with a focus in biblical, theological studies and a minimum of six courses in spirituality; a minimum of 12 months in a supervised post-educational internship that would include at least 500 hours of giving spiritual direction; a supervisor’s evaluation showing the applicant meets several core competencies; and professional references of one’s personal integrity and suitability to the field. Once approved, there is an initial fee of \$415 Canadian, and a \$125 Canadian renewal fee each year thereafter.

As you can now see, being officially certified in spiritual direction involves so much more than just completing a training. All my other arguments aside, perhaps we should refrain from loosely calling ourselves “certified” simply out of kindness to our director colleagues who have worked so hard to obtain their official certification, some of whom are fellow ESDA members.

*That makes sense. So, are you recommending that I apply to become certified?*

I think that's an issue for personal discernment. If you have been called to serve a community for which being certified in spiritual direction would increase their faith and trust in your ministry, it may very well be worth the time, effort, and investment. Likewise, it might be a good choice if you feel you would personally be served by having to uphold yourself and your ministry regularly to the certification's professional standards.

But if you think you need to become "certified" for legal reasons, that is not the case. There are no state, provincial or federal laws currently requiring the licensing or certification of spiritual directors. We are still viewed primarily as a ministry of the church more than being a separate profession out in the world.

*So, if I stop referring to myself as "a certified spiritual director," what can I call myself?*

You can use all kinds of appropriate adjectives to describe yourself as a spiritual director: trained, active, practicing, discerning, etc.

I also recommend that you look through any bios you have written and change the word "certification" to "certificate," such as, "I have received certification in spiritual direction from AwesomeSauce training program" to "I have received a certificate in spiritual direction from AwesomeSauce training program."

By being aware of this issue, my hope is that we can all become more careful and clear in the language we use to describe ourselves, our calling and our ministries.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss what's appropriate for you, please feel free to contact us at ESDA. We'd be happy to chat!