

# **OFFERING SPIRITUAL DIRECTION TO EXTROVERTS**

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would first of all like to acknowledge the excellent contribution made by all the directors who took time to give my questionnaire serious attention. The results have been above and beyond my expectations and have helped me greatly, not only with this project, but also with my own directing of extrovert directees.

I would also like to say thank you to my husband Phil whose computer skills proved invaluable both when formulating and formatting the questionnaire, and subsequently while unravelling and correlating the results.

## **OFFERING SPIRITUAL DIRECTION TO EXTROVERTS.**

### **Introduction.**

During the past two years of giving spiritual direction to four directees, three of whom are extroverts, some questions were raised for me. Firstly, the proportion of extroverts to introverts was in sharp contrast with my previously held conviction that most people seeking spiritual direction would be introverts. I wondered if it was more common than I had thought that extroverts would seek spiritual direction. Secondly, I found directing extroverts to be demanding and yet at the same time rewarding, and I wondered if my experience reflected the norm among other directors. Finally, my extrovert directees did not seem to respond well to some of the techniques and approaches I was learning during the spiritual director's training programme, e.g. using interventions to keep the directee focused thus reducing the time spent on "side" and non direction issues.

For the purposes of this essay, I have understood the term "extrovert" to be as described by Michael & Norrisey as follows<sup>1</sup>.

"The habitual attitude of those persons whose life is centred outside themselves on other persons and external events or things. These persons and things are the prime source of energy for the extroverted person. The extrovert functions best when relating objectively with other people and things."

In order to give consideration to the questions, I read around this subject although the range of material I found seemed limited (see Bibliography). In addition to the reading I prepared a questionnaire (Appendix I) that was distributed to thirty-one directors. Twenty-three of these responded with completed questionnaires, two with incomplete questionnaires and two responded with brief letters. The questionnaire was structured so that it related directly to my questions above. The purpose was to survey director's experiences in directing extroverts. The first section of the questionnaire being statistical information. The second, focusing on director's experience of directing extroverts and the third, inviting directors opinions on the preferences of extroverts in regard to categories of importance.

### **Results of Survey.**

The collated results of the survey may be seen graphically in Appendix II. An examination of these identified a number of points that required further analysis and comment.

1. In graph number one, which illustrates purely statistical information relating to numbers of directors and extrovert directees, I note the following. Of the twenty-three directors who completed the questionnaire, twenty (or 87%) had directed at least one extrovert during the course of their ministry to date, and fifteen had directed two or more. Furthermore three of the directors surveyed had directed more than five extroverts. Therefore it may be assumed with reasonable certainty that directors can expect to have at least one extrovert (and very likely more), during their ministry. This finding is also supported in graph four where the respondents clearly indicated that the extroverts they directed found spiritual direction both helpful and valued. From my perspective this stands in contrast to my previous understanding that extroverts do not commonly seek spiritual direction, as they typically do not find it easy to attend to their interior life. Neraas & Applewhite comment similarly, noting

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<sup>1</sup> Chester P Michael & Marie C Norrisey. Prayer and Temperament, The Open Door Inc. 1984 p. 182.

It should be noted that in this research the identification of directees as extrovert was based in some cases on the directees own knowledge of their type preferences and in other cases by the directors perception of the directees type. Verification of each directees claimed type was beyond the scope of this research.

that extroverts “are uncomfortable with the least preferred side of our personality, our inner life”<sup>2</sup>

2. Graph number two tends to speak for itself. It is worth noting that a good number of directors found the sessions to be lively and enjoyable. One could easily assume that this is related to the director’s own orientation as two of the respondents who are themselves extroverts pointed out. One says, “Being an extrovert myself I find I’m energised by extroverts”<sup>3</sup> and another, “Their energy engages me”<sup>4</sup>. However while extrovert directors generally seem to find directing extroverts stimulating, survey results show that this experience is not limited to directors of this orientation. While eight of the directors surveyed identified themselves as extroverts, sixteen<sup>5</sup> found the sessions to be lively and enjoyable. Of these sixteen it is reasonable to assume that eight would identify themselves as introverts<sup>6</sup>.
3. As we move to graph 3, the first statistic that invites attention is the number of directors (61%) who experienced difficulty keeping their extrovert directees focussed. Two comments from surveyed directors help illustrate the difficulty. One being “Sorting through a multitude of issues. Keeping directee in the present.” Another similarly, “It is difficult to keep directee focussed on her own journey rather than the journey of others.” This second quote particularly interested me as I had experienced a similar situation with one of my extrovert directees. However, in my own case, as time has progressed, I have come to realise that these apparent digressions (ie. What appears unfocussed to me) may well be a part of the essential journey of the extrovert and should not be discounted too quickly. It may well be that what appears to be a focus on others is in fact, an important spiritual housekeeping work for the extrovert. As Nerass & Applewhite state,

“The social realm is extremely important, and when it is off balance, so are we. Consequently, healthy communications, the healing of relationships, freedom to speak the truth, and belonging, indicate to the extrovert that ‘God is alive and well.’ When things are not working well in our relationships, we are apt to feel spiritually diminished.”<sup>7</sup>

Ruth Fowke summarises the issue as follows,

“They actually need to talk themselves into finding out what they are thinking. It is as though they cannot get in touch with their own opinions until they have heard themselves speaking out about the subject. A consequence of this is that they seem to digress out loud, going, as it were, all round the mulberry bush, before coming to a conclusion.”<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the foregoing, a more detailed analysis of responses to three of the

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<sup>2</sup> Rev Julie Nerass & Rev Harry Applewhite, Extroverts and the Spiritual Life p.404. Review for Religious, May-June 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Note written by respondent on survey form.

<sup>4</sup> Ditto as note 1.

<sup>5</sup> Graph 2

<sup>6</sup> This assumption is based on the high probability that it would be unlikely for a spiritual director to be unaware of his or her orientation and thus be either unable to state it, or state it erroneously.

<sup>7</sup> Rev Julie Nerass & Rev Harry Applewhite, Extroverts and the Spiritual Life. Review for Religious, May-June 1989.

<sup>8</sup> Fowke, Ruth. Personality & Prayer (p 13.) Eagle, Guildford Surrey 1997

questions<sup>9</sup> in section 2 of the questionnaire offers a revealing insight into the style and content of interventions being used by directors while directing extroverts. For a start I note that five of the directors surveyed routinely experienced resistance to their interventions. We can add to this number a further (at least) two directors (perhaps even more<sup>10</sup>) who admitted to feeling sometimes superfluous during sessions. These responses suggest that doubt can be cast on the effectiveness of the interventions these directors are using. On its own, this may not be a particularly significant statistic. However, when we consider it together with the fact that 14 (or 61%) of those surveyed experienced difficulty keeping their directees focussed, I suggest that it raises a question regarding the style and content of interventions directors are currently trained to use. Of course, without similar statistics relating to introverts it is not possible to offer a valid comparison. However, one could speculate that interventions normally and successfully used with introvert directees are also being commonly used with extroverts. If this is the case, the results of this survey may well suggest that, although many of these may work well for extrovert directees, there are also a significant number that do not. If so, perhaps a different style and content of intervention would prove more helpful to extroverts.

Nerass and Applewhite<sup>11</sup> offer insights that support this. I quote, “Our (i.e. extroverts) best way (of praying) is interpersonal and expressive, whether that be physical or verbal.<sup>12</sup>” They go on to offer some examples, saying that extroverts relate to “worship with our bodies.”<sup>13</sup> They refer to, American Indians who mix short chants and movements as they pray<sup>14</sup>. Further they suggest that prayer (for extroverts) is also facilitated through creativity and dialogue<sup>15</sup>

The important thing seems to be giving extroverts the freedom to be extroverts so that they may more easily see the work of God in their lives. Nerass & Applewhite quote the Orthodox Bishop Anthony Bloom who wrote,

“As long as we ourselves are real; as long as we are truly ourselves, God can be present and do something with us..... But the moment we try to be what we are not, there is nothing left to say or have; we become a fictitious personality, an unreal presence, and this unreal presence cannot be approached by God.<sup>16</sup>”

In the light of the foregoing, it can be suggested that interventions, which focus the extrovert outwardly and physically may be more fruitful than many we commonly use. For example, “Could you draw a picture of .....?”. “If your feelings were to be expressed as a movement, what would it be like?” Prayer suggestions could include dance, drama (eg. enacting bible passages), the use of symbols, and spoken

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<sup>9</sup> Directee resistance to interventions, difficulty keeping directee focused, and director not feeling as though contributing much.

<sup>10</sup> Seven directors identified “not feeling as though they were contributing much” as being one of their experienced difficulties.

<sup>11</sup> Rev Julie Nerass & Rev Harry Applewhite, Extroverts and the Spiritual Life. Review for Religious, May-June 1989.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid p.405

<sup>13</sup> Ibid p.405

<sup>14</sup> Ibid p.405

<sup>15</sup> Ibid p.405ff.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid p 403

dialogue with God. Why not, during a direction session, give extrovert directees a freedom to express themselves with movement, drama, art, etc? Why not have art materials on hand? Ruth Fowke notes that extroverts “tend to pray most easily when they are also doing something else.”<sup>17</sup>

4. I have chosen a different format for graph 4. The purpose being to chart extrovert directees’ preferences over a number of categories of particular interest to directors. To the left side of the graph I have listed categories of preference conventionally associated with extroverts. To the right side is a set of “opposite” categories commonly associated with introverts. Directors were invited to rate their extrovert directees on a scale of 1 to 10 across each category. A rating of 1 or 10 indicating a strong preference either way, and a rating of 5 indicating either no particular preference or a “balanced” preference between the two poles. The results are based on directors’ opinions and represent a generalisation of their extrovert directees collectively.

The major surprise for me was how strongly spiritual direction was valued by extroverts. However, on reflection, I believe I should not have been surprised. For a start, my expectation was based on a kind of conventional wisdom. One that is now proving incorrect. Also there is the evidence of my own work directing extroverts who frequently affirm the value of spiritual direction for them. Thirdly, as already stated, extroverts are verbally and relationally oriented and prefer to work on spirituality “out there” first before attending to their inner lives. Spiritual direction provides exactly this kind of opportunity. Extrovert directees are able to “verbalise their journey” in relationship with a listening director.

Another response worth mentioning was that silence wasn’t as strongly rejected as I perhaps expected. I do note from graph 3 that nearly half the directors found extrovert directees uneasy with silence during direction sessions. However, this does not refer to the same “silence”. While silent gaps during sessions may indeed leave an extrovert feeling uncomfortable, (disconnected from director and process), the silence surveyed in graph 4 refers to times “in quiet” with God. These can in fact be very relational for extroverts (even verbal?), and therefore not necessarily uncomfortable. Although not surveyed, one might venture to suggest that appreciating silence relates more to where extroverts currently are, in terms of their own spiritual journey, than it does to their personality preference. Neraas and Applewhite suggest that the more healthily connected that extroverts are with others and the outer world, the freer they are to “pursue prayer and solitude.”<sup>18</sup>

Finally, there are two further learnings worth a brief comment. The first of these is that, in terms of worship and music, extroverts appear to collectively exhibit no particular preference either way. One might speculate that this is due to all worship and music, across the spectrum, offering extroverts opportunities to function physically, verbally and creatively. Secondly, in relation to retreats, there was a small but positive response. I mention this because it may suggest that extroverts are quite open to retreats but do not strongly relate to the style of retreat (primarily silent) currently on offer. Nerass and Applewhite discuss this at length and, while there is

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<sup>17</sup> Ruth Fowke, Personality and Prayer. (p. 15) Eagle, Guildford, Surrey. 1997

<sup>18</sup> Rev Julie Neraas & Rev Harry Applewhite, Extroverts and the Spiritual Life. (p. 407) Review for Religious, May-June 1989.

insufficient space in this essay to go into detail, they suggest that there are opportunities for those who offer retreats to include more options that enable extroverts to work with the “out there” as well as with the inner life.

### **Conclusion.**

Perhaps the first thing to say in conclusion, is that the results of this survey have raised more questions than they have answered. For a start, a parallel survey of introvert directees is called for. This would not only provide balance, but would also enable far better interpretation of the results of this survey.

One of my original objectives was related to difficulties I myself had experienced while directing extroverts. Specifically, that I found sessions very demanding of my energy. Remaining alert to a session that was content rich, moving rapidly, and seemingly had little discernable focus was very tiring.

Fundamentally, three questions were continually before me.

- 1) Where is the Directee now?
- 2) How could I intervene as my training was pressing me to do? (eg. intervene and engage early).
- 3) What kind of intervention might be appropriate? And by the time I had worked this out, the Directee had moved well on, and the intervention became pointless.

A second objective, associated with the first, was my desire to discover ways I might make spiritual direction sessions more valuable for my extrovert directees.

In relation to these objectives, the learnings and discoveries as summarised below have been helpful.

- Firstly, the importance of this research has been reinforced for me. The survey has clearly shown that, as a spiritual director I can routinely expect to have extroverts among my directees. Not only this, but properly conducted spiritual direction is experienced by extroverts as a valuable and worthwhile “help” in their spiritual journey. Moreover, extroverts may need spiritual direction more than introverts, as being able to verbalise their outer life in relationship to another is an essential for their spiritual growth. A spiritual director offers a place and relationship where this can happen in safety and confidence.
- Secondly, directors directing extroverts need not feel pressure to intervene or to “keep the directee focused”. Directors should keep in mind that an essential spiritual work for extroverts is “coming into a healthy place” in relation to their outer lives, in particular their relationships. This may have the extrovert moving rapidly across the landscape of their lives, but does not necessarily mean the directee is unfocused. Indeed the directee may be very focussed. Moreover, interventions, when they are made (and they seem best made infrequently) will be more fruitful when they stay with “deepening” rather than “focussing” the directee. Not only this, but interventions that accommodate extroverts’ preferences for the verbal, the creative, the physical, the external, will generally achieve better outcomes.

As a result of this survey, my hope is to be more “at ease” with my extrovert directees and to let go of pressure to keep it flowing in the manner training encourages me to do. I also hope to give more of my attention to a warm “being with” the directee, simply listening, rather than speaking. There is also a desire to attempt some “extrovert oriented” interventions, however this will be tempered by a need to be attentive to appropriate moments for such interventions. I also need to be less concerned by missed opportunities. Perhaps the greatest demand will still be finding the energy required to “stay with” their story as it “goes all round the mulberry bush<sup>19</sup>”. However, I am hopeful that energy released by feeling less pressure to intervene, will be helpful in this regard.

**Bibliography:**

Rev Julie Nerass & Rev Harry Applewhite, Extroverts and the Spiritual Life. Review for Religious, May-June 1989.

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<sup>19</sup> Ruth Fowke, Personality and Prayer. (p. 13) Eagle, Guildford, Surrey. 1997

**DIRECTING EXTROVERTS**

Dear

I am currently in my second year of training with SGM and am doing my research on offering spiritual direction to extroverts. As you may be aware, extroverts are not highly represented in the personality mix in New Zealand, and it would seem, even less represented among those who come for spiritual direction. From my own experience, directing an extrovert offers some challenges that are unique to this particular personality trait, thus the motivation for this research. My hope is that by getting feedback from a cross section of directors I might be able to discover more about this aspect of spiritual direction and, in the process, perhaps gain some insights based on our shared experience.

Accordingly I am asking you to help me by taking a few moments to respond to the questions below. Even if you are not currently directing an extrovert I would still very much appreciate your responses. Thank you in advance for helping me. Could you please return this questionnaire in the stamped addressed envelope as soon as possible.

Shirley Wilson.

1. How many directees do you currently direct?

1	2	3	4	5	More than 5
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2. Are you yourself an extrovert?

Yes No


3. Are you currently giving or have you in the past given spiritual direction to an extrovert?

**If your answer to question 3 was "NO" please complete section 1, otherwise please complete sections 2 and 3.**

**SECTION 1 (You have never given spiritual direction to an extrovert)**

3. If an extrovert did request spiritual direction from you, do you feel that you would need to adopt a different approach to spiritual direction than that you currently adopt for introverts?

Yes No

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(Finish here - thank you.)

**SECTION 2 (You currently give or have in the past given direction to an extrovert)**

4. How many extroverts do you or have you directed?

1	2	3	4	5	More than 5
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5. What makes directing extroverts easy for you?

The directee needs fewer interventions	
The sessions flow easily	
The directee does most of the work	
Sessions are lively and enjoyable	
Other (Please note briefly below)	

6. What makes directing extroverts difficult for you?

The directee resists my interventions	
The directee struggles with silence	
Directee does not seem to relate to contemplative prayer	
It is difficult to keep the directee focussed	
I don't feel as though I'm contributing much	
Other (Please note briefly below)	

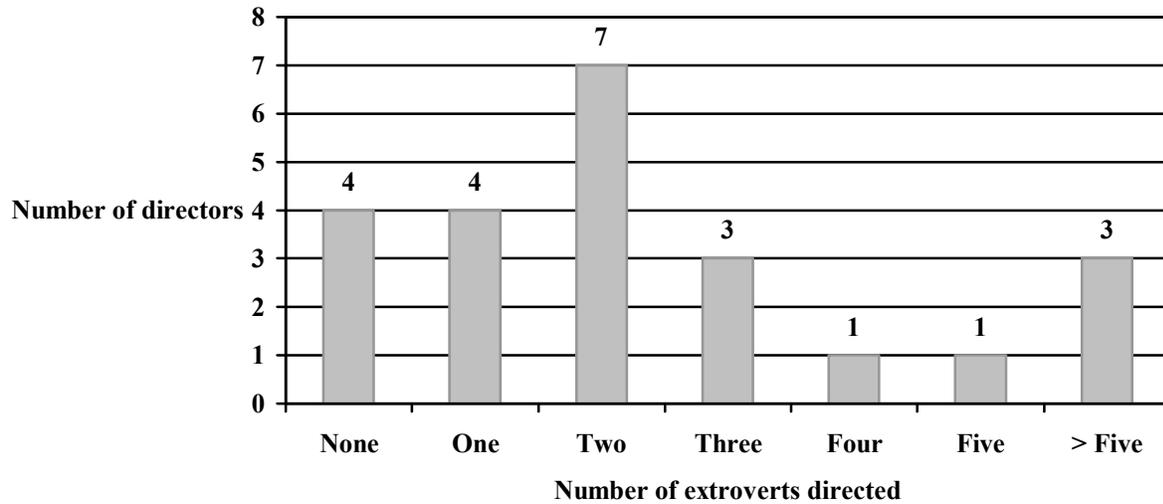
**SECTION 3** (You currently give or have in the past given direction to an extrovert)

7. As far as you are able, could you please offer your opinion on the following (generalised) attributes of the extroverts you direct/have directed. (Please place a tick on each scale to indicate where you feel your directee(s) might be).

- |                             |   |  |   |
|-----------------------------|---|--|---|
| a. Worship style preference | Pentecostal   | 1. . . 2. . . 3. . . 4. . . 5. . . 6. . . 7. . . 8. . . 9. . . 10. | High church or contemplative                  |
| b. Music preference         | Lively/modern/(loud?)                                 | 1. . . 2. . . 3. . . 4. . . 5. . . 6. . . 7. . . 8. . . 9. . . 10. | Quiet/reflective/traditional                  |
| c. Prayer preferences       | Verbal/group  | 1. . . 2. . . 3. . . 4. . . 5. . . 6. . . 7. . . 8. . . 9. . . 10. | Silent/solitary                               |
| d. Silence                  | Avoids silence and solitude                           | 1. . . 2. . . 3. . . 4. . . 5. . . 6. . . 7. . . 8. . . 9. . . 10. | Seeks silence and solitude                    |
| e. Retreats                 | Does not enjoy retreats                               | 1. . . 2. . . 3. . . 4. . . 5. . . 6. . . 7. . . 8. . . 9. . . 10. | Values retreats                               |
| f. Spiritual direction      | Does not relate well to receiving spiritual direction | 1. . . 2. . . 3. . . 4. . . 5. . . 6. . . 7. . . 8. . . 9. . . 10. | Relates well to receiving spiritual direction |

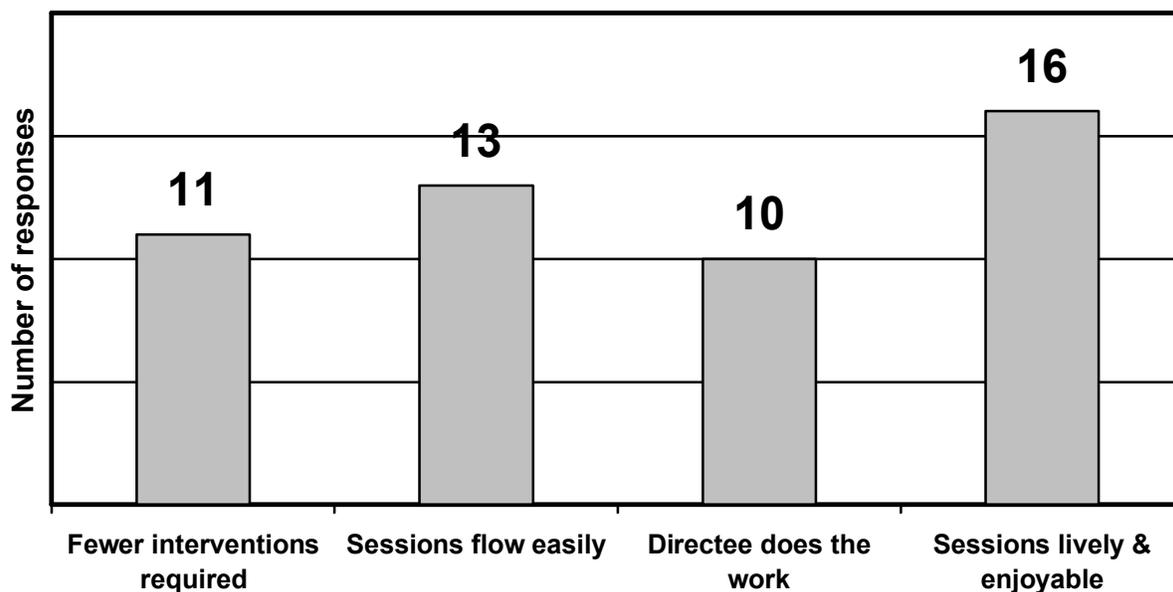
GRAPH 1

**Number of Directors who have directed extroverts during the course of their ministry**



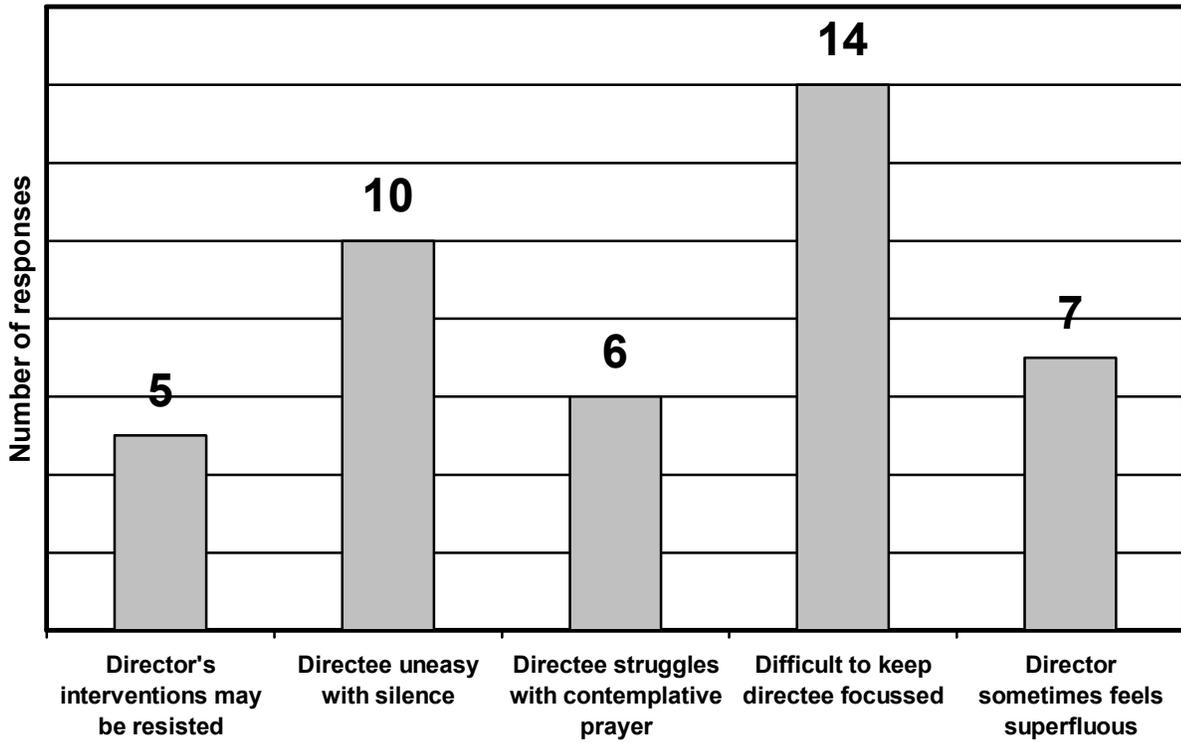
GRAPH 2

**Aspects of directing extroverts that has made the work easier and more enjoyable for directors**



GRAPH 3

**Difficulties experienced by directors who have directed extroverts**



GRAPH 4

### Preferences exhibited by extroverts in relation to categories of interest to spiritual directors

