March 4, 2016

My name is Linda Dakin-Grimm. I am a lawyer by profession and am in the masters program in theology at LMU. I recently participated in a program with Sr. Maria Lai, of spiritual direction, corresponding by email. Sr. Maria suggested the program when she learned of my disappointment in not being included in a retreat, and that I am in the middle of a life transition. I had no real expectations of the program.

The process was: I would read a short chapter from the book *What is Ignatian Spirituality?* by David L. Fleming, and then meditate on it for a few days. I would then write in my journal about feelings and thoughts that came up from reading the chapter, and then I would write a one-page personal reflection about it. I would send the reflection to Sr. Maria. She sent me back thoughts and questions about what I wrote. I would then take those thoughts and questions to prayer for a few days. When I was ready, I moved to the next chapter and did the same thing. We covered the first ten chapters of the book in this way. After that, I met with Sr. Maria in person to discuss our work and a way forward.

This way of proceeding was wonderfully useful to me. Although we were exchanging material electronically, the connection was real and personal. I was surprised every week by the insightful questions Sr. Maria asked and by the perceptions she had of what was sometimes hiding behind my words. I never felt pressured or "directed." I felt understood and gently accompanied. About 6 or 7 weeks into the process, I experienced some internal resistance to going deeper, so I slowed down a bit but Sr. Maria walked through this with me.

I might have thought that the lack of eye-to-eye contact would make the experience less beneficial. I don't believe this was the case. This might be because of Sr. Maria's perceptiveness, and the process might not work as well with a less intuitive director. But in my case, the distance actually helped, as it is much easier for me to write about deeply personal things like prayer and my relationship with God, than to speak about them. I believe that the correspondence aspect of the relationship also let me build trust week by week, and to slowly reveal myself at my own pace. It also allowed me to read and re-read the feedback, as I had it in writing. This would not have occurred in the same way if we had been meeting in person.

The experience was a wonderful gift and I recommend it (and Sr. Maria) without reservation.

Linda Dakin-Grimm