Looking for a way to grow your personal relationship with God?

Spiritual direction might be the answer.

Having a spiritual director means having someone who walks with you on a journey to "become more attentive to those inner movements, the voice of God," said Amy Hoover, of the Creighton University Retreat Center in Griswold.

The number of Catholics doing spiritual direction is small but growing, she said. "We haven't helped the masses recognize the grace of being a reflective people," she added.

There are opportunities. About a third of those who come to the retreat center in the woods near Griswold are from Creighton University, another third from high school groups and a third from church groups or people looking for silence.

Spiritual direction is offered by Jesuit Father Bob Dufford and Hoover at the former Boy Scout camp. The late Father Lavern Wingert purchased the property in the 1970s and made it into a retreat center, where he hosted primarily people in addiction recovery.

Today, retreats such as Kairos, Christian Experience Weekend, Christ Renews His Parish and similar encounters invite people to enter into a relationship with Jesus, Hoover said. "As that grows, the need and the desire for spiritual direction grows," she said. Spiritual direction is deeply rooted in the Catholic faith tradition she added, suggesting the mystics such as St. Catherine of Siena, St. Theresa of Avila, St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. John of the Cross advocated for a personal relationship with God.

How does one start a personal relationship with God? Hoover compares it to dating.

"When entering into a relationship with your spouse, you start with that first date, you're attentive to each other, sharing about yourself and listening," she said. "It doesn't go anywhere unless you continue to do that.

That's how I imagine it." She recommends people find a quiet place and imagine Jesus sitting across from them. "In your imagination, what is Jesus sharing with you and what do you want to share with Jesus?" she said. And continued "God is in us. The words of God will come out. The key is to sit in silence and be mindful, appreciate the beauty in the surroundings." Hoover sees spiritual direction as a ministry of being a companion. She asks what's going on in a person's prayer, where have they encountered God, what's their struggle with God, "so that we can together listen for where God is working and moving in our lives," she said.

It takes courage to seek out a spiritual director because it suggests vulnerability, Hoover said.

"If there's a stirring in your heart or you sense you're being called to a different or deeper relationship with God, a spiritual director can walk with you," she adds. "It might be helpful."