

Practicalities

When making the initial contact it would be wise to think about some or all of the following:

- Frequency of meeting (bi-monthly, quarterly etc. or more frequently at the beginning?)
- Place of meeting and mode of travel if necessary
- Whether to disclose any other one-to-one meetings you are having (e.g. counselling, mentoring etc.)
- Payment? Many companions will be able to offer this ministry without charge, while others will welcome a contribution in recognition of their own training and supervision. (If you are in employment and are invited to make a donation, a possible guideline is whatever you would earn in an hour)

The First Meeting

The first meeting will be exploratory – a chance to get to know one another, to compare what you hope for with what the companion can offer. Your companion may suggest that you meet for a few times and then review the relationship together. Throughout, do say honestly what you think and feel about your meetings.

Preparing for a meeting

Your meetings will be most fruitful if you prepare for them. Pray that the Spirit may illuminate your reflections.

- Since last time, what has been going on in your life? What feelings or moods have been around?
- When were you particularly aware of God's presence or activity in your life? How did you feel at those times? Have there been any surprises?
- What are your current preoccupations? In your innermost heart what do you hope for?

Reviewing the Relationship

For the relationship to be fruitful there must be commitment; this is a spiritual discipline and it may take time for you to get to know each other and for confidence to grow. Therefore it is good from time to time to review the relationship:

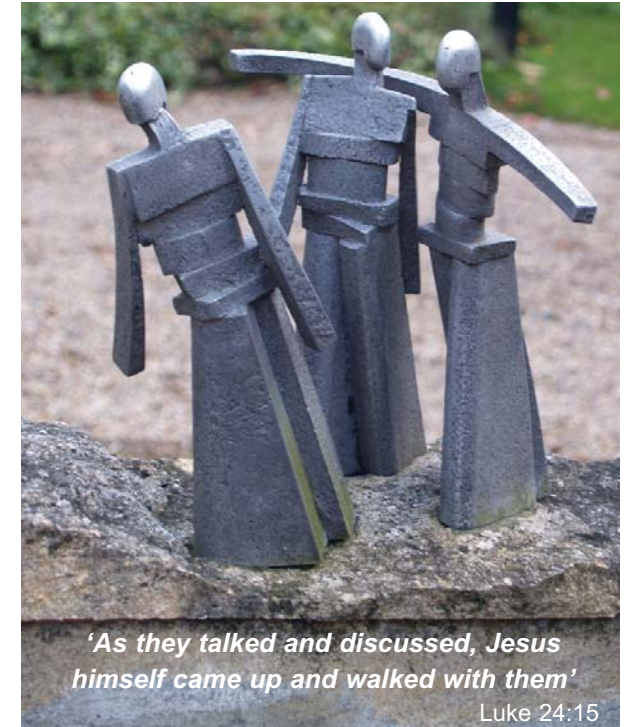
- How do you feel before and during the meetings?
- Are you being heard, accepted and respected?
- Do you feel supported and accompanied?
- Are you free to be yourself and say whatever you want?
- Are any periods of silence comfortable or uncomfortable?
- Is there some humour and challenge and are these comfortable?
- When guidance had been offered or an activity suggested was this helpful? Did you feel free to follow it or lay it aside?
- Do you think the relationship still has something to offer? How might you help it to continue to be fruitful?
- Do you feel that the relationship may have become stuck? Might it be time for a change? Is this something you can talk over with your companion?

This leaflet was prepared by the Spiritual Direction Resource Group on the basis of several others including one by the Retreat Association, Kerridge House, 42 Woodside Close, Amersham, HP6 5EF.
www.retreats.org.uk

The Spiritual Direction Resource Group:
Revd Canon Dr Nigel Rooms
Canon Angela Ashwin
Revd Sarah Clark
Revd Canon Dr Michael Taylor

Produced by the Spiritual Direction Resource Group
Department for Development
Diocese of Southwell & Nottingham, Dunham House,
8 Westgate, Southwell NG25 0JL tel 01636 817232, email:
catriona@southwell.anglican.org

Finding a spiritual companion



'As they talked and discussed, Jesus himself came up and walked with them'

Luke 24:15

Jonathan Clarke, 'Ernmaus', Sacrista Prebend, Southwell

Many people now recognise that having a spiritual companion can be helpful. Choosing a companion can have important consequences in your life, so it is worth making the choice carefully. This leaflet seeks to help you do that.

What's in a name?

We recognise there are different ways of describing being accompanied on our spiritual journey – it has variously been called spiritual direction, accompaniment, guidance, companionship or soul friendship. Associated with these names are different models for this confidential relationship – from fairly formal and directive to the informal and non-directive. We will talk about spiritual companionship to cover all of these ideas while recognising the breadth of approaches.

What we think it is

Two definitions; - companionship is:

...help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God's personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and live out the consequences of the relationship. (Barry and Connolly *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 1984)

...giving attention to the roots which are of equal if not more value than the fruits. Attending to hidden places of rootlessness and anxiety in order to seek wholeness. (Angela Ashwin)

Spiritual companionship is at the heart of pastoral care (Barry & Connolly, 1984). It reaches to the core of our being in relation to God and all of life. It asks the questions; *who am I for God?*; *who is God for me?*; *whose kingdom am I seeking?* – all in the reality of daily living.

Three interrelated areas of the pilgrim's life are the focus of companionship:

1. the inner life
2. the daily life
3. the whole of life as vocation

Companionship is then a double listening at depth to both the self and God. It is an activity in and of the Holy Spirit. It results in a life lived towards God of ever greater freedom and the making of wise Christian choices.

How can it help me?

Some people are less concerned about this than others, but it is still important to be clear about companionship's possible outcomes – we see these variously as:

- A listening and discerning heart - with a desire and willingness to follow Christ.
- Formation of a praying self and living in deeper trust, rooted and grounded in Christ.
- Gradual growth in humility, holiness and the fruit of the Spirit.
- Faith and courage in times of darkness, pain, distress or personal transition.
- Readjustment of the use of time. Less driven or compulsive. Stability.
- Energy for and sustainability of work and ministry – less burnout, self-rejection, failure.
- Affirmation and accountability in relationships with self, God and others.
- Sensitive discernment and greater freedom in answering the question “how then shall we live?”
- Reaching the hidden and darker depths of ourselves in a supportive context
- Ability to make sense of and interpret what is going on spiritually.
- Healing – allowing the whole self to be wholly before God and offered wholly to God.
- Those who benefit from accompaniment may discover how best they can accompany others.

How do I find a companion?

Choosing a companion is a very personal decision. As you seek the right person pray for wisdom and discernment. You will want to reflect on what you are seeking through the relationship – but you also may want to trust your instinct. It may be helpful to think about some or all of the following in relation to a possible companion:

a) The Person

What gender, age, role (e.g. clergy / religious / lay), denomination and possibly tradition (evangelical / catholic etc.) would you prefer?

b) The Person as Companion

Will they: Hold the companionship boundary strongly or lightly? (e.g. in relation to counselling); be trained?; hold specific knowledge (e.g. Myers-Briggs); have an annual retreat?; also be companioned?

c) The Relationship

Are you looking for; formality/informality; a particular spiritual tradition (e.g. Ignatian) or an eclectic approach; someone with a shared interest (music, painting etc.); someone near or far from your own context?

Once you have clarified some of these issues you can either use your own networks to search for the right person or use the diocesan list. For the latter contact Nigel Rooms with your preferred requirements in a companion on 01636 817231 or nigel.rooms@southwell.anglican.org

Books that might help

Gordon Jeff, *Spiritual Direction for Every Christian* (London: SPCK, 2007)

Peter Ball, *Introducing Spiritual Direction* (London: SPCK, 2003)

Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening* (London: DLT, 1992)

Anne Long *Approaches to Spiritual Direction* (Bramcote: Grove Spirituality, 3rd Edn.1998)