

# **THE WAY OF COMPANIONSHIP**

*A manual for teacher/leaders*

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## PREFACE

This document is what we at the Mental Health Chaplaincy are calling an “alpha” version of our Companionship training manual, which means it is a work in progress and not yet a “first edition.” That means the wording may be rough in places, the layout and format less than dazzling, and some of the concepts still in need of refinement. You are seeing it because we value your insights and hope you will help us as we continue to work on a finished version. Please share with us your comments, questions, and suggestions about the material here. If there are any resources that you find helpful to teaching and training related to Companionship, we’d love to hear about them.

As some of you know, Craig has written a book, along with his friend and colleague David Paul. We anticipate that the book, titled *Souls in the Hands of a Tender God: Stories of the Search for Home and Healing on the Streets*, will be a useful resource for Companionship training programs, as well as an inspirational “read” for a general audience. Watch for it to be released by Beacon Press in the spring of 2008. In the meantime, we are developing a Web site, [www.tendergod.com](http://www.tendergod.com), that will contain information about the book, updates about its publication progress, and announcements of Craig’s appearances relating to both the book and chaplaincy programs around the country.



## INTRODUCTION

Dear Friends,

Some of you I have met. Others of you are colleagues yet unknown. What we have in common is our experience on the front lines: being present with individuals who are homeless, facing mental illness, troubled by trauma and abuse, struggling with drugs and alcohol.

You have been a Samaritan touched by the suffering of another person, someone who has stopped by the side of the road or reached out when others passed by. You have felt in yourself pain, loneliness, confusion; you know emotionally what it is to need help. You have a genuine concern for others and their well-being. You are willing to introduce yourself as a person, as a neighbor, and as a human being, and are open to sharing the moment and the journey with another. You have honored the call to be a companion, simply sitting with fellow human beings who are in struggle or difficulty, coming alongside, listening to their stories, and sharing a few steps together.

For two decades I have companioned individuals on the street, in shelters and drop-in centers, and at meal programs, and come alongside souls who have found their way to the church seeking sanctuary and help. The aim always is just to be present, to share the journey as persons, with deep respect and great care. At the heart of companionship is love, a power in us and among us of infinite connection, healing, and growth.

Over the years I have explored with students and laity the way of Companionship. Early on, our Companionship trainings were nine months long, with small groups meeting weekly on Tuesday or Wednesday evenings from 7:00 to 8:30. We covered a lot more than Companionship: sessions on homelessness; conversations with doctors, nurses, and social workers in the mental health field; and an introduction to scriptures, theology, and spiritual practice supportive of ministry with individuals who were on the edge and hurting. In time it became clear that the core of Companionship was quite simple and that it grew from gifts and capacities that are available in all of us.

Companionship is not, in the end, a theory to be learned or a set of skills to be taught. It is a way of life, a way of being in the world with others. Even the phrase “Companionship training” is something of a misnomer. What we can do is invite people to experience the way of Companionship—approaching another person with concern and introducing ourselves with grace; exploring the practice of hospitality, coming alongside, listening and accompaniment. These are the tools for supporting another person in creating a circle of care and encouraging them in finding healing home and community.

This manual is designed to support you as a companion teacher/leader as you invite others to discover and explore the way of Companionship. The manual lays out a three-hour approach, but you should feel free to adapt, develop, and tailor it to your needs. It provides a framework, offers some basic language and guidelines, and suggests exercises to help people understand and begin practicing the way of Companionship.

The way of Companionship is both simple and endless—simple in its basic theory and practice, yet endless in the learning and growth we experience as Companions.

Companionship is our natural path with each other. Companionship is in our nature. We are made to share our life journeys with each other. We are created for sensitivity, created to be sympathetic, empathic, and compassionate. We are born to interact and to respond to one another’s suffering and distress. The capacities for companionship are innate within us all. The introduction to

Companionship represented by this manual is an introduction to our basic nature: the core of who we are as persons, the part of us that is the best and deepest.

Our instinct is to help the person who is in trouble. Why does the flight attendant always announce that in the event of a loss of cabin pressure, when the oxygen masks descend, “if you are traveling with a child or someone who needs assistance, put your own mask on first and then assist the other person”? Because it’s in our nature to help someone in distress.

The natural state of our hands is relaxed, open and ready to give and receive. We do not walk around day after day making a fist. We are made to walk together side by side, not created essentially to go crashing into each other like football players. It is natural to sit with each other looking out at the world. That is what front porches are for.

Teaching the way of Companionship is a process of opening ourselves and opening each other to potential already within us. It is an opportunity to meditate on what it means to be human, to reflect upon who we are as persons and to contemplate what is most basic in caring for and serving one another.

The way of Companionship leads to the sacred in our life together. The way of Companionship leads to moments of truth, to living authentically and honestly and responsibly with one another. Sharing the journey of Companionship leads to moments of unanticipated grace, palpable mercy, and the deepest anchor points of faith. Teaching the way of Companionship invites you to shape and speak your own most profound beliefs, even as you invite others to begin a journey that is ultimately spiritual and soul-growing.

Many of us are motivated to teach the way of Companionship out of our own experiences of being companioned. Somewhere, at some time, someone noticed our woundedness, our fragility and need. Someone sensed our sorrow and struggle—felt something like what we were feeling—and was empathetic. That someone had compassion for us, joined us in our suffering, came to us and expressed concern. They offered their presence, stood by us, listened, helped hold our hurt ... and took the next step with us. I encourage you to name those who have companioned you on your journey. They are your instructors in lines of care going back into the ages.

This manual is only an outline for you to start with. You will teach the way of companionship as you have experienced it with others in your own journey.

There is a vocabulary in these pages: approach, sensitivity, compassion, concern; hospitality, “side by side,” listening, accompaniment; partnerships, “circles of care,” referral and collaboration; mutuality, authenticity, and responsibility. Language is crucial to forming a caring human community and communicating with each other. But language is a living thing; meanings develop and evolve. People find their own key words and phrases, shape new definitions and do their own naming. I think every time I’ve taught my Introduction to Companionship class, I have changed some of the vocabulary, discovered a new way to say something, or found new meaning in a word or phrase. One of the reasons I continue to use an easel pad or a blackboard when I teach—rather than PowerPoint or some other, higher-tech presentation, is the freedom it gives me to rearrange ideas on the spot, add new understandings, and recreate again and again the lively flow of life that is the experience of Companionship.

For years I defined Companionship as a relationship responsive to suffering. One night in Boston, a small group of us were talking after dinner. Someone asked about the boundaries of Companionship—how does one stay safe with a stranger or set limits on intimacy?

“Companionship is a public relationship, not a private one,” I said. “It’s a relationship that develops out in the open. It’s a visible caring—stopping on the sidewalk, saying hello in the shelter, greeting a person in church, being present at a community meal or fellowship hour, sitting together in

the waiting room, riding the bus. Companionship is not giving someone a ride alone in your car, or taking them home on your own.”

The next morning, as I wrote the definition of Companionship on the first page of a pad of newsprint sitting on a wobbly easel, I added the word “public:”

“Companionship is a public relationship in response to suffering.”

The material herein is not copyrighted. Feel free to keep developing it yourself. Let your teaching evolve as people ask questions or don’t understand something. I’ve included occasional illustrations and exercises, but I trust you will draw on your own wisdom and experience. I’m a story teller, with a little bit of acting experience, and I enjoy role-playing. I bring in pictures, try new exercises, call on the audience to help me with examples, draw on scriptures, recite poetry ... and always encourage people to share their questions and observations.

Teaching is an art, a matter of creating moments where one can “live into” knowledge with one’s whole being—one’s body, senses, feelings, intellect, personhood; one’s connectedness to others and the world, and one’s capacity for wonder, mystery, spirit, and faith. The way of Companionship can involve patient, humble moments when little or nothing seems to happen, and moments that are extraordinarily rich and full. It may produce moments that are beyond language.

What is both joyous and daunting is that each time you offer an introduction to Companionship, the session will go differently. We are talking about how two people come together and what happens in the course of sharing even a few moments of the journey.

How does a training session begin? The doors are open. The room is set up. Some refreshments are available. People start coming in. I usually begin by introducing myself and then going around the group, inviting people simply to say their name and say a word or two about their interest in the training. I am alert for the person who is feeling shy or uncomfortable. In response to some comments, I may say that we will be covering material that may be helpful to a question, concern, or interest that a person raises. I begin to sense that, yes, everyone here does have the potential for companionship. I say it is enough if something that is learned today helps, even once, to produce a moment of relationship.

The training is not about qualifying a group of people to make up a Companionship team, or prepare individuals to take on a certain level of assignment. I make clear that this is an introduction. It will be up to each person to decide where and how—or even if—he or she wants to practice the way of Companionship.

In fact, Companionship cannot be assigned. Our task is not to make matches, but to nurture openness to persons in need and foster the capacity to respond out of concern for our neighbor’s well-being.

The ideal of the companion is the Samaritan, the neighbor who stops to care and helps the wounded to find a place of healing and ongoing support.

Companionship has a primary care for the stranger, the person who is isolated and most vulnerable, the person who is outcast, who lives on the margin. Companionship cares for those who are least able to make their own needs known and ask for help.

If you would teach Companionship, be a companion to your neighbor who has nowhere to go and who has no one else in their life. Before you teach or seek to lead others, go first yourself to be with a sister or brother who is alone on the street or somewhere else in the world of mental illness, trauma, or addiction. Let those who have struggled with the awful depths, the unimaginable heights, and the bizarre side roads of human existence be your instructors and colleagues in learning and readying to teach this way of patient presence.

Perhaps you have had your own journey to the edge. Don't be afraid to teach from your own story, your own experience of healing and growth, doubt and faith.

Companionship is a humble calling. It does not keep accounts, require reports, or measure to outcomes. Companionship may be expressed in the briefest of glances, in a nod or a smile, in a gentle hello; it might evolve slowly over days and weeks, or even months or years, into a growing strength of connection and care. I have companioned a man who walks each day from a campsite near my home to the city library and back. I know him only as Walter. In almost fifteen years he has never spoken more than a few sentences, and that much only a few times. Walter and I did not seek each other out. No one introduced us. We are simply human beings, neighbors in an elemental connection with each other. I am sensitive to Walter's condition. His gloomy face evokes a complex of feelings within me. I am concerned for his health, especially in winter. I greet him with respect and wonder when and if we shall have something more, one day, to do with each other. There is nothing specific to suggest or report. We see each other and are part of one another's orbit; we have a few ragged threads of relationship now woven between us. Feeble as it seems, that is a kind of Companionship. It is at least something in the life of a man who might have no other human relationships.

This is the path we are teaching, a way in which each step is fully worthy. The journey is more important than any particular destination or achievement. Our interest is in the relationship itself, in forming the little threads of connection and attachment we are able to shape with each other. Our focus is on the small and immediate moments together.

Teaching companionship is not about the curriculum, the content of training, the skills of the instructor, the length of a session, or the material covered. The nine-month course format that I began with 20 years ago has turned into something much more brief and, sometimes, even quite informal. Recently I "taught" companionship to two new colleagues who wanted to do outreach on the streets. We had half an hour over lunch. I told them what I could, tried to say what was at the heart of the matter, and encouraged them to be in touch with questions or comments. And that was it.

The point is that there is not set curriculum, and in a sense, there is no way that we can teach a detailed and comprehensive method of Companionship. In fact, it has become clear to me through the years that learning the way of Companionship is a life-long process. What I can do get someone started will inevitably give way to experiential learning—"on-the-job training," so to speak.

That said, I have (as some of you know) settled on my own standard teaching approach, a three-hour class that I call, simply, Introduction to Companionship. In some cases, people ask for only one or two hours, and I try to accommodate. The basics are relatively simple:

- Through sensitivity, compassion, and concern, we are called to attention, to attend.
- We approach and introduce ourselves, sharing our care and concern.
- We offer hospitality and come alongside, open to listening and sharing the journey for the next step or two.
- Our aim is to encourage healing and help in the creation of a circle of care.
- We seek to develop our relationship in the direction of neighborhood, into the growing mutuality of living together in community.

As we begin, I look around the room and tell folks that the very fact they are here suggests that they have what it takes to companion. In smaller groups I invite people to introduce themselves and say a word or two about what has prompted them to come. An hour or so later, after people have shared something of their stories with each other, I declare that the group has "graduated"—they are companioning. The rest is detail and "gravy."

I'm not being cavalier or irreverent. Many of us have spent whole lifetimes learning personal and professional skills of listening and care, and I deeply value the gifts of those who have patiently

helped me to heal and become whole. But I also want to honor and value the capacity we each have to be present with a neighbor, a sister or brother, a fellow human being who is struggling.

Companionship is a spiritual practice, a rite of faith, a sacred moment that requires no pastor, priest, or special place. Companionship recognizes that in every relationship the ground between us is always holy.

I would counsel you to teach as if any moment in these several hours together may reveal the deepest truth. Don't be surprised if someone shares a situation of hurt or pain: "I have a friend (or family member) who is struggling. I just want to know how I can help." "There is an elderly woman on our block who seems to have no family." "I pass this man every morning on my way to work..." People are being called to companion long before they come to the training.

Know that even if you are the only person doing this, you are not alone. As you plan the event, send out announcements, and set up the room, the Spirit is at work within you. "Faith moments" will occur throughout the process. Finding the words to invite participants will forth from you what you understand and believe about what it means to love and care for each other. People's puzzlement and questions will lead to discoveries together about ministry. You will find yourself both inspired and prompted, and also at a loss for words or facing mystery. That, too, is the work of the Spirit. Don't be afraid to say "I don't know," or "Let's look at that more with each other." Companion the participants, be with them, create a safe space to ask questions and explore, come alongside to look at questions together, listen deeply to what is being surfaced, what is coming up in the group, support each individual to take his or her next step in companioning.

Bear in mind that participants will be at different places on their journeys. For some I say, "If next week or next year or down the road you stop for a moment and say hello to the stranger who has come through the door of your church, or pause for a moment to observe and consider helping a person who is homeless or confused on the street, this introduction to the way of Companionship will have borne fruit. The purpose of this education, this workshop is not to recruit, train, and organize a group of volunteers for specific tasks. This is an introduction to a way of life, a path that may lead to many different settings of service.

Teaching the way of Companionship does not mean that we have to have all the answers. A companion doesn't have all the answers. Companions can stumble, be uncertain, make mistakes. Companions are not perfect, and neither are those of us who teach the way of companioning.

Over several hours, a process occurs. People come in, not sure of what will happen or what they are going to learn. They—and perhaps you—will experience a range of emotions. Concerns and questions will be expressed. A safe space among you all will gradually emerge. Stories will be told. You will find common ground. You will share words of understanding and wisdom. A narrative will take shape about who you are as individuals, as neighbors, as a people. Limits and boundaries will be recognized. You will begin to form a small, temporary circle of care and respect for each other. A degree of mutuality will grow, and you will begin to discern gradually a responsible direction.

You as teacher or leader are inviting the participants into experiencing, in a few hours together, a way of life. You teach them by *creating* companionship, by fostering a series of graceful moments in which participants can share their journeys with each other and discover a way forward in common.

Each of you will organize this experience differently, according to your own lights, traditions, and resources. I trust the Spirit in this. I invite you to share your wisdom, questions, and learnings with me and others. I urge you to gather occasionally with colleagues who are answering the call to teach and lead the Companionship journey. We in the Mental Health Chaplaincy make no claim to ownership over the use or dissemination of this manual. We do not seek to create a formal Companionship training structure or organization, no central command or control.

We acknowledge that in the name of Companionship a person may do any manner of things. Authenticity and integrity in teaching the way of Companionship are ultimately a matter of the Spirit, whose marks are humility, tenderness, consensus, laughter, ease and grace, inclusiveness, suasion, gift, liberation, wholeness, and—above all and in all—love. Rigidity, force, fear, superiority, grimness and exclusion, conditions or prerequisites, hostile judgment, and division mark a way quite other than Companionship.

Do not charge for your teaching. Use spaces already available, Ask partners, such as congregations, to contribute and help provide materials and refreshments. Let each training be sponsored by some local community of faith or human service willing to open the doors to all who wish to participate. Whenever possible offer the companionship training ecumenically. Let Companions organize themselves within a local church or cluster of congregations or center of service.

Do your work as a Companionship teacher/leader as part of a community of faith. Seek recognition from your congregation, a local council of churches, or the agency, organization, or ministry you serve. Be accountable to a body larger than yourself.

Please be in touch. The chaplaincy phone number is 206-622-2472, and my e-mail address is [craig@mentalhealthchaplain.org](mailto:craig@mentalhealthchaplain.org). The Chaplaincy's Web site is [www.mentalhealthchaplain.org](http://www.mentalhealthchaplain.org). Check us out there, if you haven't already, and watch for the inauguration of our blog sometime this fall, where we intend to feature weekly posts to encourage Companionship teacher/leaders and will offer an opportunity for dialogue. Do be in touch with us—and with each other.

Together,

Craig

## KEY TO USING THIS MANUAL

This document is set up so that outlines of basic topics appear on verso (left-hand) pages, with corresponding text appearing on recto (right-hand) pages.

For example, open the manual to the first topic, “Companionship Is,” and let the manual lie flat before you. (That might not be so easy given the manual’s current binding, but we’re working on it for future versions.) On the left-hand page are some brief “talking points” about the topic to be discussed. We recommend that you write these talking points on an easel pad or overhead projection sheet for your audience to see; alternatively, you might prepare a PowerPoint slide of each “talking points” page. Each “talking points” page is designated with an easel pad icon at the lower left, as shown in the illustration below.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>COMPANIONSHIP IS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➔ <b>A RESPONSE TO SUFFERING</b></li><li>➔ <b>A RELATIONSHIP SUPPORTIVE OF HEALING</b></li><li>➔ <b>A PUBLIC MINISTRY</b></li></ul>	<p>One way to begin a session is to retell the parable of the Samaritan:</p> <p>A person is lying by the side of the road, wounded and hurting. People pass by, “making the face that does not know.” Finally, someone stops and attends to this human being who is suffering, and accompanies the person to an inn, where healing goes forward in a community of care.</p> <p>The parable of the Samaritan illustrates the way of companionship. Companionship is a response to human suffering. It is a relationship between two persons, supportive of healing. The work is done publicly so that the way of companionship is transparent to all.</p>
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← (easel pad icon)

### Instructions, Background/Interpretive Information, and Exercises

On the right-hand page (and, in some cases, continuing on the subsequent left-hand page) you will find text of several types: comments, suggestions, illustrations, and exercises, designed to help you lead participants in exploring the topic headlined on the “talking points” page.

Instructions and suggestions for *you*, the teacher or leader, appear in this font:

One way to begin a session is to retell the parable of the Samaritan.

Background information or interpretive suggestions appear in the following font:

A person lies at the side of the road, wounded and hurting. People pass by, “making the face that does not know.” Finally, someone stops and attends

Exercises appear in this (italic) font:

***An exercise in hospitality***

*Choose a partner. Stand 15 or 20 feet apart. Now take a step forward toward each other. Take another step. Continue to approach each other, one step at a*

**Ready to go?**

**The “talking points” for the first topic appear on the next verso page.**



## **COMPANIONSHIP**

**IS:**

- ➔ A RESPONSE TO SUFFERING**
- ➔ A RELATIONSHIP SUPPORTIVE OF HEALING**
- ➔ A PUBLIC MINISTRY**



One way to begin a session is to retell the parable of the Samaritan.

A person lies at the side of the road, wounded and hurting. People pass by, “making the face that does not know.” Finally, someone stops and attends to this person who is suffering and accompanies that person to an inn, where healing goes forward in a community of care.

The parable of the Samaritan illustrates the way of companionship.

Companionship is a response to human suffering. It is a relationship between two persons, supportive of healing. The work is done publicly so that the way of companionship is transparent to all.

Companionship differs from friendship. It isn't a relationship built on sharing common interests or activities. Companionship is a way of expressing our concern for another human being and encouraging their healing and well-being. It is not a professional role. Companionship is about our most basic roles with each other as human beings and as neighbors.

In our own time, the way of companionship has developed especially as a response to the suffering of the neighbor who is homeless, and our sisters and brothers who face the stigma and isolation of mental illness.

But the way of Companionship is a faithful and deeply spiritual response to anyone who is alone and in struggle or distress.

The way of Companionship begins in a moment of relationship between two individuals and leads to lives of working with one another to create just, caring, and peaceable communities. The way of Companionship is, in the end, a way of life.

Your first task is to help define Companionship as a specific way of caring for a person who is suffering and a basic way of relating to a loved one, neighbor, or stranger.

## **SUFFERING**

**CAN BE CAUSED BY:**

- ➔ **DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY**
- ➔ **INJURIES TO BODY OR BRAIN**
- ➔ **NEUROLOGICAL DISORDERS**
- ➔ **BIOCHEMICAL IMBALANCES**  
(mental illness)
- ➔ **TRAUMA, STRESS, ANXIETY**
- ➔ **INTOXICATION, ALCOHOLISM, ADDICTION**
- ➔ **PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES & PERSONALITY DISORDERS**
- ➔ **FAMILY/RELATIONAL CONFLICTS**
- ➔ **POVERTY & OPPRESSION**
- ➔ **LEGAL, MORAL, ETHICAL STRUGGLES**
- ➔ **SPIRITUAL NEEDS & CONCERNS**



You may want to explore with your audience how and why people suffer.

Suffering can take many forms. It can be rooted in many different aspects of human life. All of us are vulnerable. Our earthly existence is ultimately fragile. No one is immune to suffering and struggle.

Some of us are born with significant physical or intellectual limits.

Some of us face profound disease or injuries in the course of our life.

Some of us experience serious disruptions in the system of nerves connecting our brain and body, controlling such things as our muscles and movement.

Some of us struggle with disturbances and disorder in the chemistry of our brain and individual brain cells.

Some of us face serious trauma, extraordinary stress, and deep anxiety.

Some of us wrestle with intoxication, chemical dependency, or drug addictions.

Some of us experience psychological challenges, wounds to our sense of self, emotional conflicts, and fragmentation of our personhood.

Some of us are bound in struggles with family or work.

Some of us suffer from the effects of social injustice—poverty, oppression, war.

Some of us are caught in painful legal, ethical, or moral struggles.

Some of us have deep spiritual needs and concerns.

Ask participants to give examples of suffering. Bear in mind that it is not the task of Companions to diagnose, but simply to be aware of the many causes and manifestations of suffering.

## **FOUR "MOVEMENTS"**

IN THE JOURNEY TO  
HEALING & WHOLENESS

**APPROACH**

**COMPANIONSHIP**

**PARTNERSHIPS**

**MUTUALITY**



It is helpful to locate Companionship as part of a larger process of healing.

Companionship is one of four “movements” in a journey toward healing and wholeness:

1. The movement of approaching a person who is in suffering, isolated, or in distress is fueled by concern and informed by observation. It culminates in our introducing ourselves to the other as a neighbor and fellow human being.
2. The movement into Companionship involves four basic practices: offering hospitality, sharing the journey side by side, listening, and accompaniment.
3. Acknowledging our limits, we support a person in developing relationships of healing and growth in the wider community. The movement into encouraging an individual to build partnerships emerges as the person we are companioning expresses specific material needs and identifies personal goals.
4. As the person we are companioning creates an ongoing circle of care, the journey together becomes more mutual. Our fundamental equality and value as persons are affirmed. Both of us are worthy and participating citizens in our local community, sharing in responsibility for ourselves, others, and the world. We each have our intimate circle of care and support, our unique network of family and friends. We are souls, each of us moving toward wholeness, finding our deepest and fullest spiritual identity. We may share a common faith community, or we may find our way unfolding along quite different spiritual paths. But for a time, we share the way together and discover that our stories are part of a rich and much larger journey that includes us all, unto the ages of ages.

Every occasion in which people approach each other holds the potential for Companionship. We may attend to the issues of suffering and struggle, help foster care and healing, and part as souls deepened in spirit and faith.

Invite participants to ask any questions that they may have about Companionship at this point. Don't try to answer everything now; participants' questions will often point to topics you will cover as the session continues. (If that's the case, acknowledge it: “That's a good question, and it's something we'll be talking about in a few minutes.”)

**WE ARE BY NATURE**

**SENSITIVE**

**COMPASSIONATE**

**CONCERNED**



You are now ready to explore how we know when someone is suffering and how we are “invited” to share the journey toward healing and wholeness.

*sensitivity*

Long before our mind is conscious of it, our body is aware of another person's suffering and picks up on it. Our senses take in the struggle and distress. Our eyes see the open sore, the worn clothes, the tears, the bent head, the slow shuffle, the shaking hand. Our ears hear the wheezing breath, the cough, the choked cry, the murmured nonsense, the blurted call. Our nose breathes in the sour smell when a person has no opportunity to bathe and no access to a restroom. We can taste in our own mouths the hunger that drives a person to forage for food in garbage cans and dumpsters. The cold and rain hit our face just as they do the person we pass who has no shelter or home. Even as our neighbor sits alone and untouched by even the smallest gesture of recognition, our own skin reminds us both of what it is like to be bereft of contact and how important it can be that someone nod to us, smile at us, reach out, take our hand or anoint us—even if at a distance—with the energy of care.

We are innately, inherently, instinctively sensitive. We are created in such a way that our senses register the suffering of others. We are naturally equipped to register each other's hurts. We don't have to be taught to see the wounds or hear the cries of another. What happens next is also quite natural.

*compassion*

Our senses trigger within us a range of feeling. We are capable of sympathy—of feeling in ourselves something like what another person is feeling. We are capable of empathy—feeling in ourselves the same mood and emotions another person is feeling. We are capable of compassion—sharing with another person the conditions weighing upon them; feeling with them the hurt, the frustration, the fear and anxiety, the despair and the anger that come with being diminished, demeaned, and dismissed; cast aside as shameful and unworthy. These capacities for sympathy, empathy, and compassion are natural within us.

*concern*

As our senses take in another's struggle and our own feelings are triggered, we become aware of a level of concern rising in us. It is this concern that causes us to pause, to consider the suffering of our neighbor and make some decision as to how we will respond.

Your task here is to help participants understand that the Spirit is with and in the sufferer, seeking to effect healing and well-being. The Spirit is already at work in the life of the other with intimate and infinite love. The Spirit invites us as Companions through our sensitivity, compassion, and concern to join in a process of care that is already underway.

The possibility of companionship is always before us. But it is discernment, a decision, a choice as to when and how we will act on our concern. How will we respond to the suffering of our neighbor and to the Spirit's prompting us through our senses, compassion and concern?

# OBSERVATION, REFLECTION, INTRODUCTION

**Our Roles:**

**PERSONAL ROLE(S)**

**ROLE AS NEIGHBOR**

**ROLE AS HUMAN BEING**



Your task here is to help participants explore their concern by observing a person who is suffering, reflecting on their capacity to respond, and shaping a way to introduce themselves to the person.

Participants might ask themselves:

- What do I see or hear or smell? What are my senses picking up? What is touching me?
- What emotion or mood is being triggered in me? What does it feel like to be in this person's shoes? How did I feel when I was in this position? What am I experiencing now as I am here, now, sharing this person's condition?

Encourage participants to observe more closely. What has caught their attention? How serious is the wound, the risk to health? How far and for how long has this soul wandered? How isolated is this person? How fearful and protective? How open to the nearness and presence of others? How able or willing to communicate, to engage?

Then they might consider what, exactly, is their concern for the person they are observing—health, food, clothing, shelter, safety, comfort? How might they share their concern? Where do they start?

Ask participants to picture themselves in this situation. What do they have to offer? How do they introduce themselves?

We all have specific identities. But we all have larger and more basic roles. We are neighbors. We share the planet, this particular time and space together. Our relationship to each other is given. We are part of the same fabric of existence and life. We stand on common ground. I may introduce myself with a gentle glance, a nod, a smile, a hello. These are the acknowledgements of neighborhood. The largest role we share with each other is the role of human being. We have been born. We are on a journey. We are headed somewhere.

It is as a neighbor, as a human being, as a sister or brother in the human family that we approach, introduce ourselves, and offer care.

Encourage participants to trust the prompting of the Spirit as to whom to approach, and when and how. Companionship is not a matter of assignment, but a deeply spiritual process, a calling. What counts most is that they be open to the possibility, not how many or whom they companion. God is not keeping score, not grading them as

observe  
reflect  
observe  
reflect  
introduce

Companions. God is present with grace and tenderness to all souls. God senses immediately each person's struggle, feels fully every individual's suffering, and responds instantly with gentleness and healing mercy. This inspirational wave of love embraces Companions, too, drawing them in and inviting them to find their own, authentic way of sharing the journey with the other.

Point out that it's not the Companion's responsibility to have answers or be ready to offer any material gift. It is enough to be present.



# **PRACTICES OF COMPANIONSHIP**

**HOSPITALITY**

**“SIDE BY SIDE”**

**LISTENING**

**ACCOMPANIMENT**



This is the heart of Companionship training. You are defining Companionship by presenting four basic spiritual practices: hospitality, side-by-side sharing, listening, and accompaniment.

Companionship is a basic human response to the suffering of another person. It is a way of sharing the journey toward healing and wholeness. It is a primary and public form of caring relationship that helps another to build supportive partnerships with others, and a growing circle of care. Companionship is a way for an ordinary person to assist someone in distress.

Begin by stating again the general definition of companionship: that it is a response to suffering, a relationship supportive of healing, and a public ministry. Use the following four paragraphs to define Companionship in practical terms:

Henri J.M. Nouwen, in his book *Reaching Out*, defines hospitality as creating “free and friendly space for the stranger.” Where shall we meet? How close is it comfortable for us to sit or stand? How much needs to be said or shared? How long shall we engage on this occasion? How do we part and say good-bye? In the aid of creating a safe space between us, gestures of hospitality may be helpful: an offer of something to drink, some nourishment (“companionship” is rooted in the Latin, *cum panis*, with bread), an act of kindness, a small material mercy.

In Companionship, the journey is shared side by side. You are not behind the person telling them where they are to go or what they must do. You are not in a face-to-face stance. You and the other person are looking out at the world together, each seeing the way ahead from your own perspective, each coming from your particular past, each with your particular gifts. Side by side, you acknowledge that your circumstances are different. Your power is not equal, and your conditions are not the same, and yet you stand, for the moment, on important common ground as two unique and distinctive persons.

In this attitude of presence, it is vital to practice the elemental gift of listening. A Companion offers to hear the other person’s story. The basic structure of human story is simple: We all exist in a present, we emerge from a past, and we are moving into a future. As a Companion, you begin in the present, asking simply how things are going. If it seems comfortable, you may inquire a little about the near and immediate past. You might ask a little something about what is next for this person—where might he or she be going from here? Does he or she have a safe place to stay for the night? What does tomorrow hold?

It is by listening that we begin to see what the next steps may be in a person’s journey and can make an offer to accompany them. As a Companion, you might physically go with a person, or you might simply hold the person in your thoughts and care. Accompaniment should never mean doing for the other person what he or she is able to do, but to offer support and encouragement as they move beyond our relationship to develop lines of communication and connection with partners who can help them meet particular needs. As a Companion, you should

be careful to recognize the limits of what you can do, especially when it comes to companionship and accompaniment.

### ***An exercise in hospitality***

*Ask each participant to choose a partner. Have them stand 15 or 20 feet apart. Now ask them to take a step forward toward each other ... and, after a moment, another step. Have them continue to approach each other, one step at a time, until one or both of them are ready to stop.*

#### **Follow-up: Ask the participants:**

- What did you experience as you walked toward each other?*
- What did you “sense” of the other person?*
- What feelings came up in you?*
- What concerns emerged for you?*

### ***An exercise in saying hello***

*Ask participants to greet their neighbors and introduce themselves however they wish to.*

*Then ask if they have any comments.*

### ***An exercise in sharing the journey side by side***

There are three basic stances we can take with another human being: (a) one before the other, (b) face to face, and (c) side by side.

1. *Invite a participant to stand in front of you, facing the other participants.*
  - *Describe how you might direct them, push them, coach them, tell them where they need to go and what they need to do.*
  - *Ask the person how it feels to have you standing behind them directing their life.*
2. *Now ask the person to face you. Stand opposite each other, sideways to the audience.*
  - *Invite people to name what kinds of interactions human beings have face to face—for example, “interviews,” “seeing each other’s eyes, looking into each other’s face,” “intimacy,” “confrontation,” and so on.*
  - *Point out that when you are standing in front of a person, the person must go through you or around you in order to go forward.*
3. *Invite the person to stand next to you in whatever way is comfortable.*

- *Point out that now you are looking out at the world together, but each of you has a unique and particular perspective. You don't see the world exactly the same way.*
- *You can share your views.*
- *You may have different levels of power, but in this side-by-side stance, the person who companions the other chooses to set aside much of his or her power in order to join the other on their journey.*

Summarize the exercise by pointing out to participants (or reiterating it, if you've said it before) that in companionship, we practice sharing the journey side by side. We can turn and face each other as much or as little as we like. We may offer suggestions or directions, but it is enough simply to be present and begin to listen. Our interest is in how the other person sees and experiences the world, what barriers they are facing, what steps they want to take.

**STORY:  
THE NARRATIVE**



Make the point to the participants that listening to another person's story is at the heart of companionship. Point out that each of us has a story. Use the image on the easel pad to emphasize that the basic structure of our stories is simple: We are in the present; we have emerged from a past, and we are headed into a future.

### ***An exercise in listening***

*Have each participant choose a partner. One person will be the listener, and the other will be the storyteller. Leave it up to them to decide who will be the storyteller and who will be the listener. Instruct them as follows:*

1. *Listeners:* *Invite your storyteller to say a little something about their present, a little something about their past, and a word or two about where they are headed, what the future holds. Try three simple questions, for example:*

*“How's it going today?”*

*“Are you originally from around here?”*

*“What's happening tomorrow for you?”*

2. *Storytellers:* *Feel free to say as much or as little as you like, and whatever you like.*

### *Follow-up:*

*Invite the group to respond and share comments on the exercise.*

People have a natural tendency to respond to each others' stories—to reciprocate, to share something of themselves and their journeys. When we share our stories, we find commonalities. We have shared experiences of places and people, and we share interests.

None of us tells our story in exactly the same way as another person does. For some it may be easy, but for others it might be uncomfortable. Pay attention to what both the storytellers and the listeners experienced, and be prepared to comment as they describe the exercise from their points of view.

## **SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF LISTENING**

- 1. Be aware that it is a gift simply to listen**
- 2. Listen for feelings and themes**
- 3. Take care with responses**
- 4. Listen to yourself**
- 5. Listen over time and in community**
- 6. Listen for the words of faith, hope, health, and potential**
- 7. Listen for the "soul story"**



Explain to the participants that in Companionship, the practice of listening is guided by the seven principles summarized in the “talking points.” Be prepared to elaborate on the principles, drawing from the following thoughts and pieces of advice:

1. It is a gift simply to listen, without commenting or advising, and honoring pauses and silence. In suffering, it can be hard for a person to find words. Illness may make ready and coherent thought difficult. It is enough to receive whatever utterance another offers or attempts, no matter how terse, elliptical, or confused.
2. As a Companion, you need to listen for the feelings and themes in what another is sharing. You may not be able to understand the other person’s story, but you can acknowledge the emotions they are feeling, the mood they are experiencing, and what basic human need or issue they are facing.
3. Responding calls for great care. A Companion should invite the other person to elaborate on a point, to tell more, to explain and help the Companion understand.
4. As a Companion, you should listen to yourself, drawing on your own inner experience—the feelings and memories that are emerging, the images and ideas that cross your mind.
5. In Companionship, the task is to listen over time and in community, to hear something of the other’s many-faceted experience: to seek to understand the whole person.
6. It’s especially important to listen for the language of faith, for the words of hope and possibility, for what gives this person strength and encouragement. Listen for the stories of where and when the person has felt good and worthy. Listen not just for the illness, but for the signs of wellness underneath—for the roots of health in the person’s life, for the movement of healing at work.

In companionship, we listen for the “soul story” that reveals one’s deepest identity, one’s wholeness, the story of who an individual is, ultimately, in relationship to others and the world—the spiritual dimension of the person’s life.

## **ACCOMPANIMENT**

**Going with**

**Saying goodbye**

**Holding in thought and prayer**



Point out that as we help create safe space for a person, as we come alongside and listen, the question arises, what are the next steps?

Describe how a Companion can go with a person as a next step.

Sometimes we may be able to make a referral. Like the Samaritan, we may be able to help someone get to an “inn” (a shelter, clinic, or some other appropriate facility) where care is available to forward healing and wholeness. We may be able to physically accompany the individual, make personal introductions, and help ensure that care is provided. We may simply make a call to make sure that a resource is open or available, give directions, and perhaps send along a note of introduction or explanation.

Talk about how to say goodbye.

We may simply thank a person for the opportunity to share, however briefly, and say goodbye. Especially with a stranger, it might be a good idea to say, “May I say hello again when I see you” or “I hope we’ll have a chance to see each other again.” It’s helpful to think about what makes a “good” bye, a good leave-taking,

Introduce to participants the concept of “holding” someone spiritually.

Finally, we can always hold a person in our thoughts and prayers, remembering them as they take their next steps. This is an ancient spiritual practice which recognizes that even at great distances we are all connected, all part of a great web of creation.

### ***An exercise in spiritual holding***

*Ask the participants to pair up again. Instruct each person to invite the other to share something they would like help in holding; a decision, a question, another person they care for.*

*Invite people to reflect on their experience with the group.*

## **LIMITS AND BOUNDARIES**

**Physical limits**

**Sensitivity limits**

**Emotional limits**

**Intellectual limits**

**Personal limits**

**Social limits**

**Spiritual limits**



**Your task at this point is to help participants understand their limits as Companions. Use the “talking points” to name the reality of our human limitations.**

We are limited by our bodies. We can only do so much, physically.

We are limited by our senses. We can see only so much, listen for only so long, without becoming overloaded.

We are limited emotionally. We can bear only so much pain and sorrow, absorb only so much hurt or abuse, directly or secondarily.

We are limited intellectually. We do not know everything.

We are limited personally. Each of us has a particular set of gifts, talents, and abilities, our own unique identity and integrity, but none of us has it all.

We are limited socially. We can engage in a finite number of relationships and only a few that are deeply intimate, mutual, and long-lasting. We are part of families, congregations, larger communities in which we have specific responsibilities.

We are limited spiritually. We are a part of the universe, but not the center of it.

One of the ongoing challenges of Companionship is to honor our limits and set boundaries. We cannot be superheroes.

**Point out to participants that it is helpful in the long run to recognize the limits of companionship. In so doing, we witness to the reality that health and wholeness are gifts of life in community.**

**"I'M NOT ABLE TO DO THAT."**

**– Miss Manners**



**Acknowledge that it can be hard to say no. Introduce the “gospel according to Miss Manners.”**

Is it hard to say no? Miss Manners tells this story: A woman wrote for advice, saying that she and her husband who lived in an upscale suburb of Detroit had little time for themselves. Every weekend they went to cocktail parties and dinners. The woman simply could not say no, could not turn down an invitation.

Miss Manners wrote back, “I understand your problem. The next time someone calls, simply say, ‘I’m not able to do that.’ If they ask for an explanation, simply repeat, ‘I’m not able to do that.’ If they persist in asking you why, simply keep repeating, ‘I’m unable to do that.’ Pretty soon they will quit questioning your disability.”

To say “I’m not able to do that” opens up the possibility for introducing others who can help, thereby beginning to build a circle of care.

**Invite participants’ questions and comments about honoring limits and setting boundaries.**

## **MAKING A REFERRAL**

**Contact, confirm, connect**



**Introduce guidelines for making a referral. Stress to participants that they themselves might not be able to help when a person has a specific need. In many cases, professional help is required. The following are some pointers for helping participants understand the process of making a referral:**

Companionship offers a one-to-one relationship, a basic experience of presence and trustworthiness. This may be the first time in a long while that a person who has been ill, isolated or outcast, has a sense of connection, an experiencing of bonding with another person. Just forming a simple Companionship relationship can take days, weeks, months, sometimes even years. Encouraging an individual now to add a second person to this small circle of care can be difficult.

Making a referral is an art. You can imagine that the man by the side of the road who had been badly beaten might have been wary when the Samaritan said, "Let's go to the inn." Would he be left alone again, vulnerable, prey once more to others? Where was this inn? Who ran it? How would they treat him?

**Suggest to participants that they always try to give another person options. Encourage them to talk honestly with the person they're companionship about what they know and what they don't know.**

**Explain the concepts "Contact, confirm, and connect," drawing from the following guidelines for making a referral:**

Once you have the name of a resource (i.e., a person or facility to whom you can refer someone), call and check to see if this is a good resource for help and assistance: See if there is room for one more in the facility or on the caregiver's schedule; find out what the requirements are and what the person needs to do to get help there. Get the name of someone to talk to, someone who can meet the person and help them when they arrive. It might be useful to write a brief note of introduction, composed with the help of the person you are referring.

**Advise participants to encourage the person to do as much as possible for themselves.**

## **COLLABORATION**

**Debrief, discuss, delineate**



## **Explore with participants what it means to collaborate with other caregivers.**

Companions cannot be a substitute for a wider circle of care. They can, however, be a part of that wider circle, co-operating with those who provide treatment or other professional assistance.

## **Explain what it means to “debrief” someone.**

A Companion can be a sounding-board, but should encourage the other to answer questions, fill out paperwork, and get the information needed to feel safe and comfortable. Companions might suggest their availability to check in and listen further as the person processes and reflects on his or her experience with other caregivers.

## **Caution participants that they might not be able to talk with other caregivers because of confidentiality issues, and that, as Companions, they do not want to get caught in the middle between the person they are companioning and the professionals involved.**

However, Companions can share their honest concerns with the person they are companioning and also with the others who are part of the circle of care. Again, it is important for Companions to be clear about what they can and cannot do—to be clear, that is, about the limits and boundaries of their role.

Building a circle of care means working with service systems and providers who may be overworked and stretched thin. The person being companioned may face difficult barriers and requirements. It is precisely in this phase of partnerships that it becomes vividly clear just how challenging are the systemic issues and the social, economic, and structural dynamics that affect those who are most isolated and vulnerable in our midst. This is where we begin to appreciate the need for social change.

## CRISIS AND EMERGENCY

***Crisis* is characterized by helplessness and/or a feeling of confusion.**

**Four-step crisis intervention model:**

- 1. Vent**
- 2. Identify the problem**
- 3. Brainstorm solutions**
- 4. Agree on action**

***Emergency* is characterized by threat, danger, destruction ... a feeling of fear**

**→ Call 911**



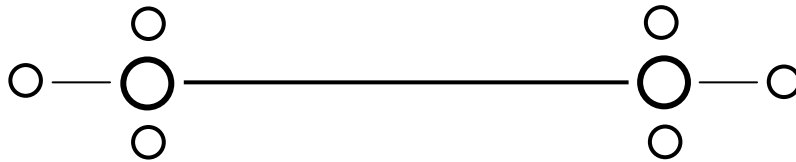
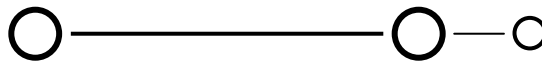
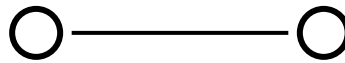
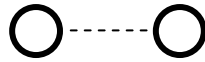
Define “crisis” as a situation characterized by the sufferer’s *helplessness*, inability to find resources, or inability to make a plan.

Introduce the crisis intervention model used by your local Crisis Clinic. (Talk with someone from your local Crisis Clinic to learn about their intervention framework.) *Note that the four-step model shown in the “talking points” visual, taken from that used in Seattle, is given as an example.*

Give participants the phone number of the local Crisis Clinic. If any participants are from other communities, advise them to consult their telephone directory to find the number.

Define “emergency” as a situation characterized by *threat, danger, destruction, and/or a feeling of fear*. Emphasize to participants that if either they or the person they’re working with is in danger, they (the participant) should call 911.

# MUTUALITY



**Authenticity**

**Responsibility**

**Personal**  
**Social**



Use the image from the easel pad to illustrate how the relationship of Companion to companioned develops and grows. It begins tentatively (dotted line connecting the two persons) and becomes a one-to-one relationship (solid line connecting the two). The Companion then encourages the companioned to begin building partnerships with others who can offer particular types of care (third person, and eventually more, entering the relationship as illustrated by the additional circle to the right). When the relationship comes to its completion, both Companion and companioned have their own circles of care and support (bottom set of lines and circles).

Drawing from the following paragraphs, discuss the concept of *mutuality* and how it becomes a vital component in the way of Companionship.

Companionship leads to supporting another person in building a circle of care, but not only that; it issues in a growing mutuality. The person has their life, their circle of healing and support. You, as Companion, have yours. You are both on journeys toward wholeness. Your paths have run parallel for a time, but then they diverge as you each continue your individual way.

Mutuality is not a matter of intimacy, but rather of authenticity and responsibility. In a mutual relationship, we can acknowledge that we have our own hurts and wounds, our own fears and worries, our own challenges and need for others, but we do not need to go into intimate detail. Nor are we called, as Companions, to make an in-depth, long-term covenant with the person we are companioning, such as is implicit in a friendship or explicit in a professional caring relationship.

In Companionship our touch is light, but real.

In Companionship we look carefully at our personal responsibilities to each other as human beings and as neighbors. We explore our mutual responsibilities as members of society, as citizens. We companion in a context, as part of a community of care. Our relationship with each other is guided by the spiritual roots and values of the community—the congregation, the ministry, the service, the larger system of care of which we are a part. If we have a relationship beyond the time of companionship, it will take shape in these settings of community.

The hallmarks of a successful Companionship are authenticity and responsibility (personal and social).

## **SETTINGS FOR COMPANIONSHIP**

**Sunday Morning Companions**

**Community Companions**

**Residential Companions**

**Outreach Companions**



Describe the variety of settings in which Companions might serve.

The following are some examples:

Sunday-morning companions provide a ministry of presence at services of worship and special celebrations, being available especially to the stranger or the parishioner who comes in need or distress.

Community companions offer a ministry of presence together in settings beyond the church—serving as volunteers in residences, shelters, meal programs, and drop-in centers.

Residential companions live in housing facilities, forming community as ordinary persons with individuals are moving from isolation to connection, through convalescence and into recovery.

Outreach companions minister as intentional Samaritans, present on the streets seeking out those who are without care, isolated, and most vulnerable.

Emphasize to participants that whatever the setting, Companionship is not a way for “lone rangers,” but a ministry practiced together and recognized by a local community of faith.

## **FORMING A COMPANIONSHIP TEAM**

**Prayer**

**Scriptures (e.g., *Gentle Bible*)**

**Sharing**

**Discernment**



Finally, you might share with participants a model for forming a Companionship team through regular spiritual support meetings.

The following is a possible outline:

The meeting might begin in prayer, with the leader inviting participants to share with the group whatever they would like us to “hold” as the group comes together. The team is reminded that One is listening who has infinite care for what is on our hearts and in our lives. Our circle together, hearing each person bring petitions, confessions, and celebrations, is an extension and expression of the holy, sacred, and tender love that constantly embraces us and those whom we companion.

Then the group might read scripture together, using a current week of readings from the *Gentle Bible* or another set of texts. Several different voices may articulate the wisdom available from our common history and heritage as God’s people. Each is invited to let one word or phrase, “such as we may have need,” rest on us and in us.

It is in terms of that word and our prayers that the group shares each other’s concerns. The aim at this point is not to problem-solve or give advice, but to hear one another more deeply and fully, again to be part of a gracious “holding” of one another’s souls – the wholeness of who we are.

Finally, the meeting moves into a time of discernment. All are quiet. A person may suggest a particular learning, direction, truth, or wisdom that is emerging in this moment. The task is not to comment or critique, but to let this offering clarify people’s individual and common efforts. There is an ancient formula that locates discernment in the context of the community of faith: “It seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us.”

The question is not “Do you agree with me?” but “Are we in agreement together with the Holy?” Are we, individually and together, moving in a way that makes for healing and wholeness?

Suggest that Companion groups keep a brief register of the meetings, recording prayer concerns and requests, noting helpful scriptures, language, and understandings, and remembering important moments of inspiration and discernment.