

Exploring Spiritual Accompaniment - Beginning to Accompany Another

The initial conversation is not Spiritual Accompaniment 'proper'. It is a 'pre-accompaniment conversation' and part of a discernment process. The purposes are:

Exploring the relationship

- At this stage, it is without obligation. Both director and directee are seeking to discern whether they wish to work together. It is an exploratory session. It is important to be open to the possibility of being mutually unsuitable. Intuitions, felt senses, or images can be important clues, as well as the glaringly obvious. (Finding lives 'overlap' too much).
- An attitude of hospitality, goodwill, generosity in interpretation, and attentiveness in listening is essential, together with a contemplative disposition, a space open to God and to the other person.
- Sharing appropriately about oneself.
e.g. Is there anything you would like to know about me, or the way I work? This needs to be done with care. A new directee may want to ask for some information about the director's training, experience or church relationship, or pilgrimage.

Exchanging basic information

What are they seeking? Expectations

Long-term or short-term accompaniment, or one-off?

Frequency of meeting

Any pressing problem

Areas they wish to explore

The director will be receiving supervision

How the relationship will be evaluated and terminated

Explain the framework of the Retreat Association Guidelines and provide a copy.

Clarifying what Spiritual Accompaniment is, and what the director is seeking to offer
Distinguishing from pastoral counselling, soul-friendship, pastoral supervision, and prayer partnership (in the more usual sense).

Is the person problem-centred or pilgrim-centred?

NB – The 3-fold foci:

What is happening in times of prayer?

Awareness of God in daily life?

Personal vocation and vision

At the core, it is about:

Who is God for me? And Who am I for God?

Any practical questions: Availability, frequency of meetings, time boundaries, confidentiality and the limits of confidentiality, are they seeing anyone else (counsellor, therapist, medic)?

- Contact details and how/when to be in touch between meetings
- If the directee has travelled a long way, a longer session may be appropriate
- Meeting place, parking, map or travel directions if necessary.

Initial relevant background of the directee

- A person's story will unfold gradually as it touches on issues they wish to explore in the sessions.
- Exploring the purpose of Spiritual Accompaniment allows a working alliance and understanding to take shape.

Priorities

- To help them become aware of how and where God is in their life, rather than suggest ways of finding God.
- To stay with what is, and not to seek to change a person's experience of reality, rather, seeking to deepen it.
- To encourage a contemplative and reflective disposition

Questions that the director needs to carry with them as they listen

- Where is God encountering the directee? - Experience
- Where has the directee been in life? - Faith story
- What does the directee care about in life? - Values
- What does the directee feel about life? - Energy
- Where does the directee want to go in life? - Vision

Encourage reflection before deciding about whether to continue: leave it with the directee

The aim is to hold the directee supportively, not drop them or grip them, and be available to journey with them, as in an open hand.

A word about money and insurance:

St Antony's Priory's insurance will cover a Spiritual Director who

- Who meets directees at St Antony's Priory
- Has completed the course
- Has received the referral from St Antony's Priory
- Is offering accompaniment within the Retreat Association Guidelines

In this situation, we provide a service to both parties. We can't do this if any money changes hands, as we are a charity. However, we would suggest and encourage directees to donate to the work of the Priory. Gift aid envelopes are available and bank details.

<https://ssm.org.uk/donate/>

If a Spiritual Director works from home, they need to be aware of their legal liabilities (See RA guidelines). In that case, a Spiritual Director might ask for a donation so that they can cover their costs.

This might include having adequate insurance cover. A list of suitable insurers can be found on the [website](#).