St Antony's Priory
SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT

The Working Alliance in Spiritual Accompaniment

In spiritual accompaniment, the relationship between director and directee is the very ground in which spiritual accompaniment can take root. Barry and Connolly, in the work, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction,* emphasize that the heart of this ministry is a collaborative, grace-centred relationship oriented toward helping the directee notice and respond to God's presence. This relational foundation is often described as the *working alliance*: a bond of trust, shared purpose, and mutually understood roles that enables the spiritual journey to unfold with honesty and freedom.

At its core, the working alliance recognizes that three participants are involved in spiritual direction: the directee, the director, and God, who is the ultimate guide. The director's task is not to solve problems or prescribe spiritual solutions but to help the directee attend to God's movements: those subtle invitations, resistances, desires, and consolations that shape the spiritual life. For this to happen, the relationship must be grounded in deep respect, attentive listening, and reverence for the mystery of the directee's experience.

Trust forms the essential starting point. Directees must feel safe enough to speak candidly about their prayer, struggles, and interior movements. When a director listens with contemplation, compassion, patience, and non-judgment, the directee gradually comes to trust that their experience matters and that God is genuinely at work within it. This trust is strengthened by clear expectations about the purpose of direction, the role of each participant, and the boundaries that protect the integrity of the relationship.

The working alliance also involves a shared commitment to discernment. Director and directee collaborate in noticing where God may be leading. Both participants attending to patterns of grace, moments of consolation, experiences of desolation, and the felt sense of invitation. The director supports but does not control this process: the spiritual life remains the directee's own responsibility, lived in freedom.

Finally, the alliance is strengthened by the director's humility and ongoing self-awareness. Barry and Connolly highlight the importance of the director's interior freedom, ability to set aside personal agendas, and willingness to let God guide the encounter. When the director is attentive to their own reactions, biases, and limitations, the relationship remains open, spacious, and oriented toward God's action rather than the director's preferences.

Practical Considerations

1. Establishing Clear Expectations and Boundaries

Purpose: Spiritual direction focuses on helping the directee pay attention to their relationship with God and live out the consequences of the relationship

Roles: the directee brings their lived experience and takes ownership of their spiritual journey. The director listens and following a movement, helps discern.
Confidentiality: Clear assurances with reference to exceptions such as safeguarding concerns.
Session rhythm: Frequency, duration, and how to handle cancellations
Ending: How will we bring this relationship to an end, when appropriate

2. Creating an atmosphere of safety and reverence

The directee should feel safe enough to speak freely about interior movements. This is helped with the following are fostered:

- A quiet, uninterrupted space
- Director's attentiveness and unhurried presence
- Non-judgmental contemplative listening
- Respect for the directee's pace

3. Maintaining consistent presence and availability

The director's reliability helps the directee's process. This might include:

- Starting and ending on time
- Being emotionally and spiritually present, not distracted
- Minimizing self-disclosure unless it serves prayerful discernment
- Keeping administrative matters clear and simple

4. Keeping the relationship oriented toward God

The working alliance remains strong when both participants continually return to the central question: **Where is God in this?** Practically, this involves:

- follow a movement, rather than a problem
- Encouraging the directee to seek God's invitations in concrete experiences
- Letting silence have a rightful place

5. Evaluating and adjusting the alliance over time

Healthy alliances evolve. Periodically, director and directee may:

- Review how the relationship is functioning
- Clarify emerging needs or shifts in prayer
- Address concerns openly
- Discern whether the relationship should continue or change

6. Director's ongoing formation and self-care

The director supports the working alliance by:

- Maintaining personal prayer and spiritual direction
- Seeking supervision
- Attending to burnout or emotional strain
- Continuing study and formation