

People who offer this ministry are called spiritual directors, spiritual companions, soul friends or prayer guides. They offer:

- \* A safe, confidential relationship in which to explore your relationship with God.
- \* Space and time just for you: especially valuable in the midst of a busy life.
- \* Their attention, encouragement and affirmation
- \* A place to consider any questions, challenges or problems you may have.
- \* Guidance in exploring fresh approaches to prayer, Bible study, discipleship etc.
- \* The discipline of regular reflection and self-examination.
- \* Companionship during a period of discernment or change



They are not there to answer all your questions or solve your problems, but to help you discern God at work in your life. They are there to listen attentively to you, and to God working in you,

trusting in the guiding of the Holy Spirit.

Companions may be women or men, lay or ordained. They will have undertaken training for this ministry. They will also have their own spiritual companion who accompanies them on their pilgrimage.

There follows one person's experience of this ministry, to give you an idea of what it may offer and entail.

## Meeting my spiritual companion

*(DM's own experience of this ministry)*

Every six or seven weeks I spend an hour with a fellow Christian, who has offered to walk alongside me and share my faith journey. Before each meeting I look back prayerfully over the preceding weeks at what has happened in my life. What has been good, what not so good? Where have I experienced God really present with me? Have there been times when I felt God was NOT with me? Are there things I regret? Are there people or situations I am finding difficult, or challenging? I often jot down a few notes about the things I most want to share, and always pray before the meeting.



When we meet it is not an interview – more two friends chatting in the living room over a cup of coffee. I know it is safe to bring up any topic that concerns me, as everything I share (unless it is criminal!) is completely confidential. I can talk freely, and doing so enables me to hear myself – we don't often really listen to ourselves! My friend has been on

training courses, so that she (but it could be a man) can listen to me without being judgemental, but able to hear some of my unspoken thoughts or emotions. Part of her skill is helping me to see / hear things that I may be avoiding, or just unaware of. It has been very affirming to share good experiences with someone who understands their spiritual context. But she can also challenge me, or suggest things I may not have considered. Although we both pray for each other, and our relationship, we choose not to pray together during our meeting, though I know for some people that would be important.

After meeting for over three years it is a relationship I greatly value. As an 'outsider' she can often see things with a clearer eye. When I had a difficult situation at church, she knew none of those involved, so I could talk freely to her when I could not easily have spoken to anyone at church. I know I am not alone when facing whatever comes, as there is a wise friend to share it with. Just reviewing my faith journey with her on a regular basis has helped deepen my relationship with God. I look for where God is at work in my life, or where I need to change my ways to grow into His vision of what I could be. I thank God that people offer this ministry to help us on our journey.

## Finding a Spiritual Companion

Finding a spiritual companion who is right for you is a very personal matter.

Points to consider are:

- \* Do I prefer to see a man or a woman?
- \* Does it matter if they are clergy or lay?
- \* Do I want to see someone local, or from further away?
- \* Is their denomination important?
- \* Does anything else really matter to me? Someone from a specific spiritual tradition or willing to hear confession or with experience of a particular aspect of spiritual development?

If you want to find a spiritual companion, or just find out more about this ministry, you could talk to your parish priest, or contact the Spirituality Adviser in your Episcopal Area. (see next page)

They may suggest one or more people to contact to arrange an initial meeting. At this meeting you can both explore if the relationship seems promising.

If either person feels it would not work, then they may withdraw, without embarrassment, and a new person may be suggested.

Once you have found someone, you will then agree how often to meet, and for how long. The norm is for an hour at intervals of anything from 4 weeks to 4 months. Most people offer this ministry freely, but a few ask for a donation.

## Making Contact

For more information about this ministry, or help in finding a spiritual companion, you may:

- \* Follow the links on the diocesan website: [www.leeds.anglican.org](http://www.leeds.anglican.org)
- \* E-mail: [spirituality@leeds.anglican.org](mailto:spirituality@leeds.anglican.org)
- \* Telephone the Diocesan Office on 0113 2000 540

If you are interested in offering this ministry, the Diocese runs a 2-year training course. For details of this please use the contacts given above.

Please use this leaflet in your parish, and elsewhere, to tell people about this valued but little-known resource for any Christian

## A companion for your spiritual journey?

Christian life and faith is a process of continuous development and growth. We can always learn more of God and his love and hopes for us.

We may have questions, such as:

- \* How could I deepen my prayer life?
- \* Where is God at work in my life?
- \* Worship seems 'stale' - is there a way to refresh my approach to it?
- \* How can I relate my faith to my life from Monday to Saturday?
- \* Is God asking me to do something for him, or to change in some way?
- \* God seems absent - how can I find my faith again?
- \* How can I be a more committed Christian?

Many Christians through the centuries have found it helpful to meet regularly with another person of faith to talk about their relationship with God, and their on-going spiritual journey.

This leaflet explains more about this ministry, and what it offers.