

Role Description and Person Specification

Spiritual Accompanier

Role title

Spiritual Accompanier

Responsible to

The Bishop of Sheffield's Adviser on Spirituality

Support given

Spiritual Accompaniers (hereafter referred to as Accompaniers) receive support through:

- regular supervision
- periodic top-up events
- yearly 'Gatherings'
- mailings
- access to the Bishop of Sheffield's Adviser.

You can expect the provision of a supportive, inclusive and positive environment where all views and opinions are considered equally alongside support from Diocesan staff

Main purpose of the role

The ministry of Christian accompaniment involves relationships between God, the person offering this ministry and the person receiving this ministry¹.

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The role of the Accompanier is to help the Accompanee focus on their relationship with God and so enable their personal vocation (to become the person they were created to be) to grow and be better lived out through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit.

The focus of the Accompanier is primarily on the inner life of the Accompanee, and attention to this in the context of the experience of life and spiritual activities rather than as a moral guardian or confessor.

¹ This section taken from Retreat Association (2019) 'Spiritual Direction Guidelines', Princes Risborough: Retreat Association, p.3. Note: Terminology revised.

The Accompanier will seek to: listen discerningly to what is shared respond in ways that are conducive to the directee's discernment of God in their life offer insights and perspectives that are helpful to the Accompanee in their communication and response to God and living this out in their life.

Common and significant areas of exploration in the relationship will include:

- personal experience and inner (emotional and spiritual) reactions to that experience
- discerning reflection on that experience, seeking to enable in the Accompanee growing discernment of the movements and leading of God's Spirit in their life
- the practice of prayer and the ongoing development of spiritual life, sources of further insights and perspectives, other ways in which their journey might be explored and supported.

The Accompanier has significant potential power and responsibility which should be exercised with great care to ensure the intention of the relationship and the autonomy of the accompanee are not undermined. This involves care in the use of language, in the expression of moral judgements and in the handling of decision-making.

The Accompanier will be offering this ministry as part of their expression of their personal vocation and within the context of their own spiritual life in relationship to their faith community and their own Accompanier.

The focus

The focus of the Accompanier is primarily on the inner life of the accompanee, and attention to this in the context of the experience of life and spiritual activities rather than as a moral guardian or confessor.

The Accompanier will seek to:

- listen discerningly to what is shared
- respond in ways that are conducive to the Accompanee's discernment of God in their life
- offer insights and perspectives that are helpful to the Accompanee in their communication and response to God and living this out in their life.

Responsibilities

It is suggested that, in respect of good practice, Accompaniers will:²

1. themselves be in receipt of regular accompaniment.
2. take their ongoing training and development seriously, availing themselves of opportunities to further develop their skills and understanding.
3. receive regular supervision to help them reflect on and develop their practice.
4. not (ordinarily) relate to the Accompanee in a separate context (for example as a friend, colleague, minister or supervisor). This enables the Accompanee to be free in sharing whatever they wish and the Accompanier to respond with objectivity and balance; it also avoids any confusion of roles.
5. keep matters shared between the Accompanier and Accompanee as confidential unless a legal obligation is involved. Other disclosures may be made in certain cases of serious harm in agreement with the Accompanee.
6. have knowledge of local and national legal and ethical guidelines – for example in relation to safeguarding – and abide by them.
7. reflect on ongoing practice and vocation.
8. ensure there is clarity about the nature of boundaries and confidentiality in the relationship.
9. at all times act in a way that respects the personal and spiritual integrity and wellbeing of the Accompanee.
10. have a contingency plan in place in the event of incapacity or death.
11. be informed on legal liabilities and ensure they have taken appropriate legal cover

² Taken from Spiritual Direction Guidelines produced by the Retreat Association and adopted by those responsible for training, selecting & developing spiritual accompaniers in the Sheffield Diocese and Methodist District.

The training

The aims of the Art of Spiritual Accompaniment course are to:

- introduce Accompaniment
- enable growth in the ministry of Accompaniment through prayer, listening and reflection.
- explore and practice a range of approaches to prayer
- develop discerning listening
- explore key themes of Accompaniment

It is particularly suitable for people who:

- find themselves drawn to listening to others' faith journeys
- wish to develop further in their ability to listen to God in the lives of others
- sense a call to the ministry of Accompaniment
- are companioning others on their journey and wish to develop this ministry
- have completed the 'Spiritual Growth & Transformation' course or the equivalent

This is an experiential course rather than an academic course, open to all in a congregation or Christian community. This course will build upon the work covered in 'Spiritual Growth and Transformation'.

When it is time to [leave the cave], I follow Rockwell and Marrion back out of the cave again, thinking what good guides they are. They kept me safe while letting me practice courage. They pointed me in the right direction without telling me what to see. Though they had been there many times before, they let me explore my own cave. Maybe that is the difference between pastoral counsellors and spiritual Accompaniers. We go to counsellors when we want help getting out of caves. We go to Accompaniers when we are ready to be led farther in.

Barbara Bradford Taylor, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*. Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2015.

Person specification

The core skills and qualities of an Accompanier listed below should make it clear that accompaniment is not about being directive, but a work of great humility in the service of transparency to the Holy Spirit. They are to be aspired to at the outset, and an Accompanier would be committed to continuing development in these areas.³

Criterion	Essential (for enrolment to ASA ⁴)	Desirable (for enrolment to ASA) but required before addition to Bishop's List
Knowledge	1. Prayer	Knows and agrees to local and national legal and ethical safeguarding guidelines.
Skills		4. Clarity 6. Able to say 'No'
Experience		8. Discernment
Personal Attributes	2. Listening 9. Accountable	3. Restraint 5. Self-awareness and humility 11. Difference
Qualifications/Training	Completion of SG&T or equivalent.	
Availability	10. Communion 12. Openness	7. Learning

Table 1. Skills, experience and attributes needed to carry out the role of Spiritual Accompanier.

- 1. Prayer:** The primary requirement is that the person should have an ongoing relationship with God and a commitment to deepening that relationship. It is essential that any person offering the ministry of

³ Taken from Spiritual Direction Guidelines produced by the Retreat Association and adopted by those responsible for training, selecting & developing Accompaniers in the Sheffield Diocese and Methodist District.

⁴ See <https://www.sheffield.anglican.org/learning/courses/art-of-spiritual-accompaniment/> for the second of our formation courses.

accompaniment should themselves meet regularly with an Accompanier.

2. **Listening:** A person who shows themselves able to listen on many levels and pick up deeper resonances ('holy listening'), and is able to foster the Accompanee's skills of articulating their thoughts and feelings.
3. **Restraint:** A person who can hold themselves in check and hold the hospitable space in which the accompaniment conversation can develop. This affects listening, holding boundaries and handling the power balance in the accompaniment conversation with integrity.
4. **Clarity:** A person who can enable clarity in establishing agreement with the accompanee on the length and frequency of sessions and the process for evaluating and terminating the relationship.
5. **Self-awareness and humility:** A person who recognises their own strengths and limitations and when to refer, e.g. to a counsellor. A person who holds the awareness that God is at the centre of the conversation and that they must step back, but who is also aware of their own worth.
6. **Able to say 'No':** A person who does not need to be needed and is aware of the dangers of mutual dependency. A person who can distinguish between being a 'soul friend' and a friend; the closeness and mutuality of friendship militates against the objectivity which is necessary for the accompaniment relationship to serve the Accompanee's spiritual growth.
7. **Learning:** A person who never stops being a learner ('beginner's mind') and is open to new perspectives. A person who is willing to participate in ongoing training.
8. **Discernment:** A person who enables the accompanee to learn the skill of discernment and exercise it themselves, primarily through modelling good discernment: a mutual process of waiting on the Holy Spirit and sharpening awareness of the moral and spiritual significance of the Accompanee's inner processes. A person who already practises good discernment regarding their own spiritual life.
9. **Accountable:** A person who models transparency, integrity and accountability by participating in supervision. Who (whatever the denomination) is willing to sign to accountability to the Bishop of Sheffield.

- 10. Communion:** A person who shows awareness that the spiritual accompaniment relationship is in service of the wider church and wider world.
- 11. Difference:** A person who is able to be with otherness, variety, uniqueness and difference – e.g. gender, age, race, culture, sexuality, theology – including the recognition that to get to know another involves acknowledging ignorance, and preparedness to work at understanding another's life and experience.
- 12. Openness:** A person open to the surprise of God, the freedom of the Spirit, who blows wherever [she wills].

Many of these skills are essential for all listeners, while some are particular to Accompaniment, specifically those skills relating to awareness of God in the conversation, i.e. Nos. 1, 5 and 8.