

Overview of the Companioned Prayer™ Learning Experience

Companioned Prayer requires a compassionate, faith-filled environment of fellowship, friendship and trust. The learning environment must be one of shared personal trust and love. Without this, people will not readily open themselves to the depth of experiencing the Lord and his graces. Instead, they will remain in an intellectual-only mode of reception, and will only minimally allow themselves to transition into the mystery of God's presence within the prayer. Therefore, the learning environment must consciously foster compassionate sharing, caring and trust.

There are many ways to learn and share Companioned Prayer. In all instances when you are learning the prayer and learning to companion others, you should consider the learning to be an exploratory experience. Allow yourself and your prayer partners the freedom to make plenty of mistakes, without any pressure "to get it right." Share your experiences and impressions with each other, and discuss how the companioning, mentoring, and learning processes are working, so you can benefit from your synergy. And always, to the best you can, be guided by the love of Christ in your heart and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

It has been discovered through many years of offering programs in Companioned Prayer, that detailed descriptions of the prayer process and how to do it (such as in chapters 10 and 11), and many instructional sessions (e.g., 15, 20 or 30), do not result in people adopting and practicing the prayer. In fact, the opposite occurs. While the information itself may be useful, it encourages the prayer to become an intellectual challenge; something to be figured out instead of surrendered into.

A better approach is to show people the prayer by companioning them one person at a time, and then assisting them reflect upon their prayer experience. This keeps the offering focused on their own actual experience. This very personal orientation has been developed into a basic learning experience of three parts: 1) four small group introductory prayer sessions, 2) ongoing group prayer meetings, and 3) a one- or two-day group retreat. Offering an introductory Companioned Prayer ministry presentation prior to the learning sessions is strongly encouraged.

There is significant flexibility in how the learning experience can be offered:

- One or more optional introductory presentations can be held for different audiences prior to the four introductory prayer sessions. Since the presentation is to a group, there is no limit to the size of attendance.
- The four introductory prayer sessions can be offered in a medium sized group environment (see "Team Mentoring in a Larger Group", below), or they can be in single or multiple small or very small groups of just one, two or three other persons. (The learning experience is usually enhanced when the four learning sessions are held within a two week period.)
- The four sessions can be held once a week, or multiple times within just a couple of weeks, or they may even be all provided in an initial weekend retreat.

- The learning experience can be a distinctly planned periodic occurrence within ongoing Companioned Prayer ministry group meetings, or it can be separate from and in addition to ongoing group meetings, or some combination of the two.
- Or the learning experience can simply be incorporated into an ongoing Companioned Prayer ministry group as new people show up to the group in response to ongoing outreach and personal invitations.
- The learning experience can also be integrated into other ministry programs, such as homebound ministries or teen or young adult ministries. It can be included in seminarian training or other programs such as lay Jesuit formation.
- The learning experience can be parish centric or it may include outreach and participation from multiple local parishes and religious organizations.

Prior to the start of the learning experience, confirm that all participants will be able to attend the four introductory prayer sessions, a few subsequent ongoing group meetings, and ideally, a later retreat. Also ask them to bring a journal for them to write in. During the first two sessions, participants will usually not learn to companion another person, and will not be asked to do so; that will be available with guidance during the next two sessions.

A quiet, reverential environment, such as an established place of prayer, can be helpful. The location should be reserved so that you will not be disturbed by others during the time that you need. If you are not in a chapel or church nave or sanctuary or similar environment, consider placing a crucifix, Bible and candle on a cloth next to you. This may help the persons you are with know that they are in a place of exterior and interior faith and grace. You are inviting them into an intimate relationship with God, and a prayerful environment can help them to be in that possibility.

This approach to learning Companioned Prayer is highly dependent upon the Holy Spirit's inspiration with each person. It is not based upon extensive instruction in the art of praying or companionship; and such instruction should be avoided. What is important is that participants should be encouraged to recognize, value, and respond to the Holy Spirit and the tender love of Jesus in their own prayer experiences. That is where the focus needs to be.

Therefore, the instruction provided to the participants who are learning the prayer in these sessions is purposefully designed to be minimal. In the first and second sessions, learning is primarily through experiencing being companioned and reflecting on those prayer experiences. The goal is to assist participants experience the grace within the prayer and to assist them recognize the value of their prayer experiences. In the third and fourth sessions, participants have an opportunity to experience what it is like to companion another person, with the presence and support of an experienced companion.

Although some basic information about how to pray the prayer is initially provided, as well as an opportunity for questions and answers, overall, instruction is minimized in favor of experiencing the prayer and experiencing companionship, and reflecting on those experiences.

Handouts and Resources

The recommended handouts for the four learning sessions are available at www.CompanionedPrayer.org/resources. The standard Companioned Prayer form for Ordinary Time should be provided to participants at the end of the first session.

Handouts for New Participants	1st Session	2nd Session	3rd Session	4th Session
The quotes of Bishop Quinn	X			
The Companioned Prayer Disclaimer	X			
Confidentiality and Sharing	X			
The standard CP form for Ordinary Time	X	X		
Guidelines for Praying	X	X		
Guidelines for the Companion			X	
Summary of Companioned Prayer				X

Handouts for those learning the prayer should be kept to a minimum. Extensive instruction and handouts cause a person's learning to primarily be intellectual rather than intuitive and spontaneous (which are more relevant for a prayer). Offer the prayer and let God inspire people directly. Do not get in the way with extensive explanations. Faith, trust in God, and openness to God's mystery should receive primacy. This has taken many years of experience to appreciate.

Additional resources for the mentors are available at www.CompanionedPrayer.org/supplemental-resources.

Additional Resources for Mentoring	1st Session	2nd Session	3rd Session	4th Session
Overview of the Learning Experience	X			
Guidelines for the First Two Introductory Prayer Sessions	X	X		
Guidelines for Reflecting the Prayer Experience	X	X		
Guidelines for the Third and Fourth Introductory Prayer Sessions			X	X
Accessible and Safe Environments	X	X	X	X
Book, handouts and forms available at www.CompanionedPrayer.org/resources and www.CompanionedPrayer.org/supplemental-resources	X	X	X	X

Journaling should be encouraged throughout the four introductory prayer sessions, and may be continued in regular ongoing Companioned Prayer ministry meetings as each person desires.

Additional support for those mentoring or sharing the prayer includes other experienced companions (including from other parishes), material on the Companioned Prayer Christian Fellowship (CPCF) website, and communication with the CPCF at info@CompanionedPrayer.org.

Team Mentoring in a Larger Group

When team mentoring in a single large group, when it is time for experiencing the prayer or companionship, the group must separate into smaller groups of not less than two or more than three people learning the prayer per experienced companion. After each small group completes its companionship, individual reflections or feedback, and journaling, it then rejoins the large group. Team mentoring in the combined larger group's other activities can be shared to the extent desired by the mentors.

Confidentiality

The entire learning experience and all further ongoing Companioned Prayer meetings and retreats should embrace the complete confidentiality of any experiences that are shared by any participant. That is, in addition to there being no requirement for anyone to share their experiences, if anyone does share, the content of the shared experience must remain only with those individuals with whom it was shared, unless the person sharing has expressly stated otherwise. The only exception would be in regards to mandated reporting as discussed below in "An Accessible and Safe Environment." See "Sharing and Discussion" in chapter 5 of the book *Companioned Prayer* and the handout, "Confidentiality and Sharing." This requirement for confidentiality must be expressed in the introductory prayer sessions, and whenever anyone new joins an ongoing prayer group who has not been instructed in the necessity for confidentiality.

An Accessible and Safe Environment

It is very important that all venues and people involved in sharing Companioned Prayer comply with the requirements and guidelines for ensuring that people with disabilities can fully participate in the full learning experience, and that everyone sponsors a safe environment for all participants and leaders. The Safe and Accessible Environment requirements and guidelines discussed under that heading in chapter 5 of the book, *Companioned Prayer*, should be applied. Additionally:

- All Companioned Prayer venues (for outreach, introductory prayer sessions, ongoing prayer meetings, retreats, etcetera) should be ADA compliant. Special needs of participants for access, communication, seating, etcetera should be sought and reasonably accommodated. Costs for reasonable accommodation must not be borne by the person being accommodated.
- Companioned Prayer ministry leaders should be trained in ensuring a safe environment free from potential abuse, and should know the applicable reporting requirements, including mandated reporting as required by law.

All meetings in all venues (for outreach, introductory prayer sessions, ongoing prayer meetings, and retreats) should comply with the Safe Environment requirements of the hosting and sponsoring organizations, as well as the additional Safe Environment guidelines of the Companioned Prayer Christian Fellowship available at:

www.CompanionedPrayer.org/supplemental-resources

Transitioning to Ongoing Meetings

A Deeper Intimacy of God's Love

The purpose of the four introductory prayer sessions is for participants to become familiar with Companioned Prayer so that they might continue within a small prayer circle, experiencing and growing in intimacy with God. It is in this continued practice within a small group that the amazing gifts that await occur. In these ongoing Companioned Prayer meetings, we discover the personal love of Jesus being gifted to us and transforming our lives in love. Therefore, the transition from the introductory prayer sessions to the ongoing prayer meetings is crucial; and the mentors have a key role to play in encouraging that to happen.

It is important to recognize that individuals open themselves up to the Companioned Prayer experience uniquely. Some people might take to the prayer and its subtleties very quickly. Other people may need more familiarity with the inner prayer experience in order to truly let go into trusting and surrendering into God's presence. Other people just need more time to become familiar with the prayer process. Some people may have simply missed some introductory prayer sessions. Therefore, the mentors should continue to provide gentle personal support or encouragement as needed to ensure a smooth transition into the ongoing follow-on prayer meetings.

This can be done within the ongoing follow-on prayer meetings, or separately. Within the ongoing prayer meetings, the mentors may spend more time with those who need it, offering personal support and encouragement. This support should be mostly in the form of supportive comforting presence, rather than extensive instruction. Simply be attentive, encouraging, and flexible. Another way is to add a meeting or two to the introductory prayer sessions for everyone (or just for those who will especially benefit from it), if that is appropriate, in which encouragement and the mentor's gentle presence is provided. If an extra session is offered for everyone, the meeting format should essentially be the same as your church's Companioned Prayer ministry's ongoing prayer meetings.