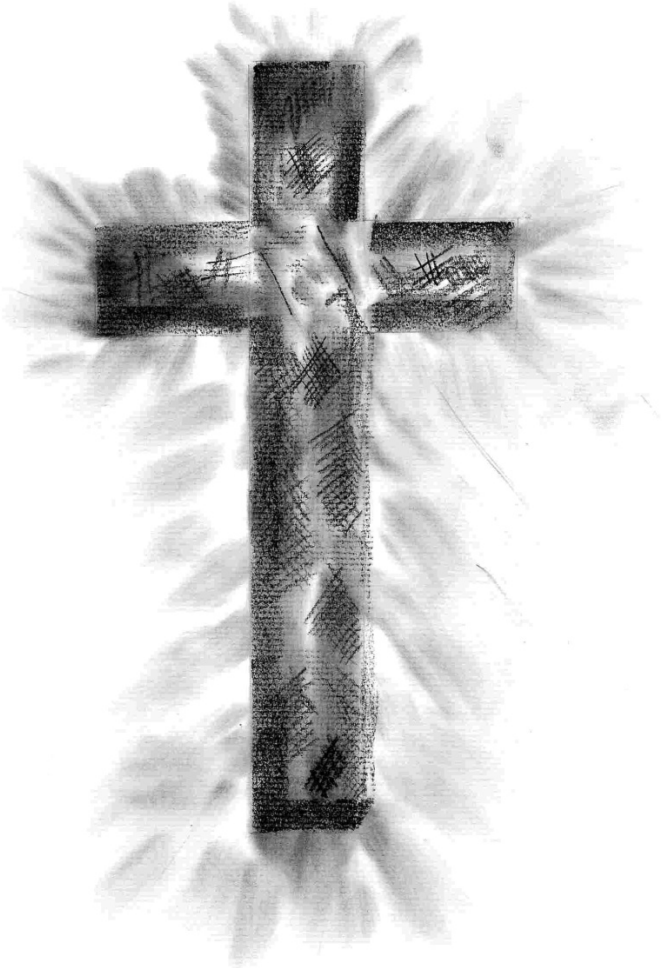
Companioned Prayer™



An interactive prayer for companions, families, and small groups

William Stobbe

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at
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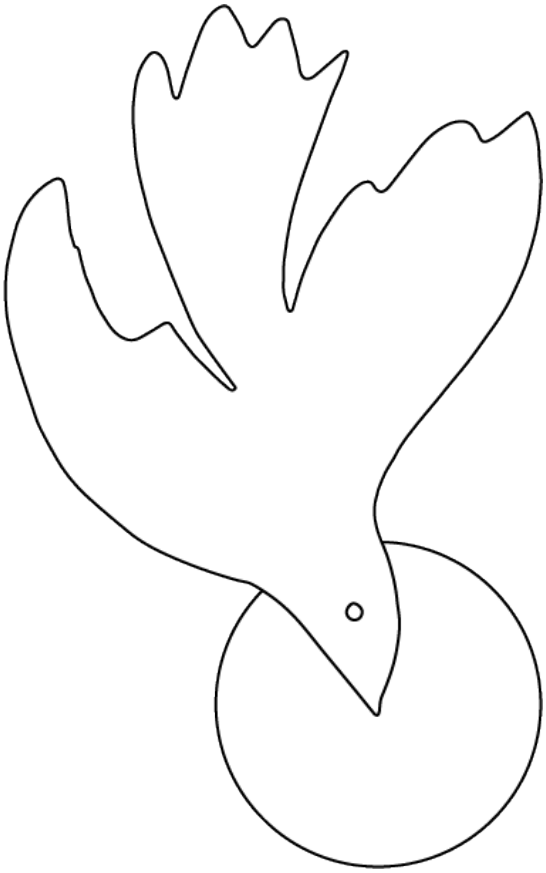
Companioned Prayer™



A Prayer of Reconciliation and Renewal
within the Loving Heart of Jesus

The purpose of this book is to help people experience and share Companioned Prayer. This book, or a more recent version, is available for free downloading, with the restrictions described below, at the website of the **Companioned Prayer Christian Fellowship**:
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Companioned Prayer; An Interactive Prayer for Companions, Families, and Small Groups

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10/5/2026

CHRISTIAN PRAYER

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"Companioned Prayer is a prayer with a friend that can eventually bring you to the real purpose of your faith, which is an intimate, daily, loving relationship with God. It is a miracle that you will feel taking place within you. It will take time, but it will happen in you."

"Companioned Prayer is a form of personal prayer that can change your relationship to God."

"I hope everyone can participate in the Companioned Prayer program. It can change your life."

- Bishop Francis Quinn

9/11/1921 – 3/21/2019

www.CompanionedPrayer.org

Companioned Prayer is dedicated to
the Virgin Mary, the mother of our Lord,
who in Luke 1:48 says,
"Behold, all generations shall call me blessed."
Moved by the Holy Spirit, she responded to God,
offering herself completely to Him.

We have always desired to feel and know
that we are a part of God's loving care.
Companioned Prayer offers a way, through
God's love, to know that directly.

In grateful thanks to Frs. Ed McMahon and Peter Campbell, whose discoveries and personal support launched me on the path to Companioned Prayer.

And deep gratitude for all of my family and friends, especially my wife Minnet, who have helped me on this journey, and who continue to do so.
– Bill Stobbe

Who This Book is For

This book is primarily for those who already practice Companioned Prayer, and wish to know more about it, and may wish to share it. This book is not recommended for initially learning the prayer. First, experience and practice the prayer with friends in a small group for a few months as described at www.CompanionedPrayer.org. Then, with the inner graced experience of the prayer familiar to you, this book will help you understand the prayer more in-depth, and will provide additional information for sharing the prayer or for offering it in ministry. Companioned Prayer is an amazing prayer that opens our hearts to the direct experience of God's grace felt and known inside us through Jesus' love, mercy and understanding. It is a wonderful encounter that nurtures us personally, calling us into divine love and grace. Use this book for additional guidance after you have experienced the prayer.

Disclaimer

In Companioned Prayer™ we experience Jesus as our true Companion. The prayer experience is between the person praying and God, and requires an active faith relationship with Him or a searching for that relationship. Companioned Prayer, and the other interior or reflective prayers and practices offered, are offered and practiced as Christian, interactive, contemplative prayers. They include the role of a prayer companion who reads text and accompanies the person who is praying. These prayers are not a form of therapeutic treatment. Neither are they spiritual direction, nor spiritual or pastoral counseling. They are private, personal prayers with the assistance and companionship of another person. Neither the companion nor the person praying should view the role of the companion, or the prayer practice or prayer experience, as a substitute for professional therapy or treatment. Your prayer companions, the sponsoring or hosting organizations and the Companioned Prayer Christian Fellowship (CPCF), their directors, officers, employees and volunteers, and the authors of Companioned Prayer and other material offered by the CPCF, are not responsible for your prayer experience or the results thereof. Each church, organization, or individual that offers or practices Companioned Prayer is responsible to determine the suitability of the prayers or the offered material for their own programs and purposes. The prayers and materials are offered "as is" and may not be suitable for all individuals or programs. For additional information, see "Trauma and Major Illness" and "Influences of Other Prayer or Meditative Practices" in chapter 12. If you have related questions or concerns about any prayer or practice, discuss them with your professional therapist, doctor and/or priest before beginning or engaging in any further practice of the prayer. You should not practice *any* prayer with which you are not comfortable. However, Companioned Prayer when practiced with faith and in community can offer us God's personal tender mercy and love, felt and know within us in a way that is unique to each person.

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Chapter 1
What is Companioned Prayer?

Abide in me, as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. ...As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love.

John 15:4-5a, 9

A New Prayer Experience

Sometimes we are fortunate to experience God's loving grace gifted to us with the help of another person. Those are precious moments – when we know God's abiding love for us, experienced and known through the gift of friendship or a special moment in a relationship. When we hold our child or grandchild, or when we look into our mother's eyes and feel her heart. Or those special times when we feel we are one with our husband or wife, or our brother or sister. Sometimes we find these moments with a friend, or more rarely, with a small group of friends.

When we do experience such moments of grace, we cherish their personal richness and special meaning for us. They are times of treasure that often just seem to happen – when our feeling of wholeness in ourselves, our family, and in God's creation seem to break through into a connectedness we recognize as very special, even holy.

In faith we know such opportunities for being open to the gift of God's grace can also occur in our worship and prayer. But these prayer times are usually either in corporate worship or solitary prayer or reflection. It is not common to find a prayer specifically designed to open us up to that private inner knowing of God's tender presence with the guidance of one other person. That is the unique gift of this prayer.

Companioned Prayer™ is a simple way to help one another be present to God and open to his gift of grace and understanding felt and known directly. In this manner we accompany or companion each other in prayer. Yet our prayer subject and experience are completely private and personal. In faith we take our personal prayer to God, to the loving heart of Jesus, and wait for some inner movement or discernment. We stay with this as it unfolds and leads us to new personal understanding and renewal, given from God's love.

In Companioned Prayer the traditional contemplative blending of devotion, alert listening, and faithful waiting come together with personal and private prayer issues. This is a prayer of the gift of God's love, his mercy felt and known within us.

> *"My spiritual journey has taken on a new dimension. I feel God's call and Christ's love. Each time I pray with my companion, I feel like God has touched me."*
>
> *"When I let myself listen in this contemplative way, the Holy Spirit gently guides me to new revelation, to new understandings that are very personal to my situation. God is with me in this prayer."*
>
> *"I felt that God was present; his glory penetrated me. I knew Jesus' love was total."*

This unique interactive prayer is ideal for friends, family members, and acquaintances. It can be practiced at home, in church, or in other settings. It can be part of a regular practice of spiritual growth in our faith journeys, and it can be practiced as part of a healing ministry with others.

In whatever way we practice it, we experience ourselves as part of a community or fellowship of God's children. Our faith is awoken from within. We are called into a new being, as a child of God. We find his love transforming. Each time we pray we discover anew our life in Christ. We find that in this Christ-centered prayer and experience, we come to know his saving presence. "*For, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*" (Romans 10:13)

Praying with Another Person

Companioned Prayer is usually practiced with another person, a companion. The companion guides the person through a structured prayer experience, following the desires of the person praying. The companion assists the person praying to stay focused on their inner prayer experience, surrendering into their walk with God. With this companionship and supportive instructions, the person praying can be more present to their inner prayer experience. We find that we are in a prayer of attentive inner listening. In this holy listening we are no longer "doing prayer." Instead we find ourselves "in prayer" and then "being prayer" as we let go into God praying in us. Our soul is nourished by His gifted intimate presence and love.

In this prayer, the term "companion" carries a double meaning. In addition to the person assisting in the prayer, it also refers to Christ. Christ is our Companion in our prayer. We find him present in his constant love throughout the prayer, including within our experience of the very things that we pray about.

Unlike the more traditional forms of contemplative prayer in which a word or phrase may be silently repeated or in which one sits in silence, in this prayer we pray about the same kinds of things that we might otherwise find ourselves praying about in personal prayer. We pray about things that are personally important to us, such as our concerns, about thankfulness, personal challenges, loved ones, our faith, and so forth. But instead of us selecting, we listen to what God is calling us to be with in prayer. Of all the issues that might be personally important to us, we ask which one might God want us to listen to in prayer.

Once a prayer subject is identified, instead of simply praying about it, talking about it, or asking God for his intervention or other action about it, we take it to the loving heart of Jesus. We

experience our prayer subject within God's tender love and remain open to the Holy Spirit. Within the compassion of Jesus' sacred heart we wait for some inner movement – for something to come that we sense is related to what we are praying about. In this way we follow the inner direction of the Holy Spirit, letting her guide us to greater understanding and mercy.

Throughout this experience we let our attention also be on our physical nature, our body. This helps us to be grounded in our prayer experience, and to not get caught up into analytical thinking and emotional responsiveness. It also facilitates being open to noticing God's quiet inner movement and call within us in our present moment.

Each of us is unique. We all have our unique stories, our unique concerns, and our unique spiritual journeys. We are each called individually to God in a special way. This is a prayer practice that honors that. The companion knows that they are there to help the person be attentive to their prayer subject within Christ's loving presence. The companion does not provide advice or suggestions about the person's prayer issue. In fact, the companion usually doesn't even know what the person is praying about. The subject of the prayer is private, between God and the person praying. The companion knows from his or her own experience of the prayer that God's mercy and grace are found within the prayer issue as it is held in Christ's love and carried forward by the Holy Spirit into revelation, into God's mercy and grace. The companion knows that this is holy ground, that this graced felt movement from within cannot be made to happen by anything that the companion or the person praying does. It simply comes as gift; a gift beyond any thought of advice or suggestion from the companion. A gift from God.

Our Companioned Prayer Journey

As we pray this prayer, we find that over time we are drawn into an intimacy with God. Our spiritual journey is enlivened from within, as we increasingly discover a personal relationship with him. We experience his healing touch, his care, his love, and his divine presence at first as discrete prayer occurrences, and then gradually more subtly and continuously. In all this we experience healing and wholeness integral to who we authentically are, and we discover that who we are includes being deeply loved by God.

As we are drawn into his tender intimacy, we find our heart responding in ever deepening faith and love. We also discover our prayer experiences to be expressed throughout the scriptures, within our liturgy, sacraments and worship, and in the lives of our brother and sister saints. Within this experience born of prayer our appreciation for our Christian faith and formation increases, as does the value we give to the support and guidance of our Church or religious community in our ongoing spiritual development. Our personal Companioned Prayer journey becomes an exciting lifelong awakening to God's presence. We are continuously renewed in him by his gift of his love.

Appreciating the Prayer Experience

When experiencing Companioned Prayer, this sense of gift, of God's presence within our concerns and within our daily lives, may not be obvious at first. For some people it is apparent after only a few experiences of the prayer. For others it is more gradual, kind of a dawning awareness, but very real and solid. Individual experiences vary. In the inner movement of symbols and graced understandings, some people's experiences frequently revolve around the themes of

their faith; for example, of Christ's presence in their life. For others, their graced inner movements and gifts may be obviously related to their faith only occasionally, with an understanding of how it all is a personal gift of faith coming at a later time. In any case, whether appreciated right away or later, a personal growing relationship with God and the sense of his miraculous love within our life is inevitable with regular practice of the prayer.

This book primarily focuses on how to experience, practice and share Companioned Prayer. However, a true understanding of this interactive prayer cannot come from reading about it. It can only come from experiencing it. As an illustration of the flow of the prayer's interior movements, a representative example of the prayer experience is presented in chapter 2. Chapter 3 identifies essential principles of the prayer. Chapter 4 discusses how to experience the prayer, and contains the prayer form. The prayer is almost always prayed with others, and chapter 5 discusses prayer partners and prayer groups. Once experienced, Companioned Prayer can be used in many ministries, and chapter 6 discusses sharing the prayer in service ministries. Chapter 7 provides pointers when you find yourself praying without a prayer partner. Chapter 8 reviews forms of the prayer for each Church season as well as an intercessory form. At some point you may be moved to share the prayer with others, and the next five chapters have extensive material to support you: chapter 9 contains ways to share the prayer; chapter 10 provides additional guidelines for the person praying; chapter 11 discusses additional guidelines for the companion; chapter 12 covers a variety of supplemental topics; and chapter 13 talks about sharing from the heart. Finally, chapter 14 talks about Companioned Prayer and the Church.

As with any contemplative prayer, the best way to experience Companioned Prayer is with a small prayer group sponsored by your church or religious community, which offers an ongoing experience and fellowship. If one is not available in your area, get together with some friends and start one using the material beginning with chapter 4.

To appreciate the grace and value of Companioned Prayer, you must go beyond reading about it. You must experience the prayer, with others, over a period of time. Prayer is not an intellectual understanding; it is a living, formative, contemplative experience of God.

The Companioned Prayer Christian Fellowship

Moved by our experiences in the prayer, by our Companioned Prayer ministry fellowship, and by our Christian faith, some of us have formed the Companioned Prayer Christian Fellowship, Inc. (CPCF). The CPCF is a United States 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization established to promote the practice of Companioned Prayer in Christian communities and ministries. The CPCF provides information and resources worldwide to those who are interested in experiencing the prayer, sharing it, employing it in their ministries, listing their prayer groups and programs, and sharing their experiences and perspectives. The CPCF has no official membership; anyone who practices Companioned Prayer can consider themselves associated with the CPCF. If you are practicing the prayer and desire to share it with others or if you are already doing so, you are encouraged to participate in the CPCF. The CPCF's website is www.CompanionedPrayer.org.

Chapter 2
What Happens When We Pray?

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. At the time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. The Lord called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

1st Samuel, 3:1-9

A Prayer Experience

In Companioned Prayer™ each time we pray the experience is different. The following is a representative example. This text, however, does not capture about five to ten minutes of quiet waiting, listening, noticing and nurturing which is integral to the prayer.

OPENING PRAYERS

My prayer partner is sitting next to me. She will companion me in my prayer. I close my eyes. She begins our prayer in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Next she says out loud her prayer to God. She is thanking him for this prayer time, asking him to help us both be open to his presence, asking Jesus to be with us as we pray. Her words feel right. I too want to let go into God's presence and trust in Jesus' love for me. She finishes and then invites me to say a prayer either silently or out loud.

I sit in silence for a few moments, asking for Jesus to help me be open to his presence. I ask him to companion us both as we pray together, to be present within our needs. I ask for help listening for God's quiet call, and for help in being open

and receptive to him. I thank him for this prayer and for my prayer partner. Then I recall the present needs of myself and of others. I recognize my need in an area of faith. I ask for God's help with each of my four children. I recall an omission of personal trust in a relationship. I ask for God to help someone I know who is ill, and another person who is alone. I thank God for my work which provides for so many.

I feel focused in my faith and in God. I know that I am now ready to go on in the prayer. I say "Amen." I keep my eyes closed as we continue with the prayer.

AS WE ARE

My companion invites me to take a few minutes to come before God as I really am, noticing how I am physically feeling right now. She guides me to noticing the tension in my back and shoulders, how my head feels, my breathing, and other parts of my body. I take my time and let my attention be drawn into my body. I notice my breathing. I find my busy analytical mind naturally quieting down. I seem to be more in tune with how I am feeling at the moment. When I am ready for us to continue, I let my companion know.

ASKING GOD

My prayer partner invites me to stay with how I am feeling inside, and to be open to God's loving presence. I welcome the reminder to trust in God's love and in his presence to us. I feel more connected to him within my faith. My companion asks me to let her know if something comes when I ask myself, "Of everything going on in my life, what feels like God is calling me to listen to, inside me right now?"

I wait. I am aware of all the things going on in my life right now, of all my concerns, my challenges as well as my blessings. But I don't pick one. I try to let something stand out on its own, to somehow feel special. I try to be open to whatever comes, even if it isn't something that I would have picked for myself. I know that I have entered into this prayer in faith and trust, and I put myself in God's hands.

Finally something comes that seems to have a subtle presence to it, something that feels like it's the one. It's about my concern and sorrow for my very elderly mother and her difficulties with Alzheimer's and her recent fall and broken arm. But I don't let my prayer companion know what it is. I keep my eyes closed and say "Okay" when I feel we are ready to continue.

GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE

My companion asks me to notice how all this feels inside and how I carry it. I take the time to notice how my sorrowful love for my mother and her condition is heavy in my heart. After a brief pause my companion invites me to be with this with tenderness and faith. She asks me to notice how it feels to take all this to the loving heart of Jesus, and to feel his gentle love and acceptance in all of this.

Staying with my feelings of my mother and how I carry all of that, I take it all to Jesus' loving and compassionate heart. I let myself be open to Jesus' loving presence, to his loving heart. In faith I wait, and after a while I begin to sense his tender love and acceptance with all that I am carrying. I know that Jesus is with me in this prayer. I take my time with this, and then let my companion know that we are ready to go on.

LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS

My companion asks me to notice how it feels in my body to be with my prayer subject in this gentle, faith-filled way. She invites me to allow my awareness to seep into my body, to settle in and sense how all this feels inside.

I do that, and I am aware that there is more here than I know of. There is a texture to all of this that seems more than my prayer issue, more than my body, more than my feelings. I am in the realm of holy mystery and faith, experiencing Jesus' gentle presence and his love and compassion within my sorrow. I let myself go into all of this.

After a short pause, my companion invites me to wait in openness and faith within the gentle loving heart of Jesus and to see if it feels like there is anything else that God might want me to notice in all of this. It might be a word, an image, a feeling, or perhaps a memory. Something that somehow seems to fit or connect with the way this whole thing feels inside. She asks me to let her know if something comes.

BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT

Although some thoughts come, my primary experience continues to be awareness of my mother's condition and how heavy in my heart it all is, even within Jesus' gentle presence. In faith and allowing myself to be open to Jesus' loving presence, I stay with how it all feels inside, how my prayer subject feels as I hold it gently in faith, in God's presence. I again let myself sink into letting go into trusting God's presence. Other thoughts and a few images come that seem quite ordinary. Eventually something comes that seems somehow different. It feels subtly connected with how I am feeling inside. It is an awareness of the specialness of my mother. This feels right, feels somehow connected with my sorrowful love and concern for her. I let my companion know that something has come by saying, "Okay."

She asks me if it feels right, inside, to journey with some more. It does, so I say "Yes."

She asks me to notice how all this now feels in my body. I pause and notice how all this is, and how I seem to carry it. It seems like this new awareness of my mother is somehow connected with my prayer subject, my love and sorrow for my mother. My companion then encourages me to be present to all this with gentleness and faith, and asks me to let go into how all this now feels inside, and to let her know if anything comes that fits the way this all feels.

I let go into all of that within Jesus' loving presence and I wait to see if anything else comes; for some movement or shift felt inside. After a short while I notice a new sense of the specialness of my mother, a more graced inner light of who she is. I stay with that and I realize that this is her essence, who she is created as, a light, an intelligence, a joy and a loving heart all in one essence as given by God. I am also still gently aware of my concern and sorrow for her.

I take a while to be aware of all of this and finally I let my companion know that something more has come by saying out loud the word "Light."

My companion repeats the word "Light." When I hear her repeat the word I shared, I seem to be more present to it. She then asks if it feels right inside to journey with some more. I know it feels okay to continue with it in prayer, so I say, "Yes."

Next she suggests that I ask myself, "How does all this 'Light' feel in my body?" I pause to notice that. She continues by saying, "With gentleness and faith, let go into how all this feels inside; and let me know if anything comes that fits the way this all now feels."

In faith and trust in God, I let go into how all about this feels, and I wait to see if there may be anything else that God might share with me. I am still very present to this whole sense of my mother's inner light and of my quiet sorrow. After a little while, I sense Jesus' presence; and then I see that his divine Light is with her, is joined to her light. I know that he is with her and will always be with her. I feel a deep sense God's divine love and care for us all. I am aware that all this has come as Jesus' loving gift, a knowing beyond any knowing that I could create for myself. I am in awe of this sense of God's personal gift and mercy. I feel a letting go, a relief and gladness. I am grateful and sense that my prayer has been answered and that this is a good place to stop, at least for now.

Keeping my eyes closed, I let my prayer partner know that I'm ready to end this part of the prayer and to go on.

RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE

My companion suggests that we nurture this special place that I've come to inside. She invites me to pause here and to let go into God's presence within all of this, resting in the quiet tenderness of his Spirit for a while, and to then let her know when I feel we are ready to go on.

It feels good to spend more time with how all this feels inside, to really let go into it and to just rest and be in God's presence. I feel like I am home. I rest here letting it all penetrate me. I am not waiting for anything more, for any movement of the Holy Spirit or for any further gifts or insights. I am just here, open to God's Spirit, surrendering in his presence. I take my time and let myself abide in him, in his love. After a little while, I am ready to end the prayer. Still keeping my eyes closed, I let my companion know.

CLOSING PRAYERS

She suggests that as I savor all of this, I let myself know that this is God's personal love and grace, experienced and felt inside me. I reflect on how right this feels. My prayer experience affirms that God's mercy and grace are awesome and personal, tender and loving. My companion invites me to stay with this sense of holy and precious gift. She suggests that I may wish to silently offer a prayer in response.

I silently thank God for his love for my mother and his presence with her; and I ask that he continue to help me trust in his goodness and mercy. I say, "Amen" and then slowly open my eyes.

My companion also says a brief prayer out loud, thanking God for this gift of grace-filled quiet time to be with him.

The prayer is over, but I feel like I've just been touched and held by God's loving presence. I thank my prayer partner for companioning me in prayer. I feel very grateful and close to my prayer partner for accompanying me in my prayer journey. After a brief pause, I ask her if she would like me to companion her in the prayer.

A Companion's Experience

Companioned Prayer is usually practiced with two people. Below is the companion's side of the preceding prayer experience. Again, this text does not capture about ten minutes of quiet accompaniment to allow the person praying the time necessary for waiting, listening, noticing and nurturing.

OPENING PRAYERS

My prayer partner is sitting next to me. I will companion him in our prayer together. We close our eyes. I say, "In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we open our hearts to you, O Lord. Amen." I begin by saying out loud a prayer to God. I thank him for this prayer time, asking him to help us both be open to his presence, asking Jesus to be with us as we pray. I am ready to turn this prayer process over to him and to let him enter our hearts and our prayer. I say "Amen" and then invite my prayer partner to also say a personal prayer, either out loud or silently, and if silently to say "Amen" when we are ready to go on.

After a pause of a few moments, my prayer partner has privately said his prayer, and says "Amen" out loud. I am excited to know that we are embarking on our special prayer journey together.

AS WE ARE

I invite my prayer partner to take a few minutes to come before God as he actually is, noticing how he physically feels. I invite him to notice his back and shoulders, and other parts of his body in order to help him slow down, to get out of his head

thinking, to be more in the moment, and more open to inner discernment. I take some time with all this. After a while I can tell he has slowed down, and he lets me know that he is now ready to continue.

ASKING GOD

I invite my prayer partner to stay with how he is feeling inside, and to also be open to God's loving presence. I know this prayer is predicated on our trust and surrender to God. I ask my prayer partner to let me know if something comes when he silently asks himself, "Of everything going on in my life, what feels like God is calling me to listen to, inside me right now?"

I wait. Sometimes when something is obvious or comes right away, my partner responds after only a few moments. Sometimes it takes a little while. I know it's a process of discernment, not an intellectual choice. After a while he says, "Okay." I know that something has come.

GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE

I don't know what his prayer subject is, but I invite him to notice how it all feels inside, and how he carries it. After a short pause I ask him to be with it with tenderness and faith, and to notice how it feels to take his prayer subject to the loving heart of Jesus, and to feel his gentle love and acceptance. I ask him to take his time, and to let me know when he has done that and he is ready for us to continue.

I wait. I know he is with Jesus as he holds his prayer subject. After a while, he says "Okay" and I know we are ready to go on.

LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS

I ask my prayer partner to notice how it feels in his body to be with his prayer subject in this gentle, caring, faith-filled way. I invite him to allow his awareness to seep into his body, to settle in and sense how all this feels inside. I pause here to let him be aware that there is more to all this than what he might be thinking or aware of.

After a short pause, I invite my partner to continue within the gentle loving heart of Jesus and to wait in openness and faith to see if it feels like there is anything else that God might want him to notice in all of this. It might be a word, an image, a feeling, or perhaps a memory. Something that somehow seems to fit or connect with the way this whole thing feels inside. I ask him to let me know if something comes.

BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT

I wait, again with patience. I know that this is a prayer of contemplation and discernment, and taking the time to allow that to happen is part of the prayer

process. After a while, my partner indicates that something has come by saying "Okay." I then ask him if this feels right inside to journey with some more.

After a brief pause, he quietly says "Yes." I can tell he is not focused on me even though he is providing some feedback.

I ask him to notice how all this feels in his body. I pause and then encourage him to be present to all this with gentleness and faith. I invite him to let go into how all this now feels inside, and to let me know if anything comes that fits the way this all feels.

I wait, letting him have time for letting go and for discernment. After a while something else must have come that feels right, because he says the word "Light."

I do not know what his prayer subject is, and I do not need to know. His prayer is between him and God, and I do not need to understand any symbols or images that he might choose to share. So I simply repeat the symbol back to him by saying, "Light." I then ask him if this feels right, inside, to journey with some more. He checks inside and says, "Yes."

I again suggest that he ask himself, "How does all this "Light" now feel in my body?" I pause to give him time to notice that. I then continue by saying, "With gentleness and faith, let go into how all this feels inside; and let me know if anything comes that fits the way this all now feels."

Again, I do not know what his personal prayer is all about, but I know it is more than simply the word "Light." I know this is just a symbol of his unfolding prayer of trust and surrender. So I just wait, letting God do the work. Some time goes by. My partner remains quiet with his eyes closed. After a while I can see some outer changes. He is sitting more relaxed, he is very focused on what is happening inside him, in his prayer. Finally he shifts, and keeping his eyes closed, he quietly lets me know that he has come to a good place to stop at least for now.

RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE

I suggest that he nurture this special place that he has come to inside. I invite him to pause here and to let go into God's presence within all of this, resting in the quiet tenderness of God's Spirit for a while; and to then let me know when he feels we are ready to go on.

He takes his time. I know he is letting go into this, into God's gift of His presence. After a little while, he lets me know that we are ready to end the prayer.

CLOSING PRAYERS

I suggest that as he savors all of this, that he let himself know that this is God's personal love and grace, experienced and felt inside him. I pause to give him time to do that. I then invite him to stay with this inner sense of holy and precious gift.

> I suggest that he may wish to silently offer a personal prayer to God in response, and then to say "Amen" when he is finished.
>
> After a while he says, "Amen" and opens his eyes. Then I say a brief prayer out loud, thanking the Lord for this gift of his quiet grace, his presence made known.
>
> I give him a little time to be with his experience. Finally he says "thank you" to me, but I feel like I should be thanking him. I am honored that he has trusted me in faith to companion him in his prayer with God. I feel a deep affinity and friendship secured in God's love for us.
>
> After a brief pause, he asks me if I would like him to companion me in the prayer. I nod yes; I am ready.

Your Prayer Experience

Your experience in Companioned Prayer will always be personal to you. It will differ each time you pray or companion someone. But when entered into with humility and faith, and with trust in God's will, the result will be a sense of God's personal gift and mercy, received out of God's tender love for us. When practiced over time this sense of closeness and trust in God's living presence grows in our life, and we become more free and born anew in Him. And when practiced regularly with your prayer partner, a bond of God's intimate love is found between and within you, and Christ's presence is known.

Chapter 3
The Gift of God

The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord

Romans 6:23

A Relationship That Grows Over Time

When Companioned Prayer™ is practiced regularly, God opens us to his abiding presence, and we flower in him. This is our discovery that awaits us. The experience of God calling us personally into a new and intimate relationship with him, into revelation, and into his mercy and grace, felt and known inside us.

This is a gentle and gradual process. It cannot be hurried, but amazingly, we can experience it through Companioned Prayer. This prayer is not just something that we do; it is time we spend being open to, and nurturing of, our awareness of God as the prime mover and shaper of our lives. As a result of our time in prayer, we find that we are carried forward in his hands by his love, in ways beyond our knowing, that guides us and transforms our understanding of ourselves as children of him who loves us deeply.

So, in faith we turn to God in prayer and give our self to him each time we pray. We allow our self the time to experience and know the depths of his love. While it is easy to learn the steps of Companioned Prayer with a friend or in a group, appreciating what the prayer experience truly offers is a process of growth. This discovery is exciting as you experience it with regular practice and the support of a prayer partner or small group. It occurs over time because it is real; it happens within you as you grow in response to God's love.

Because the prayer experiences are subtle, it can be easy to initially miss their value and the value of the prayer, especially in the beginning. The key to experiencing the personal growth of our formation in Christ that Companioned Prayer offers, is to understand that while individual prayer experiences gift us with God's intimate mercy, the greater gift is his real presence to us. This is a presence of being in a personal relationship with our Lord, a presence and relationship that deepens and is revealed as our awareness of him is nurtured through our many Companioned Prayer experiences.

How does this happen? It happens because God is love and he loves us. When we give ourselves to his love in trust and humility, we open ourselves to a greater knowing of him, and of his gifts of mercy and grace. Companioned Prayer has steps or movements that help guide us through this encounter. Our prayer companion offers us these guided movements as we stay

focused interiorly on our walk with God, as Jesus calls us into prayer, into a personally meaningful relationship with him.

A Contemplative Prayer Experience

Companioned Prayer is unique in a number of ways, not just in having a companion who helps us pray. For example, in order for us to be open to God and to experience the gift of his presence, we must learn to take our time at every step or movement in the prayer: to allow time for us to notice how we are as we come before God, to allow time for us to discern God calling us forward, to allow time to notice his love and acceptance, to allow time for us to notice the subtle movement of his Holy Spirit, to allow time to notice his mercy and grace, to allow time to nurture the experience of his silent presence and his gift to us, and to allow time to nurture our natural response of thankfulness or other awareness. This general attitude of waiting, noticing and nurturing – all in faith as we place our self in God's hands and heart – is the traditional contemplative aspect of prayer. Without this faithful waiting we would quickly and repeatedly jump to our own agenda in prayer, and not be open to our Lord's will for us. Without this gentle openness, we succumb to wanting to control the prayer, to control the experience, and to control our relationship with God. And then we would miss his very special gift of his grace felt and known within us. So we pray slowly and unhurried, without an agenda and without a desired outcome, except to be with our Lord.

A Blend of Contemplative and Personal Prayer

In most personal prayers, we pray to God about something. Something important to us: a personal challenge, a concern for a loved one, …for something going on in our life. In Companioned Prayer we also pray about something going on in our life, something personal. But instead of us selecting what to pray about, we try to let God pick something for us to bring to him in prayer. We ask, of everything going on in my life, what does it feel like God is calling me to listen to in prayer? What does he want me to be aware of? This too is a contemplative approach. Knowing that God knows us completely, even better than we know ourself, and knowing that he loves us, as best we can we turn the selection over to him.

Open To God As We Are

In doing so, we must be open and honest with ourselves, and we must come to God in humility. Therefore, when we enter into Companioned Prayer we come to God as we are, right then, here and now. We come to God with humility, acknowledging how we are, including our limitations, our hurts, our joys, even how we physically feel. We enter into the relationship from this humble authenticity and with our heart open to the mystery of the loving heart of God. It is in this mystery of God's love that our spirit is moved by the gentle whispers and tugs of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, once something comes that feels that God wants us to pray about, we consciously take it and our self to the essence of God's love: to Jesus' loving heart.

Jesus Loves Us

Essentially this prayer is our surrender into the personal loving presence of our Lord, exemplified by his loving heart. This is the simple key to our prayer experience. Letting go *into our prayer subject within our experience of the love of Jesus* is the heart of the prayer.

Through our faith we let ourselves experience this tender divine compassion by taking our fragile and wounded selves into the mystery of this abiding love, and letting go into this very real and very present gift of Jesus' loving heart. In this way we simply are open to experiencing his tenderness and loving acceptance, felt inside us, not as a concept but only as an abiding and familiar experience. An experience that we allow and encourage by giving ourselves into and participating in his gift of tenderness and loving acceptance, felt inside us, in our wounds, in our prayer issue, as we take it to him in faith and abide in that love. In the reality of Jesus' presence, we are open to the flowing presence of his love felt in the tenderness of our prayer issue, allowing us to be closer to our prayer issue and accepting its special gift to us, instead of handing it off or distancing ourselves from it. For it is within the tenderness of our brokenness that, with faith and humble acceptance, we experience God's mercy and grace.

Letting God Draw Us Forward Into Our Prayer Experience

It is God's love for us that draws us forward into our prayer experience. It is not our actions or thoughts, or anything that our companion does or says. Our companion simply helps us stay attentive to this inward pull from God. For "the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words." God, who knows and searches our hearts, causes the Holy Spirit to stir within us at first even beyond our perceptions, beyond our knowing, "too deep for words," praying within us and calling us to him "according to the will of God." (Romans 8:26-27)

In faith we are attentive to this gentle quiet movement of the Holy Spirit within us, surrendering into what God calls us to listen to and notice, as our prayer subject is formed and as it changes, all within the tender embrace of Jesus' love, within his loving heart, as we let go into God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit praying within us.

In so doing we find that God reveals himself through his loving mercy and grace, felt and known within; within the very tenderness of our prayer subject that he has called us to listen to and to bring to his loving heart. And we know that this happens simply because he loves us, individually and personally. Our prayer is answered in ways that are beyond our knowing, beyond our ability to create, and we are aware of Jesus' love for us and the blessing of his presence now and always. In this we rest, and then offer a prayer in response.

Transformed by God's Love

It is from many of these Companioned Prayer encounters with our Lord, over time, that we are gently formed by him according to his loving will. We find that we are more peaceful, more loving, more open to others. We begin to abide in God's constant presence and love, and we know that Jesus' love for us is complete, as we are enveloped and nurtured by the mystery of his love. Within all this, we recognize him in others, in service, in scripture, in worship and in the Eucharist, and in the Church, which all become increasingly valued. When practiced over time, Companioned Prayer offers us God's personal gift to us: himself.

Chapter 4
Experiencing Companioned Prayer

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:28-30

Surrendering into God's Love

Companioned Prayer™ is a prayer of surrendering into God's love. In each movement of the prayer, we progressively allow ourselves to be drawn into God's loving presence, into the arms of his personal love for us. Let's look at this within how the prayer is laid out.

OPENING PRAYERS

We begin by opening our hearts to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is in our heart that we receive his love; so we begin with this intention, purpose, and action. This is our first prayer movement, and what we are doing in Companioned Prayer. But we don't do it only in the abstract. We come to God with open hearts with our own personal prayers. We bring our prayers to him because we know that he loves us in how we actually are, and in our needs. This makes our relationship one of trust and love, both personal and authentic.

AS WE ARE

After the opening prayers, we continue to surrender into Jesus' love by noticing how we physically feel as we settle in to our time of prayer, held tenderly in the loving arms of our Lord. Again, this is not simply a conceptual letting go, but we take the time to intentionally notice how this really feels in our body, letting go into how we actually are as we come before God. To slow down within this quiet noticing, to really let go into it and into his presence in us, we let our attention be with parts of our body, so that we come to him in humility and authenticity held in his love in this present moment of prayer.

ASKING GOD

Then within this total surrender of ourselves and continuing to be open to his loving presence, we give ourself to him as we inwardly ask ourselves, what does he want us to be with in prayer? Of everything going on in our lives, what does it feel like he is calling us to listen to, inside us right now? Is there something special that he would like us to be with in prayer, something he wishes us to be aware of, or to bring to him? Here we are really turning our prayer over to God in trust, knowing that he loves us completely.

GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE

When something comes, we pause to notice more about it, and then we take it and ourselves right into the loving heart of Jesus. This is a deeper surrendering into his divine love within us. We slow down and take the time to feel his gentle love and acceptance of us and the special prayer subject that he has brought to our attention. We stop and notice all this within his loving heart.

LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS

When it feels right to continue, we are again reminded to let go into how all this fees inside, to inwardly stay within the gift of his presence and our prayer subject held in his love. And then within his gentle loving heart, we wait to see if there is anything else that God may wish us to know, to be aware of, as we continue to surrender into him.

BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT

Perhaps there is nothing else, or perhaps we might find God calling us deeper into our prayer journey with him. We are unhurried here; we wait to see if he wishes us to be drawn into something more as he gently enfolds us in his love; and in this, we allow ourselves to follow where he leads us, until it feels like his personal grace and gift in us is completed, at least for now.

RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE

In this sense of gifted grace felt and known within us, we now pause simply to be with God and to let go into his presence. We rest in the quiet tenderness of his Spirit, nurtured by his love.

CLOSING PRAYERS

Before we finish, we take time to acknowledge his personal love and grace felt within us, and we offer an interior personal prayer to him in response to his gift of love. In all of this, we have been blessed by his personal love for us.

Experiencing the Prayer

The best way to experience Companioned Prayer is by joining or forming a Companioned Prayer ministry in your church or religious organization. Do not try to learn the prayer from a book. The prayer needs to be experienced with another person. Likewise, learning all about the prayer prior to experiencing it will cause you to witness or observe your prayer, dividing your attention instead of surrendering into God and experiencing the depth of the prayer. However, if your church or religious organization offers an introductory presentation of their Companioned Prayer ministry prior to experiencing the prayer, you are encouraged to attend.

The basic introductory experience consists of three parts: 1) a small group introductory prayer series, 2) follow-on group prayer meetings, and 3) a one- or two-day group retreat. Alternatively, if an introductory series is not available, you can be initially introduced to the prayer

within an ongoing prayer group. Elements of this basic introductory experience can also be applied to other formats or venues, such as a weeklong retreat.

If an introductory experience is not available in your area, get a few friends together and with the support of your pastor, host your own using the material in this chapter, which is also available on the Companioned Prayer Christian Fellowship website's Resources webpage at www.CompanionedPrayer.org/resources. If your group is large, e.g., five or more, you may wish to host your own more structured introductory series as discussed in chapter 9. It is not recommended to try to learn the prayer on your own, without companions. Likewise, it is best to experience the prayer with others physically in person rather than via video or other technology (Zoom, online, etcetera). The video experiences are not the same as an actual in-person experience; they are significantly incomplete.

You may also have been companioned in the prayer by someone in a ministry group as part of their ministry. If you wish to understand more about the prayer and to experience it regularly, ask the person what their ministry group offers for continued practice and learning.

There should be no prerequisites or conditions required to experience Companioned Prayer. You do not need to take a preliminary class, attend an introductory presentation, or have a particular theological understanding. If you feel moved to experience Companioned Prayer, if you seek an ongoing awareness of God's grace in your life as may be offered through prayer, then you are ready.

If you participate in the three-part introductory experience as described in this chapter and as recommended by the Companioned Prayer Christian Fellowship (CPCF), you will likely experience the following:

- In a structured introductory series, each prayer session will be about one-and-a-half to two hours long. The sessions are designed to be sequential, so if possible, it is recommended to attend all sessions.

- After the introductory prayer sessions, you should continue to participate in an ongoing Companioned Prayer group. Groups typically meet once a week for about an hour-and-a-half. During these follow-on group prayer meetings, you will continue to be companioned in prayer, and have the opportunity to companion someone else. After the introductory prayer sessions, in the continuing prayer group you will find yourself transitioning from becoming familiar with the methodology of the prayer to experiencing surrendering into God in the prayer. If there is not an ongoing Companioned Prayer group in your location, the participants of the introductory prayer sessions can easily form one. Each Companioned Prayer ministry group will establish its own meeting format. For example, a group may include listening to scripture (*lectio divina*) in addition to Companioned Prayer.

- After participating in at least four or five follow-on group prayer meetings, you will want to also participate in a Companioned Prayer one- or two-day retreat as soon as one is available. These retreats are wonderful opportunities for additional prayer

experiences, learning, and question and answer discussions. They are typically offered in a church or retreat center environment.

In this coordinated experience, becoming familiar with the prayer is very easy. However, there is no single point when the prayer is "learned." It is an ongoing inner personal discovery. Therefore, a good approach to learning the prayer is to see what happens over time as you participate with others. You might ask yourself, "How can I participate with others and be open to God, exploring together what may happen in our faith lives in this journey of prayer, relationship, and grace?" Continuing in your prayer group will help keep this discovery fresh, in the Spirit of God.

Guidelines for Praying

Companioned Prayer is much simpler than any instructions. It is an effortless, graceful prayer that proceeds naturally. Nevertheless, it is helpful to know some general guidelines for praying (and for companioning, as in the next section). These prayer guidelines may be restated during the first prayer session that includes companioning, or simply provided as a handout; so you do not need to learn them prior to your first session.

- The prayer is between you (the person praying) and God. The content, the pace, and the selection of what happens next is always made by you (the person praying), not by your prayer companion. You should feel free to ask your companion to repeat phrases, to back up, to go faster or slower, or even to stop at any point. The companion follows and honors the desires of the person praying.

- Companioned Prayer is a private experience. You do not need to share anything about your experience, and the companion should not expect you to.

- Just before being companioned, let your companion know of any special needs such as difficulty hearing, time constraints, or using a different form of the prayer.

- When praying, keep your eyes closed during the entire prayer and stay focused on your inner experience, even when talking with your prayer companion.

- Always let your companion know when you have completed a step with an "okay" or similar statement. If you get confused, forget the instructions, or are just unsure of what to do next, just keep your eyes closed and ask your companion. If you feel bored, frustrated or challenged, feel free to say so. If you want to stop, just say so. Your companion can help you to honor whatever you feel is the right thing to do.

- If you elect to share a symbol of what has come, your companion will repeat it back to you. A symbol can be just a word or two that might best capture the essence or feeling of what has come. When we hear our symbol repeated, it seems to help us move from what was to what is; we become more present to it. Sharing a symbol is not the same as sharing your prayer issue. However, if you feel that your symbol is too private, you should never feel compelled to share it.

- This is not a prayer of doing. You do not need to concentrate or force anything to happen. You do not need to quiet or still the mind, or stop it from thinking. Don't worry if nothing happens. Your companion cannot make anything happen inside you. Neither can you. Have patience and faith. Forget any agendas that you may have come with. Turn the whole process over to God, and be open to his gentle loving presence.

- The prayer is meant to be experienced within an environment of compassion, faith and community. Both the person praying and the companion need to endeavor to be present to each other with openness, gentleness, empathy and appreciation, all within a recognition of the special way that God can be present to us in the prayer.

- Do not look for an experience or for meaning while you are praying. Simply let go into experiencing your prayer subject within the quiet loving heart of Jesus in trust and simplicity, and stay with that as you continue to listen within Jesus' tender heart.

- Lastly, do not rush through your prayer. Take your time, and really allow yourself to enter into your own prayer journey. Be open to waiting, noticing, and nurturing your prayer experiences. Your companion does not need quick feedback. Your companion understands that God is present and reveals his grace and will for us in quiet, caring, patience. So, spend as long in the prayer as you would like, staying with whatever comes and being open to however God may be calling you.

Guidelines for the Companion

The following guidelines for the prayer companion will make more sense after you have had some experience being companioned in the prayer. The key to fruitful companioning is to be with the other person with openness and delight for their presence.

- The role of the companion is to assist the person who is praying surrender to God in faith and trust within their prayer experience. The companion's role is to honor the person's spiritual journey and their relationship with God by accompanying them in their prayer. In this accompaniment, the companion serves the person who is praying.

- The companion is not a guide. The companion follows the desires of the person praying, who is in turn open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

- When companioning someone in their prayer, be present from within your own faith; from within that part of you where you know grace and gift are felt. Companion from the presence of Christ within you.

- Use a tone of voice and quality of presence that demonstrates your respect for what they are doing. Know that the person may be spending time with sensitive issues or challenges. Having a faith-based quality of presence that is respectful, attentive, caring and patient is the most important thing that you can do. The companion offers a loving, compassionate presence of openness, gentleness and faith.

- The companion must be non-intrusive. Respect the person's privacy. Do not present an expectation of personal sharing or of being involved in what the person is praying about or journeying with. Do not offer judgmental comments during or after their prayer.

- It is vital that you give your prayer partner sufficient time to not only do what you are offering, but to also allow them to notice anything that may be happening within themselves. Therefore, do not rush through the *[pauses]*. Allow at least ten to fifteen seconds at each *[pause]* before going on. At each *[wait]*, wait for them to let you know when they are ready to go on. It is within the time that we give for each *[pause]* and each *[wait]* that God quietly reaches out to us. So do not pass over them quickly. Setting a slow pace encourages the person praying to slow down and take time to be with the Lord in the prayer; time needed to be open, to wait, to listen, to notice, and to nurture.

- If at any point you do not remember where in the prayer you are at, simply ask the person praying. If you are not sure what they would like you to do next, simply ask them. If you are not sure you heard what was said, rather than guess, simply ask them to repeat it.

- When becoming familiar with companioning, there may be a tendency to automatically revise some of the prayer's wording to a more familiar phrase; for example, changing "let me know when we are ready to go on" to "let me know when you are ready to go on." Stay with the wording as printed.

- If the person praying says out loud a word or symbol of what came to them, simply repeat it back to them exactly as they said it and then continue. For example, if they said the word "path," repeat "path" back to them with the same tone as it was said. If the person praying said a phrase or whole sentences, just pick out a word or two of theirs that might best capture the whole feeling of what they have shared, and repeat it with the tone given.

- Do not engage in significant dialog until their Companioned Prayer has been concluded. Do not offer advice about the issues they are praying about. As a companion you know from your own prayer experience and faith that the answers to the person's issues, and the grace to allow the person to receive them, will come from God from within their prayer.

- After the person has finished praying, it is nice to offer a personal prayer or blessing on behalf of the person. Say a prayer or blessing out loud, and then when finished, if they journal their experiences, invite them to briefly journal what was special about their prayer, giving them a couple of minutes to do so.

The Prayer's Format

When we read the words of a prayer, it is usually obvious that it is a prayer. The words typically define the relationship between God and the person praying, and then relate that to a person's situation. For example, it might proclaim God's authority and glory, and then ask for his guidance and intervention in our life.

The prayer format or wording of Companioned Prayer is different. Just looking at the words of the prayer, it may not be obvious that it is a prayer. The words themselves do not evoke

the form or meaning typical of a traditional prayer. Therefore, it may not be easy to recognize that Companioned Prayer is a prayer if you only read its words. There are at least two reasons for this.

First, Companioned Prayer presupposes the authority and immeasurable love of God, and a personal relationship between God and the person praying and their prayer companion. And second, it is a companioned or guided prayer that endeavors to keep the practitioner focused on their inner experience of God's presence within their prayer journey, rather than on scripted depictions or meanings of God and faith.

Thus, it is not the wording of the prayer that makes Companioned Prayer a prayer. It is the intention and faith of the person praying, and that of the companion, that makes this a prayer. And it is the reality and love of the Father, his Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the practitioner's willingness to surrender into the living and loving relationship with him, that creates the prayer experience. The wording and format of the prayer facilitate that experience, but are not the prayer itself.

In the New Testament, Jesus constantly calls us into an intimate and personal relationship with him. This is what Companioned Prayer responds to, and this is why it is a prayer.

The format for Companioned Prayer follows. The *italic text* is instruction for the companion. The **bold text** is for the companion to say out loud. The instruction "*[pause]*" means that the companion should pause briefly, about ten to fifteen seconds, and then continue without waiting for a response from the person praying. The instruction "*[wait]*" means that the companion should wait until the person praying has given a response before further instructions are offered.

The prayer form on the next page is the standard form for use in Ordinary Time. For other forms see chapter 8, and check for downloadable forms available from the Companioned Prayer Christian Fellowship's resources page at www.CompanionedPrayer.org/resources.

The prayer format beginning on the next page does not communicate the graced interior reality of the prayer experience itself.

Companioned Prayer™
for the season of Ordinary Time

OPENING PRAYERS
Begin by saying, **In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we open our hearts to you, O Lord. Amen.**

Then on behalf of the person you are praying with and yourself, say a personal prayer out loud.

> *For example: asking for Christ to be our companion; for our trust in the Lord; for the guidance of the Holy Spirit; thankfulness for this time of quiet; asking Christ to be present within our needs, inside our very brokenness, inside our joy; to help us listen inside to God's quiet call; to be mindful of our sins, and of the grace and blessings received; or, to humbly journey inside with Christ.*

Then invite the other person to also say a personal prayer silently or out loud, and to say "Amen" when they are ready to continue. [wait for the person to say "Amen"]

AS WE ARE
Then say: **Coming before God as we are, take a few minutes to notice how you physically feel, held tenderly in the loving arms of our Lord.** *[briefly pause, and then continue]* **For example, let your attention go to your back and notice what that feels like.** *[pause]* **Notice your shoulders** *[pause]***, your neck** *[pause]***, your head** *[pause]***, your arms** *[pause]***, your hands** *[pause]***, your feet** *[pause]***, your legs** *[pause]***, your stomach** *[pause]***, your heart** *[pause]***, and your breathing.** *[longer pause]* **Notice the body-sense of how you feel right now** *[pause]***; and then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait for a response, and then go to ASKING GOD]*

ASKING GOD
When they are ready, say: **Staying with how this feels inside, and being open to God's loving presence; let me know if something comes when you ask yourself, "Of everything going on in my life, what feels like God is calling me to listen to, inside me right now?"** *[wait for a response]*

GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE
Notice how all this *repeat the symbol if shared* **feels inside, and how you carry it.** *[pause]* **With tenderness and faith, notice how it feels to take all this to the loving heart of Jesus, and to feel his gentle love and acceptance in all of this. Take your time, and then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait]*

LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS
When they are ready to go on: **Notice how it feels in your body to be with this, in this gentle, caring, faith-filled way. Allow your awareness to seep into your body, to settle in, and sense how all this feels inside.** *[pause]* **Within the gentle loving heart of Jesus, wait in openness and faith to see if it feels like there is anything else that God might want you to notice, such as a word, image, feeling or memory that seems to somehow fit with the way this whole thing feels, and then let me know.** *[wait]*

BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT

a. *If something comes, reflect back the symbol if shared, pause, and then ask,*

b. **Does this feel right, inside, to journey with some more?** *[wait for a response]*
If "no" go to RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.

c. *If "yes," say:* **Ask yourself, "How does all this** *repeat symbol if shared* **now feel in my body held in Jesus' love?"** *[pause]* **With gentleness and faith, let go into how all this feels inside; and let me know if anything comes that fits the way this all now feels.** *[wait]*

If something comes, go back to a.

Repeat a, b, c as long as the person wants to continue, or as time allows.

When they are ready to stop, go to RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.

RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE
When the person is ready to stop, or if the time has run out: **Okay; let's nurture this special place you've come to inside. Pause here and let go into God's presence within all of this, resting in the quiet tenderness of his Spirit for a while. And then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait]*

CLOSING PRAYERS
When they are ready to end, say: **As you savor all of this, let yourself know that this is God's personal love and grace, experienced and felt inside us.** *[pause]* **Staying in this holy and precious gift, you may wish to silently offer a prayer in response, and then say "Amen."** *[wait]*

When they are finished, say out loud a brief prayer or blessing, also ending with "Amen."

After the prayer or blessing, you may invite the person to write in their journal if they wish.

Chapter 5
Prayer Partners and Groups

Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

Matthew 18:20

Fellowships in Faith

Prayer partners are wonderful. Your appreciation for your partner will grow and deepen appreciably over time. You will find yourselves on an extraordinary journey together that neither of you had imagined. You will be sharing your spiritual gifts and challenges in intimacy and trust, held in God's love.

Therefore, do not underestimate the value or gift of a prayer partner or prayer group; or for that matter, of being a prayer companion for your partner. In addition, it is easier to learn and continue the practice with another person, or by taking turns in a small group. Most people find it easier to let go into their prayer experience if they are not trying to figure out where they are at within the prayer format. People often ask if they couldn't just make an audio recording of the prayer steps and play them back with a start and stop button, or similarly use an application with voice responses. The experience, however, will not be the same, especially over time; neither a recorder nor an app is a suitable substitute for a live companion. The presence of others is vital in deepening our prayer and in experiencing and growing in our Christian spirituality. There is no substitute for a compassionate person who supports you in your faith journey (and as you support them), and who can also respond sensitively and appropriately to the surprising twists and turns that can happen in your prayer. Knowing that such a person is present with you in and of itself greatly facilitates your ability to surrender to God within your prayer experience.

In addition, there is something else going on when you pray with a companion. Even though your companion usually will not know the content or meaning of your prayer as it is unfolding, he or she is nevertheless very present to and a part of your prayer experience. When your companion is, through their own faith and prayer experiences, engaged with you and supporting your prayer journey, we usually find that there is a sense of God's presence. God's presence is sensed within the experience of the person praying, within the experience of the companion, and also within the experience that they are sharing. It is felt in the dynamic of the prayer as it is relayed between them when it is occurring. Jesus said that when two or more are gathered in his name, he will be present. That is the experience of Companioned Prayer™. He is present within us as our Companion when we pray the prayer, and he is present when we come together to companion each other in the prayer.

Besides being a richer experience when we are companioning one another, having a companion often means that you have set up regular times to get together for prayer. Having a set routine will greatly facilitate a regular prayer practice. Even when we have a prescribed time assigned for prayer, we will be far more likely to stay to it if we know that another person is counting on our presence. Thus, it is highly recommended to have established times, whether it is with another person or with a small group or with both. For example, you might have a routine where you pray with a small group once a week, and perhaps pray with family members (see chapter 8), or in service (see chapter 6.) Set a prayer routine that is comfortable for you.

Also, when we meet regularly with another person or in a small group, we become friends, sharing of ourselves and being changed by each other. We discover how we are each on our spiritual journey and how it is unfolding in our everyday lives. We become a small Christian community, nurturing each other through love, faith and fellowship. We envelop each other in tenderness, creating prayer communities of hope, friendship, love, mystery, and faith. We discover that a bond of God's intimate love is found between and within us, and Christ's presence is known.

Whether with an individual or a small group, we should have a common understanding that we meet and pray together to support our own and each other's personal faith journeys. With this common understanding and appreciation, everyone will be sensitive to the very special supportive role that each person gives to one another. Each person is there to support and honor the other person's unique spiritual growth and experience, understanding that each person's path may be different while it is unfolding before and within them, yet leading to God in the best possible way. Thus, we know that one person's experiences of God and grace may not necessarily be what is appropriate for another person. God calls us each in our own unique way, and as companions to one another in prayer, we know and honor that in each other.

Group Meeting Formats

Each Companioned Prayer ministry should establish its own meeting format according to the desires of its participants and the larger community of which it is a part. In addition to time set aside for Companioned Prayer, the meeting may also include time for personal sharing and visiting, sharing of experiences, time for planning, and/or time for sharing of readings. Ongoing instruction in the prayer (except as considered in chapter 9) should be avoided or minimized, perhaps in response to a particular need that might arise . Before companioning each other, groups typically begin with a prayer said out loud on behalf of the group, a reading/listening of scripture as in *lectio divina*, or perhaps a reading by a saint. Likewise, the meeting should end with a prayer said out loud on behalf of the group. Alternatively, the Companioned Prayer session can be incorporated within another regular prayer, meeting, or liturgy, such as within Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours. Or a Companioned Prayer ministry may choose to incorporate a particular theme for a period with supportive prayers and discussions that encourage participation and integration with the greater life of the church. Examples might include favorite saints, intercessory prayers (see chapter 8), church seasons or special feast days, or joint participation with other church ministries. Intentionally exploring how the prayer or our shared prayer experiences (within the strictures of "Sharing and Discussion" below) relate to the scriptures and teachings of the church can also be very fruitful.

When it is time to companion one another in Companioned Prayer, depending upon the size of the group, its participants will likely want to temporarily break up into smaller groups of two or three people, with everyone taking turns having an opportunity to both companion and pray. In a group of three the person who has just finished praying sits out while the other two people engage in the practice. For example, in a group of three: A companions (→) B, C→A, and B→C. In a group of four: A→B, C→D, B→C, and D→A. Teens and vulnerable adults in particular should be encouraged to companion in small groups of three instead of two, with at least one participant who is an experienced companion aware of and responsive to the requirements of a Safe and Accessible Environment (see below). While sitting out, some people may prefer to remain with the small group and silently follow along, while others may wish to go off to a place of quiet, such as a sanctuary or chapel if available, for personal prayer or reflection after being companioned. Often people find it rewarding to keep a journal, and may use the quiet time immediately after their prayer to write in their journal notebook. People should also feel free to not companion another person if they do not feel ready or comfortable doing so.

Staying Within the Sense of the Prayer

While each Companioned Prayer ministry will choose its own group meeting format within the structure of the organization of which it is a part, it can be useful to be aware of ways to enhance the group's sense of the received gifts of the prayer throughout the entire meeting experience. In this respect, it is important that the meetings do not devolve into judgmental discussions of dogma, theology, or even scripture. All participants, including people new to the group, must feel that they are a part of a welcoming group that does not inappropriately apply strictures of theological acceptance or correctness. Not everyone is at the same place theologically in their faith, and they must be allowed to grow from within their inner call and awakening provided by God within their prayer experiences. Therefore, it is recommended that:

- If the Companioned Prayer group includes *lectio divina* and its sharing or discussion, such sharing should focus on how hearing the scripture passage made the person who is sharing feel, or what insight they gained. If someone shares, others may share how they are personally responding to what has been shared, or may share their own personal response to the scripture. Try to simply stay within the sense of how you responded to hearing the scripture. Nurture those feelings and that awareness. Critical scriptural and theological analysis can be encouraged in a separate Bible study or similar program offered by pastors or trained leaders. The discipline of dogma, the explanations of the faith, and the analysis of theology are the responsibility of the Church, and not of a Companioned Prayer ministry.

- If the time for Companioned Prayer is preceded by a time of listening to scripture, in order to maximize the potential impact of the scripture on your Companioned Prayer experience, it is also best to minimize discussion between *lectio's* sharing and Companioned Prayer.

- When finished with Companioned Prayer, participants should try to remain in the quiet sense of their prayer experience until the group offers sharing of experiences. Casual talk and discussion prior to group sharing can easily diminish our own response to the sharing, and can also diminish this sense of received inner grace as it might otherwise be carried forward into our active life. However, private sharing between the paired companions immediately after praying, which is a spontaneous grace-filled response to the personal

prayer experience, can be cherished. If the group has become noisy prior to sharing, the invitation to share can be preceded by inviting everyone to close their eyes and to recall their prayer experience, and what it felt like. Pause, and then invite everyone to open their eyes, and to share anything from their prayer experience, or to remain silent if they prefer.

It is this inner sense of the holy gift that we are receiving that we want to conscientiously nurture throughout the entire group meeting. Companioned Prayer is simple: opening our hearts to God and listening inside for his tender love, personally felt and known as divine gift. Let's keep our attention on that. Additional recommendations for group sharing and discussion are offered below.

Sharing and Discussion

One of the natural outcomes of praying together, either with one other person or within a small group, is some expression of sharing. When we share something of our prayer experiences, we learn not only how we each experience God's love and mercy in ways that are unique to us, but we also discover that we are a faith community growing together in our awareness of God's presence. We find God active in us individually and within us as a group, calling us all to a greater sense of being, loving and giving from within our faith experience. For sharing and discussion the following guidelines are offered:

- Sharing and discussion should never take the place of the prayer. Always include plenty of time for praying.

- No one should feel compelled or obliged to share anything at all. There should not be any pressure or expectation by any individual or by the group for anyone to share. For example, in a group it would be inappropriate to take turns going around in a circle with each person in turn sharing. No one should ever be put in the position that if they do not wish to share, they have to actively decline to do so. For many of us, retaining the privacy of our prayer most often feels right. As Christ said, we are to go to our inner room and pray in secret (Matthew 6:5-8). Companioned Prayer honors that. We turn inward and our prayer is silent within us and God. We should not feel compelled to reveal our sacred, private prayer experiences unless called upon by the Holy Spirit for a good known by God.

- When inviting others to share, also invite them to remain silent if they prefer.

- If someone does share, unless that person says otherwise, it should never be spoken of outside of the group, not even to a spouse or priest. Everything shared must remain completely confidential and not shared, even in confidence, except as required by mandated reporting (see "A Safe and Accessible Environment" below). The person who had the prayer experience is the only one who may decide whom to share it with.

- When sharing, it is important that no one engage in advice or critical comment with respect to specific experiences, issues or challenges that a person may be dealing with. In order to provide the necessary continuity of the prayer environment, we must never feel like we will be analyzed or judged in any way. The group cannot become an advice or encounter group. Advice, if sought or given, should be clearly outside of the time set aside for

Companioned Prayer. However, if someone asks for advice on using the prayer format, either as companion or as the person praying, such discussion is encouraged.

- Likewise, Companioned Prayer groups should avoid discussions or sharing that seem to impose values or judgments, including theological viewpoints, if they are presented or discussed in a sense of what is correct or right for everyone. The purpose of the group is to nurture the personal inner experience of grace and faith without any pressure of adhering to or acceptance of another person's opinions or beliefs. No one in the group should use the group format, group experiences or individual experiences to develop or advance any doctrinal creed or interpretation for others in the group. Even innocently responding to what someone has shared with your doctrinal interpretation of their experience (even if that doctrine is generally accepted by your faith community), is inappropriate, as it declares or redefines the person's interior prayer experience in a way that may be different from the person's moment of grace with God, and can feel like at best a disruption and at worst an obliteration of the essence of what was personally important. (If you wish to draw attention to a doctrine of faith that may be related to a person's shared prayer experience, a better approach is to either state that what was shared reminds you of a scripture narrative or doctrine, or to ask the person who has shared, whether they think their experience reflects the doctrine.) In the Companioned Prayer experience, God calls each of us to new understandings, individually and uniquely in the best possible way. We honor and support each person's personal prayer journey. We are not there to convert or "save" anyone. Likewise, we are not there to publicly define and defend our own views and beliefs. Anyone feeling a need to engage in theological debate as a result of a prayer experience should do so outside of the group or companioning setting. (See chapter 14 for a discussion of the Church and Companioned Prayer, and the relationship of the prayer experience with theology.)

- This is not meant in any way to discourage an individual from sharing his or her interpretation or understanding of their own prayer experience, or of their own personal spiritual journey. On the contrary, they are positively encouraged to do so to the degree that they feel so moved by the Holy Spirit. When someone does share their experience and does so within a theological or faith-based perspective, the others in the group should be supportive of the person and their experience without reinterpretation or debate. In fact, when someone shares, even the simplest support expressed by others in response can be very meaningful for the person who shared. It is our loving presence to each other in such a safe and supporting manner that is truly the real essence of spiritual dialog.

All that said, sharing is a crucial part of our Christian prayer experience. It is in sharing that we find ourselves exploring even deeper the spiritual significance of our personal prayer experiences, our relationship with God, and our spiritual fellowship in Christ. Not only do we find ourselves recognizing and affirming the presence of God in our prayer and his deep love and mercy for us, but also in each other, our Christian fellowship. Sharing in this way leads us to increasingly value our experiences of the presence of God in our lives and our personal relationship with Christ, from which all spiritual life flows. Additionally, when we hear our friends' prayer experiences, we recognize our shared spiritual journey and our shared faith lived and experienced in all of us, nurturing our friendships and community. We discover our love for one another within the tender embrace of the Church.

The Weave of Faith

Having said all of the above reasons for avoiding didactic theology while in the prayer group, now I would like to encourage the place of scripture and faith within our prayer groups, and even within our introductory experiences, but with sensitivity to our personal experiences in prayer. Our prayer experiences are ultimately personal experiences of Christ and the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our faith journey. The gift of scripture, the teachings of the Church, and the experiences of the saints can all be of great encouragement for our personal surrender into His presence and into the grace of his love and mercy felt and experienced within us. Therefore, at times it can be very helpful to share specific scripture passages or teachings as they may relate to or call upon our inner sense of our faith journey experienced in prayer. Connecting the richness of our Christian faith with our prayer experiences or with what we are doing when we are praying, is important, when done with sensitivity and openness to the variety of ways that God personally and uniquely calls us.

Leaven in the Church

The Companioned Prayer ministry should be like leaven in the church. It should be a humble ministry that, working within the church or religious organization of which it is a part, offers its prayers and the graces of the Lord to all.

Regular prayer group sessions are encouraged to be held within the facilities of the church or religious organization of which they are a part. Meeting in a church chapel, nave, and/or sanctuary is preferred. You should not only have a quiet reverent place for the prayer circle to gather, but also a larger reverent space for spreading out in groups of two or three when companioning each other. Within such a quiet reverent space, holy prayer is natural and welcomed by the participants, and encourages the letting go into the personal faith experience of the prayer. Repeatedly experiencing the holy presence of God in our Companioned Prayers within this intentional environment also causes one to naturally be more open to the holy presence of God when in this environment for other worship and prayer. Additional recommendations include:

- The Companioned Prayer ministry's prayer groups and prayer circles should not meet in secret, but should function transparently within the normal life of the church, and with the support and guidance of the church's pastors and religious leaders.

- There should be no separate Companioned Prayer titles, ranks or positions of hierarchy, and there should not be formal or ceremonial ministry membership; although the ministry leadership can share responsibilities as necessary to carry out the ministry, such as coordination, outreach, and other tasks, and rotate these duties as practical.

- The ministry should not have its own rites or liturgies, formal or informal, and should not have its own vestments, robes, etc.

- The ministry should not offer or promote its own theology separate from the church or the religious organization of which it is a part.

- Companioned Prayer groups or prayer circles should not adopt or employ a restrictive charism or perspective of purpose or theology unless that is made obviously clear to all who participate or who might be inquiring about the prayer group or ministry, while also letting people know that the Companioned Prayer experience itself is not so constrained. Consecration to a saint or purpose, while appearing holy, may also inhibit some people from participating. Any intentional or dedicated adoption of a charism should be discussed with and approved by the ministry's church or religious organization.

These recommendations are intended to ensure that Companioned Prayer ministries are a normal part of the church or religious organization in which they function, and that they do not create separate entities of authority or control. Companioned Prayer ministries should support our spiritual growth and personal relationship with God within all aspects of the Church's life of faith.

Welcoming

An important function of the group is to welcome people, including people with limited or no experience with the prayer. Welcoming and encouraging can be offered as presented in chapter 9's section titled, "Ongoing Prayer Meetings." A few of those points pertinent to new participants are summarized here:

- Always take a few minutes for personal introductions and welcoming.

- People new to Companioned Prayer should be given six handouts: "Bishop Francis Quinn's remarks," the "Guidelines for the Praying," the standard prayer form for the current liturgical season, such as "Companioned Prayer for Ordinary Time," the "Guidelines for the Companion," "Confidentiality and Sharing," and the Companioned Prayer "Disclaimer." These basic handouts are available at *www.CompanionedPrayer.org/resources*, and together with your group's contact information and meeting times, can be preassembled into welcoming packets for new people.

- When a new person is paired for companioning, they should be paired with an experienced companion who can help give them support and feedback as needed. If they came to the group as a friend of someone already in the group, they should be paired with that person, at least initially.

- People new to Companioned Prayer should not be expected to companion others until they desire to do so.

- When it is time for sharing and a new person is present, remind all participants that sharing is optional and confidential.

- If the new person has not attended an introductory series, they should be encouraged to do so if one is available. Regardless, the new person should be encouraged to continue participating in the prayer group.

- One of the more experienced companions can offer their friendship and availability to a new person. The experienced companion can be available outside of the group setting to answer questions, to encourage the person to continue with the prayer, and to provide friendship.

When a new person is present, there may be a tendency to want to provide extensive prayer instructions during the meeting. This should be avoided. The meetings should continue to be experientially based, that is, learning from praying and sharing.

Faith, Fellowship and Our Journey Together in Christ

It is important to note that an atmosphere of faith, trust, and friendship is critical for prayer partners and groups to work. What should be occurring is more than simply being a companion to each other's prayers. Participants should also allow the others in the group to get to know them. This requires that each person be open to one another, to share in friendship and fellowship. See from the other person's perspective, feel their pain and challenges, and appreciate their joys and gifts received. Allow yourself to be changed by your prayer partner and group participants. Let the Holy Spirit work through all of you together as well as individually. And then companion each other in prayer from that level of intimacy and tender love for each other.

This does not happen overnight, and should not be forced. But it can be nurtured. If the group understands in the beginning, or as new people join it, that such relationships are anticipated to form, participants will feel freer to risk being both vulnerable and friendly. Even get-togethers outside of the contemplative prayer time can help nurture our relationships within the group. For example, a monthly evening or afternoon gathering of Companioned Prayer participants from across various ministries and parishes, for a meal, friendship, and an inspirational talk, can be helpful. When we have that quality of presence where we can give and receive the caring appreciation and support for each other without the interior walls that we usually put up, then we will truly feel free to trust and surrender to the Lord in our prayer. And the experience will be much more than just leading another person through a prayer format. We will know the living presence of Christ within our midst, calling us forward into faith, and enlivening us in the Holy Spirit.

A parish's Companioned Prayer ministry may wish to have a number of prayer groups or prayer circles to maximize the opportunity for people to participate. The size of a prayer group or circle should not be so large as to discourage intimacy, trust, sharing and friendship. An average of around eight to ten people showing up may be about maximum, or they may be larger if they also incorporate this smaller group size for trust and sharing. In addition, some groups may form that focus on a particular ministry, outreach or shared experience. Or other groups may be oriented to a particular age group, such as teens. However, in all cases, the primary emphasis within all Companioned Prayer groups and circles should be the time set aside for the prayer experience itself, followed by an opportunity for sharing.

Within our Companioned Prayer ministry, we will discover our personal prayer experiences and our personal spiritual development are a part of the larger tradition of the Christian personal journey. In fact, as one begins to experience the inner awakening of God's presence within us from Companioned Prayer, and as we continue to experience and be transformed by

God's grace through regular prayer practice with each other, our understanding of our personal faith formation within the context of the Church's teachings and the personal experiences and transformative journeys of the saints becomes vital. When we find ourselves walking in a new path for us, it is good to know that this path has been followed by countless other devoted Christians, and to know something of their experiences and directions for us. In this sense, your Companioned Prayer ministry group should be an integral part of your church or religious community's activities and purpose. Your Companioned Prayer ministry group should build up the entire church and religious community of which it is a part, supporting the mission to bring the grace of Christ fully into the hearts and minds of all people.

Personal Challenges in Prayer Groups

Prayer groups should be faith environments of compassion and community. The prayer group and those supporting it should recognize that Companioned Prayer partners and groups are not a substitute for professional therapy, medical treatment, or counseling if that is what a person needs. Prayer groups can ensure that everyone is aware of this, including people who are new to the prayer, by providing a handout of the disclaimer found at the beginning of this book. The handout is available as a downloadable pdf file at www.CompanionedPrayer.org/resources.

This does not mean that it is inappropriate for participants to deal with significant personal issues or challenges within their prayer. But these issues and challenges are between them and God, not between them and their prayer group or prayer partner. It is the role of the prayer group or partner to help create a loving and supportive environment that, within the context of faith, nurtures each person's personal faith journey and prayer experience. For example, during a prayer, inner feelings and issues can often shift and express themselves in many surprising ways, sometimes in laughter, sometimes in tears. The prayer companion may help the person to gently be with those feelings, to hold them, and to invite Jesus' tender love into them if that is what the person wants to do. When the person praying gets in touch with sensitive issues or when tears come, he or she may sometimes feel that there may be something within those tears that God is gently calling them to listen to and understand. The person praying and the companion understand that within the context of faith, God can often gift us with mercy and grace from within the very personal pain or issues that are challenging us.

A Safe and Accessible Environment

All Companioned Prayer ministry groups need to be aware of, and comply with, their hosting and sponsoring organizations' safe environment requirements and guidelines. These guidelines are designed to prevent abuse, especially of children, teens, and vulnerable adults. They also protect everyone in the prayer group. Within the unique context of Companioned Prayer, several additional recommendations are pertinent:

- When breaking into small groups of two or three people for prayer, no small group should be physically isolated such that it cannot be seen by others. If possible, use a large open space such as a church nave where small groups can disperse. If smaller rooms are necessary, keep the doors open.

- Whenever a child, teen or vulnerable adult is being companioned, do so in a small group of three people instead of two whenever possible, with the participation of at least one experienced companion who has met the organization's requirements for safe environment training. This experienced companion should not separate themselves from their small group during the time of prayer.

- In the *AS WE ARE* part of the prayer, never ask about, or direct anyone to notice, those parts of the body associated with sexuality.

- Throughout the prayer, and afterwards during sharing time, do not put your hands or arms on or around another person.

- Use an ADA compliant location, so that no individual has limited access or egress.

- Follow all public health and safety rules and recommendations, including those applicable to virulent diseases such as Covid-19, which include requirements for masking, vaccinations, social distancing, etcetera.

For further recommendations, including safe environment training, procedures, standards and reporting (including mandated reporting as required by law), contact your hosting organization's office associated with creating and maintaining a safe environment.

Complementary Activities

Companioned Prayer ministry groups can enrich their fellowship and faith with complementary activities that occur outside of the group meeting. Activities may include people from more than one Companioned Prayer ministry group or parish. Sample activities may include:

- Periodic gatherings for a meal, friendship, and an inspirational talk.
- Other social get-togethers (e.g., potlucks) at church or at parishioners' homes, and at coffee shops and restaurants.
- Short-run (e.g., an afternoon) Companioned Prayer training focusing on a requested subject. Just a few examples are:
    - Companioned Prayer with kids
    - Extended time within the *Resting in God's Presence* portion of the prayer
    - How to open oneself to God's love in prayer
    - Challenges of using the prayer within a specific service ministry
- Off-site periodic retreats that may combine prayer, instruction, worship, sharing, fellowship, reflection, private time, and discussion.
- Support or planning meetings for using Companioned Prayer in a service outreach ministry.
- Group experiences of other traditional forms of contemplative prayer (such as *lectio divina*, Taizé prayer, labyrinth prayer, the Examen, and others) to better appreciate

how our Companioned Prayer experiences are also found within these forms of interior prayer.

- Presentations by Companioned Prayer ministry participants to other ministry groups or parishioners to let them know about Companioned Prayer.

Successful Prayer Groups

We may often wonder what we should be doing to help our Companioned Prayer groups to thrive. Should we have guest speakers? Should we have coffees or potlucks? Should we explore the experiences of the saints? Should we explore how our prayer experiences are reflected in scripture and church teachings? How should we do outreach? Do we need signs? Who will make phone calls? Who will lead our prayer circles? Who will greet people?

But instead of focusing on what to do, it may be better to focus on how to be. Our doing will come out of our being. In Companioned Prayer we experience God's love for us, personally. In this being loved by God, we find that we can flower in his love, and be love. Jesus said, "*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love*." (John 15:9) In all of the functions of our prayer groups, we can nurture this awareness and our surrender into being loved by God.

Then in him and in his love, our own hearts will open and we can be to others what we all need: companion friends in Christ. In this way we can reach out and be fully present to one another, to welcome and accompany, to encourage, to explore and discover, and to inspire. Then our doing will be the gift of God's grace, not simply because our theology tells us to be this way, but because it is our inner authentic experience from which we share and are with others. This must not be an adopted attitude or artificial mood. It must be genuine and include our own vulnerabilities, cares, and joys. Jesus also said, "*Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* (John 13:34-35)

From this real presence our prayer groups and ministries will thrive and grow, and will become the living Good News. For more on this topic, see chapter 13.

Chapter 6
Companioned Prayer in Service

This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this, that someone should lay down his life for his friends.

John 15:12-13

Offering Companioned Prayer to Others

At some point in your journey with Companioned Prayer™ you may feel a calling to share the prayer with others. This might be individually with some friends or family, or it might be within a ministry that provides a service to people in need. Examples of such ministries include ministries to the homebound, to end-of-life/hospice care, within teen or young adult ministries, ministries to the homeless, within bereavement ministries, social justice ministries of all kinds, to people with special needs, and many others.

When you begin to feel this call to share the prayer in service, then it is time to explore how God might be calling you in this way. You might even ask your prayer companion to use the Companioned Prayer form for the Easter Season. In openness and faith, try respond to how Jesus may be calling you. It may be in a way that is not so obvious or expected at first. But when you feel that you would like to offer the prayer to others, a good approach is to see if there are others in your Companioned Prayer ministry who would like to join you. If you desire to share the prayer with family, such as your children, you might find another parent who would be open to also sharing with their children. This would give you an opportunity to encourage each other, to compare notes, and to discover this gift together. Similarly, if you wish to use Companioned Prayer within your ministry, partnering with another minister is a great approach.

When teaming with someone else, ask them to first participate in an introductory prayer series if one is available as discussed in chapter 4, *Experiencing Companioned Prayer*. Or sponsor the introductory experience yourself to others in your ministry. Talk to the ministry leaders about the prayer and its application in the ministry, and ask to sponsor an introductory experience for those ministers who might be interested. You can lead the small group experience yourself, as described in chapter 9, *Sharing Companioned Prayer*, or you can coordinate with others to do so.

Whether you are offering the prayer to individual family and friends, to ministers in an established group ministry, or directly to people in need, the best way to offer the prayer to others is to share how much you personally value the prayer. You might share some of your experiences and how the prayer has affected your life. It does little good to get into esoterics of the prayer form, the prayer's history, how the prayer fits into theology, or similar subjects. Simply keep it

personal, brief, and invitational. You may also ask for their partnership and assistance. For more on this topic, see the "Outreach" section within chapter 9.

Many of the topics addressed in chapter 13 under "Christ Centered" and "Faith" also apply to when and how to use Companioned Prayer in service outreach. Always be honest and open with the people you are calling on, and always give them the opportunity to decline your offer. Never try to sneak the prayer in, or disguise it, or use it without their knowledge and agreement.

Ministering Directly to People in Need

Companioned Prayer offers us a way to be with someone in need in a way that facilitates that walk with God, a walk that is personal to each person, yet open to the gift of God's grace felt within their very trial, within whatever is their situation in life. Through our personal outreach and caring presence, Jesus' tender loving presence can be our shared reality, given by him and received deeply within. Whether we are responding to someone in need as part of an organized program such as a caring ministry of our church, or as part of some other outreach service, or whether we are just responding individually, Companioned Prayer can be offered directly to those in need. The person being visited or ministered to need not have any understanding of the prayer in order to do it. Simply ask them if they would like you to guide them through a private prayer of listening for God's grace, his tender presence. You might let them know how you have found the prayer to have helped you, and how special you believe the prayer is. Be ready to respond to any questions they may have, sharing from your own experience with the prayer.

If they are uncertain about whether to proceed with a full Companioned Prayer, ask if it would be okay just to pray for God's gentle love and blessing felt within them, within their cares and concerns. If that is okay, let them know that you will lead them in a short guided prayer that includes noticing how their cares and concerns feel inside, in their body, and that you will then invite them to feel God's gentle love and tenderness. Before you lead this introductory personal prayer experience, you can ask if there is anything in particular they would like to pray about. If they share something, you can include it in the first movement of the prayer as indicated.

Depending on the needs of the individual, it can also be very helpful to invite the person to spend a few minutes noticing how they physically feel. If they are willing, explain how you will lead this, using either the full *AS WE ARE* movement of Companioned Prayer or an abbreviated version. After they have noticed how their body feels, and when they are ready to go on, continue with the prayer:

Introductory Personal Prayer

> **Dear Lord, we ask for your love and blessings today, especially for *[the person's name]* and for [his** *or* **her] cares and concerns (especially for _____** *[insert cares you know of or they have shared, such as their health, their loved ones, and so on]***.)** *[short pause]*
>
> **Now as we come to God in prayer, I invite you to silently be aware of any special care or concern that at this time you would like Jesus to know about. Take your time, and let me know when you have that in mind and you are ready to go on.** *[wait for a response]*

When they are ready, continue with: **Notice how this care or concern feels in your body, and how you have been carrying it.** *[pause]*

Now with tenderness and in faith, notice what it feels like to take all of this to the loving heart of Jesus, and to feel his gentle love and acceptance. *[pause]* **Take your time, and after a while let me know if you can feel His gentle love and tenderness within all of this.** *[wait]*

If they can feel some of God's gentle love, continue with: **Okay, let go into how all this feels inside, into God's tender love within you, within how you are holding all of this in his love. Just rest within all of this for a while. Take your time, being open to anything else that may come, and noticing what that may feel like inside.** *[pause for a few minutes]*

After a few minutes, continue with: **Continue to rest in God's quiet tenderness until you are ready to stop at least for now, and then let me know.** *[wait]*

When they are ready to stop, conclude with: **Lord God, we thank you for the blessings of your love and care for us, and ask that you strengthen our trust and faith in you. Help us to always be in your gentle care, even in our times of trial.**

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

When using the above format in an intimate small group, such as a family, use each person's name in the opening prayer, and wait for each person to respond out loud before going on to the next part of the prayer. Before praying, be sure to provide very simple and clear instructions for them to let you know when they are ready to go on in response to what comes. The above introductory personal prayer form can be downloaded from the supplemental resources page of the CPCF's website.

Besides being a gentle prayer in itself, the above format will acquaint the person with how God's love can be felt inside them, and will give them a feel for how verbal guidance and feedback can be part of a companioned prayer with God. Afterward, invite them to share what that was like. Make sure they know that they shouldn't feel compelled to share if they don't want to. After some sharing and encouragement, you can then again invite them to individually pray the full Companioned Prayer with you, either then or perhaps later on subsequent visits, when they are ready.

Being with Someone with Companioned Prayer

When the person you are ministering to says they would like to pray the Companioned Prayer with you, let them know what the two of you will be doing before you begin. For example, let them know that although their prayer is with God, because it is a guided or companioned prayer, the two of you will be able to briefly talk back and forth during the prayer. Also let them know that you will be asking them to notice what their body feels like in order to help them be more open to God and not caught up in thinking and emotion so much. If they are in physical pain, let them know that you will not expect them to dwell in their pain, but that they might notice how

their overall body feels like. Also let them know that if they wish, they can keep their prayer completely private.

When you are ready to start, tell them that you are going to start with a prayer said out loud and then you will invite them to also say a prayer out loud, if they wish to. Then simply use the standard *Companioned Prayer for Ordinary Time* prayer format. If the person is in significant physical discomfort, encourage them to take some time with being very gentle with their body. Help them invite Jesus' compassion into their overall physical state. Help them pause to notice what his compassion feels like in their body as they continue to be close to and own how they are physically feeling, and get their feedback that it is okay to continue before proceeding with the next prayer movement.

You should also read chapters 11 and 12 before you companion someone in need or someone who has not been through formal coaching in the prayer. If you do not have the printed prayer with you (or if you choose to memorize the prayer so that you don't have to refer to a printed piece of paper), do not be upset if you don't get the words perfectly. Just do the best you can, knowing the sequential movements of the prayer, what the process feels like from the inside, and that Jesus will be a companion to both of you. The caring, faith-full quality of your presence of companioning is more important than the exact words used.

Accompanying – Not Converting

Do not presume that because this is a prayer of faith that you can only companion someone of your faith or denomination. As long as you present the prayer as a prayer with God, and as long as you have faith that Christ is present to both of you, you can invite the person to pray. God has never asked that we adopt a particular dogma before we can pray to him. Nor is he constrained by our paltry ability to surrender in faith to him in order for him to be able to reveal himself or to give us his gifts of mercy and love. Jesus knows our every tear, our brokenness, and our pains. He knows the crosses we bear. He is with us with compassion. It is in the simple act of praying that he often makes himself freely known. Companioned Prayer is a wonderful way to offer the experience of a fresh living faith to people who perhaps may only have a glimmer of some unrealized stirring within them. Trust in God's power, ability and love, and do not hesitate to offer the prayer to anyone in need or trouble.

But remember that you are not there to cure or to convert anyone. In fact, if you have an attitude that you are there with the answers, the experience will likely not be one of spiritual gift and grace. You need to be there in humility, knowing that whatever you offer, it is given by God, not you. You are there on the same level as the person you are visiting. You are brothers and sisters in your journey with Christ, both infants of God. You are with the other person to also learn and be renewed from their presence to you. Therefore, be open, loving and vulnerable with them. You must be willing to have their perspective, and to be open to learning and growing from it, letting their experience change you. Know you are powerless and let yourself be open to the Holy Spirit working through both of you as you serve each other. It is in your relationship of humble faith in God that you will find yourself and the person you are with, open to receive God's gifts of mercy and love.

Companioned Prayer can be the precious heart, the heart of Jesus' love, within any caring visit to another person. That does not diminish the importance of the other usual aspects of such visits: friendship, listening, comfort, reflection, and responding with specific help. All of these, together with Companioned Prayer, should be a part of reaching out to another person in love in any personal Companioned Prayer ministry.

Accepting Their Gift of Companioning

At some point, the person may offer to companion you in prayer. This is an important part of the ministry, and should be accepted gratefully. If you do not have time, set a time when you can come back and receive their offer. If you have been companioning them a few times and they have not offered to companion you, ask them if they would like to companion you in prayer. Often unless you ask, it will not occur to them that they can be your prayer companion. Carry a printed copy of the prayer with you for them to use, and help them out as you pray if needed. But don't treat the first few times as instructional sessions with frequent corrections and critical feedback. Just gracefully accept their companioning in the spirit it is offered. Such mutual engagement allows them to be involved and helpful to another person, in a special faith-caring way. It can be a special treat for them as well as for you.

Ministry Team Planning and Support

Companioned Prayer ministry teams can get together regularly to share ideas and to support one another. For example, you can relate how different situations of need can most effectively use different guidance and sensitivity. Or you might discuss how you can ensure that a safe and accessible environment is created and maintained as discussed in chapters 5 and 9. In all cases, however, everyone involved should be very clear that confidentiality of the person visited is imperative. Without the person's own authorization, you cannot share their personal information or experiences with anyone, including with others in the group, (except as required for mandated reporting per "A Safe and Accessible Environment" in chapter 5). But you can share your own experiences of being the companion for others.

Having a Companioned Prayer ministry service team can also allow those involved to get together between outreach visits to practice Intercessory Companioned Prayer. As you call on someone and get to know them, ministry team members can companion each other with the intercessory prayer contained in chapter 8. This will give the outreach companion inner guidance and assurance as he or she accompanies the person called on in their walk with God.

At some point, if the person being called on becomes physically able, invite them to join your regular Companioned Prayer circle, and eventually to join your Companioned Prayer ministry team.

When deciding whom to call on, also consider offering the prayer to the person's immediate caregivers: concerned family and friends who are most involved in providing nurture and care. Let them know that you are willing to show them how to companion their loved one in prayer. If there is an interest, set up a special time in which they, the person in need, and you can all be available together. Make sure to include any special considerations that might pertain to using the prayer with the specific needs being ministered to.

In addition to offering the Companioned Prayer to a person's immediate caregivers, you (and/or your ministry team) can also offer the prayer to other caregiver organizations outside of your church. For example, helping organizations that serve the homeless, those with AIDS, people struggling with addiction, battered women, teen runaways, prisoners and families of prisoners, et cetera. Let them know that you have a prayer practice that you believe is exceedingly helpful and healing to those in need. Also let them know that the practice is private and non-intrusive, and it is not used to proselytize. If possible, approach these groups from a personal invitation or testimony of someone in the organization, or better yet by someone served by the organization who has been companioned in the prayer.

The engagement of all Companioned Prayer ministries must be very personal, rather than "classroom" style. Whatever the design of the ministry, service must meet the personal needs of the individuals being served; that is, the ministry must authentically meet their needs where they are at, rather than requiring them to meet the demands of the program.

The Companioned Prayer service ministry should remain flexible and responsive to the grace of God in its planning and implementation of Companioned Prayer service. When things do not turn out as expected, be open to what God may be telling you in these experiences and situations. Often our best plans are not God's best plans, and something greater awaits, if we will only listen with openness, trust, faith and patience. In this way we can be responsive to God and let our approach evolve through the gentle nudges of the Holy Spirit.

Ministries of Compassion and Community

In whatever way we share the gifts of Companioned Prayer, our ministry should be one of both compassion and community; a ministry in which we deeply appreciate each other. Compassion is caring, kindness and appreciation for another. Community is being open to letting yourself receive compassion from others. So, the entire group is equal; everyone is valued as a child of God as we are. This is not the usual care-giver/care-receiver top-down model. It is a model where we are all open to each other, and to the trust, faith and grace experienced within the friendship and caring for each other.

To facilitate this we can consciously help create a compassionate environment. First by experiencing how God loves us unreservedly, even with all of our frailties and faults. With this realization born of direct experience within Companioned Prayer, we are freer to open our self to others, including strangers. We are touched directly by God's loving grace, even within our brokenness and personal challenges, making known in us the goodness of who we are. This allows us to be empathetic to others who are in times of personal trial, because we know how precious that trial is, and how God's presence within each of us affirms the incalculable treasure that each person is.

Our experiences of Companioned Prayer also let us realize that we do not need to fix or change other people. It is not our job to "make them right" or to control their beliefs, emotions or experiences. We can simply be present to them; listening with compassion and appreciation of them and the journey they are undertaking. We can be open to allowing them to affect us, in growing friendship and oneness. Trusting God, in humility we empty our self (our ego) interiorly to make room for them, we open our hearts to them, and likewise we allow ourselves and our story

to be shared equally with them, so that their hearts can likewise be expanded, and so that a community of compassion can be born.

In this way, compassion and community are experienced and grow within actual relationships. It is not a theological or theoretical understanding that takes place; it is actually experiencing the gift of each other. In this the Kingdom of God is born. And it is nurtured by the caring presence that we provide to each other when we companion one another in prayer. In this mutual fellowship of trust, faith and love, we can then be open to letting go into our prayer issues within Jesus' tender presence; and we can be open to continuing to experience being beckoned forward into faith, healing and revelation. This is the gift of a ministry of compassion and community.

This environment of faith, compassion, trust, and community – a letting go, an acceptance, an appreciation of what is, and an embracing; all within the tender loving heart of Jesus – is vital for any Companioned Prayer ministry. It is critical that we establish a ministry environment of loving care and trust, where everyone can feel and trust the loving heart of Jesus, the compassion of Mary, the gentle tenderness of God's Holy Spirit, and our love for one another. Within all this we can offer the prayer, and we can companion one another. Without first establishing this environment, people will not surrender into their own prayer's personal faith story and will not know Mercy.

Responding to the Need for Faith Formation

The awakened personal awareness of God's presence within the individual that can come about from Companioned Prayer, may create a personal need for more understanding and appreciation of all that the Church offers. Therefore, the Companioned Prayer ministry may wish to facilitate access to further worship and faith formation. Thus, we can discuss faith in relation to a person's prayer experiences and their spiritual needs as they have expressed them; and we can inform them of the services offered through their local church, such as worship times, bible studies, Sunday school, childcare, reconciliation, OCIA, and other programs. We can offer to accompany them to church or, with the person's approval, we may coordinate their engagement with people from other church ministries. When an individual's experiences in Companioned Prayer are reflected in their experiences and understandings gained through participating in Church worship and formation, then the personal appreciation of the riches of faith and the treasure and mercy of God is sure to grow.

A New Paradigm for Service Ministry

In addition to companioning individuals in need, Companioned Prayer outreach ministry groups should also evolve their outreach to facilitate the individuals and communities of need to adopt Companioned Prayer within themselves and acquire the skills to companion each other in faith. In this paradigm, the shift is from a compassionate, faith-filled, traditional caregiver-to-recipient ministry approach to an empowered-community-ministry, in which with compassion and faith its own members can companion each other. The Companioned Prayer outreach ministry can plan for and facilitate the development of this new empowered-community-ministry. When sharing the prayer in this way, it is important to not diminish the direct role of the Trinity in the prayer. The prayer must retain the Trinity and the loving heart of Jesus as its core.

In this evolved peer-to-peer approach to ministry, the community realizes the experience of God's grace through its members directly and collectively, through their own faith and the working of the Holy Spirit. This empowerment of the human spirit by the Holy Spirit, with faith, understanding and compassion, will dynamically transform the entire community of need, into a community of ministry, of God's grace and gift.

God's Personal Gift to Us

Having a prayer ministry team that serves those in need is a fundamental part of being a Christian Church and being a Christian. Offering Companioned Prayer as the heart of that encounter is a wonderful way to share God's love and mercy with others. And as we do so, we will find our own heart is opened and transformed. Then reaching out to give others practical aid will not be a "fixing chore" but will be a treasured opportunity to fulfill our own and God's desire to love. Those in need will become God's very special gifts to us to express his love.

For this is what Jesus asked us to do: to love one another, to be kind to others, to take care of the sick, the lonely, the persecuted, those in prison, those who suffer. To be a Christian is to extend Christ's love given freely within us to Him seen in all others through faith, but especially to the poor and those in need. The Good News is to be made real by us through the expression of our love in the daily reality we find ourselves in. This is the great gift we have been given: to be able to bring the love and gift of God's Kingdom to all people. It is in the real relationships that we create, and in the love, care and kindness we give others, that we serve Christ. This love is an active choice, and an activity we can do. And when we repeatedly experience Christ's presence and love within us in Companioned Prayer, his abiding love fills us and heals us, making us whole in him. And in our inner reality of him we are free to love others. We will want to love others; we will choose to love and serve. And as we grow in our awareness of Christ within us and in others through Companioned Prayer, and as we reach out to others in love and service, we will be transformed: we will truly become Christ's living disciples.

Chapter 7
Praying by Oneself

The body is meant... for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ...Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

1st Corinthians 6:13b, 15a, 19-20

I Am With You Always

Sometimes it is not possible to have another person with you when you wish to pray. For such times, a revised format of the prayer in chapter 4 is presented below. Even when another person is not available, Christ will still be your Companion with you when you pray. Know that he is present to you. His personal love, grace and mercy are available throughout your prayer experience, including within the depths of those very issues that you might find yourself being called to be with. He knows you personally, knows your personal challenges and pains completely, and loves you with a personal and sustaining love beyond measure. It is within this faith that you will be companioned even when you pray "by yourself."

Practicing Companioned Prayer™ by yourself is no substitute for practicing it with a companion, but may simply be an additional opportunity for prayer. Experiencing Companioned Prayer with a prayer partner or group should be an established routine practice before adding the experience of praying by oneself. This is not only because the prayer is easier to do with another person, but also because we grow in faith in community. The very real nurturing of spirit, faith and understanding provided by others within the partner and group prayer experience cannot be provided any other way.

Nonetheless, there are times when the complete privacy and lack of concern of any time constraints afforded by praying by oneself may allow you to let go further into your prayer experience and to stay with it longer than you might in a group or partner setting. For example, you may want to take more time within the *RESTING IN GOD'S SPIRIT* part of the prayer as described in chapter 12's "Abiding in God's Presence." Therefore, do not put off praying whenever you feel the need, or whenever a partner is not available.

Companioned Prayer without a Prayer Partner

You are never alone when you pray. Jesus is always our Companion. When engaged in Companioned Prayer by yourself, you may want to keep a list of just the headings or a simple

outline of the form nearby so that you can glance at it if necessary to remind yourself where you are in the process. You may also want to include the prayer within a daily office such as Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer or other similar reading or devotional. An example of a simple Companioned Prayer outline is illustrated below.

Opening Prayer – Begin in the Trinity, and with a personal prayer to God.

As We Are – Take time to come before God as we actually are, noticing how you physically feel right now held in the loving arms of our Lord.

Asking God – Being open to God's loving presence, ask yourself, "Of everything going on in my life, what feels like God is calling me to listen to, inside me right now?"

God's Love and Acceptance – Notice how this all feels inside, and then take your prayer subject to Jesus' loving heart, and feel his gentle love and acceptance.

Letting Go in the Loving Heart of Jesus – Let go into all of this with gentleness, caring, and faith; and wait attentively within Jesus' love to see if anything else comes.

Being Open to God's Spirit – Notice and slowly follow any interior movement from God.

Resting in God's Presence – Quietly rest within God's tender presence.

Closing Prayer – Silently conclude with a personal prayer.

A more complete description of the basic form of the prayer when by yourself follows:

OPENING PRAYER
Begin the Companioned Prayer by saying, **In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, I open my heart to you, O Lord.** *Then say a personal prayer.*

> *For example: asking for Christ to be our companion; for our trust in the Lord; for the guidance of the Holy Spirit; thankfulness for this time of quiet; asking Christ to be present within our needs, inside our very brokenness, inside our joy; to help us listen inside to God's quiet call; to be mindful of our sins, and of the grace and blessings received; or to humbly journey inside with Christ; etc.*

AS WE ARE
Coming before God as we are, take a few minutes to notice how you physically feel, held tenderly in the loving arms of our Lord. [briefly pause, and then continue] For example, let your attention go to your back and notice what that feels like. [pause] Notice your shoulders [pause], your neck [pause], your head [pause], your arms [pause], your hands [pause], your feet [pause], your legs [pause], your stomach [pause], your heart [pause], and your breathing. [longer pause] Notice the body-sense of how you feel right now. [pause] When you are ready to go on, go to ASKING GOD.

ASKING GOD
<u>When you are ready</u>, stay with how this feels inside, and being open to God's loving presence; be aware if something comes when you silently ask yourself, **"Of everything going on in my life, what feels like God is calling me to listen to, inside me right now?"** *[wait for a response]*

GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE
Now with tenderness and faith, notice how it feels to take all this repeat symbol if desired to the loving heart of Jesus, and to feel his gentle love and acceptance in all of this. Take your time, allowing yourself to feel God's tender love within all this.

LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS
When you are ready to go on: Notice how it feels in your body to be with this, in this gentle, caring, faith-filled way. Allow your awareness to seep into your body, to settle in, and sense how all this feels inside. [pause] Within the gentle loving heart of Jesus, wait in openness and faith to see if it feels like there is anything else that God might want you to notice, such as a word, image, feeling or memory that seems to somehow fit with the way this whole thing feels. [wait for a response]

BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT

a. *If something comes, notice the symbol, pause, and then silently ask yourself,* **"Does this** *repeat symbol* **feel right, inside, to journey with some more?"** *[wait for a response]*

b. *If "no" go to RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.*

c. *If "yes," with gentleness and faith, let go into how all this feels inside; and wait to see if anything comes that fits the way this all now feels. [wait for a response]*

Repeat a, b, c as long as you want to continue, or as time allows.

When you are ready to stop, go to RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.

RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE
When you are ready to stop, or if the time has run out, nurture this special place you've come to inside. Pause here and let go into God's presence within all of this, resting in the quiet tenderness of his Spirit for a while. [wait]

CLOSING PRAYER
When you are ready to end: As you savor all of this, let yourself know that this is God's personal love and grace, experienced and felt inside you. [pause] Staying in this holy and precious gift, you may wish to silently offer a prayer in response; and then when you are ready, just slowly open the eyes.

Do not worry if your mind wanders. That is only natural, and common when you are praying by yourself. Just return to the body-feel of where you left off; and then continue.

Companioned Prayer in the Moment[1]

Often it feels like it might be a good time or moment for Companioned Prayer but it is not practical to sit and devote the necessary time. Perhaps there is no readily quiet place to sit. Or

[1] I first heard many of the ideas in this and the next section from Ann McGlone in 1992 as a result of her work with Bio-Spiritual Focusing at the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange's Center for Spiritual Development. I have presented them here with a Companioned Prayer orientation.

perhaps something has just happened that has caused you to recollect or feel something special, and you don't want to wait or distance yourself from it before you listen for God's grace within it. There are many moments in our lives when we sense that there is something special within our experience of the moment. In those times it can feel like there is a quiet special tug associated with the moment. Classic examples can be when we are caught up in a sunset or sunrise, when we are reunited with loved ones, and when we feel God's presence in worship. Or perhaps something might trigger an important memory that we had forgotten or had neglected for so long, such as memories of childhood, special people, or special places. Various events in our lives can carry a subtle yet powerful sense that they are somehow connected with our personal journey as offered to us by God. When we feel them, they usually come to us spontaneously and they usually also pass on rather quickly. Often there is not any specific message associated with them as much as just a sense of being briefly enriched by the connection.

Yet these special moments can also be wonderful doorways to God's spirit through Companioned Prayer. If we have time to sit down in a quiet spot and spend some contemplative time within such moments that is great. And even better still if another person is there who can be our companion in the prayer. But more often, these moments catch us when we are busy or have commitments that we must keep. We don't have much time, there is no practiced companion available, and we may not even have a quiet place to sit. In such times what is needed is a way to be present to the moment and to see if there is anything more within it that God is calling you to notice. You can do this by just following the basics of Companioned Prayer when by yourself.

When you recognize that a special moment comes, if you can, close your eyes, and staying within the body-feel throughout:

1) Say a brief prayer to ask God to help you appreciate this moment of gift and for Jesus to be your companion as you spend a little time with it.
2) Notice how the moment feels in your body as you are held in Jesus loving arms.
3) Allow yourself to hold it gently within the loving heart of Jesus.
4) Notice how it feels to be with it in this tender faith filled way.
5) Let go into all of it within the gentle loving heart of Jesus, and wait in openness and faith to see if it feels like there is anything more in it that God may be calling you to be aware of.
6) If a symbol comes (a word, image, thought or feeling), notice how that now feels inside, and let go into that, with tenderness and faith.
7) Continue noticing and letting go in faith into whatever comes as long as it feels right.
8) When ready to stop, pause and rest in the gift of God's gentle presence for a while.
9) End with a brief prayer in response.

Even if you can't close your eyes or sit down, deliberately pause what you are doing long enough to spend a little time with the special feeling of the moment. Don't just ignore it or push it away in order to get on with your busy schedule. Stop and allow your attention to really go into it, and with gentleness and faith allow yourself to be open to what may come as a gift from God's spirit. Just allowing yourself to spend a little while with it in this way is in itself a gift.

An even briefer way of letting go into a moment, a kind of touch and go, is as follows:

1) When you notice a special feeling, pause to ask God to help you feel his tender love within it, and then pause to feel Jesus' loving presence in it, letting go into how all that feels.
2) Notice what that feels like in your body, and wait in openness and faith within his gentle love to see if it feels like there is anything more in it that God may be calling you to be aware of.
3) If a symbol comes (a word, image, memory, thought or feeling), notice how that now feels inside, and let go into that with tenderness and faith.
4) Continue noticing and letting go in faith into whatever comes, as long as it feels right.
5) When ready to stop, discern the gift of God's gentle presence in all this, and then end with a brief prayer in response.

Many times, even if we do not have time to sit down with these moments and to open ourselves up to God's possibilities within them, just spending a little time with them will plant them into the richness of our life. And when we do sit down with a companion for Companioned Prayer, we may find that they then again come up as something special that God is calling us to listen to.

Of course, God speaks to us through many other situations, not just these positive special moments. We all find ourselves challenged at various times by frustration, fear, anger, resentment, confusion, busyness, boredom, et cetera. Consider if at such times we listened within, would we find that perhaps God might ask us to learn something special from those moments? Something not necessarily logically or emotionally derived, but some graced understanding gifted to us? These challenging moments are also doorways into God's love for us as he calls us into our spiritual and human wholeness in him.

So, when you find yourself in these very human moments of trial, close your eyes and:

1) Ask for God's presence and mercy within your issue or feelings.
2) With Christ as your companion, let go into the sense of your feeling of trial and of the need for God's love, noticing how that all feels in your body as you are held tenderly in his arms.
3) Take all of it to the loving and compassionate heart of Jesus, and pause there within his tender love and acceptance.
4) Then, being open to the possibility of his gift, wait in faith to see if there might be something, some symbol (a word, image, memory or feeling) or understanding that he might be quietly calling you to notice.
5) If something comes, notice how that now feels inside, and let go into that with tenderness and faith.
6) Continue noticing and letting go in faith into whatever comes as long as it feels right.

7) When ready to stop, discern the gift of God's gentle presence in all this, and then end with a brief prayer in response.

Whether in moments of special positive awareness or in moments of trial, pause and ask God for his grace and mercy to be found in humble surrender to God, as he might choose to reveal the gift of his spirit from within the very unique moment you find yourself in. If within these moments of prayer, you do have an opportunity to sit and close the eyes to more attentively follow the petition of Christ, by all means do so.

Pray Within Other Activities

In addition to responding to special moments of gift and moments of challenge, some people find it is also possible to incorporate the practice into routine activities that lend themselves to quiet inner reflection. For example, you might incorporate it into walking, gardening, doing the dishes, or other similar activities. Reorient the activity, or some time within it, to be a prayer time, a special time to spend with God.

1) Begin with a quiet prayer for the time of the activity.
2) Then while engaged in the activity/prayer time be open to noticing anything special.
3) You may even ask yourself, "Is there anything about all of this [moment, activity, or subject that you find yourself in] that God might be calling me to listen to or notice?"
4) Pause to be in Jesus' loving heart with all this.
5) Let go into how it all feels inside and how you carry it in your body.
6) Wait in humble faith in Christ's gentle presence. Notice anything that comes.
7) Again let go into how that feels, being open to anything else that feels right to notice.
8) Continue noticing and letting go in faith into whatever comes as long as it feels right.
9) Then rest in God's presence with thanksgiving, offering a prayer in response when ending.

During an activity, be open to following a changing itinerary as it were. Be flexible and "go with the flow." And always be open to stopping the activity at any point during the prayer, closing the eyes, and more attentively following the prayer in faith and devotion. While praying within an activity can be helpful, like all forms of Companioned Prayer by yourself, it should not be a substitute for regular Companioned Prayer with a prayer partner or group within your faith community.

Continuing our Companioned Prayer Experiences

Our personal faith journey can be gifted by also taking regular time in personal prayer recollecting our prayer experiences with a prayer companion. It is usually most fruitful to do so when you have quiet time for personal prayer, and when your mind is most quiet, such as when you first wake up or perhaps other times set aside from your daily activities.

In these quiet personal periods, you can pray in openness and surrender to God, allowing yourself to settle into the gift of his presence felt and sensed with you. Allow time for this; do not rush. Take a minute or so to let your mind and presence become aware of the quiet alertness of and presence of God. Being drawn within his grace, allow yourself to recall your experience of a Companioned Prayer when you prayed with a prayer companion. Notice how all this prayer experience felt and where you came to in your prayer, and God's gift to you within it. Let go into all that, just resting in how it all felt and meant for you, and how it all feels and means to you now. Do not concentrate or force any of this to happen; just allow it all to happen with simple intention and faith. In resting in this, let yourself be nourished by this quiet, tender, personal experience. Whether you are drawn into more, or you simply rest within this special place, you will be nurtured and enlivened by God's grace, personally experienced. When finished, you can offer a simple or traditional prayer to God.

If it has been a while since your paired Companioned Prayer, and if you typically journal your Companioned Prayer experiences, just before entering into this personal prayer time of recollection, you may wish to look at your most recent Companioned Prayer journal entry. If your entry is long, just focus on the sense of the essence of the experience captured in the entry.

This type of prayerful recollection within times of quiet can be a significant continuation of our personal journey of faith and closeness with our Lord. Whether you do this for five, ten, fifteen minutes or more, and whether daily or periodically, as a frequent practice this prayerful melding of recollection and encounter can help us be tenderly drawn into the gift of God's divine presence.

The Gift of Regular Practice

If you regularly practice Companioned Prayer, even in its abbreviated forms when special moments come or during routine activities, or in quiet periods of recollection, you will naturally learn to be more attentive to moments of potential grace in your life. And you will realize that they are occurring all the time. You begin to realize that life is presenting you with endless possibilities to experience and respond to divine love. We find ourselves more and more in a state of being aware that we are blessed and are one with Christ. All of life is a living relationship with the Creator and giver. Being open to such possibilities should not however become an adopted mood. Life is meant to be lived naturally, spontaneously and authentically in the present. Being attentive to recognizing special moments and being open to God's presence within them must not be a mood-making exercise. It is just more of a habit of naturally noticing, questioning, recognizing and appreciating – within the context of faith.

We need a way to make our lives always more open to God's spirit. We need to imbue his love and caring into our relationships and into our everyday world. Such prayerful attentiveness will help to transform our lives and those around us into opportunities of gifted grace.

Chapter 8
Intercessory and Other Forms of the Prayer

I lift my eyes to the hills; – from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Psalm 121:1-2

Intercessory Companioned Prayer

Other forms of Companioned Prayer™ are possible. For example, below is a form when praying for others. Unlike most forms of intercessory prayer that are petitions, this form asks God whom we should be praying for and then leads us into whatever we should be aware of concerning this person or the issue that they represent. In other words, instead of petitioning God for God's specific actions or graces on behalf of someone else in need, we let God tell us what we need to hear concerning the person in need. The primary focus of this intercessory prayer is to bring another person to our awareness in a manner that invites us to know and share something about their situation that we would not be aware of in any other way. In the end, we may become aware of something that will allow us to be with the suffering person with more ease and love, or perhaps we will be aware of specific actions we can take to help the person, or perhaps there may be some other outcome of the prayer that is personal to us or to our relationship with the person. Like regular Companioned Prayer, at the end of this intercessory form (in the *CLOSING PRAYERS* movement) we may find ourselves praying a traditional intercessory prayer of petition for the person, or some other prayer that is appropriate to our Companioned Prayer experience.

You will see that this Intercessory Companioned Prayer includes much of the same open receptive language as in the standard Companioned Prayer form. Its difference is subtle but significant. This intercessory prayer form is also designed to be prayed with a companion.

The format for Intercessory Companioned Prayer follows. The *italic text* is instruction for the companion. The **bold text** is for the companion to say out loud. The instruction "*[pause]*" means that the companion should pause for about 10 to 15 seconds and then continue without waiting for a response from the person praying. The instruction "*[wait]*" means that the companion should wait until the person praying has given a response before further instructions are offered.

Intercessory Companioned Prayer™

OPENING PRAYERS
Begin by saying, **In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we open our hearts to you, O Lord. Amen.**

Then on behalf of the person you are praying with and yourself, say a personal prayer out loud.

> *For example: asking for Christ to be our companion; for our trust in the Lord; for the guidance of the Holy Spirit; to help us be aware of others' needs; asking Christ to be present within our needs, inside our very brokenness; to help us listen inside to God's quiet call; to be mindful of our sins, and of the grace and blessings received; or, to humbly journey inside with Christ.*

Then invite the other person to also say a personal prayer silently or out loud, and to say "Amen" when they are ready to continue. [wait for the person to say "Amen"]

AS WE ARE
Then say, **Coming before God as we are, take a few minutes to notice how you physically feel, held in the loving arms of our Lord.** *[briefly pause, and then continue]* **For example, let your attention go to your back and notice what that feels like.** *[pause]* **Notice your shoulders** *[pause]***, your neck** *[pause]***, your head** *[pause]***, your arms** *[pause]***, your hands** *[pause]***, your feet** *[pause]***, your legs** *[pause]***, your stomach** *[pause]***, your heart** *[pause]***, and your breathing.** *[longer pause]* **Notice the body-sense of how you feel right now** *[pause]***; and then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait for a response, and then go to ASKING GOD]*

ASKING GOD
<u>When they are ready</u>, say: **Staying with how this feels inside, and being open to God's loving presence; let me know if something comes when you ask yourself, "Of everyone in my life, who does it feel like, inside me right now, needs God's love and care?"** *[wait for a response]*

GOD'S LOVE AND COMPASSION
Notice how all this *<u>repeat name, relationship or symbol if shared</u>* **feels inside, and how you carry it.** *[pause]* **With tenderness and faith, notice how it feels to take all this to the loving heart of Jesus, and to feel his gentle love and compassion in all of this. Take your time, and then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait]*

LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS
<u>When they are ready to go on</u>: **Notice how it feels in your body to be with this, in this gentle, caring, faith-filled way. Allow your awareness to seep into your body, to settle in, and sense how <u>all</u> this feels inside.** *[pause]* **Within the gentle loving heart of Jesus, wait in openness and faith to see if it feels like there is anything else that God might want you to notice, such as a word, image, feeling or memory that seems to somehow fit with the way this whole thing feels, and then let me know.** *[wait]*

BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT

a. *If something comes, reflect back the symbol if shared, pause, and then ask,*

b. **Does this feel right, inside, to journey with some more?** *[wait for a response]*
If "no" go to RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.

c. *If "yes," say:* **Ask yourself, "How does all this** *repeat symbol if shared* **now feel in my body held in Jesus' love?"** *[pause]* **With gentleness and faith, let go into how all this feels inside; and let me know if anything comes that fits the way this all now feels.** *[wait]*

If something comes, go back to a.

Repeat a, b, c as long as the person wants to continue, or as time allows.

When they are ready to stop, go to RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.

RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE
When the person is ready to stop, or if the time has run out: **Okay; let's nurture this special place you've come to inside. Pause here and let go into God's presence within all of this, resting in the quiet tenderness of his Spirit for a while. And then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait]*

CLOSING PRAYERS
When they are ready to end, say: **As you savor all of this, let yourself know that this is God's personal love and grace, experienced and felt inside us.** *[pause]* **Staying in this holy and precious gift, you may wish to silently offer a prayer in response, and then say "Amen."** *[wait]*

When they are finished, say out loud a brief prayer or blessing, also ending with "Amen."

After the prayer or blessing, you may invite the person to write in their journal if they wish.

Guidelines for Intercessory Companioned Prayer

Some notes pertaining to the above form of intercessory prayer are offered below. Also use the guidelines provided in chapters 10, 11 and 12 as applicable.

OPENING PRAYERS

In your opening prayer include personal prayers of petition and intercession for the individuals you are concerned about.

AS WE ARE

See the guidelines in chapters 10, 11 and 12 pertaining to this prayer movement.

ASKING GOD

Be open to finding out that the person whom God's wants you to be aware of at this time might be someone other than the person you had in mind. Be open to the possibility that the person who may need God's love and care is yourself. Or, what comes may include your relationship with someone. Or it might even be someone who has passed on. If one of these happens, do not put that message aside, thinking that it shouldn't be someone other than whom you had in mind, shouldn't be you or involve you, or shouldn't be someone who has died. God may be calling you to listen to something very special in his own way. Have trust in him. A symbol or subject that may initially come may not even be a person; but if followed, it may lead to an awareness of someone in need. Following how God calls us may lead to the person you were concerned about with insight and compassion that might not be possible any other way. If the person you had in mind does not end up being included in your prayer, you can always pray the Intercessory Companioned Prayer again later.

GOD'S LOVE AND COMPASSION

Here we take our prayer subject to Jesus' loving heart and allow ourselves to feel how the whole issue feels inside us, in faith. As in regular Companioned Prayer, we notice how this feels in our body, how we are carrying all of this. This is not a step where we ask God to love the person or situation that we are praying about, outside of how we are feeling about the person or situation within ourselves. Nor are we handing the person off to God for him to fix or take care of as his responsibility. In other words, we are not creating a mental picture of someone and then giving that God's love, nor are we simply mentally or emotionally petitioning God for his love for them. Instead, we continue to be aware of how God has revealed that the person or the situation feels within us, how we are carrying it; and that is what we bring to Jesus' loving Heart. Then we allow our self to feel his flowing love and compassion in all of that. In this prayer we are not the intercessor praying for another person. Christ is our intercessor for all of us. In faith in his saving intercessory love for us all, we humbly place our self and our prayer subject in his loving Sacred Heart, while in faith we personally accept his tender compassion with our prayer subject as we are now one with it as it is further revealed to us, as we hold and carry it in our prayer.

LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF GOD
BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT
RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE

See the guidelines in chapters 10, 11 and 12 pertaining to these prayer movements.

CLOSING PRAYERS

As in regular Companioned Prayer, allow yourself a closing prayer that is appropriate to the Intercessory Companioned Prayer experience that you have just had. In doing so you may find yourself praying in thankfulness or worship, or praying a traditional prayer of petition or intercession, or for strength of a new understanding within your relationship with the person you were praying about, or perhaps for strength and faith to carry out specific helping actions on behalf of the person. Any variety of responses may be appropriate.

Compassionate Intercessory Companioning

When companioning someone using the intercessory prayer form, consider your companioning to be part of the person's prayer. Therefore, companion with a sense of compassion for the person, relationship or situation being experienced in the prayer, as well as for the person you are companioning. Envelope both within the love and compassion that you can share. You do not need to know who the person is praying for or the details of any relationship or situation in order to extend your prayer to the person you are with and those they may be praying for.

Intercessory Companioned Prayer When by Yourself

Another form of Intercessory Companioned Prayer that can be used when you are by yourself is provided below. Note that it has some slight variances from the other form. Also see chapter 7 with regards to praying by yourself.

OPENING PRAYER
Begin the Intercessory Companioned Prayer by saying, **In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, I open my heart to you, O Lord.** *Then say a personal prayer.*

> *For example: asking for Christ to be our companion; for our trust in the Lord; for the guidance of the Holy Spirit; to help us be aware of others' needs; asking Christ to be present within all our needs, inside our very brokenness; or to help us listen inside to God's quiet call, etc. Include intercessory petitions for the needs of specific individuals.*

AS WE ARE
Coming before God as we are, take a few minutes to notice how you physically feel as you are held tenderly in the loving arms of our Lord. [briefly pause, and then continue] For example, let your attention go to your back and notice what that feels like. [pause] Notice your shoulders [pause], your neck [pause], your head [pause], your arms [pause], your hands [pause], your feet [pause], your legs [pause], your stomach [pause], your heart [pause], and your breathing. [longer pause] Notice the body-sense of how you feel right now. [pause] When you are ready to go on, go to ASKING GOD.

ASKING GOD
When you are ready, stay with how this feels inside, and being open to God's loving presence; be aware if something comes when you ask yourself, **"Of everyone in my life, who does it feel like, inside me right now, needs God's love and care?"** *[wait for a response]*

GOD'S LOVE AND COMPASSION
Notice how all this repeat name, relationship or symbol, if desired feels inside, and how you carry it. With tenderness and faith, notice how it feels to take this to the loving heart of Jesus, and to feel his gentle love and care. Take your time, allowing yourself to feel God's tender love within all this.

LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS
When you are ready to go on: Notice how it feels in your body to be with this in this gentle, caring, faith-filled way. Allow your awareness to seep into your body, to settle in, and sense how all this feels inside. [pause] Within the gentle loving heart of Jesus, wait in openness and faith to see if it feels like there is anything else that God might want you to notice, such as a word, image, feeling or memory that seems to somehow fit with the way this whole thing feels. [wait for a response]

BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT

a. *If something comes, notice the symbol, pause, and then silently ask yourself,* **"Does this** *repeat symbol* **feel right, inside, to journey with some more?"** *[wait for a response]*
b. *If "no" go to RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.*
c. *If "yes," with gentleness and faith, let go into how all this feels inside; and wait to see if anything comes that fits the way this all now feels. [wait for a response]*

Repeat a, b, c as long as you want to continue, or as time allows.

When you are ready to stop, go to RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.

RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE
When you are ready to stop, or if the time has run out, nurture this special place you've come to inside. Pause here and let go into God's presence within all of this, resting in the quiet tenderness of his Spirit for a while. [wait]

CLOSING PRAYER
When you are ready to end: As you savor all of this, let yourself know that this is God's personal love and grace, experienced and felt inside you. [pause] Staying in this holy and precious gift, you may wish to silently offer a prayer in response; and then when you are ready, just slowly open the eyes.

Forms for all of the Church Seasons

Each of the Church seasons and times can have its own Companioned Prayer form, as offered below for the Roman Catholic calendar year or its equivalent in other denominations. In each of these Companioned Prayer forms, it is important to be open to whatever God wants us to pray about in response to the ASKING GOD question, and to not seek a response aligned with what we might decide is a theologically correct response.

Advent

Advent is a time of anticipation and preparation; a time of waiting and longing for the birth of Jesus.

Use the Ordinary Form but replace the question within *ASKING GOD* with, "**What feels like my heart longs for, inside me right now?**"

Christmas Season

Christmas is a time of joy, thanksgiving, and hope.

Use the Ordinary Form but replace the question within *ASKING GOD* with, "**Of everything in my life, what feels like I am especially thankful for, inside me right now?**"

Ordinary Time

Ordinary time is when we know that Jesus is with us, when we can quietly and attentively listen inside and be with him in prayer.

For the season of Ordinary Time between the Christmas and Lent seasons, and again between the Easter and Advent seasons, use the Ordinary Form, which asks, **"Of everything going on in my life, what feels like God is calling me to listen to, inside me right now?"**

The Lenten Season

Lent is a time to get ready for the death of Jesus. It is a time of introspection and preparation, a time to seek a personal closeness with God.

During Lent use the form in the following section of this chapter, which asks, **"Does it feel like there is anything in my life right now, keeping me from God?**

The Paschal Triduum

The Paschal Triduum is the time of the passion (suffering) of Jesus, a time when God asked him to sacrifice everything for love of the Father and for the love of us.

The Paschal Triduum is a very short three-day season. During Holy Week, from Thursday to Saturday's Easter Vigil, use the Paschal Triduum Form, which asks, "**Of everything going on in my life, what feels like God is asking of me, inside me right now?**"

Easter Season

Easter is time of hope and a time of being called to a new awakening, a new relationship with our risen Lord. When Jesus appeared to his disciples after his death, each time he called them to a new purpose, to a new understanding, and a new mission.

Use the Ordinary Form but replace the question within *ASKING GOD* with, "**Does it feel like Jesus is calling me in some way, inside me right now?**"

The above standard prayer forms can be downloaded from the "Resources" page of the CPCF's website at www.companionedprayer.org/resources.

A Lenten Prayer Form

The standard Companioned Prayer format for use during Lent is provided below.

Companioned Prayer™
for the season of Lent

OPENING PRAYERS
Begin by saying, **In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we open our hearts to you, O Lord. Amen.**

Then on behalf of the person you are praying with and yourself, say a personal prayer out loud.

> *For example: asking for Christ to be our companion; for our trust in the Lord; for the guidance of the Holy Spirit; thankfulness for this time of quiet; asking Christ to be present within our needs, inside our very brokenness; to help us listen inside to God's quiet call; to be mindful of our sins, and of the grace and blessings received; for God's mercy; or, to humbly journey inside with Christ.*

Then invite the other person to also say a personal prayer silently or out loud, and to say "Amen" when they are ready to continue. [wait]

AS WE ARE
Then say, **Coming before God as we are, take a few minutes to notice how you physically feel, held tenderly in the loving arms of our Lord.** *[briefly pause, and then continue]* **For example, let your attention go to your back and notice what that feels like.** *[pause]* **Notice your shoulders** *[pause]***, your neck** *[pause]***, your head** *[pause]***, your arms** *[pause]***, your hands** *[pause]***, your feet** *[pause]***, your legs** *[pause]***, your stomach** *[pause]***, your heart** *[pause]***, and your breathing.** *[longer pause]* **Notice the body-sense of how you feel right now** *[pause]***; and then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait for a response, and then go to ASKING GOD]*

ASKING GOD
When they are ready, say: **Staying with how this feels inside, and being open to God's loving presence; let me know if something comes when you ask yourself, "Does it feel like there is anything in my life right now, keeping me from God?"** *[wait for a response]*

GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE
Notice how all this *repeat symbol if shared* **feels inside, and how you carry it.** *[pause]* **With tenderness and faith, notice how it feels to take all this to the loving heart of Jesus, and to feel his gentle love and acceptance in all of this. Take your time, and then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait]*

LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS
When they are ready to go on: **Notice how it feels in your body to be with this, in this gentle, caring, faith-filled way. Allow your awareness to seep into your body, to settle in, and sense how all this feels inside.** *[pause]* **Within the gentle loving heart of Jesus, wait in openness and faith to see if it feels like there is anything else that God might want you to notice, such as a word, image, feeling or memory that seems to somehow fit with the way this whole thing feels, and then let me know.** *[wait]*

BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT

a. *If something comes, reflect back the symbol if shared, pause, and then ask,*

b. **Does this feel right, inside, to journey with some more?** *[wait for a response]*
If "no" go to RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.

c. *If "yes," say:* **Ask yourself, "How does all this** *repeat symbol if shared* **now feel in my body held in Jesus' love?"** *[pause]* **With gentleness and faith, let go into how all this feels inside; and let me know if anything comes that fits the way this all now feels.** *[wait]*

If something comes, go back to a.

Repeat a, b, c as long as the person wants to continue, or as time allows.

When they are ready to stop, go to RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.

RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE
When the person is ready to stop, or if the time has run out: **Okay; let's nurture this special place you've come to inside. Pause here and let go into God's presence within all of this, resting in the quiet tenderness of his Spirit for a while. And then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait]*

CLOSING PRAYERS
When they are ready to end, say: **As you savor all of this, let yourself know that this is God's personal love and grace, experienced and felt inside us.** *[pause]* **Staying in this holy and precious gift, you may wish to silently offer a prayer in response, and then say "Amen."** *[wait]*

When they are finished, say out loud a brief prayer or blessing, also ending with "Amen."

After the prayer or blessing, you may invite the person to write in their journal if they wish.

A Prayer for Confession

In preparing for the Rite of Reconciliation (confession), one may wonder what to bring to God in confession. What is most in need of bringing forth and receiving God's mercy within us? One approach to a most personally meaningful confession within the Rite of Reconciliation is to turn to God and ask within yourself what he wants you to bring to him. Another words, of everything that you are carrying within yourself (your hurts, your disappointments, your failures, even your aspirations or personal will or ego), is there something that especially stands out and

feels right to bring to the personal love of God in confession? Note that the following form does not limit our awareness to sin, but allows for following any response that feels on-target with *ASKING GOD*. The following prayer form can be used in this regard. In fact, it may lead you to understand or appreciate more of the depth and significance of the issue identified, which can form a larger more whole meaning to share and be with during the rite.

Companioned Prayer™
In preparation for the Rite of Reconciliation

OPENING PRAYERS
Begin by saying, **In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we open our hearts to you, O Lord. Amen.**

Then on behalf of the person you are praying with and yourself, say a personal prayer out loud.

> *For example: asking for Christ to be our companion; for our trust in the Lord; for the guidance of the Holy Spirit; thankfulness for this time of quiet; asking Christ to be present within our needs, inside our very brokenness; to help us listen inside to God's quiet call; to be mindful of our sins, and of the grace and blessings received; for God's mercy; or, to humbly journey inside with Christ.*

Then invite the other person to also say a personal prayer silently or out loud, and to say "Amen" when they are ready to continue. [wait]

AS WE ARE
Then say, **Coming before God as we are, take a few minutes to notice how you physically feel, held tenderly in the loving arms of our Lord.** *[briefly pause, and then continue]* **For example, let your attention go to your back and notice what that feels like.** *[pause]* **Notice your shoulders** *[pause]***, your neck** *[pause]***, your head** *[pause]***, your arms** *[pause]***, your hands** *[pause]***, your feet** *[pause]***, your legs** *[pause]***, your stomach** *[pause]***, your heart** *[pause]***, and your breathing.** *[longer pause]* **Notice the body-sense of how you feel right now** *[pause]***; and then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait for a response, and then go to ASKING GOD]*

ASKING GOD
When they are ready, say: **Staying with how this feels inside, and being open to God's loving presence; let me know if something comes when you ask yourself, "Of everything that I am carrying inside me, what feels right to bring to the loving heart of Jesus in confession right now?"** *[wait for a response]*

GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE
Notice how all this *repeat symbol if shared* **feels inside, and how you carry it.** *[pause]* **With tenderness and faith, notice how it feels to take all this to the loving heart of Jesus, and to feel his gentle love and acceptance in all of this. Take your time, and then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait]*

LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS
When they are ready to go on: **Notice how it feels in your body to be with this, in this gentle, caring, faith-filled way. Allow your awareness to seep into your body, to settle in, and sense how all this feels inside.** *[pause]* **Within the gentle loving heart of Jesus, wait in openness and faith to see if it feels like there is anything else that God might want you to notice, such as a word, image, feeling or memory that seems to somehow fit with the way this whole thing feels, and then let me know.** *[wait]*

BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT

a. *If something comes, reflect back the symbol if shared, pause, and then ask,*

b. **Does this feel right, inside, to journey with some more?** *[wait for a response]*
If "no" go to RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.

c. *If "yes," say:* **Ask yourself, "How does all this** *repeat symbol if shared* **now feel in my body held in Jesus' love?"** *[pause]* **With gentleness and faith, let go into how all this feels inside; and let me know if anything comes that fits the way this all now feels.** *[wait]*

If something comes, go back to a.

Repeat a, b, c as long as the person wants to continue, or as time allows.

When they are ready to stop, go to RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.

RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE
When the person is ready to stop, or if the time has run out: **Okay; let's nurture this special place you've come to inside. Pause here and let go into God's presence within all of this, resting in the quiet tenderness of his Spirit for a while. And then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait]*

CLOSING PRAYERS
When they are ready to end, say: **As you savor all of this, let yourself know that this is God's personal love and grace, experienced and felt inside us.** *[pause]* **Staying in this holy and precious gift, you may wish to silently offer a prayer in response, and then say "Amen."** *[wait]*

When they are finished, say out loud a brief prayer or blessing, also ending with "Amen."

After the prayer or blessing, you may invite the person to write in their journal if they wish.

Perhaps someday this form will be included in how the rite is offered. This form for confession is available on the CPCF website, and may also be used as an additional standard prayer form during Lent.

An Abbreviated Format without the Feedback Lines

If you have been practicing Companioned Prayer with one or more regular prayer companions for some time, at least a few months, you may wish to use the prayer in a more

abbreviated format. This shorter format retains the prayer's eight movements, but offers less text said out loud, thereby minimizing the companion's spoken intrusion into a person's inner prayer experience. For example, all of the text that asks for feedback is removed. In other words, without the lines such as, "let me know when we are ready to go on," "let me know if something comes," et cetera. Without these instructional feedback lines, it is incumbent upon the person praying to let their companion know the status of their prayer after each place where the feedback instruction would have occurred. In the abbreviated forms, the *AS WE ARE* prayer movement is offered without the direction to notice each part of the body; instead, it is up to the person praying to take the time to do that or to become aware of how they are physically feeling. Alternatively, you may ask your companion to use the standard prayer version of the *AS WE ARE* movement, while using the abbreviated format for all other movements.

In the abbreviated form provided below, the person praying may also ask for any of the text in ***bold italic*** to also not be spoken. For example, in the *LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS* prayer movement, you may want your companion to read one of the first two sentences in italic, but not the other. Thus, if you wish to be companioned with an abbreviated form, it is important to let your companion know exactly what parts of the bold italic text that you do not want your companion to read. If you do not do this, your companion should use the form as provided, reading all of the bold italic text. Even if any of the bold italic text is not said out loud, the person praying may still silently follow the italic text's intention. However, reduction beyond the bold italic text should be cautiously resisted, as all of the basic components of the prayer are usually necessary to allow for a complete companioned faith experience. *Changes to the wording of the bold italicized text (other than removal) should be avoided. Changes to the bold text which is not italicized, should not occur, as the result would no longer be Companioned Prayer.*

When becoming familiar with the abbreviated prayer form, experience the complete abbreviated form (with all of the bold italic text) a few times before beginning to remove any of the bold italic text. Experience the various ways to practice this prayer form in order to discern the optimum balance for you. An example of a personally selected and blended abbreviated form is available on the CPCF website. You are encouraged to create one that is right for you.

The abbreviated versions should not be used to shorten the prayer experience or to facilitate hurrying through the prayer. Therefore, when using an abbreviated format it is vital to continue to take as much time within each movement as necessary to allow yourself to truly slow down and notice the subtleties of your unfolding prayer experience as you journey within with Christ. In fact, after establishing familiarity with the abbreviated format of your choice, the lack of feedback instructions subtly removes the impending impact of that expectation, which can result in the person praying letting go further into the quiet and grace of each prayer movement, and actually lengthening their time in prayer and deepening their prayer experiences.

The abbreviated forms should only be used by those already familiar with the nuances of the complete prayer. The abbreviated forms for all of the Church seasons are available at: www.CompanionedPrayer.org/supplemental-resources.

Companioned Prayer™

Abbreviated form for the season of Ordinary Time

For use by prayer partners familiar with each other's prayer style.
*Any of the **bold italic** text may be skipped if desired by the person praying.*

OPENING PRAYERS
In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we open our hearts to you, O Lord. Amen.

On behalf of the person you are praying with and yourself, say a personal prayer out loud.

Then invite the other person to also say a personal prayer silently or out loud. [wait]

AS WE ARE
Coming before God as we are, take a few minutes to notice how you physically feel*, held tenderly in the loving arms of our Lord.* *[briefly pause]* ***For example, let your attention go to different parts of your body, noticing the body-sense of how you feel right now.*** *[wait]*

ASKING GOD
Staying with how this feels inside, and being open to God's loving presence; ask yourself, "*Of everything going on in my life,* what feels like God is calling me to listen to, inside me right now?" *[wait]*

GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE
Notice how all this *repeat symbol if shared* ***feels inside, and how you carry it.*** *[pause]* **With tenderness and faith, notice how it feels to take all this to the loving heart of Jesus, and to feel his gentle love and acceptance in all of this.** *[wait]*

LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS
Notice how it feels in your body to be with this, in this gentle, caring, faith-filled way. Allow your awareness to seep into your body, to settle in, and sense how all this feels inside. *[pause]* **Within the gentle loving heart of Jesus, wait in openness and faith to see if it feels like there is anything else that God might want you to notice** ***that seems to somehow fit with the way this whole thing feels.*** *[wait]*

BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT

a. *If something comes, reflect back the symbol if shared, pause, and then ask,*

b. ***Does this feel right, inside, to journey with some more?*** *[wait for a response]*
If "no" go to RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.

c. *If "yes," say:* **Ask yourself, "How does all this** *repeat symbol if shared* **now feel in my body** ***held in Jesus' love*****?"** *[pause]* **With gentleness and faith, let go into how all this feels inside*****; and see if anything comes that fits how this all now feels.*** *[wait]*
If something comes, go back to a.

Repeat a, b, c as long as the person wants to continue, or as time allows.

When they are ready to stop, go to RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.

RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE
Okay; let's nurture this special place you've come to inside. **Pause here and let go into God's presence within all of this*, resting in the quiet tenderness of his Spirit for a while.*** *[wait]*

CLOSING PRAYERS
As you savor all of this, let yourself know that this is God's personal love and grace, experienced and felt inside us. *[pause]* ***Staying within all of this, you may wish to silently offer a prayer in response.*** *[wait]*

When they are finished, say out loud a brief prayer or blessing.

After the prayer or blessing, you may invite the person to write in their journal if they wish.

An Abbreviated Format for Praying by Oneself

In addition to the shortened formats offered in chapter 7, Praying by Oneself, there are times when you may feel it is appropriate to pray a very abbreviated Companioned Prayer when you are praying without a prayer partner or companion. The abbreviated format offered below should only be used after some months of regular experience with the prayer, and only if you feel inwardly called to do so. This abbreviated prayer is not a more advanced form of the prayer. It is vital that you have enough experience of the full Companioned Prayer to ensure that your experience using this abbreviated format retains the thorough scope of the full prayer, even if it is not stated, and even though some of the movements of this abbreviated format ostensibly appear directed more to God than toward your inner experience. This abbreviated format should not be used exclusively; the other forms of the prayer presented in chapters 4, 7, 8 and 12 should be used as well.

Throughout keep the balance of awareness of body, mind/emotion and spirit as a prayer of interior trust and surrender to the Lord. Always bring in portions of the full Companioned Prayer as appropriate for any particular situation in the prayer.

The basic movements of this very abbreviated Companioned Prayer format when praying by oneself are briefly as follows:

1. *Say a short invitatory prayer or offer a period of reflective silence with the Lord.*

2. *Notice the general sense of how your body is feeling, held in Jesus' loving arms.*

3. *Say,* **God, what do you want me to listen to?**

4. *When something comes say,* **In this, and in your compassionate loving heart, I wait Lord.**

5. *When something comes say,* **Within all this, in you Lord, I listen.**

6. *Wait, and repeat 4 and 5 as led by the Holy Spirit.*

7. *When ready to stop, say,* **I rest in you, Lord***, and pause.*

8. *When ready to end, say,* **Thank you for loving me.**

9. *Follow with a personal closing prayer.*

Always use any part of the full Companioned Prayer whenever you feel it is appropriate.

For an equivalent abbreviated format for intercessory prayer, instead of saying, "God, what do you want me to listen to?" say, "**God, who needs your love and care right now?**"

When using the above abbreviated format for praying by yourself, keep your experience grounded in the body-feel of your prayer subject and in God's grace received. Do not replace your authentic felt experience or graced awareness with theological or elevated concepts of God.

Companioned Prayer with Children

Children find that they can quite easily practice Companioned Prayer; in fact, often easier than adults! Their familiarity with play with its ready movement of awareness, naturally lend themselves to the inner movements of the prayer. Children are able to easily enter the prayer with their full attention, without looking for structured explanations or intellectual justifications. The prayer form provided in chapter 4 is also very suitable for children. However, sometimes a more spontaneous or simpler approach is beneficial. These simplified formats can be similar to the movements described in chapter 7 under "Companioned Prayer in the Moment" except modified to include a companion. They can be used in a "formal" sit-down session; or they can be used "in the moment" as previously described.

For example, if a child comes in from school with a heavy heart or challenge from some incident, you might ask the child if you could be their prayer companion. When a child is particularly upset, it is beneficial to spend time helping them notice how they carry their feeling in their body (*AS WE ARE*). You do not need to know the cause of the child's distress in order to companion them in this manner. For example, one evening my youngest son, who was ten at the time, arrived at my bedside extremely upset. He had severe allergies and was all stuffed up, was having trouble breathing, and could not calm down to go to sleep. He was crying hysterically and I could not make much sense of what he was trying to say. I invited him to pray while he was standing next to the bed. After nodding his assent among the sobs, the first challenge was to get him to calm down enough to begin the inner listening. I knew that he needed to refocus his attention on his body.

So I asked him to hop up and down on one foot, and then the other, noticing what his legs felt like while he was doing it. Then I asked him to close his eyes and swing his arms one by one, noticing how they felt. Next, he rolled his head and neck, felt his sides and stomach, et cetera. Throughout this process I continually invited him to notice how his body felt. I could see him calming down. The tears stopped; the attention was inward. I asked him to notice if there was any

place in his body where he could physically feel how upset he was. He nodded yes, and I ask him to put his hand there and to feel Jesus' gentle comfort. He placed his hand on his stomach and felt God's gentleness. I asked him to continue with gentleness and wait to see if there was anything that God might be calling him to notice in all of that. After a few cycles of noticing, he smiled and said that God had told him that it was okay that his dad had died. (His father had died of cancer when he was four.) His response was a great surprise to me, but I just invited him to spend some time with how all that felt inside and to let me know if it felt right to continue. Staying with his inner awareness, he said that this was the right place to stop. I encouraged him to pause and notice how all that felt, and to say a prayer in response. When he opened his eyes, he knew he had received a special gift of God's healing love and understanding. His breathing had also cleared, he was calm and was at peace. I told him that he had been kissed by God, and he happily went off to bed.

In another example, my oldest son who was eleven at the time, had been gladly participating in instruction for about five weeks in preparation for being baptized at the Easter vigil service. He knew it was very important; a defining decision and moment in his life. As the evening service approached, he became quite nervous about the decision. I didn't ask him what his specific issues were, but instead after dinner I asked him if it would feel okay to spend some time with it in prayer. He agreed, so we sat next to each other on the sofa, and I began to companion him. He immediately sensed his overarching baptismal issue, and journeyed with it, with faith, compassion and gentleness. I could see by his changing face and body language that he was following a process of inner revelation and grace. At the end, he had a very peaceful look, and when he opened his eyes, I asked him if he was ready to be baptized. He turned to me with clear eyes and conviction, and said, "Oh yes, I *am* ready."

This approach to childhood's challenges can help our children to be open to receiving God's grace in their time of need without any judgments or explanations from us. After the prayer experience you can ask if they would like to share anything about their prayer experience, and provide parental support as appropriate. If they do share, it is important not to enter into criticism or judgment, as they will then consider this to be part of their prayer experience, diminishing their trust and willingness to enter into prayer the next time. If you must address the child's situation, try to wait a little while, or at least move to another location or activity in order to establish a clear break with their prayer experience.

Such an approach will let children learn that God's love and graceful understandings can be received in the midst of trial. Of course, the offer to be their prayer companion need not be limited to times of trial. Times of either challenge or grace can be an appropriate moment. For example on a hike, or while camping or sailing, you might offer to pause and be their companion. In all cases it is important that the child always be invited and not told to practice the prayer. The child must enter the prayer of his or her own freewill.

This process of inviting the child to seek comfort and understanding from within also teaches the parent to trust in God's closeness and the gift of his inner wisdom. The parent can learn that they do not have to fix, correct or teach every aspect of their child's life when the child has the inner gifted resources right at hand. This can change the parent-child relationship, freeing the parent from much worry and the perceived need for constant control. The parent will also find that a spiritual awareness and appreciation of the mystery of God will naturally blossom with the child's growth.

Once the child experiences being companioned in prayer, they can also experience companioning others. In fact they may, on their own, recognize situations in others that would be a natural opportunity for prayer. Children can show other children how to hold a hurt or special moment in the body-feeling of Jesus' tender love, and to attentively let go into that, waiting for movement and grace. Because children can so easily follow Companioned Prayer's inner movements, it is quite simple for them to spontaneously share this gift with others, without the need of a formal prayer format.

Children can also offer the prayer to adults, especially family members they love. This can include parents and grandparents, when those adults demonstrate a willingness to be vulnerable and non-controlling to the child, and who understand that a child's offer to companion them is in itself a special gift of love and grace.

When our children practice this prayer, both during regular sit-down times, and during "in the moment" times, they will grow into a maturity and spiritual freedom never before experienced. A new generation will be created by God: free, open, loving, secure and safe in God's love, without the need to control or hurt others. They will grow in spirituality and grace, and the world will be changed.

Chapter 9
Sharing Companioned Prayer

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 13:34-35

After you have been practicing Companioned Prayer™ with a partner or in a group for a while, you may find that you want to share the prayer with others. Or perhaps you have just been introduced to the prayer yourself, and you would like to share it with friends or family members. Follow the call in your heart, and share this gift with others. You are ready whenever you feel the call, whether you have been practicing the prayer for years or whether you have had only a few prayer experiences. The guidelines in this and the next four chapters can help you provide caring and effective sharing.

If you have not yet begun to practice Companioned Prayer, do not use the material in this chapter to learn the prayer. Instead, experience the prayer from a Companioned Prayer ministry group that uses the approach and material in chapter 4. If no group is available to you, with the support of your pastor, simply get together with a few friends using the material in chapter 4. After you have been practicing the prayer for a while, you and your group may wish to then use the material of this chapter 9 to expand your group and offer new opportunities for people to experience the prayer.

Companioned Prayer requires a compassionate, faith-filled environment of fellowship, friendship and trust. The sharing 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, compassionate sharing, caring, and trust must be consciously fostered.

There are many ways to experience and share Companioned Prayer. In all instances when you are initially experiencing the prayer or are sharing it with others, you should consider it 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 it is all going, so you can all benefit from your collective 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.

Overview of the Sharing Experience

The initial approach to sharing the prayer was a formal instructional series which focused on the nuances of the prayer such as in chapters 10 and 11. However, it was discovered through many years of offering these programs, that detailed descriptions of the prayer process and many instructional sessions (e.g., 10, 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.

The next approach developed was one of personal mentoring within a formal series of usually four or five sessions. In this approach, individuals experienced in the prayer companion one person at a time, and then assist them reflect upon their prayer experience. The advantage of this approach was that it refocused the learning from intellectual instruction to the individuals' own actual experiences. However, the drawback of this approach was that the people learning the prayer may find themselves in a position of trying to meet the expectations of the mentors or they may feel self-imposed pressure to "get it right," thereby fostering some potential performance anxiety. This approach also continued to foster a hierarch of teacher (i.e., mentor) / student, and an artificial or intellectual complexity of the prayer process.

It has since been discovered that sharing the prayer is very easy. Individuals who wish to experience the prayer can simply come to an existing Companioned Prayer circle and participate. An experienced companion can briefly provide some very basic guidance when companioning occurs. A packet of the basic handouts can be provided for the person to review later when at home. By simply coming to the group a few times and experiencing the prayer and experiencing companioning, one can easily become familiar with the prayer. As noted in chapter 5, prayer groups can orient themselves to welcoming people in this way.

However, when a number of people wish to learn the prayer at the same time, a more formal approach can be advantageous. This can be the situation when the prayer ministry is offering an introductory series such as during Lent or some other liturgical season. These series can be well publicized in advance and sponsored by the parish leadership. Basic instruction can be provided in as little as two sessions, or can easily be expanded into more sessions, e.g., from four to six, to allow more opportunities to experience and discuss the prayer, as well as opportunities to include additional types of prayer such as *lectio divina*, or to weave into the discussions a specific theme such as "pilgrimage," "contemplation," "listening for God in our lives," "falling in love with Jesus," etcetera. An example of a basic four-session series is available on the CPCF website's supplemental resources page, as is a generic five-session series that combines *lectio divina*, St Ignatius's daily Examen, Companioned Prayer, and the Eucharist. Note that this latter series is not intended to teach Companioned Prayer as much as it is to introduce participants to the interior prayer experience. Taking the time to familiarize people with general interior prayer experiences can be very helpful, particularly for people with no contemplative prayer experience. This approach can also be supported with discussion of the Church's teachings on contemplative prayer, so that parishioners can appreciate how these interior prayer experiences can nurture a more personal intimate relationship with Christ.

Continued participation in an ongoing Companioned Prayer circle after a series is assumed in order to appreciate the prayer's depths and gifts. In fact, learning the prayer does not usually

occur in an introductory series. It occurs in continued participation in a Companioned Prayer circle. The purpose of an introductory series or an introductory retreat is simply to initially become familiar with the prayer in order to facilitate continuation in a prayer group.

In either case, whether simply welcoming individuals into a prayer group, or facilitating a group in a formal series, the recommended approach is neither instructionally oriented nor does it use mentors for the companioning. Instead, in a group led by one or two experienced companions, when it is time for experiencing the prayer, the new people simply companion each other in pairs. Sharing focuses on the inner experience of companioned prayer within a warm and welcoming faith community. In a series, the prayer can be experienced in stages, first in response to group prayer exercises, then in pairs using a shorter version of the prayer that does not have all of the prayer movements, and then finally using the full standard prayer.

One-On-One Sharing

While the previous section focused primarily on sharing Companioned Prayer in a small group setting or by welcoming people in an ongoing prayer group, you should also feel empowered to share the prayer personally with a friend or a couple of friends. In friendship and faith, offer to share your experiences and the prayer with other people, even one person at a time, as you feel called to do so. This can be as part of an established ministry or simply on your own. Simply follow the call and love of God in your heart.

When sharing the prayer with another person, personal friendship, kindness, and fellowship foster the ability for inner surrender in faith and trust. Within this personal approach, the CPCF's basic handouts can also be offered.

One-on-one sharing sessions can continue with the person as part of a continued personal relationship in prayer, and/or can become part of a larger ongoing prayer group or a service ministry.

Outreach

Introducing the prayer to others either in formal sessions or simply welcoming people to a prayer group, can be preceded by outreach to let people know about the prayer, opportunities to experience it, and opportunities for small group support and subsequent retreats. The most effective outreach is personal: personally inviting others and sharing your story and feelings about Companioned Prayer and about your Companioned Prayer ministry with them. You can do this individually with friends or acquaintances, and you can also do so in group settings.

It does little good to talk about the details of the prayer, its relationship to theology, or other esoteric characteristics of the prayer. Likewise, detailed handouts about the prayer are not useful. What is important is your testimony about the prayer experience, and how it has affected you. All questions should be invited, and answered as best you can.

It is important to always obtain the full support of your priest or minister before offering Companioned Prayer in their parish or community. Therefore, personal outreach should start with them. For a discussion about possible resistance by your faith leader, see "Resistance to Compan-

ioned Prayer" in chapter 13. The prayer at the end of that section can also be used in outreach to others, and is included within the sample outline for an introductory presentation.

Introductory Presentations of the Companioned Prayer Ministry

When presenting to a group, again the best approach is personal sharing of your Companioned Prayer ministry and your Companioned Prayer experiences, together with offering people an opportunity to experience some brief group prayers of inner grace. A sample outline of an hour-long presentation that introduces your Companioned Prayer ministry, and its group prayers, are available on the CPCF's supplemental resources webpage. Also provided are sample flyers, reminder cards, and a signup sheet. If possible, have two people experienced with Companioned Prayer lead the presentation and share their personal experiences. It is the combination of hearing your personal stories of Companioned Prayer, experiencing the quiet inner grace afforded by the group prayers, and your warmth and enthusiasm that will motivate people to want to experience Companioned Prayer.

Multiple introductory presentations at different times, venues, or interest groups can be made prior to a scheduled introductory prayer series, or simply to welcome people to a prayer circle. Outreach announcements and media can focus on these introductory presentations rather than on an introductory prayer series. However, attendance in an outreach presentation should not be a requirement to experience the prayer.

Offering an introductory Companioned Prayer ministry presentation prior to the introductory prayer sessions is strongly encouraged, as it will facilitate enthusiasm for letting go into and experiencing the grace of the prayer.

Flexibility

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

- One or more optional introductory presentations can be held for different audiences prior to an introductory prayer series or to simply encourage people to come to a prayer circle. Since the presentation is to a group, there is no limit to the size of attendance.
- The introductory prayer series can be offered to any sized group that can be supported by an environment (such as a church nave) that can handle multiple pairs of people in prayer.
- The series' 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 experience is often enhanced when the introductory prayer sessions are held within a two- or three-week period.)
- The sharing 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.

- Welcoming individuals to experience the prayer within an ongoing Companioned Prayer ministry group can be continuous or can be promoted as periodic (such as the first prayer meeting of each month.)
- The sharing experience can also be integrated into other ministry programs, such as homebound ministries or teen or young adult ministries. It can be included in vocation discernment, seminarian training, or other programs such as lay Jesuit formation.
- As previously mentioned, a series can be incorporated into a longer program that includes more than Companioned Prayer. For example, it could include sessions dedicated to *lectio divina*, the Ignatian Examen, or other interior prayer practices of the Church, together with the sessions for Companioned Prayer.
- The sharing experience can be parish centric or it may include outreach and participation from multiple local parishes and religious organizations.

Essentials

The best approach for sharing the prayer combines friendship, faith, some minimal instruction, and simply experiencing the prayer. A warm and welcoming personal engagement is essential for people to want to be part of the prayer group experience, and to allow themselves to surrender to God in faith and trust.

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, church nave, 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.

As mentioned in chapter 4, experiencing the prayer should be in-person rather than online or via video with others. The experience is significantly different in-person.

This approach to sharing Companioned Prayer is highly dependent upon the Holy Spirit's inspiration with each person. It is not based upon extensive instruction in all of the aspects of praying or companioning (such as in chapters 10, 11 and 12); and such instruction should be <u>avoided</u>. Likewise, there should be no prerequisites or requirements placed on those who wish to experience the prayer. 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. After all, it is God who teaches us to pray from within our prayer experiences. In this respect, it can be very helpful to repeatedly weave into the sharing experience the importance of slowing down and waiting; being open in faith, allowing time to sense and notice the Holy Spirit gracing our inner experience, and time to for God's grace to call us into himself. You can also encourage the faith aspects of the prayer by your own personal sharing of your prayer experiences. For more on this, see "Sharing Your Personal Testimony" in chapter 13. It also can be very helpful to relate the participants' shared experiences to relevant scripture passages.

When providing guidelines for companioning and being companioned (see chapter 4), it is important to let them know that companioning is very easy and delightful, and that the key is to simply be with the other person with openness and delight.

When people are present who are relatively new to the prayer, experienced companions can very slightly expand how they share their companioning and prayer experiences, thereby providing additional guidance by example. For example, you could say how you took extra time to allow a clearer awareness of something special rather than moving quickly on; or how you stayed with your prayer subject while simultaneously letting go into the love of Jesus; or how you were able to notice how something felt in your body; or when you were companioning, what you did when you were not sure what the person praying said; and so forth.

When providing a series, if an experienced companion is not available, someone will still need to be the group leader, even if they do not have any experience with the prayer. This leader or facilitator should obtain the support of the group's pastor or religious superior. The leader will need to read chapters 1 through 5 and chapter 9, and will need to facilitate the group experiences in the introductory prayer sessions.

In a series of three or more sessions, possibilities include:

- In the first session each person will companion their prayer partner using the *Introduction to the Loving Heart of Jesus Companioned Prayer* form, instead of the standard Companioned Prayer form for Ordinary Time. This alternative form is similar to the standard form except that it lacks two prayer movements, *LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS* and *BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT*. It also omits the reflection of symbols. A set of these prayer forms for each liturgical season can be found on the CPCF's supplemental resources webpage.

- In the second session the full Companioned Prayer form can be used, but without the sharing of symbols. The discussion of symbols and their employment during the prayers can be postponed to the third session. Prior to breaking into pairs in this second session, the facilitator should hand out the standard Companioned Prayer form for Ordinary Time and talk about how to employ the two new movements, *LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS* and *BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT*. These discussions should not be extensive as they will not make any sense until the movements are tried out a few times.

- During the third session the facilitator can lead a brief discussion of how to share symbols and how to reflect them. Encourage the participants to share and reflect symbols in order to experience what that is like.

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

Handouts and Resources

The recommended basic handouts for the people who are becoming familiar with the prayer, either in an ongoing prayer circle or an introductory prayer series, are available at www.CompanionedPrayer.org/resources:

- The quotes of Bishop Quinn
- The Companioned Prayer Disclaimer
- Confidentiality and Sharing
- The standard Companioned Prayer form for the current liturgical season, e.g., for Ordinary Time
- Guidelines for Praying
- Guidelines for the Companion
- Summary of Companioned Prayer

These handouts can be combined into a packet given to people attending a prayer circle for the first time, or they can be provided within a series at the sessions indicated in the sample series outlines.

Other handouts for participants becoming familiar with 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 those who are facilitating the sharing experiences are available at www.CompanionedPrayer.org/supplemental-resources, and include:

- Safe and Accessible Environments

Additional support for those 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.

Confidentiality

The entire sharing 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 regard to mandated reporting as discussed below in "An Accessible and Safe Environment." See "Sharing and Discussion" in chapter 5 for pertinent information. 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 sharing 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 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 and Accessible Environment guidelines of the Companioned Prayer Christian Fellowship in chapter 5 and available at

www.CompanionedPrayer.org/supplemental-resources

Note that for some individuals with special needs, learning the prayer via the introductory prayer series may not be appropriate. A more incremental and customized approach may be better. See "Companioning Individuals with Special Needs" in chapter 12 and its associated sections.

Basic Elements Within a Series

Whatever format is used in an introductory series (i.e., number of sessions, theme, etc.), the following elements or topics should be included:

- Opening and closing prayers for each session
- Confidentiality and sharing, and the disclaimer (can be selected from the handouts)
- Testimonies of experienced companions
- Some basic information of how to pray (can be selected from the handout)
- Some basic information of how to companion (can be selected from the handout)
- Participants separate into pairs and companion each other, using the standard prayer form for the current liturgical season, such as Ordinary Time
- Group sharing and discussion

- The CPCF's basic handouts

It is also helpful to consider a series to be "participatory;" that is, everyone should be encouraged to participate and share with each other. The leader should also ask participants to help lead some of the above basic elements, similar to how sharing of tasks can occur in a Companioned Prayer group.

As previously mentioned, some samples of detailed formats (outlines) of series are available on the CPCF's supplemental resources webpage. These can be modified to accommodate your needs and situation.

Journaling

Individual journaling can be a part of a person's discernment of their prayer experience. Therefore, ask participants to bring a journal to write in. At their first meeting, provide a blank journal or small writing pad to each person who did not bring a journal.

Let them know that immediately after their prayer, their companion will give them time to write about their experience in their journal. Encourage them to write and/or sketch about the feeling, insight and closeness to God that they experienced in their prayer and as reflected upon. Suggest that at this time their entries should be brief, even just writing or drawing a symbol if they wish. Encourage them to stay within the essence of their prayer experience, and to not expand into theological, social or personal implications of their prayer experience at this time. Suggest that they can always expand upon their journal entries when they are home.

Also let them know that these journal entries will not be shared; they are theirs alone. Also, they should not journal about what anyone else is sharing or experiencing.

This journaling should be encouraged throughout the introductory prayer sessions, and may be continued in regular ongoing Companioned Prayer ministry meetings.

Transitioning to a Deeper Intimacy of God's Love

The purpose of an introductory series is for participants to begin 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 an introductory series to the ongoing prayer meetings is crucial; and the experienced companions have a key role to play in encouraging this 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, experienced companions can 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 experienced companions 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. Separately from the meetings, they can reach out to new participants to encourage their continuing participation, form friendships, and provide personal guidance and encouragement as needed.

During this time, you can respond to specific needs or you can provide the more general inspiration of some of the principles of the prayer (such as in chapter 3 and elsewhere) which can be shared through personal stories and reflections of personal sharing. Another way is to add a special meeting or two for those who will especially benefit from it, if that is appropriate, in which encouragement and friendship is provided.

Ongoing Prayer Meetings

In our ongoing prayer meeting, our personal relationship with Jesus significantly develops more intimately. We experience his tender loving presence in an increasingly personal and meaningful way. Therefore, people becoming familiar with the prayer should initially understand that ongoing regular Companioned Prayer meetings after the introductory prayer series, as well as a subsequent retreat, are the best part of experiencing the prayer. Joining or forming a prayer circle is essential for this experience. Nevertheless, some people may at any point choose not to continue, and we should be happy for whatever benefit they received, honor their decision, and thank them for their participation. Perhaps they may elect to continue at a later time. If a person is not inspired to continue after attending all introductory prayer sessions, more instructive sessions or extensive explanations should not be offered, but continuing friendship is wonderful.

Discernment will naturally continue during ongoing Companioned Prayer ministry meetings and continual prayer experiences. This ongoing participation can be in a regular Companioned Prayer ministry group that meets at least weekly. If no group is available, the companions and participants should form such a group, deciding how often and when to meet (at least weekly). See chapter 5, *Prayer Partners and Groups*, for additional information.

As new people join the group, the group's roles of welcoming and nurturing take on greater significance. Experienced companions can make a point of reaching out in friendship to individuals who are new to the group or who are transitioning into the group from an introductory prayer series. Establishing a personal friendship can encourage a new person to attend, and can help them be open to asking questions, and can help them to feel that they are a cherished person within the Companioned Prayer ministry and experience.

Participants should be made aware that additional resources, including prayer forms and handouts, are available at www.CompanionedPrayer.org/resources and its supplemental page. The availability of this material allows further instruction to be self-paced; and also allows experienced participants the ability to recommend a particular handout in response to any individual need.

Companioned Prayer Follow-on Retreats

After people have had some ongoing experience in Companioned Prayer circle meetings, they should be encouraged to take part in a Companioned Prayer retreat expressly designed for people who have more than introductory experience with the prayer. This retreat provides a personally rich experience where additional time can be spent in a variety of possible ways, such as:

- in prayer;
- in companioning;
- in sharing of our prayer experiences and their significance to us, including personal context and related scripture;
- in learning the nuances of the prayer;
- in fellowship and community;
- in surrendering into God in the prayer;
- in question-and-answer discussions;
- in discussing challenges or difficulties with the prayer;
- in experiencing other Companioned Prayer forms, such as Intercessory, *Lectio Divina*, and Confession;
- in planning Companioned Prayer ministries;
- in developing and discerning our relationship with Christ;
- in relating our prayer experiences to those of the saints;
- in how our prayer experiences correlate with our Christian faith and traditions.

The retreat can also include an overall theme of a scriptural or personal nature (e.g., the prodigal son, pilgrimage, etc.), a church season (Lent, Advent, etc.), a focus on a particular ministry (teens, homeless, hospice, etc.), the relationship of our Companioned Prayer experiences to those of a saint or mystic recognized by the church, or some other subject. There is no end of possibilities. For example, a simple agenda for a retreat might include:

- Sharing and discussion of personal experiences, and validation of experiences, not just of the prayers during the retreat, but of people's experience since starting Companioned Prayer.

- The contemplative nature of the prayer, including: waiting and noticing, allowing time for cycling, not wanting a prayer experience or outcome, and abiding in Christ.

- The prayer's impact on the Church, and our roles.

Many other agendas are possible. Plan your Companioned Prayer retreat with your group and come up with an agenda that works for the group overall. Always include time for Companioned Prayer. Do not try to fit too much into what time you have available during the retreat. Let the time you do have be unhurried so that people can sink into their experiences and

have time to reflect and listen inside, allowing themselves to be open to the greater truth within, which such an uninterrupted program and setting can allow. You may want your retreat to revolve around only a few topics or activities. Remember, you can always have additional retreats or workshops later.

Keep the retreat a prayerful experience of being close to God and not just an exchange of information. Try to include an opportunity for people to share some of their personal stories if they wish to, and to get to know each other in friendship and fellowship.

Retreat Suggestions

- Companioned Prayer retreats can be repeated a few times a year with different leaders and/or different topics or themes. They should be designed for people who have been practicing Companioned Prayer for a while, in addition to people who have recently completed the introductory prayer sessions and several regular ongoing prayer meetings.

- All retreat planning requires considerable lead time. Retreat planning should include a detailed timed outline of activities, topics, and leadership roles. A well-planned retreat should awaken and nurture the participants' intimate personal relationship with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, while also enlivening our fellowship and community.

- Avoid too much instruction, but have instructional materials available for those who need them. Some instructional topics, handouts and exercises can be used, as long as the focus does not become instruction and technique. The retreat experience should remain personal, just as the prayer experience is personal.

- Retreats should be planned to include multiple Companioned Prayer ministries in the area.

- Retreats should be led by more than one person if available, mentoring new leadership if feasible. Certification or credentialing of retreat leadership, such as clerical, religious, or other designation, should not be required or imposed, although such leadership should be welcomed. All retreats should have the support and approval of the sponsoring organization such as the local parish or group of parishes.

- As appropriate, encourage retreat participants to volunteer to present select material, at least the beginning group prayers, the concluding prayers, and the scripture readings. Involving participants will enhance the fellowship of the group.

- Whatever outline is created for the retreat, be prepared to modify it as the retreat progresses in order to best meet the needs of your participants.

- Retreats can be one or two days long, and can be at a church or nearby retreat center if available. A two-day retreat offering optional residential accommodations is ideal.

- A nearby retreat center, such as those operated by a religious order, usually offers a quiet environment set aside for prayer and reflection. These locations are ideal for encouraging participants to let go in faith within the quiet presence of God in their prayer and in their

overall retreat experience. Another approach is to offer the retreat at a nearby church different from the one attended by most participants. Perhaps there might be a group in the host church that is willing to provide set-up, food, clean-up, etcetera.

- Other than the costs to host the retreat (retreat center charges, meals, etcetera) there should be no additional costs to participants. Retreat leaders should donate their time. Costs to accommodate special needs must be borne equally by all participants or by the sponsoring organization. Costs to participants should be kept to a minimum, and never represent a barrier to participation. Financial sponsorship should be available.

- Confidentially of personal prayer subjects and sharing should be maintained during and after the retreat, unless expressly authorized by the person who shared their experience.

Some interior exercises may be appropriate for a Companioned Prayer retreat depending upon your particular program emphasis. Sample interior exercises are available on the CPCF "Supplemental Resources" page at www.CompanionedPrayer.org/supplemental-resources.

Integration with Theology

As we share this prayer in presentations, in introductory sessions, within our prayer groups, in retreats, and in our personal sharing and discussions, we may wish to share how our prayer experiences or the prayer itself relates to our Christian faith and theology. Our rich Chrisian story shared by the Church in its variety of ways – through scripture, formation, liturgy and worship, prayer, preaching, service, and the personal experiences of the saints – all relate to what we are doing when we pray Companioned Prayer or companion someone else in the prayer. This rich source of faith inspiration can and should be a part of our sharing of Companioned Prayer, not only because of its own truth, but also because of how the Christian story supports our Companioned Prayer experiences and personal journeys of surrender and increasing intimacy with Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

The integration of Companion Prayer and theology is, however, delicate. Its purpose is not to justify theology or to confirm theological concepts, but rather it is to better draw people into their Companioned Prayer experience with the inspiration and support of the faith. This needs to reflect how the scriptures and Church teaching support and encourage us to experience the mystery of Christ's presence, rather than simply define Christian principles.

This integration of theology and experience can be very meaningful, particularly when shared with flexibility in response to the subtlety of our shared prayer experiences or what is happening interiorly when we are following the prayer's format. This personal approach, when offered with the sense of sacred wonder, does not need to overly declare our theological foundations, since the value of these foundations will on their own become apparent over time as God inspires us within our prayer experiences. We do not need to replicate what the Church is already so good at and what it does. But even just a little of our scripture, theology, or Christian story can help us recognize the living reality of Christ in our prayer experiences in the same way that he is experienced in scripture and in the breaking of the bread. This will personally encourage us to surrender and let go into God's presence and his mercy found within our prayer experiences. This need not be a call to religious piety or perfection, but instead should call us into the mystery

of God's living grace within our humility as we are, in faith before God. Sharing in this way should still align with the guidelines presented in chapter 5 and elsewhere.

Supportive Interior Prayers

Many people are not familiar with being accompanied by another person in prayer while sitting with their eyes closed. They may also not be familiar with pausing to notice interiorly felt movements of the Holy Spirit. If people desire to have some personal experiential introduction prior to being individually companioned, you can offer either of the following two exercises during outreach or in the first two introductory prayer sessions. These exercises are suitable for use with individuals (such as when reaching out to one other person) or with a group. They can also be useful in a Companioned Prayer retreat, whether it is an introductory retreat focusing on the introductory prayer sessions, or a follow-on retreat as described above.

Additional interior prayers, which may be appropriate for an outreach presentation, for people attending a Companioned Prayer group or circle who have not participated in the introductory prayer sessions, for use in an introductory series, or for use in a Companioned Prayer retreat, are available at www.CompanionedPrayer.org/supplemental-resources.

Psalm 46:10

This exercise is a companioned reflection of Psalm 46 verse 10, "Be still and know that I am God." Including the sharing at the end, it takes about ten minutes. First invite them to sit comfortably, close their eyes and to briefly notice their breathing and what their body feels like. Then let them know that you will be repeating the verse, leaving off a portion each time. And that after each time you say it, you want them to keep their eyes closed and to be open to noticing what feelings, thoughts or images might come. You can break up the sentence as follows:

Be | still | and know | that I am | God

That is, the first time say the entire sentence. The second time, leave off the word "God." The third time, stop after "know"; and so forth. Allow enough time (for example, a half-a-minute) after each pause for them to notice what might come, but do not ask for feedback during this exercise. After the last pause, invite them to open their eyes. Let them have time to do so; and then invite them to share their experiences. Help them confirm their experiences of noticing the movement and grace of the Holy Spirit. This exercise can also be useful when introducing *lectio divina*.

The Mystery of God

This simple prayer exercise is often a favorite. It fosters our awareness of the interior presence of the mystery of God within us. (All timing is approximate.)

1. **I invite you to settle into your chair. Notice how you physically feel (tired, etc.) Stretch; and settle in.** *[pause 15 seconds]*

2. **Become aware of your breathing.** *[pause 20 seconds]*

3. **Allow yourself to be open to that place within you where you feel closest to God.** *[pause 45 to 60 seconds]*

4. **Take some time to allow yourself to be drawn into that quiet, special place.** *[pause 30-45 seconds]*

5. **…into the intimacy of God's grace;** *[pause 30-45 seconds]*

6. **…into the light of his Spirit;** *[pause 30-45 seconds]*

7. **…into the love of Jesus.** *[pause 1-1½ minutes]*

8. **Take a minute to nurture this intimate place within you; this awareness of our life in God.** *[pause 1-1½ minutes]*

9. **Now take a moment to be thankful in the Lord with all of this.** *[pause 30 seconds]*

10. **Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be evermore, world without end. Amen**

After the prayer, you can invite sharing, perhaps asking, "What was that like?" or "What did you discover?"

Reflective Prayer

This Reflective Prayer acquaints those praying it with all of the parts of Companioned Prayer except the *LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS* and *BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT*. It also does not include any individual participant feedback or individual timing. Including the brief sharing after the prayer, this prayer takes about 15 minutes.

Let them know that this is a guided prayer in which you will be providing a series of instructions, each followed by a short time for silent reflection. Let them know that there is no "right" or "correct" response, and to not worry if they are not sure if they are following the prayer appropriately, or if they don't seem to have any response. Also let them know that in the beginning you will be asking them to spend a few minutes noticing how they physically feel, including noticing different parts of their body, before going on to the rest of the reflective prayer. Then invite them to settle into their chairs, and to keep the eyes closed throughout the prayer until the end.

The following Reflective Prayer is for Ordinary Time. A set of Reflective Prayers for the liturgical seasons is offered on the supplemental resources page of the Companioned Prayer website. If the prayer is not being associated with a season, the prayer for Ordinary Time is suggested.

Reflective Prayer
for the season of Ordinary Time

OPENING PRAYER
In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we open our hearts to you, O Lord. Amen.

AS WE ARE
Coming before God as we are, let us take a few minutes to notice how we physically feel. *[pause]* **Let your attention go to your back and notice what that feels like.** *[pause]* **Notice your shoulders** *[pause]***, your neck** *[pause]***, your head** *[pause]***, your arms** *[pause]***, your hands** *[pause]***, your feet** *[pause]***, your legs** *[pause]***, your stomach** *[pause]***, your heart** *[pause]***, and your breathing.** *[longer pause]* **Notice the body-sense of how you feel right now** *[pause]*

ASKING GOD
Staying with how this feels inside, and being open to God's loving presence; notice if anything comes when you ask yourself, "Of everything going on in my life, What feels like God is calling me to listen to, inside me right now?" *[pause for about a minute]*

GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE
Notice how all this feels inside, and how you carry it. *[pause]* **With tenderness and faith, notice how it feels to take all this to the loving heart of Jesus, and to feel his gentle love and acceptance in all of this.** *[pause for one to two minutes]*

RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE
Let's nurture this special place we've come to inside. Pause here and let go into God's presence within all of this, resting in the quiet tenderness of his Spirit for a while. *[pause for about two minutes]*

ENDING
Softly strike a chime, or say: **In God we give thanks, Amen.**

After the group reflective prayer, allow for a few minutes of quiet time as people take different amounts of time to open their eyes. Then you might offer the opportunity for people to share or comment about their experience. You can point out that although very similar to Companioned Prayer, it is not Companioned Prayer. Companioned Prayer offers a more intimate prayer experience with God.

Feedback

It can be very helpful at some point after offering an introductory experience, to ask participants for feedback, especially comments that can help you improve how you offer the prayer or how you identify and respond to their needs. You may find that people ask for more initial instruction during their learning process, or for more analytical integration with theology or scripture. However, the experience of God does not come from ideas about God or from detailed instruction. No matter how lofty or thorough such concepts or instruction might be (or how good they may feel), they trap the mind into analysis and concepts. But we don't experience God (or the kingdom of heaven) in analysis or concepts. It has taken many years of offering detailed

programs of instruction (sometimes covering every part of this book!) to realize this truth. Jesus did not teach through detailed technical analysis of the Hebrew scriptures, law or theology. Instead, he expressed himself in parables and through direct healing. He was trying to get us to reorient ourselves in order to experience the presence of God which is at hand. This is what we are doing when we experience Companioned Prayer. When we experience the prayer in this way, then we are open to new experiences beyond our limited intellect, beyond our own creation of thoughts. In prayer, when we have these direct experiences of God's presence, of his mercy, love and healing, and with them the deeper understandings given to us by God, then when we hear scripture at Mass or participate in Bible study, then our awareness of the significance of the Word becomes very personal and profound. Our faith in deepened and awakened to his infinite love, discovering that Jesus is risen and with us. So, resist more instruction until after a person has had at least a couple of months of prayer, except as may be necessary to meet an individual's need for basic proficiency.

Other responses to requests for feedback may lead to exploration of how a person might use Companioned Prayer within ministry to others. See chapter 6 on this topic. Similarly, feedback may lead to other planning, outreach, or fellowship.

Grace, Not Instruction

For prayer, information and content are overrated. Caring and nurturing are what count. Support the person and their experiences. Forget extensive instruction. Create a community of caring and friendships. And then experience the prayer within that. Experience grace with another person and nurture that. We discover God in each other as well as in ourselves. This appreciation occurs as a gift; it does not happen because of theology, information, or analysis. It is a gift of God's grace borne from his love.

Instruction can get in the way of simple surrender. So, avoid programs of instruction. Save it for much later. Instead, simply give your tenderness and let the prayer happen. Share from your heart and care for each other. And you will all know the grace and love of God.

In Faith and Fellowship

This chapter has focused on the basics of how to share the prayer. Our sharing should relate to our individual experiences of awakening and growing in Christ, in faith and in fellowship. Our goal of sharing Companioned Prayer is not experiences, as personally significant as they may be, but our goal is to offer others a closer relationship with God – an ongoing discovery of how much God loves us, and how that love affects our life and our relationships. See more about this in chapters 13 and 14, *Sharing from the Heart* and *Companioned Prayer and the Church*. It is also essential that the prayer not be taught as a technique, but instead as a prayer of deep Christian faith that offers a personal encounter with God. This requires a community of acceptance, friendship, sharing, and affirmation. In our friendships and care for each other, our prayer discoveries and companionships will flourish through the gifts of Christ's presence.

Chapter 10
Additional Guidelines for the Person Praying

But now thus says the LORD, he who created you... "Do not fear for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."

Isaiah 43:1-3a

Understanding these additional guidelines can help us respond to different situations or needs in our prayer. However, the detail provided in these additional guidelines should not lead us to conclude that they will produce a "perfect" prayer. Companioned Prayer™ is not a technique that if done perfectly will generate results. It is a contemplative prayer of placing our self in God's hands, and in faith and trust being open to his mystery and grace. Grace does not happen because we follow certain instructions. Grace is simply a gift; a gift beyond our instructions and understanding. These additional guidelines may help us to turn to God in trust and openness, but beyond that it is all a gift of God; not of our own doing.

Companioned Prayer as led by your companion is designed to include all the questions and reflections your companion will need to assist you through your prayer experience. These additional guidelines are supplemental, to help you understand your options within the prayer.

The additional guidelines in this chapter are in <u>addition</u> to the fundamentally essential "Guidelines for Praying" found in chapter 4. When initially experiencing the prayer as recommended in chapter 4, it is usually not helpful to read this chapter 10. It is better to read this chapter after you have been practicing the prayer for a while.

Guidelines for Each Part of the Prayer

First, even before engaging in Companioned Prayer, it is very helpful to start the prayer ministry meeting or prayer session, whether with a group of people or only two people, with a general beginning group prayer. This helps us enter our time set aside for Companioned Prayer within the full context of our faith.

Similarly, at the end of the meeting, it is good to conclude with a group prayer. This shared prayer experience furthers our recognition that we are one body in Christ, and that we share our Christian experience and journey in him.

The following sections correspond to the Companioned Prayer form. These guidelines will not make much sense without practicing the accompanying prayer.

OPENING PRAYERS

Begin by saying, **In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we open our hearts to you, O Lord. Amen.**

Then on behalf of the person you are praying with and yourself, say a personal prayer said out loud.

> *For example: asking for Christ to be our companion; for our trust in the Lord; for the guidance of the Holy Spirit; thankfulness for this time of quiet; asking Christ to be present within our needs, inside our very brokenness, inside our joy; to help us listen inside to God's quiet call; to be mindful of our sins, and of the grace and blessings received; or, to humbly journey inside with Christ.*

Then invite the other person to also say a personal prayer silently or out loud, and to say "Amen" when they are ready to continue. [wait for the person to say "Amen"]

We begin each paired Companioned Prayer by opening our hearts to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and we also begin with personal prayers. These *OPENING PRAYERS* are a very important part of the Companioned Prayer. They are not a prelude to Companioned Prayer; they are an integral part of it. The *OPENING PRAYERS* establish the experience of both the companion and the person praying within a personal relationship with God. They acknowledge our faith in God and declare our dependence upon him in this prayer. The content of the opening prayers should not be fixed, but should be left open to each person according to their need or desire at the time. The opening prayers should be extemporaneous, not written down. The opening prayer topics given in the prayer form are simply possible suggestions to assist us as we become familiar with Companioned Prayer. If a more formal written prayer is desired, it should be said before this personal opening prayer time, during the beginning group prayer.

Notice that there are two parts to the *OPENING PRAYERS*. The first part is a general prayer said out loud by the companion on behalf of both the companion and the person who will be praying the Companioned Prayer. Although the companion's opening prayer is usually offered in a general way, such as suggested by any of the examples given, it is helpful to also include personal prayers for the person praying, naming the individual. The person who will be praying the Companioned Prayer can say their prayer out loud or silently. They can also say a general prayer, but they are encouraged to recall real needs, challenges, issues, people or thanksgivings in their life right now that they would like to bring before God's awareness. This more specific approach not only helps establish our Companioned Prayer within a very personal relationship with our Lord, it also acts as a prelude to prepare us for the *ASKING GOD* part of the prayer. They can also include their companion by name in their prayer. If the person has said this part of the prayer silently, then when they are finished they should say "Amen" out loud in order to let their companion know that they are ready to go on.

AS WE ARE

Then say: **Coming before God as we are, take a few minutes to notice how you physically feel, held tenderly in the arms of our Lord.** *[briefly pause, and then continue]* **For example, let your attention go to your back and notice what that feels like.** *[pause]* **Notice your shoulders** *[pause],* **your neck** *[pause],* **your head** *[pause],* **your arms** *[pause],* **your hands** *[pause],* **your feet** *[pause],* **your legs** *[pause],* **your stomach** *[pause],* **your heart** *[pause],* **and your breathing.** *[longer pause]* **Notice the body-sense of how you feel right now** *[pause]*; **and then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait for a response, and then go to ASKING GOD]*

Do you know how it feels to be held tenderly in the arms of someone who loves you? Perhaps your mother when you were young, or someone else very special. In those moments you can feel the tenderness being gifted to you as you are held; you can feel this grace in your body as you let go and are just held in love.

Similarly, you may be aware of how you physically feel as you are tenderly held in the loving arms of our Lord. Can you notice how your body is responding? Can you simply let go into the grace felt deeply in your body? Can you notice how your back feels? Your shoulders? Your neck…? Coming before God as we are, held in his love even as we may be tense, hurting, upset, tired, broken, carrying our desires, hopes, burdens, challenges, and relationships – can we let go into how we actually physically feel right now?

In this prayer we come before God as we actually are; not how we wish to be. We come to him in mind, body and spirit. The purpose of noticing how we physically feel as we are held tenderly in the arms of Jesus, is not to substitute our physical awareness with religious feelings of comfort or contentment. Instead, the purpose is to allow ourselves to let go into our physical awareness even more deeply; to really let go and to notice, perhaps even taking a little longer to do so.

Taking time to develop an awareness of how we physically feel helps us to be humble in God's presence within the created relationship of how we really are right now. There are four primary effects from this, as well as from when we frequently allow our attention to go to how we feel in our body throughout the prayer.

First, it helps center us in who we are as a person created by God. Spending time being aware of our bodies helps us gain an appreciation for our total humanness. We are whole human beings with rational, emotional, spiritual *and* physical natures. God's presence is reflected within all of his creation and we are his created children. Awareness of our physical nature, for example our breathing, can be found in many prayer forms. This contemplative prayer endeavors to offer ourselves to God as we truly are: all of ourselves as we are held in his love. This means that if we are tired, if we are sick, if we are tense, we acknowledge how we physically feel. We don't try to change it or mask it. We humbly acknowledge our human condition and relationship by simply being aware of our physical nature as it is at the time of our prayer held in his loving arms.

Second, placing our awareness on how we physically feel helps us to remain centered in a frame of mind that is other than analytical. The essence of contemplative prayer is that we stop or slow down our analytical thinking mind's activity enough to just be receptive; to listen in our heart and be in God's presence, and to be open to his love and wisdom through his gift of the Holy Spirit. We want to allow ourselves to be drawn into his mystery and his love. But that doesn't readily

happen if we are always talking, thinking, analyzing or judging. By initially and periodically letting our attention go to how we are physically feeling, we find we are less caught up in critical thinking and are more open to God's quiet movement felt within us.

Third, our body-awareness also helps us to not be caught into emotional feelings and processes in the same way that it helps us to not be so caught up in our analytical processes. This does not mean that in this prayer we are to avoid our feelings or those issues that are emotionally important to us. On the contrary, we offer ourselves to God in this prayer with our whole physical, mental and emotional selves as we actually are at the time. For example, if we are upset at the time of prayer or if we are carrying a heavy emotional issue, then that is how we are. We don't adopt an artificial attitude or mood. For example, we don't try and adopt a peaceful or serene feeling, or an attitude of purity or sanctity. We pray acknowledging how we really are. But we need to pray in a manner that also promotes awareness and listening to God. Therefore, we often bring our awareness back to our bodies; for example, how an issue or symbol feels in our bodies, how we seem to carry it. This allows us to be present to the issue or feeling without being caught up in the emotional content of it. This frees us to be present to our issue while simultaneously freeing us to be receptive to God's grace or presence that might come from within our very need or issue.

Fourth, awareness of our body helps us keep our prayer and our prayer subject in the present. Time spent with awareness of the body, even briefly, brings us back to the present moment. It takes us out of our future and out of our past, and grounds our experience in the here and now where God meets us and cares for us. Significantly, this part of the prayer is a settling into a rhythm of pausing and simply noticing what is, without intellectual analysis; a quiet attentiveness which continues in all of the remaining movements of the prayer.

At the beginning of this part of the prayer, the companion says to the person praying, "take a few minutes to notice how you physically feel..." This means that one should not rush through this, but should be quietly attentive to how you are physically feeling, allowing your attention to be sequentially drawn to those parts of the body that might have some physical feeling, such as tenseness, soreness, etc. Here the person praying takes a quiet inventory of their body, moving along among different parts of their body and/or allowing themselves to be drawn forward, all the while noticing what their body feels like.

Often we will notice some physical sensation such as tenseness in our shoulders or stomach/solar plexus area that we would not have been aware of if we had not taken the quiet time for this intentional inventory. During the physical inventory, the companion is not looking to receive feedback, except that the person praying may wish to ask the companion to slow down or pause at various places.

Throughout this contemplative prayer we frequently bring our awareness back to the body, or back to how our prayer subject feels in our body. Yet when we do so, we retain a sense of mind-body balance. We are not abandoning the mind to attend to the body. Nor do we totally abandon what our body feels like when our attention is more mindful. We try to be fully present to the complete humanness of our prayer experience, which incorporates our created embodiedness, heart, mind, and spirit, as well as the personal gift of God's loving presence with us. Being present

to our body helps us to be grounded in the physical reality of this complete gift. For more on this topic, see chapter 12's "The Body Feel of God's Presence."

Note that this part of the prayer ends with the companion asking you to let him or her know when you are ready for both of you to continue on together with the prayer. Simply say "Okay" when you are ready to go on.

ASKING GOD

When they are ready, say: **Staying with how this feels inside, and being open to God's loving presence; let me know if something comes when you ask yourself, "Of everything going on in my life, what feels like God is calling me to listen to, inside me right now?"** *[wait for a response]*

This is the point in the prayer where we first identify what to pray about. Some forms of contemplative prayer repeat a faith-based word or phrase over and over and ask the practitioner to follow the sound or the meaning as it conveys one towards a closer experience of God's presence. Other forms of contemplation focus on understanding, letting the intellect reflect greater and greater insight into scripture or other devotional text in a personally meaningful way. However, in the Companioned Prayer form of contemplative prayer, the subject of our prayer may often be the same type of subject that is typical of our private "everyday" non-meditative prayers. For example, we might pray about matters of personal concern or need, such as the health or wellbeing of a loved one, or we may pray about a past hurt, or about a challenge that we might be facing in our work, in our personal relationships, or perhaps even in our faith. Or equally we may find ourselves praying about something positive in our life, such as a new relationship or new personal opportunity, or thankfulness. But the important difference is that instead of us selecting what we pray about, in Companioned Prayer we are receptive to whatever God might identify for us as important to pray about at the time. We pause, and within our prayer and faith, we are open to God's inspiration, receptive to his will for us. We understand that he knows all of our concerns, our joys, our hurts and our challenges intimately and completely. We turn the selection over to him.

This does not mean that we ignore our concerns or issues and adopt an indifferent or detached attitude. On the contrary it is vitally important to allow ourselves to honestly acknowledge how we are, being real in our moment of prayer as we place ourselves in God's hands. But staying within our receptive faith, we let our attention turn inward and, aware of all we carry inside, we share our feelings and issues with Jesus, and we sense what feels like God is calling us to be with in prayer. In other words, of everything going on in our life, of all our personal burdens, challenges, hurts, joys and longings that we are carrying, what might God want us to spend some time with, in prayer with him, in this moment?

This is not an intellectual exercise. Both the question and the selection or answer are decidedly neither analytically reasoned nor emotionally prioritized. Nor, in faith, do we imagine what God wants us to listen to and be with in prayer. It is not about how we believe we are supposed to feel or be. Instead, it is about how we actually are right now, as we come before God. And it is in this truth that we are completely open to God's inspiration.

How? By being open to his loving presence. And in that loving presence we give ourself over to God, in trust, and we wait in faith for what comes. Eventually a particular subject or item

will seem to standout, or will somehow seem to be different from our other thoughts or perceptions. Sometimes awareness of the prayer subject comes quickly and is obvious; and sometimes it is not. We can check our feeling in our body to help sense if the item feels right or on-target, and to sense if it feels okay to spend some time with it in our prayer. Often it is an item that we clearly recognize as important to us, but sometimes it is not. It might be something quite different than what we would have expected to pick for ourselves. Sometimes it is just a feeling, a sense, or even an image or memory.

Once we have something that seems to be right to pray with, we do not spend any time analyzing it. We do not try to figure it out, or try to clarify it or define it further, or try to explore its significance. Instead, we purposefully accept it as it is, often with its own ambiguity of meaning or feeling. Once something feels right to journey with in prayer, we can either simply say "Okay" or say a symbol of what came as discussed in chapter 4's "Guidelines for Praying" and in "*LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS*" below, thereby letting our companion know that we have something and we are ready to go on.

If nothing seems to come, or if you feel bored or frustrated, it is important to let your companion know that. Or perhaps many things have come but nothing seems to stand out as special. Stay focused on your inner experience, keep your eyes closed, and just tell your companion what is going on and how you feel about it. Your companion can make suggestions that can help you determine what you might want to do next, including occasionally offering an alternative question.

GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE

Notice how all this *repeat symbol if shared* **feels inside, and how you carry it.** *[pause]* **With tenderness and faith, notice how it feels to take all this to the loving heart of Jesus, and to feel his gentle love and acceptance in all of this. Take your time, and then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait]*

Once we have an idea of what to pray about, the next step is to notice how it feels in our body, how we carry it; and then we notice how it feels to bring it the loving heart of Jesus, and to experience his tender love and acceptance. The prayer subject may feel positive, negative or neutral. It may be an issue of thankfulness or joy, or it may be an issue of concern or challenge, or it may be some other aspect of our life. In all cases we pause here to abide in God's tenderness and acceptance within our involvement with our prayer issue. Sometimes our prayer subject might feel too sensitive or hurting for us to want to get close to it. But in faith we can. By allowing God to bring love, acceptance and tenderness to an issue, we will notice that we can then be more accepting and patient with the prayer issue ourself.

In faith we silently take our prayer subject to Jesus' sacred and loving heart. We do this with simple and devoted intention. And then we quietly wait, in faith, and abide in his flowing and very tender love. So silent and pure is his love that we may or may not notice it most of the time. But in faith we experience our prayer subject even deeper, more pronounced, within our Lord's love, because he is with us.

Taking our prayer subject to Jesus' loving heart is not a theological or intellectual action. Nor do we picture an image of his loving heart and focus or act within the image. This step of the

prayer is not a devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the sense of a traditional devotion in which one meditates and adores Jesus and his loving grace. Instead, in this step we humbly bring our prayer subject and ourself to Christ, to his sacred and divine heart, in simple intent, surrendering ourself to him, allowing our self, our soul, to be open to him as our Lord. It is from God that love flows, and in this reality of his extraordinary love and mercy, we humbly surrender to him, placing ourselves in his good hands and heart. That is all we need to do in this step of the prayer. In faith we open ourself to receive God's love into who we are in our fragility, in our brokenness, in our needs, and in how we own and hold our prayer issue, knowing he is with us in our prayer. Knowing that Christ is our Companion in our prayer, that he journeys with us as we hold our tender or sensitive issues in his loving heart, helps us to also be his instrument of love here on earth in our relationships, and even to those issues inside us that need his healing love.

It is very important to note that the purpose of taking our prayer issue to Jesus and experiencing his gentle love and acceptance is not to nullify or neutralize the feeling of our prayer subject or issue. It is not a matter of making it or ourselves "feel better" or "feel good." Nor should we replace or substitute our prayer issue with feelings, thoughts or images of faith, such as Jesus' love or Mary's compassion. We are not handing our prayer issue off to God, giving it to Jesus for him to take from us. The purpose of intentionally taking the time to abide in Jesus' love at this point in the prayer is to more closely experience our prayer subject within his presence. We have received or identified our prayer issue with God's help, and we want to acknowledge, accept and know it, and carry it forward into our prayer with him, and not abandon it.

In this contemplative prayer we will find God's presence and grace gifted to us *from within the very prayer issue we are carrying*. In fact, often the grace or gift that we experience in our prayer is in proportion to the degree that we honestly acknowledge, with humility and faith, our actual prayer issue, and not avoid or replace it with a "good feeling," "religious or devotional feeling," or "good intention." At the time of our prayer, our real prayer issue is our cross that we are called to carry, and that we willingly take up. It is essential to us and to our prayer. Being with it in Jesus' love and acceptance allows us to be more accepting and patient with our issue; allows us to be closer to it within our faith relationship with God, rather than more distant from it. This is true for prayer issues that feel positive as well as those that feel negative. Perhaps we do not have the strength or patience to forgive or to be accepting of an issue of pain or hurt in a way that will allow us to be closer to it and to carry it forward in our prayer. But in faith we know that with Jesus as our loving Companion, we can.

Sometimes in this contemplative prayer it is easy to feel Jesus' compassion, love or tenderness with a prayer issue. Sometimes it is not so easy. So spend some time with it, and if it is not easy, let your companion know so that he or she may help you. Your companion can suggest different ways for you to be with your issue. Your companion may even suggest just taking a portion or piece of your issue and bringing that to Jesus' gentle loving heart, and seeing if you can hold just that piece. In any case, if you would like help with this, just ask. And in doing so it is not necessary to share what your issue is if you do not wish to.

When we are with our prayer issue within God's love and acceptance, it is important to notice how our prayer issue feels in our body. Often it is reflected physically in some way. Typically as a result of allowing it to feel some patience or gentleness, we might notice that the issue physically feels lighter or less heavy in our body. Or we may feel less tense, more relaxed.

Sometimes when an issue seems to start off with a physically noticeable correlation, such as a tightness or pressure in some area of our body, we might even notice a specific change in that area. In any case, noticing how it feels in our body to be with our prayer issue in this gentle faith-filled way helps us to remain receptive to God and not caught up in the emotion or analysis of an issue. It also greatly helps us remain close to our prayer issue.

Do not rush through this step. Take your time, and only after you have spent some time with this, let your companion know that you are ready to go on by simply saying, "Okay."

More information on this subject can be found in chapter 3's "Jesus Loves Us" and chapter 12's "The Loving Heart of Jesus."

LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS

When they are ready to go on: **Notice how it feels in your body to be with this, in this gentle, caring, faith-filled way. Allow your awareness to seep into your body, to settle in, and sense how all this feels inside.** *[pause]*

Once we begin to feel Jesus' loving presence it is important to pause, to stop, and to allow yourself to really notice how it feels to be with our prayer subject in this gentle, faith-filled way. Staying with how that feels in our body, we accept and let go into the overall experience of our prayer issue as we embrace it within the faith and love of Jesus.

We say "all this" because we recognize that there is much more here than just our feelings. Letting go into how all this feels inside is not about surrendering into our feelings. It is about surrendering into *the sense of God's presence within how our prayer subject feels inside* – into the sense of "something more"; that deep sense of the mystery of God that our faith calls us to be open to – as we abide or surrender into his loving presence, into his sacred heart. In humility and trust we pause to notice that, and to let go or surrender into *all of this* as a preparation for continuing with our prayer.

Continue with: **Within the gentle loving heart of Jesus, wait in openness and faith to see if it feels like there is anything else that God might want you to notice, such as a word, image, feeling or memory that seems to somehow fit with the way this whole thing feels, and then let me know.** *[wait]*

In this part of the prayer we continue to be open to God's grace as we notice how it feels to be with our prayer subject within the gentle presence of our Lord, within the gentle sacred heart of Jesus. Abiding in him, we remain open to his love, knowing he continues to be personally with us and our prayer subject as we pray. Staying with how all this feels in our body, we let go into how all that feels inside. Again there is no analysis here. The letting go is not letting go into critical thinking or meditations on meaning. Likewise it is not letting go into emotional "what ifs" or emotional reactions. Instead, it is a letting go into the overall experience of our prayer issue as we hold it in the faith and love of Jesus. And since we know that he knows us completely and is with us in our prayer experience, we let go into how all about it feels. We say "all" because we acknowledge that there can be more to our prayer issue and prayer experience than we are aware of. For "…*we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.*" (Romans 8:25-26) So we just trust in God and let go into it all.

Then we wait in faith, in God's presence. We wait without demands, without an agenda. We wait receptively, being open to the Holy Spirit, for some special movement, symbol or sense that somehow feels connected or related to our prayer subject; somehow connected to how we are all feeling inside. We wait to notice an image, or a word, or feeling, or memory that feels somehow different from our other thoughts and feelings. When it comes it may carry some personal meaning for us, or just as frequently there will be no clear meaning. The connection may not be obvious. It may not even make any sense. It just seems or feels connected. In any case, once we recognize the symbol we do not try to define its relevance. In some cases we may not even recognize what it is. We do not try to define it or try to explore its meaning. We just know that it is our symbol, and we let our companion know that something has come.

Sometimes we wait and it feels like nothing is coming. But we must allow time for symbols and subjects to form; to allow time to notice; and in due course to allow time to nurture. So give yourself plenty of time for all this. Linger; do not rush. Give yourself the time to notice God quietly working within you. Be open to your prayer subject changing, or shifting to a new symbol or to new awareness.

If we don't give ourselves enough time or if we have expectations, we might become impatient or bored. Or we might feel we are wasting our companion's time. Or we might be embarrassed that nothing is happening. When any of this happens, it is important to let our companion know the situation. Just keep the eyes closed and tell your companion what is going on. If you feel some frustration or performance anxiety about it, let your companion know about that too. Then he or she can make suggestions or ask you questions that might facilitate your prayer experience. You might be invited to go back to the body feeling of your prayer subject. Or you might be invited to just notice the body feeling of nothing happening. Even within that, God can call us forward.

Be assured that this contemplative prayer is not a performance-based exercise. Success is not measured by what comes. There is no right or wrong experience. Our companion knows that. Our companion has no expectations for us. It is a prayer of just being present and open within God's loving compassion, and being available should anything come. We are powerless to make anything happen. Our companion is also powerless to make anything happen. We can only place ourselves in an attitude of gentle faith in God's care, being honest within ourselves, and receptive to his word. That is the prayer. Beyond surrendering into that trust, we can do nothing.

Sometimes our prayer subject might feel particularly intense. This can be the case whether our prayer subject is positive or challenging. When it dominates our attention, it is important to give ourselves plenty of time to be with it as we wait for anything else to possibly come. We may want to briefly notice how it feels in our body. It may take a while for the intensity of our prayer subject to subside enough for us to be able to begin to notice any new subtleties or symbols that might come forth. So, in Jesus' loving heart we wait with gentleness, faith and patience, knowing that Jesus is with us, holding us in his love.

At any point in the prayer whenever something comes, it can be helpful to briefly pause to allow yourself to notice the whole sense of it, giving a little time for it to further form and for you to notice, before letting your companion know that something has come. Again, the purpose of this brief pause is not to engage in analysis or to try to more clearly define the meaning of what

has come, but instead the purpose is to allow yourself the time to sense any subtleties that it may represent. Then when you respond by either sharing your symbol or by just saying "Okay," your inner sense of your response will be richer, more inclusive of the whole of it.

If something does come, when we recognize that a symbol is present, and when we are ready to let our companion know that something has come, we can just say, "Okay." Or if we want to, we can share something of our symbol. For example, we might very briefly state what it is. If we do share the symbol, we should share just that essence of it that most contains the feel of it. We don't need to give elaborate descriptions that capture all of it. For example, if the symbol is an image of a path by a stream leading up a mountain with boulders and forests, we might just say the word "path." Or if what comes is an issue which carries much emotion, we need not describe the issue or the emotion. We can just say a word or two about the feeling of the issue as it has come to us. Our companion doesn't need to know all about it. Likewise, there is no need for our companion to understand its personal significance. We want to stay with the sense or feel of the symbol, and talking about it or trying to describe it will constrain and take us away from our interior experience. Often what comes is so uniquely subtle or precious that it cannot be easily spoken in a word or two. In such cases, trying to clarify it or speak it may feel awkward and take us away from it. In that case, just stay with whatever came, and let your companion know that something has come by saying, "Okay."

BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT

a. *If something comes, reflect back the symbol if shared, pause, and then ask,*

b. **Does this feel right, inside, to journey with some more?** *[wait for a response]*
If "no" go to RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.

c. *If "yes" say:* **Ask yourself, "How does all this** *repeat symbol if shared* **now feel in my body, held in Jesus' love?"** *[pause]* **With gentleness and faith, let go into how all this feels inside; and let me know if anything comes that fits the way this all now feels.** *[wait]*
If something comes, go back to a.

Repeat a, b, c as long as the person wants to continue, or as time allows.

When they are ready to stop, go to RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.

If we do elect to share something of the symbol, our companion will repeat it back to us. If we have shared a description, he or she will just pick out a word or short phrase that best captures the essence of what has been shared. When we hear our companion repeat the symbol, it seems to help us move from what was to what is; from our prayer issue to the symbol received. When we hear it, we become more present to it.

Whether we have shared a symbol, or simply said "Okay," our companion will continue by asking you if it feels right, inside, to journey with it some more. Again, this is not an intellectual or analytical question. Nor are we looking for a "good feeling." This is not a self-selection process. Just briefly notice if it feels right to go on, to spend some more time being present to how this is now. It has shifted from our original prayer subject to something else that has come; some word or image, thought, memory or feeling. The question posed asks us to check inside to see if it feels okay to continue our prayer journey with this new symbol or development, instead of the original subject or previous symbol.

If it is okay, just say "Yes." It generally helps your companion to understand what you want to do next in your prayer if you respond to this question "***b***" with a "Yes" or a "No," instead of with either an "Okay" or something like "I am ready to go on." However, if you are unsure of your response, just wait a little while longer. Pause and be open to a sense of it all, perhaps checking how it seems to feel in your body. It may take a few moments to discern what is forming in response to this question. We rarely have a clear idea of how the prayer journey unfolds. Generally, unless it feels like the prayer has come to a natural stopping place, or unless it feels like we definitely don't feel right about proceeding, we favor continuing. Often there might be just some sense of something more or some sense of other possibilities. When we hear our symbol reflected back to us, we often find within it a subtle desirability to continue, in which we are further drawn into our prayer by the Holy Spirit. Or we might want to pause a few moments to let the subtly of what may have come, to slightly further form or present itself to us, allowing us to become more aware of it, before responding to the question about whether or not it feels right to journey with it some more. Often pausing briefly will clarify our discernment to proceed or not.

However, if you are still unsure, let your companion know. If you have an idea of why you are unsure, let your companion know that too. Alternately you may feel that it would be right to continue but you have some hesitancy. Again, if you wish, you can let you companion know. If what comes feels difficult or challenging, or if you are bored or frustrated, you can let your companion know. He or she can then ask you if it would feel right to pause within God's love and acceptance. Or you might initially recognize that abiding in Jesus' love and acceptance would be beneficial. If so, let your companion know. He or she can then assist you in doing that by repeating the step, *GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE*.

In this part of the prayer, we continue to be open to our prayer subject or symbol changing, unfolding and evolving. When you indicate to your companion that you wish to continue your prayer journey with what came, then your companion will ask you to notice how all this now feels in your body as you are held in Jesus' love. Or if you have shared your symbol, he or she will ask you to notice how the symbol feels in your body. And then you will be asked to let go into how all about it feels, to let go into all of it and to wait in faith to see if there is anything else that God might want you to notice within all of it. Again, you wait to see if something comes, like a word, image, feeling or memory, that seems to somehow fit or connect with the way the whole thing feels. And then, as before, let your companion know that something has come.

When you let your companion know that something has come by saying "Okay" or by sharing a symbol, you will again be asked if it feels right to continue on your prayer journey with it a little more. You can proceed in cycling through this pattern of "***a***", "***b***" and "***c***" for as long as it feels right inside to proceed, or until any pre-allotted time has run out. At each stage you are the one who determines whether or not to continue.

When you are ready to stop, just let your companion know. Usually you will continue until there is a sense that this part of the prayer has gone as far as it should for now, and that you've come to a natural stopping place. Sometimes when you are ready to stop there is a feeling of resolution and understanding. Sometimes there might also be a feeling of unfinishedness. If there is a feeling of unfinishedness, you might let your companion know that you wish to stop but that there is some sense of unfinishedness with all of it. Your companion might suggest that you pause and ask God how he might want you to be with all of it until you can be with it in prayer again.

That is the format of the central part of the prayer. But it does not convey what happens inside as you do it. What happens inside is very personal and special. What happens inside often feels like a gift from God. Through faith and by God's loving grace we are drawn from our beginning prayer subject to symbols that may or may not contain meaning, to some understanding and grace given to us by God. This understanding usually relates to our original prayer subject. We intuitively know that such an understanding is not arrived at by our own making. We have not logically developed it, and frequently we know that it is an understanding that is beyond our capacity to generate logically on our own. Along with this understanding is a greater sense of peace and love, as shared by God. There can also be a sense of resolution or relief; a sense of received mercy that we can physically feel in our body. We feel that what we have received has been a gift, not from any sense of deserving, but just out of God's love for us.

We also know that we didn't make any of this happen, and neither did our companion. The movement of all this within the prayer is the movement of the Holy Spirit. It is God's gift to us. And yet it is personal and loving, as Jesus so wondrously provides. We find ourselves in a sense of awe and reverence. We know that we are not alone, that God cares for us and is present in our life. Each time we pray, we take that with us after the prayer is over.

Of course, when we pray we do not expect to receive resolution of our prayer issue. It would be presumptuous to expect any result. Some of our prayer-needs go very deep and may be brought to God in prayer many times before some sense of graced movement may be perceived. In fact, looking for a result, expecting a resolution, can block our relationship with Christ and our prayer experience because true prayer is simply surrender to God with openness, humility and honesty. Just taking the time to be with our prayer issue in faith and asking God to be with us, is in itself a healing and trusting gift of surrender. We can be grateful just for that.

RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE

When the person is ready to stop, or if the time has run out: **Okay; let's nurture this special place you've come to inside. Pause here and let go into God's presence within all of this, resting in the quiet tenderness of his Spirit for a while. And then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait]*

When we are ready to end our prayer, we just let our companion know that we are ready to stop. However, stopping is not an abrupt process. It too is a guided process. Continue to keep your eyes closed, and your companion will suggest that you pause and rest within this special place you have come to inside. Just rest here, not expecting any further movement. Just let go into the quiet tenderness of God's Spirit for as long as you like, being within God's silent presence. Resting here, we are no longer concerned about our prayer issue. We are no longer anticipating any movement of the Holy Spirit. We find that these things are not of immediate importance. What is important is letting go into our Lord's tender compassion and being close to God.

This prayer movement is not simply an ending appended to Companioned Prayer; it is a very important and integral part of the prayer experience. We give it time to allow ourselves to be exposed to God's silent presence in our heart. For more information on this see "Abiding in God's Presence" in chapter 12.

If something comes during this part of the prayer that you wish to journey with some more, simply share the symbol out loud or tell your companion that something has come, and he or she

should invite you back to *BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT* if time allows. Or alternatively, just silently spend time with it within this part of the prayer.

When you are ready to end your Companioned Prayer, again let your companion know that you are ready for you both to proceed to the closing prayers.

CLOSING PRAYERS

When they are ready to end, say: **As you savor all of this, let yourself know that this is God's personal love and grace, experienced and felt inside us.** *[pause]* **Staying in this holy and precious gift, you may wish to silently offer a prayer in response, and then say "Amen."** *[wait]*

When they are finished, say out loud a brief prayer or blessing, also ending with "Amen."

After the prayer or blessing, you may invite the person to write in their journal if they wish.

In closing, our companion reminds us that what we have experienced is God's personal love and grace, experienced and felt inside us. This is an opportunity for us to inwardly know and acknowledge the reality of our experience; that it is God's presence and grace given as gift out of his love for us.

Our companion suggests that we stay within this sense of holy gift and silently offer a personal prayer in response to our inner contemplative experience. This silent responsive prayer should be the natural outcome of our contemplative experience. We should be open to praying in whatever way feels right at the time and not presume in advance that a specific prayer or prayer type is best. For example, we might find that we wish to thank the Lord. Or we might find that we wish to ask him to help us keep safe any new understanding we may have received and to help us to use it in faith and trust. Or perhaps we might find that we want to ask God for help in going forward with the issue we have come to know more about through our prayer journey. You may wish to consider, "What do I want to say to Jesus?" There can be any number of appropriate prayer responses, so the best approach is to remain open to God's movement within us, knowing with humility and love that we are communing with God, and then to devote ourselves fully in that communion.

Then when we are ready, say "Amen" out loud. When our companion hears our "Amen," they also say a brief prayer or blessing out loud, ending with "Amen." This is the end of the prayer. You may wish to thank your prayer companion for the grace of their accompaniment.

If you journal your prayer experiences, you can also briefly capture what was special about your prayer experience. This should be just enough to help you remember your prayer experience later. Your journal entry can be words, or a drawing or other symbol, or anything that will help you recall the grace and understandings of your prayer and your closeness with God. If you wish to expand upon your brief journal notes, you can always do so later when you are alone.

Praying in the Mystery of Faith

The additional guidelines presented in this chapter are useful to know, but should not be used as a kind of analysis while praying. We are called to pray in openness and faith, in the

moment, trusting in God. We do not pray analytically. We are called into God's mystery beyond our understanding. Let go into that, and be in God's presence.

Chapter 11
Additional Guidelines for the Companion

Jesus… got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." … If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."

John 13:4-7, 14-15

The Role of the Companion

The role of the companion is to assist the person who is praying surrender to God in faith and trust within their prayer experience, within the loving heart of Jesus. The companion's role is to honor the person's spiritual journey and their relationship with God by accompanying the person in their prayer. In this sense, the companion does not set the pace or dictate what to do next. The companion follows the desires of the person praying, who is in turn open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The companion makes suggestions and invites the person praying to give feedback. But the instructions given by the companion are in response to what the person praying elects to say or do. The companion serves the person who is praying.

The companion knows from their own experiences in Companioned Prayer™ that Christ is present and known from within our prayer experiences. The companion honors the sacred relationship between the person praying and God, and knows that they accompany the person in their prayer journey by their invitation. As such, the role of the companion is very limited to just providing some outside structure or format to the interior dynamic prayer experience. Thus, the companion knows that they are powerless to make anything happen within that experience. They cannot manipulate or cause any inner experiences. They can only help create a prayer setting in which the person praying can find a humble and genuine faith-centered perspective of trust and surrender within their faith, as they are praying. If the companion tries to step beyond that role by inserting their will or their judgment into the person's prayer experience, they will block or hinder the prayer.

Therefore, the companion must be non-intrusive. Respect the person's privacy. Do not present an expectation of sharing or of being involved in what the person is praying about or journeying with. Keep the instructions as brief as possible. Say what you have to say and get out of the way. What is important is not what is going on between the companion and the person praying. What is important is what is going on between the person praying and God.

When companioning someone in their prayer, be mindful of your role. Be present from within your own faith; from within that part of you where you know grace and gift are felt. Companion from the presence of Christ within you. If you have just finished the prayer yourself, stay in that holy grace and give of yourself from there. Use a tone of voice and quality of presence that demonstrates your respect for what they are doing. Know that the person may be spending time with sensitive issues or challenges. Having a faith-centered quality of presence that is respectful, attentive, caring and patient is the most important thing that you can do. It is even more important than getting the words of the prayer just right. It is our gift of this caring presence to each other that can help the person open the doors of faith inside their prayer. This is the gift of faith in service to one another.

Additional General Guidelines

The additional general guidelines in this chapter are in <u>addition</u> to the fundamentally essential "Guidelines for the Companion" found in chapter 4.

- If your prayer partner has not already informed you of any special instructions or preferences, inquire if they have any. For example, time constraints, alternative prayer formats, or any hearing difficulties, and compensate as necessary. It is best to sit close together, usually beside or slightly askew rather than directly facing the person.

- Throughout the prayer, if you have given an instruction and are waiting for a response, and you have waited what you think is a sufficient time and no response is forthcoming, have patience, wait longer. You cannot assume that nothing is going on inside the person, or that they have forgotten what to do. Only if you have waited well beyond a reasonable time and you are concerned that they may just be sitting there waiting for you (especially if they are new to the prayer), you may repeat the question or directly ask if they are ready to go on. Sometimes the mind wanders, and the companion's presence and words can help the person praying to stay focused on their inner journey with God.

- Sometimes a person will respond to your request for feedback by saying, "I don't know" or "Nothing is happening." Often when this happens, they just need a little more time to sit with it. Many people are used to quick answers from their mind, and are not used to waiting for a more intuitive body-felt knowing to emerge. In such cases, simply ask, "Would it feel right to just sit and wait in faith, being open to whatever might come, just paying attention to how it feels in your body?"

- The person praying leads the process according to their inner experience. The companion simply facilitates their prayer by following the desires of the person praying. If at any point the person praying wishes to stop before the complete Companioned Prayer is over, then stop. However, you might ask them if it would be okay to stop with some quiet reflection, and if they say "yes," then lead them through the concluding parts.

- If at any time during the prayer they open their eyes and act as if they have finished, e.g., they just sit there without speaking, or begin talking about their experience as if the prayer session were over, ask them if they would like to continue with the prayer or if they are finished. If they aren't sure, ask them if it would be okay to close the eyes, and just sit

quietly for a few moments, noticing how it all feels inside. Wait a while and then ask them again if they would like to continue in the prayer.

- The companion trusts in God's relationship with the person praying, and does not provide advice or suggestions germane to what the person is journeying with in their prayer, no matter how helpful that advice might otherwise seem. If they ask for advice, indicate that you can discuss it with them some time after the Companioned Prayer session is over; and if possible, wait until you are in a different setting.

The companion should be with the person in prayer with respect, empathy, compassion and faith. The companion offers a loving compassionate presence of openness, gentleness and faith.

Guidelines for Each Part of the Prayer

The detailed options presented in this chapter can seem overwhelming. However, they need not be if we simply understand that we are all guided by God in this prayer, and that we simply provide what support we can. We do not have to be a "perfect" companion. It is not our role to ensure any outcome. God will work with mystery within all of us. Let him do it.

As stated in the previous chapter, and in chapter 5, when we first meet as a group, before we companion one another in prayer, it is good to begin with a prayer. This beginning group prayer establishes our presence and purpose within the grace of God and his love for us. This prayer can be offered by a different person each time we meet. It can be a written prayer, scripture reading, or a writing from a saint; or it may be part of a daily office or other established prayer; or it can be extemporaneous. Then continue with the prayer meeting until it is time to break into groups of two or three for Companioned Prayer.

Similarly, at the end of the meeting, it is good to conclude with a group prayer in the same manner. In this shared prayer, we often express thanks for the special way God has been present to us, and to ask for his blessing as we continue in our daily lives. Prior to the concluding group prayer, the ministry meeting may also have had additional sharing and discussion. See chapter 5 for a discussion of Companioned Prayer group ministry meetings.

The following sections correspond to the Companioned Prayer form. These additional companioning guidelines are in addition to those provided above and are in addition to the essential "Guidelines for the Companion" found in chapter 4. When initially experiencing the prayer as recommended in chapter 4, it is usually not helpful to read this chapter 11. It is better to read this chapter after you have been practicing the prayer for a while.

OPENING PRAYERS

Begin by saying, **In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we open our hearts to you, O Lord. Amen.**

Then on behalf of the person you are praying with and yourself, say a personal prayer said out loud.

> *For example: asking for Christ to be our companion; for our trust in the Lord; for the guidance of the Holy Spirit; thankfulness for this time of quiet; asking Christ to be present within our needs, inside our very brokenness, inside our joy; to help us listen inside to God's quiet call; to be mindful of our sins, and of the grace and blessings received; or, to humbly journey inside with Christ.*

Then invite the other person to also say a personal prayer silently or out loud, and to say "Amen" when they are ready to continue. [wait for the person to say "Amen"]

The companion begins the paired Companioned Prayer with a personal prayer said out loud, starting with acknowledgement that we are praying in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The personal prayer said by the companion should be extemporaneous, not written down, and not an established or formulaic prayer. The personal prayer should not ask for specific results of the shared contemplative prayer experience. Instead, a prayer for God to be present, for help in being open to his love and guidance, is more appropriate. Some sample suggestions are provided in the *OPENING PRAYERS* guidelines above. In this opening prayer the companion is encouraged to include the other person by name if it feels appropriate to do so. Except in this Opening Prayer and in the final blessing or prayer in the Closing Prayer, the person's name should not be said. After your opening prayer, invite the person about to enter into contemplative prayer to also say a personal prayer. It is important that when stating this invitation that the person be told that they may say their prayer silently if they wish.

The person about to enter into the contemplative prayer should not feel any pressure to say their opening prayer out loud, or to spend any "significant" time in their opening prayer. The person should feel that their contemplative prayer experience is between them and God, and not between them and their companion. The companion should be transparent and non-intrusive to the person's interior prayer process. The companion should not be judgmental in any way, nor should they want the person praying to "get it right" or to have certain preconceived experiences or outcomes. The companion's opening prayer should set the tone for a non-manipulative prayerful experience, without expectations or demands. Set the example for total reliance upon faith, upon God, surrendering into God through our contemplative prayer experience.

AS WE ARE

Then say: **Coming before God as we are, take a few minutes to notice how you physically feel, held tenderly in the loving arms of our Lord.** *[briefly pause, and then continue]* **For example, let your attention go to your back and notice what that feels like.** *[pause]* **Notice your shoulders** *[pause]***, your neck** *[pause]***, your head** *[pause]***, your arms** *[pause]***, your hands** *[pause]***, your feet** *[pause]***, your legs** *[pause]***, your stomach** *[pause]***, your heart** *[pause]***, and your breathing.** *[longer pause]* **Notice the body-sense of how you feel right now** *[pause]***; and then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait for a response, and then go to ASKING GOD]*

This physical inventory should be done slowly, giving the person time to pause and notice what their body feels like as they are held in Jesus' love. Each pause should be ten to fifteen seconds. If helpful, you can silently count these seconds before saying the next part. Do not rush through thinking that this is just a preparation before getting to the "real prayer." This physical

inventory is an important part of noticing ourselves as God's physically created creatures, and that we are purposefully embodied and part of God's creation. Our physical nature is part of our humanness, an integral part of who we are as created by God, and therefore part of our prayer relationship with God. Noticing this also helps us be aware of knowing this relationship outside of just our mind or intellect, and helps us retain this "other knowing" throughout the contemplative prayer experience.

The purpose of the inventory is not to achieve a state of quiet or peace, although this often is an outcome. If a person is tense or upset, then we want to encourage the person to notice how that feels in their body. Therefore, do not say words that encourage the person to become calm or peaceful or relaxed. That is not the focus of this step. Instead, encourage the person to notice how they are really feeling physically right now in their current state. This is the state they are in, the state that their prayer begins in. This contemplative prayer begins in the reality of who they are right now, not in who they might think they should be. We come to God in our real state, which includes our physical condition, whether that be broken, or in joy, or in doubt, or in any other way; even in our tiredness or tenseness.

When leading the person through various parts of their body, do this slowly. If they express any discomfort with doing this, stop and ask them if they would like to proceed with it or if they would like to skip it at least for now. If they would like to stop, ask them if it would feel okay to just sit with a general awareness of their overall body-feel in a gentle way. If they say yes, invite them to just notice how their body is and then invite them to give that feeling some gentleness, some tenderness. Invite them to do that for a while and to then let you know when they are ready to go on.

Sometimes when leading a person through this physical inventory, they may let you know specific things that they are feeling. Or perhaps they might tell you prior to the prayer. For example they might say they have a headache, tense neck or sore back. Or they might indicate an overall physical feeling like tiredness. If they identify a physical condition, give them more time in that area when leading them through the inventory. If they've identified an overall condition or physical feeling, include it in the list of physical things for them to notice. When leading a person through this inventory, avoid terms or areas that might be associated with sexuality.

As the person goes through their physical inventory, they may also express out loud some issues or feelings that may come up. This is not, however, the time for the person to spend time with these except to notice them. If they have shared an issue or feeling at a specific point in the inventory, then just allow a little more time while they are with that physical area. If, as indicated by their shared expressions, they seem to be following the issue instead of being with their body, just invite them to notice how their issue feels in their body, in order to get them back to the body feeling.

Some people come into the prayer experience so wrapped up in their head-thinking that they are unable to feel their body. (Note that this may indicate an avoidance of physical or emotional stress or trauma. See chapter 12 for more information on this subject.) When a person cannot feel their body, you might ask them to do some simple stretching and breathing, and then do the physical inventory again. Or invite them to notice any general background feelings of how they are physically feeling. If they respond with a simple, "I feel fine," ask them to notice how

that "fine" feels in their body. Once they pick up on any sense of their body, continue slowly with the inventory.

ASKING GOD

When they are ready, say: **Staying with how this feels inside, and being open to God's loving presence; let me know if something comes when you ask yourself, "Of everything going on in my life, what feels like God is calling me to listen to, inside me right now?"** *[wait for a response]*

When the person praying has indicated that they are ready to continue, invite them into God's loving presence to ask God what feels right for them to listen to, inside. Use the words contained in the prayer format for this. Notice that the words invite the person to ask himself or herself instead of asking God. This is because if they are instructed to ask God directly it usually takes the person out of their body-feeling and puts them in their intellect. From there it is difficult to be open to further movement in this prayer. It is in our heart, not our intellect, that we find Jesus' will for us. So we move our attention away from our intellect, and in humble faith we await his will for us in the mysteries of our heart. The instructions ask the person to notice "what feels like God is calling me to listen to, inside me right now." Because the question is asking the person to be open to an intuitive type of received feeling, sense or awakened issue, people new to the prayer experience may ask that the question be repeated. Or they may be unsure of identifying such an issue when it presents itself. Or they might just sit quietly waiting for a long time. If a seemingly long time has passed (particularly when the person is new to the prayer) it is okay to interrupt the person and ask, "Did something come?" They may say "yes," "no," "I don't know" or may indicate that a number of things came. If they say "yes" proceed with the next step, *GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE*.

If nothing came, invite them to go back to their body-feeling, noticing how their body feels and noticing any physical sensations, for example, using an abbreviated form of *AS WE ARE*, such as:

> **Let your attention go to different parts of your body, pausing to notice any physical sensations and any issues or feelings that might surface as you do this. Take your time, and then let me know when you've done that and we are ready to go on.** *[wait for a response]*

Be sure to include asking them to let you know when they have done that and are ready to go on. When ready to go on, repeat the instructions for *ASKING GOD*. If this again results in nothing coming, ask them if it would be okay to sit with how all that feels inside. It is amazing how God can use this feeling of being stuck or nothing coming as a doorway for his Spirit. Then proceed with the next step, *GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE*.

Sometimes a person may simply say that they would like some help with this. If that is all they say, you will need some additional feedback in order to give them the most useful suggestions. You may simply ask if anything came.

If the person indicates that they aren't sure if something came or if they indicate that a number of things came, they are letting you know that some things came but they are unclear on discerning if this is something that God is calling them to listen to. When initially becoming

familiar with this prayer, it is common for people to wonder, "How do I know if it is something that God is calling me to listen to?" The answer is that we really don't know for sure. In this contemplative prayer of faith we are opening ourselves up to God's presence and his will for us as best we can. We are simply allowing ourselves to be receptive to his direction. How do we do that? By being centered in our faith and trust in God, and simultaneously just noticing when thoughts or feelings or images or memories come that seem to somehow stand out. Perhaps they have slightly more energy, or carry a subtle feeling with them that they are to be noticed. Perhaps we find ourselves going back to them repeatedly. If the person praying is having difficulty discerning what God might be calling them to be with in prayer, it is the role of the companion to assist them to do so. The simplest way is to ask them to notice what has come, notice how it all feels in their body, how they carry it. After a brief pause, ask them to notice if something came that might have slightly more energy or carries a subtle feeling that it should be noticed, and then to let you know what they find.

Sometimes when a person identifies their prayer issue, they may say it (or something about it) out loud. If they do, simply repeat it out loud to them in the same tone as they stated it, where the instructions state "*repeat symbol if shared*" in the next step, *GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE.* There is no preference, however, for them to say it out loud.

GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE

Notice how all this *repeat symbol if shared* **feels inside, and how you carry it.** *[pause]* **With tenderness and faith, notice how it feels to take all this to the loving heart of Jesus, and to feel his gentle love and acceptance in all of this. Take your time, and then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait]*

The companion is present to the person praying from within their own faith. The companion understands that Christ is present within the shared companioned prayer experience, and that He is present within the prayer experience of the person praying. In faith, the companion invites the person praying to pause here and bring his or her prayer issue to Jesus, and to wait and notice Jesus' gentle loving compassion. The purpose of this step is not to sooth away the person's prayer issue, but rather to allow God's love and tenderness into the issue so that the person may be closer to it or more accepting of it, so that they can carry it forward in prayer.

If the person indicates that they are having difficulty taking it to our Lord's love, or if they say they would like some help with this, there are a number of ways that you might assist them. You might say something like either of the following:

> **Take a few moments to ask Jesus to tenderly enfold you and embrace you, as you gently hold your prayer issue, noticing what this feels like. Then let me know when we are ready to go on, or if you would like more help with this.**
>
> or

Knowing that Christ is present with us, take a moment to ask him to give you his love so that it might flow through you into your prayer issue. *[pause]* **Gently hold your prayer issue in your arms and let Jesus' tender love and acceptance be present to all of this. Take your time noticing what this feels like, and let me know if you are able to do this or not.**

If they would like more help with doing this you can suggest other ways that will bring their awareness of God's gentle love to their issue. You can also invite them to notice how it all feels in their body. You can also let them know that it is okay for them to place a caring hand on where they might feel it in their body.

These alternatives should not be used in lieu of the wording of *GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE*, and should not be used routinely.

If the person is having difficulty being with their prayer subject with compassion and gentleness, ask them to check inside and see what feels like the right thing to do. Always honor the wishes of the person praying. If they want to stop, help them do so. If they want to set this issue aside and ask if there might be some other issue that would feel okay to journey with, help them do that. If they say they are feeling challenged with an emotional issue but want to continue, you might ask them to check inside to see if there might be just a piece of the whole thing that they could be with. If they say yes, then see if they can take just this piece to Jesus' loving heart, and sense some gentle tenderness and acceptance. For more possible instructions see "God's Love and Acceptance" in chapter 12.

Work with the person in faith and with gentleness in your voice and manner. Help the person feel in their body both their issue and God's love, in order to help them get out of their head thinking about it and out of their emotional response to it. Respect the person's privacy and do not ask about the nature of their prayer issue. Their prayer is between them and God, not between you and them. Be sure not to project an attitude that being able to experience their issue within God's compassion is necessary for success. Such a viewpoint would be completely erroneous since there is no "success" with this prayer. We are simply being in God's presence with our prayer issue. The person praying should never be encouraged to stay with an issue that doesn't feel right inside themselves to be with. The fact that the person has identified an issue that they feel God is calling them to be with, is in itself an amazing thing that can open spiritual possibilities and grace.

Occasionally, when the person praying has had quite a bit of experience with the prayer and knows its movements, in response to *GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE* they will say out loud a prayer symbol even though at this place in the prayer the instructions do not invite a symbol to be shared. If this is the first prayer symbol that they have shared in their prayer, or if it is different from a symbol that they might have shared in response to *ASKING GOD*, you may assume that their prayer subject has already shifted. In these instances, there are some options that you can offer. You can repeat their symbol within the first sentence of the next prayer movement, *LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS,* as, "**Notice how** <u>*repeat symbol if shared*</u> **feels in your body to be with this.…**" If you know the person's prayer preference for these instances is to go directly to instruction "***a***" of *BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT* (skipping *LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS*), you can do that. Alternately you may abbreviate the

wording of *LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS* similar to its presentation in any of the abbreviated forms of the prayer (see chapter 8) but including the ending phrase, "**and then let me know.**" If the person is new to Companioned Prayer, do not abbreviate or skip the *LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS* part of the prayer.

LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS

When they are ready to go on: **Notice how it feels in your body to be with this, in this gentle, caring, faith-filled way. Allow your awareness to seep into your body, to settle in, and sense how all this feels inside.** *[pause]* **Within the gentle loving heart of Jesus, wait in openness and faith to see if it feels like there is anything else that God might want you to notice, such as a word, image, feeling or memory that seems to somehow fit with the way this whole thing feels, and then let me know.** *[wait]*

After saying the first two sentences, pause a while to give the person praying time to do this, usually about ten to fifteen seconds. Then continue. You do not need to wait for the person to say "okay" or for them to provide some other response before proceeding. In this case, requiring them to respond may take them out of their inner experience of settling into how it all feels inside.

After giving the continued instructions in this step, we wait for the person to let us know that something has come. As before in *ASKING GOD*, the person might have a variety of responses. Other than something coming, the most common response is that nothing is happening. Often people who are new to the prayer simply don't know to be patient in the prayer. If that happens you can ask them if it would feel okay to just sit a little longer with how they are, just letting go into all of that. Let them know that it is okay to take their time, and then to just let you know if something comes. In this way the companion can let the person know that you don't have time-driven performance expectations of them.

Sometimes when a person says that nothing is happening, there is an edge of frustration, boredom or impatience in their voice, or they may state these feelings plainly. When that happens, you might ask the person if it would be okay to be with how all that feels. If they say okay, then repeat the initial instructions in this step.

Sometimes a person will sit with their prayer subject a while and then lose it. Their attention will wander and at some point they will let you know that it is gone. When this happens, ask them to check inside and see what would feel like the right thing to do, and then to let you know what they find. You can suggest that they might want to take a few moments to see if it comes back, recalling how it felt in the body; or they may want to go back and ask if there might be something else to listen and journey with; or they may want to just sit with the feeling of having lost it and see if anything comes from that.

BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT

> a. *If something comes, reflect back the symbol if shared, pause, and then ask,*
> b. **Does this feel right, inside, to journey with some more?** *[wait for a response]*
> *If "no" go to RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.*
>
> c. *If "yes" say:* **Ask yourself, "How does all this** *repeat symbol if shared* **now feel in my body held in Jesus' love?"** *[pause]* **With gentleness and faith, let go into how all this feels inside; and let me know if anything comes that fits the way this all now feels.** *[wait]*
> *If something comes, go back to a.*
>
> *Repeat a, b, c as long as the person wants to continue, or as time allows.*
>
> *When they are ready to stop, go to RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.*

When something does come, the person may either say something to indicate that something has come, like "okay," "yes," or "something has come." Then go to "***b***" asking, "Does this feel right, inside, to journey with some more?"

Or the person may share something of what came, such as a word, image, feeling or memory. If the person has shared a word or symbol of what came, repeat it back to them exactly as they said it. For example, if they said the word "path" repeat "path" back to them with the same tone as it was said. If the person praying said a phrase or whole sentences, just pick out a word or two of theirs that might best capture the whole feeling of what they have shared, and repeat it with the tone given.

If you are not sure what they said, do not repeat the word with a questioning voice. Instead briefly ask them to repeat it so you can hear it correctly, saying something like, "Please repeat that." Remember that you do not need to know anything about the meaning or significance of their prayer subject or shared symbol. It does not need to make sense to you.

When repeating a shared word or symbol, do not place an article or modifier in front of it. For example, if the symbol shared is "path" do not say "the path" or "a path." Just say the word "path." After repeating the symbol, go on to "***b***" asking, "Does this feel right, inside, to journey with some more?"

Responses to "***b***", "Does this feel right, inside, to journey with some more?" can be varied. If they say "yes" or "I think so," go on to "***c***." If they say "no" honor their desire to stop at least for now, by going on to *RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.* If they are not sure, ask if they would like to just sit with it for a little while, letting it feel some of God's love and acceptance, and then to let you know if it feels okay to journey with some more. If they say okay, use the instructions for *GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE* or something similar. After they have done that go to "***b***." If they want to stop, go to *RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE*.

If you are not certain if their response to "***b***" indicates whether they wish to stop at least for now, or if they wish to continue journeying with their prayer subject within this movement of the prayer, you can simply ask them for clarification. This situation is common when, in response to "***a***" they have been saying "Yes" but then you come to a point where they say, "We can go on" or "We can continue." In this situation, you can simply ask, "Do you wish to continue to journey with your prayer subject, or do you wish to stop at least for now?"

Responses to "***b***" may also be "Yes, but…." They may have added a qualifier or something else that tells you more about their situation. For example, they may say, "Yes I think so, but it is a very big step for me" or "Yes, but it's kind of intimidating." Whenever you sense that their prayer issue or symbol is personally challenging, you can ask them if it would feel right to pause and be with it within Jesus' gentle tenderness and acceptance. This might also be the case when they share their symbol. For example the shared symbol itself or the tone of voice or other expression (like tears) may indicate a possible challenge or special sensitivity. It is usually best to ask rather than going directly into God's love and acceptance. If they say yes, work with them empathetically and in faith to help them feel God's love within their issue. Your role in this is to help them stay with their prayer subject or symbol, if that is what they want to do.

As long as the person wants to continue, and as long as time allows, continue cycling through "***a***" ***b***" and "***c***." Remember that you are assisting the person in their personal prayer with God, helping them to be open to the movement of his Holy Spirit felt within them. You are not directing them; they are directing you in response to what they are experiencing within themselves.

Sometimes a person will silently cycle through a number of symbols before they choose to let you know that one came. That is okay. They may even silently continue staying with the inner movement of the Holy Spirit until they are ready to stop. Therefore, if someone is sitting in silence for a long time, do not assume that nothing is happening within them. If nothing is happening, it is their responsibility to let you know, when they are ready to. You should not break into their prayer unless you are running out of available time. If you are running out of time, just gently say something like, "We are running out of time. Please let me know when you are at an appropriate place to stop, at least for now." If the time constraint was only from their side, you might say, "We are running out of time. Please let me know if you wish to continue; or let me know when you are at an appropriate place to stop, at least for now." Be sure to allow enough time to finish with the remaining prayer steps.

RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE

When the person is ready to stop, or if the time has run out: **Okay; let's nurture this special place you've come to inside. Pause here and let go into God's presence within all of this, resting in the quiet tenderness of his Spirit for a while. And then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait]*

In this step the companion's role is to encourage the person praying to rest in God's care without any thought or expectation of inner movement. Here the person is practicing just being in God's presence; letting go into God's Spirit for a while. Then the person will let you know when they are ready to end.

Unless they are taking more time as discussed in chapter 12's "Abiding in God's Presence," the person will usually pause here only for a few minutes before indicating they are ready to go on with an "okay" or short statement like "I'm ready." However, sometimes something specific will come as a result of this resting in God's presence. A person might have thought they were finished, but then within this silence, they understand that they are to listen and journey some more at this time. Or they may understand some other closing aspect of their walk with God. Therefore, do not be surprised if they say out loud a symbol of what has come. If they do, go back to step "***a***" in *BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT*. If they have simply stated that something has come that they would like to spend some time with, go back to step "***c***" in *BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT*.

Sometimes when the person praying has stated that they wish to stop, they may also have a feeling that their walk with God with their issue is not over. They may feel that it is appropriate to stop at least for now, but overall, they know that their journey with their issue will continue. As a companion, we should recognize this and not be surprised if we hear the person express some feeling of unfinishedness. However even if that is the case, you should invite them to rest in God's presence, within their feeling of unfinishedness as well as with any feelings of forward movement or grace. They should be invited to rest within God's tender presence as they may find it within, however they may be. Also see chapter 12's section titled "Stopping with Feelings of Unfinishedness."

CLOSING PRAYERS

When they are ready to end, say: **As you savor all of this, let yourself know that this is God's personal love and grace, experienced and felt inside us.** *[pause]* **Staying in this holy and precious gift, you may wish to silently offer a prayer in response, and then say "Amen."** *[wait]*

When they are finished, say out loud a brief prayer or blessing, also ending with "Amen."

After the prayer or blessing, you may invite the person to write in their journal if they wish.

In this part of the prayer, the companion affirms God's love for the person praying, as a directly felt and understood experience. When the person praying hears this, it helps to solidify their appreciation for this love and for God's active presence in their life, both here at this closing time of the prayer, as well as afterwards when the person goes out into their activities. After a pause to let the person hear and reflect on this, the companion invites the person to say a silent personal prayer in response to God's love and grace, felt and known within themselves.

After the person has said "Amen" and you have given them a few moments, say out loud a brief prayer or blessing on their behalf. You do not need to know what they were praying about in order to offer a prayer. For example, you can thank God for this quiet time of prayer, for the grace that was received, for a blessing to continue in our activities with whatever was special in their prayer experience, et cetera. It is also good to use the person's name in your prayer or blessing.

After the prayer, you can also invite them to briefly journal their prayer experience. Just give them a minute or two to capture what was special about their prayer. If they want to take more time or write extensively, you can invite them to expand upon their entry outside of the Companioned Prayer group setting, such as when they are at home.

Trust in God

It is not necessary to master all of the suggestions in this chapter prior to companioning others. You are not called upon to companion "perfectly" or to know all potential responses. When you companion another person, you too are in the presence of God. So simply let go into his gentle loving presence, and trust in him. You are also in prayer; you are praying. Simply companion from within that, and in faith, respond as you are inspired to. If you are unsure how to respond to a given situation in the prayer, you can always say to the person you are companioning, **"Staying with how this feels inside, and being open to God's loving presence, take a moment to sense what it feels like you would like to do next, and then let me know."** Give them the

time to discern this. Remember that you are not in control; so, don't try to be. Let the person who is praying sense how God is calling them to respond in their prayer, and then to offer guidance to you about how you might assist them to continue. Prayer is very simple; it is an attitude of humble surrender in faith, trust and openness.

The Companion's Experience

Although this chapter focuses on how to be a prayer companion to the person who is praying, it is also useful to consider other aspects of the companion's experience. While the person praying is directing their attention to their inner experience within Christ's presence, the companion is also open to Christ's presence and to the gift of his Holy Spirit. The companioning experience is often like the experience of being a Eucharistic Minister offering the body and blood of Christ. We are drawn into the divine presence of our Lord.

Within this experience, while companioning the other person, and while waiting for feedback, you may notice that your own thoughts, reflections and feelings may become more prayerfully meditative or contemplative. Or you may wish to pray for the person you are companioning, walking together with him or her in our shared spirit in Christ.

Within this time of humble, quiet waiting and prayerful surrender, some aspect of personal importance may surface that you may want to take to Jesus in Companioned Prayer. You can very briefly close your eyes to notice it further, and briefly see if there is any body feel associated with it. You may want to briefly ask Jesus to be with you with this when you have an opportunity to be with him more fully in prayer at a later time. You may also want to jot it down in a journal to help you keep it fresh for later. If you do find yourself drawn to some potential prayer subject, be sure to also keep your attention available for your first priority, the person whom you are companioning.

In any case, it is common to find the time of companioning to be a quiet, reflective and prayerful time in which we feel a greater openness to God's loving presence and grace. That in itself is worth taking the time to especially notice and cherish.

Chapter 12
Additional Information

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
...a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench.

Isaiah 42:1a, 3a

This chapter presents some additional information for both the person praying and the companion. This information can be helpful for specific situations, and should be learned at least prior to using Companioned Prayer™ in service ministry (chapter 6) and sharing the prayer with others (chapter 9). With regards to initially experiencing Companioned Prayer, I would recommend gaining a few months of regular practice of the prayer before spending any significant time with this additional information unless any of these topics are applicable to your particular situation. Since much of this builds on the material in chapters 10 and 11, if it has been a while since you have read those chapters, you may wish to review them first. Again, do not let the material in this chapter and the previous two chapters turn the prayer into analysis. The prayer experience should be inwardly dynamic and spontaneous, inspired by the Holy Spirit in the love of Christ in the moment.

The Loving Heart of Jesus

In *GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE* we are encouraged to take our prayer subject to the loving heart of Jesus. But what is the loving heart of Jesus? Some people may have a specific concept in mind, such as the Catholic devotion to the Sacred Heart and related illustrations. These devotions may venerate Jesus' physical heart as the representation of his divine love for us. For other people the concept of Jesus' loving heart may be unfamiliar and perhaps even disconcerting. Unfortunately both reactions (veneration or confoundment) take us away from our inner felt Companioned Prayer experience, and move us out to some thought, meditation, or emotional devotion. Therefore in addition to reviewing this subject in chapter 3's "Jesus Loves Us" and in chapter 10's section "*GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE*," it may be helpful to further understand how the loving heart of Jesus is surrendered into in Companioned Prayer.

Through our faith we know that Jesus is the embodiment of God's love for us as we are; and that God's love is expressed not only through Jesus but also through all of God's creation, including us. When we experience love from another person, or when we experience the love we give another person, this love is a sharing of God's love felt here and now, concretely. This love is a portion of the blessing and gift of God's love, the same love that he provided in fullness and transparent purity through Jesus.

We experience this divine love in our relationships of compassion, hope, charity, love, tenderness and affection. Therefore we already know from our own experience how tender love and acceptance feels, and we can naturally appreciate how Jesus' tender love for all humanity feels, and how his love for us, with our personal burdens and wounds that we carry, feels. Perhaps we have had some experiences in Companioned Prayer or in other worship or prayer times of more direct appreciation or experiences of Jesus' loving heart, of his pure love or tender compassion. If so, we can also place our self and our prayer subject within how this gentle and deep tender love feels inside, not as a concept, but in a physical letting go and surrendering within. This is a felt mystery that will deepen with time. So be patient, and in faith be okay with not trying to define exactly what it is.

The Body Feel of God's Presence

God imbued his creation with the Holy Spirit. We are open to living in that Spirit in the wholeness of our being – mind, heart, body and soul – in a special and wondrous way through faith; belief based on revelation, God's revelation through his son Jesus Christ, the prophets, scripture, and the miracle and awe of his creation. The revelation of love given and received with one another, and the revelation of love and grace received of God. Jesus demonstrated this incarnation of God's presence and love in his presence, words and actions. Jesus did not simply correct the old theology. He did not simply try to get us to exchange one set of beliefs or interpretations for a more accurate set. Instead he showed us that the reality of divinity – of the Kingdom of God – is to be realized in all aspects, including through the physical, in the concrete here and now. He wanted us to understand that the Kingdom of God is to be lived and carried out not just in our minds; but through faith, it is to be experienced and lived in our complete humanness: our minds, hearts, bodies and souls.

Jesus put great emphasis on demonstrating God's presence in the body. He healed the physically sick and the lame; people experienced this. He walked from town to town, and ate with people. He did not just sit in a synagogue or academy and proclaim a new "correct interpretation." He fed the multitudes. And at the Last Supper he said, "Take and eat of my body and drink of my blood." One of the things he was emphasizing was that his real presence – God's presence – is to be experienced and known through our physical bodies as well as in our minds. And that his real presence accepted fully in this way will actually transform us in the here and now; save us from ourselves and open us to the divine. He is telling us that the new Covenant with God through him is real, not just in a mystical understanding but in the fullness and realness of creation and ourselves. He was always bringing the truth of God's Spirit into concreteness; taking it beyond dogma and into the physical reality of who and how we are, here and now, in action and in body as well as in mind and spirit: in our whole real humanness. We are not just to love in the abstract or to worship love; but we are to love our neighbors and our enemies. He gives us examples such as the Good Samaritan, and others. Throughout every aspect of his ministry he proclaims and demonstrates the Good News in the very real and practical life we are living.

It is in this concrete completeness that we are called to experience the Good News, as God reveals himself within us and heals us in Companioned Prayer. As baptized Christians we are the body of Christ. "*Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*" (1 Corinthians 12:27) Both collectively and individually, through faith and grace, our body is Christ's body, our blood is his blood, as we yield to his will and let his transforming real presence – the loving

presence of God – be felt and known in our body. And in Companioned Prayer we frequently bring our attention to our physical nature, our/his body. The reason we do this is more than just to quiet our mind and our emotions. When something comes in response to *ASKING GOD* and throughout the prayer, there is a special sense to what has come that distinguishes it from other things. There is something more to it, something that can actually be felt. Not felt emotionally, but felt viscerally, genuinely, intrinsically. We can feel it in our body. It has a tangible realness that defies our making it up in our mind or emotions. So when we check inside to sense how something feels in our body in prayer, we are opening our awareness to the Holy Spirit in the reality and concreteness of the physical. In this contemplative incarnational Companioned Prayer, through faith we are open to the tender sense of the Holy Spirit felt in our body, experienced as physically felt; as a gift, not as made up by us.

That the body should have a place in our experience of the Holy Spirit should not be a surprise. Consider how wondrous the body is: how the eyes and sight give us all creation to see; how the ears and hearing give us whispers and song; how our legs and feet give us motion, and our arms and hands give us others to hold; how we can feel the wind, and the cold and the warmth; how our bodies transform food into our nourishment; how even our bodies give us the ability to co-create new life. Our bodies are miraculous, and are inseparable from our humanness, including our ability to grow in God's love and to express his love here and now. It should be no surprise that the body, which God created for his purpose, also has a role in giving us God's love poured out and experienced through the Holy Spirit. "*What God has made clean, you are not to call profane.*" (Acts 10:15) This wonderful human body is a gift of God imbued with his life force. It has more subtlety and gift than we commonly acknowledge. Thus in Companioned Prayer we frequently return our awareness of something that has come to how it feels in our body, in the realness of our humanness, knowing that by doing so we are also nurturing our awareness of God's personal and awesome loving presence. In this gift of God's grace, we begin to understand how our bodies are the body of Christ here, now, personally, and for all of us.

This awareness of God's personal love and care for us in our life, as directly and physically experienced through Companioned Prayer will dawn naturally over time with each prayer experience. In Companioned Prayer the act of bringing our awareness to the body has greater implications than simply quieting our thoughts or stilling our emotions. It is not just the body by itself, but it is with our willing soul and the Holy Spirit that the body is spiritually whole, and which is sanctified in the Eucharist. At some point when this truth is felt within, the practice of discerning how something feels in the body helps us not only when we pray but also in our everyday life. We find that it is possible to be aware of God's living Covenant and to be guided by Christ in our hearts, so that we too may respond to God's call to love, to abide in him, and to help others in the real needs of all of his people and his creation. And then, in him and with him, we will truly be his hands, his heart, his body, his people, his Church here on Earth.

Wanting Change and Recognizing the Issue

One of the most prevalent stumbling blocks to the prayer is created when the person praying lets their attention be held by an attitude of wanting change. The person seeks resolution to their issue in the form of an answer, solace, comfort, healing, or some other sign or mercy from God. This impediment to prayer and to being close to God also occurs when we are seeking "spiritual experiences." The blockage comes because the person is fixed on a preconceived desired

outcome, instead of letting go into the issue and in faith letting God provide whatever response he wills. Companioned Prayer calls upon us to be present to our issues in complete faith in God, surrendering to his will, and trusting his justice and mercy. When we hold on to a desired or hoped for outcome, we are not open to listening to what might come. At that point the prayer ceases to be contemplative; that is, it has ceased to be a prayer of listening for God's presence in our life and walking in faith with him, and has instead become a prayer of confession or petition.

Yet, the desire for God's grace and mercy is only natural, especially when we are in pain or during a time of trial when the desire for relief received from God is heightened. The companion can help the person through this blockage created by wanting change or wanting a specific outcome, if the person praying lets the companion know what is going on. For example, as a result of the *ASKING GOD* part of the prayer the person praying must let their companion know that "nothing is happening" or similar phrase. Then the companion can respond. The companion can ask the person if it would feel right or okay for them to be with the feeling of "nothing happening" – or whatever phrase was used by the person praying.

This changes the person's focus from fixating on a desired outcome, to the issue they are truly dealing with at present, right now in their prayer, which is that "nothing is happening." The first movement or shift in their prayer has already taken place, without their being aware of it. They started with their question/issue and related desire, which then shifted to "nothing is happening." Any feelings of impatience or frustration associated with "nothing is happening" are usually a result of having a desire for something to happen or unknowingly fixating on a desired outcome. By following this shift, the person will come back to being present to, and surrendering in faith into, their issue as God is calling them to listen to. It is by letting go in faith into the whole experience and feeling of "nothing is happening" that the person can be free to listen to God. The person need not feel that they have abandoned their original issue. They are just following its progression in a truly contemplative way, being open to what is real within them right now and being open to God without preconceived or desired outcomes.

Just as it is not our goal in Companioned Prayer to have God fix us, heal us, or save us, our goal is also not to validate a theology or to have a religious experience. As soon as we want that, we are not open in faith to what we may need to hear from God. Usually wanting to be healed or saved or wanting a religious experience is indicative of a deeper need; some ache or tenderness within us that longs to be listened to. If our focus is to have a religious experience or to have an experience that validates our personal theology or beliefs, then we are no longer being faithful, no longer owning and letting go into our authentic need, with faith, compassion and trust. When we want a predefined outcome we are no longer in a relationship of surrender into a living faith within our prayer. Therefore each time we pray we must be willing to let go of our theologies and instead simply trust in God. If you find yourself focused on being healed or saved or having a particular type of experience, then instead, be open to the *feeling in your body of your wanting* to be healed, saved, et cetera, rather than on the desired-for outcome. If you are companioning someone who has expressed a desire for an outcome, encourage them to be open to journeying with the *feeling of the need* of their desire rather than its outcome.

Discerning What God is Calling Us To Listened To

Some people who are becoming familiar with the prayer may expect that in the *ASKING GOD* movement they are supposed to hear God speak to them; that they are supposed to discern God's thoughts as distinct from their own thoughts. This is an erroneous expectation. In our prayerful surrender to God, he is present to us, but we wait for his inspiration through our human feelings and thoughts which we perceive as ours, but as somehow special or unique from our other thoughts or feelings that do not have his inspiration.

Often as a result of asking what feels like God is calling you to listen to in *ASKING GOD*, what comes is just a symbol, rather than a clear personal issue or subject. When this occurs, pause to notice the general feeling or sense associated with the symbol, and then notice how that feels in your body. If it seems special in some way, use the symbol and its associated feeling as your prayer subject, if it feels right to do so.

Sometimes we may find ourselves looking for or expecting a concrete issue or symbol before accepting it to journey with in prayer. We might find ourselves waiting without giving value to some very slight feeling or sense within what we have received or are aware of. However, if instead we were to allow ourself to accept this faint sense, at least temporarily, to pause and notice it, spending time with it and staying with it for a little while, it may on its own develop into something that more definitely feels like it is something to be journeyed with. This way of noticing can be useful both in the *ASKING GOD* part of the prayer as well as during *BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT*.

Sometimes a person is just not sure whether what has come is what God is calling them to be with in prayer, or perhaps even whether or not their overall prayer experience is from or with God. In such instances, encourage the person to be open to having that doubt as an issue to be with in their prayer. It is good to turn to Jesus with our doubts. We put our trust first in him, and in him we are open to truth. This does not mean that we must have perfect trust and faith in order to pray. God loves us and reaches out to us in whatever state of trust or doubt we are in. He accepts us and lovingly helps us as we are, with our imperfections, doubts, transgressions, pains, and aspirations. In fact, like Thomas, it is by owning our very real doubts in prayer and allowing them to be our prayer subject, that we may find a greater revealed Truth. However, unless we let the person know that it is okay to be with our doubts in prayer, they may not realize that this too is part of our journey in faith.

Companioning People with Short Attention Spans

Some people, due to a disability or other condition, may only be able to focus their attention for very short periods. For those people, consider offering to companion them only with appropriate sections of the prayer, with repeated instruction, or with further guidance. Perhaps share and reflect symbols frequently (possibly multiple times in each prayer movement), much more than indicated in the standard prayer forms, so that they receive frequent feedback about what they are experiencing. Let the person know that the two of you will try different approaches, and together you two will discuss what seems to work best. Empower the person to let you know what they are most comfortable with. Get to know the person and their needs with respect to how

to best apply the format of the prayer process, and let them know that you will be discovering and discussing this together through trial and error.

For example, together you might set a length of time for periods of silence after which you are to ask if something came, what they are doing or feeling, what they would like to do, or if they want you to automatically repeat or reinforce certain instructions, to regularly ask for feedback, and so forth. Another approach could be to provide breaks between the prayer's movements with brief discussion, listening or just resting. Such discussion should be minimal and should only support their giving attention and recognition to their prayer experience in the manner that will facilitate their ability to stay with their experience, including as felt in their body, with gentleness and openness to grace. Then gently guide them on to the next part with eyes closed as appropriate and as they wish. Perhaps repeat their symbol of what they have shared and invite them to notice how it feels in their body, which is a member of Christ's body, and then invite them into the next prayer element or movement. After experiencing this a number of times they may or may not, depending on their disability, be ready to experience the entire prayer in its full continuous fluidity.

Trauma and Major Illness[2]

Some individuals may have experienced trauma related to parts of their body in their past, including physical accidents, injury, violence, or even abuse, including sexual trauma. Never encourage a person to be with physical sensations or feelings (or related emotional issues) beyond their own comfort level. Remember that the person praying is in charge. The role of the companion is to facilitate by following the wishes, and responding to the needs, of the person praying. Sometimes a person's awareness of past experiences or deep emotional feelings may have been repressed and the physical inventory *(AS WE ARE)* is the first time their awareness is led back to where in their body such trauma occurred. Whenever an individual encounters and expresses feelings of violence or abuse, the companion must be especially sensitive, patient and compassionate.

If, during the physical inventory, the person has stopped within the feelings of past trauma, you might ask them if they would like to check to see if it would feel right to pause for a few moments within Jesus' gentle love and compassion (see *GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE*) or if they would like to go on with the inventory. If they want to pause within God's love and acceptance, it is important to come back to the conclusion of the physical inventory before proceeding with the prayer. That is, do not guide them from there directly into *LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS* unless they have stated that is what they want to do. If at any time in the prayer, including during the physical inventory, they wish to stop completely, honor that, inviting them to stop within compassion and tenderness felt overall inside. They have made an important and very large step in their prayer journey into wholeness.

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[2] Many of the basic concepts in this section, and in the sections "Resistances Can be Doorways" and "Stopping with Feelings of Unfinishedness" were developed by Fr. Ed McMahon, PhD, and Fr. Peter Campbell, PhD, associated with their practice of Bio-Spiritual Focusing. Here their presentation has been reframed within a Christian orientation and Companioned Prayer focus. As such, within a prayer experience instead of a psychological method, these situations rarely present themselves. Nevertheless, they are offered here as options. Their use should not replace professional therapeutic or medical care, if needed.

In addition to trauma, individuals may be personally challenged by other forms of psychological and/or medical conditions, mental as well as physical. In all cases, Companioned Prayer is not in any way a substitute for professional therapy or medical treatment. Nor should Companioned Prayer be considered as a form of treatment for such conditions. However, such conditions often challenge a person spiritually. Therefore, to the extent that the person wishes to approach their issue from a faith perspective within their prayer, you may companion them if you feel comfortable doing so. However, you must companion them with sensitivity, always asking them to check if it really feels okay and right for them to be with their issue, initially and as it changes. Take great care to invite them to repeatedly experience *GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE* with their issue, and to stop whenever they wish.

Other people may come to the prayer and find themselves repeatedly dealing with a surprisingly intensely distressing or traumatic issue. Again, you should feel free to suggest professional therapy or medical help, and discuss the special spiritual role of the prayer as distinct from any form of treatment. You should openly talk with the person to help them understand that what you offer is a prayer and not a therapy. If you feel that the person is using your companioning presence and skills as a form of treatment, or if you feel they are relying on you in any way to be their therapeutic caregiver, you should not companion them until they are clear about what the prayer is about and what your role as a prayer companion is. You should not feel obligated to companion anyone whom you are not comfortable companioning; and you should not do so. Instead ask them to discuss their participation in the prayer with their priest and therapist or doctor before possibly returning to practice the prayer.

None of this is to suggest that prayer or Companioned Prayer is inappropriate for individuals that have experienced or are experiencing trauma, dysfunction, grief or other emotional challenges, mental illness or physical illness. In fact, prayer is a natural response to such times of crisis and challenge. Nor would it be proper to suggest that physical, emotional and spiritual healing cannot occur within prayer or for that matter within Companioned Prayer. History and experience tell us that God can and does intervene, and can provide mercy and grace within personally challenging situations. But with Companioned Prayer, it must be remembered that the prayer experience is between the person praying and God, and that neither the companion nor the person praying should view the role of the companion or the prayer practice itself as a substitute for professional treatment if that is what is needed.

Companioning Individuals with Special Needs

Often people who have significant mental or emotional challenges may benefit from a gradual introduction to the prayer, customized to correspond to their special needs or situation. Instead of the introductory Companioned Prayer sessions of chapter 9, you may wish to offer just parts of the prayer repeated over multiple meetings, gradually adding more prayer movements if that is appropriate. The important thing is to try and match what you are offering to their capabilities and situation, with their feedback and direction. You should not be in a hurry to get to the full Companioned Prayer, or to even think that that is the goal. The goal should be to give the person the prayer experience which best matches their special needs and abilities, and doing so might not ever result in a full Companioned Prayer experience. Exploring the right balance should be a collaborative endeavor. When responding to people with special needs, it is also advised to work with your priest, pastor, or parish administrator so that they are informed and can

contribute to or direct the most appropriate responses. See also "Ministering Directly to People in Need" in chapter 6, review chapter 11, and see other related sections in this chapter 12.

When working with a special needs person, you can use some of the Supportive Interior Prayers referred to in chapter 9, or select some other form which is appropriate for the individual. When choosing a prayer form for an individual with special needs, it is very important to appreciate the differences between the following prayer forms: "Reflective Prayer," "An Introductory Personal Prayer," "An Introduction to the Loving Heart of Jesus," "Companioned Prayer for Special Individuals," and the standard Companioned Prayer form, all of which are available from the CPCF's website. In any case, it is always important to plainly explain what you are offering and how they are to give you any feedback. Also explain the differences when changing from one prayer form to another. An example of a prayer form for individuals with special needs is provided below.

Companioned Prayer™
for Special Individuals

OPENING PRAYERS
Begin by saying, **In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we open our hearts to you, O Lord. Amen.**

Then on behalf of the person you are praying with and yourself, say a personal prayer out loud.

Then invite the other person to also say a personal prayer silently or out loud, and to say "Amen" when they are ready to continue. [wait for the person to say "Amen"]

AS WE ARE
Then say: **Coming before God as we are, take a few minutes to notice how you physically feel, held tenderly in the loving arms of our Lord.** *[briefly pause, and then continue]* **For example, let your attention go to your back and notice what that feels like.** *[pause]* **Notice your shoulders** *[pause]***, your neck** *[pause]***, your head** *[pause]***, your arms** *[pause]***, your hands** *[pause]***, your feet** *[pause]***, your legs** *[pause]***, your stomach** *[pause]***, your heart** *[pause]***, and your breathing.** *[longer pause]* **Notice the body-sense of how you feel right now** *[pause]***; and then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait for a response, and then go to GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE]*

[If they have shared a symbol of what came, repeat it as spoken, and then go on.]

GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE
When they are ready, say: **Staying with how this feels inside, and being open to God's loving presence, with tenderness and faith, notice how it feels to take all this to the loving heart of Jesus, and to feel his gentle love and acceptance in all of this. Take your time, and then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait]*

LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS
When they are ready to go on: **Notice how it feels in your body to be with this, in this gentle, caring, faith-filled way. Allow your awareness to seep into your body, to settle in, and sense how all this feels inside.** *[pause, and then continue:]*

RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE
After a pause, say: **Okay; let's nurture this special place you've come to inside. Pause here and let go into God's presence within all of this, resting in the quiet tenderness of his Spirit for a while. And then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait]*

CLOSING PRAYERS
When they are ready to end, say: **As you savor all of this, let yourself know that this is God's personal love and grace, experienced and felt inside us.** *[pause]* **Staying in this holy and precious gift, you may wish to silently offer a prayer in response, and then say "Amen."** *[wait]*

When they are finished, say out loud a brief prayer or blessing, also ending with "Amen."

After the prayer or blessing, if appropriate, you may invite the person to write in their journal if they wish.

Note that this Special Needs prayer form does not include the *ASKING GOD* movement or the continuation of the prayer offered in the standard *LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS* and the *BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT* movements. This Special Needs form can be used incrementally. For example, the first time you use it, you may wish to exclude *LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS* and *RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.* When it seems right for both of you at another time, you could add in the *LETTING GO…* movement, and then still later, also include the *RESTING IN…* movement.

If individuals with special needs offer to companion you, they should use the same form or interior prayer which you used to companion them.

These individuals should be considered vulnerable and subject to the Safe Environment requirements of the hosting and sponsoring organizations, as well as the additional Safe and Accessible Environment guidelines of the Companioned Prayer Christian Fellowship available on the CPCF's Supplemental Resources webpage. These guidelines include companioning with two companions present, of which at least one is an experienced companion. And always ensure that the person with special needs understand the "Disclaimer" and "Confidentiality and Sharing" handouts of CPCF's Resources webpage, and have received copies. Engage in discussions about these topics so they can contribute to your understanding of their special needs, and so you have an opportunity to address any misunderstandings or concerns, and so you can confirm their understanding and agreement. If at any point you do not feel comfortable companioning the person, even if you are using a modified prayer form, you should stop. It is not your mission to personally fix anyone or to facilitate a cure. The Disclaimer is for you as well.

Resistances Can Be Doorways

Nevertheless, all of us carry personal challenges and issues within us. It is a part of the human condition. Therefore, when a person is praying it is not unusual for them to come upon hurting or broken places within them. These can be felt in a variety of ways including anger, sadness, shame, fear, pain, anxiousness, tears, and so on. Sometimes, even with deep feelings of hurt or pain, it can still feel okay to journey with those feelings in prayer. Usually when there is a

sense of "okay to be with it," the person praying also has some tangible sense of faith in God's living presence – that God is with them in their brokenness and pain. If, in your own prayer, you do decide to journey with such feelings, it is important to be with your issue with compassion. Let your prayer companion know what is going on, and ask for help with taking your prayer issue to Jesus' loving heart and with taking plenty of time and repeated instructions if desired, to feel Jesus' tender love and acceptance. (See the discussions in this chapter and in chapters 10 and 11 on *GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE*.)

However, a very natural reaction to experiencing feelings of hurt or pain is to not want to be with those feelings or their issues. We tend to hold them off at arm's length rather than listening inside them for God's call. When we resist journeying with them in our prayer, however, we usually experience them as barriers – our prayer seems to go nowhere. However, as recognized by Fathers Ed McMahon and Peter Campbell, if ministered to with compassion, experiences of resistances can often become doorways to God's awesome love and mercy, instead of walls.

It is important to never proceed into feelings of hurt or resistance when it doesn't feel okay or right to do so. Remember, you (who are praying) are in charge, not your companion. Your inner feelings and defenses need to be honored every time – without exception – by both you and your prayer companion. But with faith and love, often there can be a way to be with the resistance in a manner that does feel okay inside for you to journey with in prayer. Rather than proceeding into the hurt or issue, you might notice the feeling of resistance instead. Notice the feeling or sense of "not wanting to journey with it." If you are companioning someone who has come upon difficult or hurting feelings, you can ask the person if it would feel okay to spend some time with the sense of not wanting to be with the issue instead of with the issue itself, by offering the following wording:

RESISTANCES

When the person indicates resistance, or a feeling of 'not okay' to listening to or journeying with a feeling, issue or symbol, ask them: **Would you like to see if it would be okay to be with your sense of not wanting to be with all this?** *[wait for a response]*

If they say no and have not given you any further instructions, help them set this issue aside and then ask them what they would like to do next (e.g., discern if there might be something else that God is calling them to be with in prayer, end their prayer, etc.)

If they say yes: **All right; with gentleness and faith, ask yourself, "Would it be okay to journey with 'not wanting to be with' all of this?" Let me know if it is okay to be with the sense of all your resistance to all of this.** *[wait for a response]*

If it's still not okay, say: **Staying with how this all feels in the body, and being open to God's tender love, check inside and see if there is some part of this whole thing that would feel okay to journey with, and let me know what you find.** *[wait]*

If they say there is no part of it that they wish to journey with, and they have not given you any further instructions, help them set this issue aside and then ask them what they would like to do next (e.g., discern if there might be something else that God is calling them to be with in prayer, end their prayer, etc.)

<u>If they say yes</u>, proceed to GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE.

Throughout this process, make sure that the person praying knows that they are the one in control. Keep the instructions invitational. The companion is simply honoring the wishes of the person praying, and assisting them do whatever they wish to do. The companion does not provide any advice or direction. It is all between the person praying and God.

A similar approach to dealing with resistances can be used when a person wants to talk about or act out their prayer issue. You might ask them to check inside, in their body, and see if it would feel okay to instead journey with the feeling of wanting or needing to act out or talk about it. If not, continue with the instruction for *RESISTANCES* above. However, if they are okay with proceeding, then invite them to experience some of God's gentle love and acceptance before going further.

The invitation to pause and take their prayer subject to the loving heart of Jesus, and to feel his gentle love and acceptance should be offered throughout the prayer whenever it seems appropriate. Go slowly, allowing the person to have unhurried time to sense and be with their issue, or their resistance to it, within their relationship with God, being open to Jesus' love, and listening inside to how he might be calling them to be present to their feelings or issues. Give them ample opportunity to be with the body-feeling of their issue or their resistance, instead of being with the emotion or concept of it. And encourage them to notice the body-feel of God's love whenever they let their attention go to how their issue feels in their body. (See the instructions in *GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE* below and in chapters 10 and 11.)

Note that the above processes do not invite the person to be directly with their hurt, need or emotion. Instead, it is the resistance to the hurt that can be the doorway to God's grace. With God's love and compassion, feelings of resistance can be special opportunities to hear God and to be open to his spirit of mercy, reconciliation and understanding.

God's Love and Acceptance

Allowing a prayer subject (including the subject of resistance) to experience God's tender love and acceptance is a very important part of a person's prayer. Before reading further, stop and re-read those sections of chapters 10 and 11 about *GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE*. In this section below, additional guidelines and discussion are offered.

The companion should always be attentive for clues or statements from the person praying that can indirectly indicate that they may be journeying with a particularly sensitive issue. Symbols that are shared might include the words "scary" "anger" "sadness" and so forth. Descriptions shared can portray a sensitive or hurting picture or situation. Or the person might be giving physical clues, such as heavy sighs, slumped shoulders, or even tears. Note that all of these clues however do not necessarily mean that the person is dealing with painful or hurting issues. It is difficult to ascertain from these clues what the true nature of the person's interior experience is, and the companion should not attempt to do so. For example, tears or sighs can just as likely be tears of joy or sighs of relief. Shared symbols such as "scary" or "sadness" may not convey for example that the person's interior experience or feelings associated with these words might actually be of hope or feelings of God's personal love. So again, do not suppose that these clues

indicate a particular interior experience, unless they are accompanied by clear and specific words to that affect from the person praying.

Nevertheless, when such clues are presented, they usually do indicate that the person is carrying forward in their prayer a very sensitive issue, (regardless whether the person considers it to be a "positive" or "negative" feeling.) When you feel that they may be praying within a personally sensitive issue, that is the time to ask if they would like to pause and be with it in God's love and acceptance. Joyfully tender issues benefit from Jesus' gentle love and acceptance just as much as hurting or challenging issues. What matters is that the person is praying with a personally sensitive issue. Then the role of the companion is to help the person slow down and spend some time with it, in faith with Jesus' compassion invited and felt within them, held in their body, if that is what the person would like to do.

Sometimes a person may be praying with a particularly sensitive issue and yet when they bring it to Jesus' Sacred Heart they have not perceived or felt his tenderness or acceptance. In these occasions they may ask for help with this, or they may simply indicate that they do not feel Jesus' gentle love or acceptance. As their companion, there are a number of ways you can provide additional support.

First, if the person is fairly new to the prayer they may not have allowed themselves enough time to simply wait in faith in this part of the prayer. This is a contemplative step in which we don't do much beyond being open to God and patiently wait in faith. If we are used to doing something and expecting results, we may need to be reminded to slow down, be patient, take it easy and to approach this step in faith and trust. To help get out of our "instant expectation" frame of mind, the companion can ask us to again notice what it <u>all</u> (the prayer subject and the expectation or "nothing is happening") now feels like in their body. Bringing their attention to all of this as felt in the body will help the person get out of their head thinking or emotional stuckness, and will help them be more open to the contemplative nature of the prayer. You might use a phrase like this:

> **Would it be okay to take a few minutes to notice how all this feels in your body?** *[wait for a response; if "yes" continue with]* **Within the gentle love of God, notice how all of this feels in your body, and how you physically feel. Take your time, and then let me know when you've done that and we are ready to go on.** *[wait for a response]*

After this, again invite them to Jesus' gentle Sacred Heart, tenderly carrying their prayer issue and taking their time to just wait there for a while with gentleness and compassion, and then after a while to let you know if they are ready to go on, or if they would like some more help with it.

This waiting is more than simply waiting in time. It is also a gentle waiting in an openness to God while still being with our prayer subject. If in response they have done this and have now indicated that they are ready to go on, proceed to *LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS*.

If they would like more help with this there are a number of suggestions you can provide to assist them. If the person has indicated that they are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the concept of Jesus' loving Heart and cannot "do" that, they are signifying that they probably have abandoned the body-feel of their prayer experience (how they carry it) and have moved out into their intellect. Therefore, you might use some of the following guidelines to help them become familiar with the body-feel of Christ's loving compassion. Get to know your prayer partner and learn what approach or suggestions he or she prefers.

For example, you can ask them to recall any number of passages in the Bible when Jesus gave his love and acceptance to others, and then ask them to notice how that experience of Jesus' love and acceptance would feel within them, in their body. Have them close their eyes and take some time with this exercise. Some people have favorite biblical references or experiences that they find comforting and effective. For example, a person may be especially comforted by the recollection of the experience of Mary's compassion. Another person may be especially moved by the acceptance and love of Jesus given to sick, hurting or rejected people. Perhaps they will relate to the story of Jesus' seeking and finding the lost lamb, and his carrying it, holding it against his body, as he brought it home. Some people respond to reminders of personal times or experiences in their life when they felt God's love, perhaps directly or through friends or relatives. Sometimes when you know a person's preferences, just a word or short phrase associated with a special scripture, person, place or time might be just enough to remind the person of God's special love in their life and to be a signal for them to stop and invite God's love into their prayer experience. Be a true partner in faith and love, working empathetically to help the person to be with their prayer issue in gentle faith, if that is what they want to do.

In addition, the following two instructions may be helpful. These suggestions can also be incorporated into the introductory prayer sessions of chapter 9. The first instruction is:

> **Gently hold your prayer issue as if it were a baby or small child. Cuddle it and give it warmth and acceptance.** *[pause]* **Notice what it feels like in your body to hold it this way.** *[pause]* **Now take all of this to Jesus' tender loving heart, and notice how that all now feels inside. Take your time and then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait]*

The second instruction is:

> **Okay, notice how all this feels in your body.** *[pause]* **Now ask it if there might be just a part of all of it that would be okay with receiving some of God's gentle love and tenderness, and let me know what you find.** *[wait]* *<u>If there is a part of it that can receive God's love</u>, continue with:* **Now gently hold that part with tenderness so that it can feel Christ's gentle love through you. Let Jesus' compassion be your strength as you notice his gentleness and acceptance with how it all feels inside.** *[pause]* **Notice how this all feels inside, take your time and then let me know when we are ready to go on, or if you would like more help with this.** *[wait]*

Remember that the purpose of pausing to take our prayer issue to Jesus' loving heart and feeling his love and acceptance is not to make the issue feel better or to make it diminish or go away. The purpose is to help the person carry as much of it forward in their prayer as they

comfortably can, holding all of it close to their heart as they walk with Jesus. This is a very important understanding. Therefore, in this prayer we do not actively replace hurting or sensitive issues with religious images, thoughts or feelings; nor are we handing our prayer issue off to God. We call upon God and our faith to help us know and closely hold our issues with love and tenderness as we walk with Jesus in our faith journey, but we do not ask him to take them away, nor do we replace them with religious images or religious feelings.

Accepting our burdens, trials and challenges in the same way that Jesus accepted his – in complete surrender to God's will – is our faith-passion, our suffering love for Him in quiet tenderness within our brokenness, our prayer issue. We tenderly accept our prayer issue, within our surrender to God. In doing so we are emptying ourselves of our pride, our control. We are opening ourselves to the possibility of Christ's merciful presence and grace. This is the way of the cross. But we do not do this as a mental concept; we simply do it by fully letting go into how all about our prayer subject feels inside, with the felt tenderness, compassion and acceptance of Christ.

When first becoming familiar with the prayer, someone may wonder whether the theology of offering our suffering to God relates to this part of the prayer. In this prayer we do not give away our suffering, for Jesus to take from us and deal with. We do not separate our self from our needs, but instead, with God's help, we identify them and carry them forward in prayer. In this act we are offering them to God, but we are also surrendering and offering our self to him along with our needs and brokenness.

Likewise, someone may ask if allowing their prayer issue to feel God's love and acceptance might not be asking God to give their sin his love and acceptance. For example, if their prayer subject is a personal sinful act or omission, they may think that feeling God's love with it is the same as somehow saying that their sin is acceptable to God. Obviously, this is not the case. Sin has the effect of wounding us; of separating us from God; of creating hurt, concern and need deep within us. It is this effect of sin on us that we are taking to Jesus' awareness, and from which we open our self, in humility and surrender, to his loving mercy and grace. We are not seeking God's acceptance of the sinful act itself. (For a role of Companioned Prayer in our reconciliation with God concerning our sins, see "A Prayer for Confession" in chapter 8.)

In any case, allowing ourselves and our prayer issue to feel God's love and acceptance is not an intellectual exercise. We want to encourage the person to know how it feels in their body to carry their sensitive inner issue with God's compassion. This body-sense of tenderness and compassion is very important. Time should be taken to confirm that the person can feel God's gentle caring in their body, and that God's love and acceptance is not just a mental picture or religious concept.

Stopping with Feelings of Unfinishedness

At times when a person says they are ready to stop, they may also have expressed a feeling of unfinishedness. This can be both at times when it feels like there was "no progress" during the prayer, as well as times when resolution or closeness to God was felt. All of us carry issues and challenges that are significant in our lives, which perhaps we have been carrying for many years. The essence of contemplative prayer is just being with God: attentively sitting, listening inside,

letting go in faith, surrendering in trust and love, and responding with openness and love. It is about letting God have the full freedom to work in us. Giving that freedom means we do not place demands on him. It is not so much about our finding God, as it is about God revealing himself to us. It is a prayer that calls for faith and patience in our walk with God. In this, we are never "finished."

Although God can gift us with mercy and grace in our prayer, we may feel the call to take our issues to God many times, over many prayer sessions. God works with us gently, calling us forward into healing one step at a time, in his own time, as he knows is best for us. Therefore, it is right and expected that when we end our prayer, sometimes we may also feel unsettled feelings or a sense of unfinishedness.

If the person praying has indicated that they are ready to stop, but there are also feelings of unfinishedness, you can suggest the following:

> *A GIFT WITHIN THE UNFINISHEDNESS*
>
> **As we close, if there is any sense of unfinishedness within all of this, take a moment to let this place [that feels so** *use their words if possible*] **know that you hear it, and that with faith, you can come back and journey with it in prayer at another time.** *[pause]*
>
> *Then continue with:* **Now, being open to God and staying with how this all feels inside, let me know if anything comes when you ask all this, "How does God wish me to be with all of this until the next time we can journey together in prayer?"** *[Wait]*
>
> *Follow the wishes of the person praying according to their response. If it feels right, also invite the person to note the body-feel of what came, and invite them to take a quiet moment to be with this feeling with faith. Then continue with RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.*

Sometimes when a person goes through these steps, they may indicate that they would like to continue to be with their issue in prayer. What has happened is that their question and the answer they felt in their heart have invited them back into the *BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT* part of the prayer. Be alert for that possibility, and then as time allows, continue to support their prayer journey. Otherwise, continue with *RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE.*

Abiding in God's Presence

After we have had enough experience with Companioned Prayer to experientially know that the movement of the Holy Spirit and our awareness of the presence of God is something that we do not acquire by our actions or attitudes of our intellect or our emotions, the following additional instruction may be appropriate to the *RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE* movement of the prayer.

When we come to this part of the prayer we usually have come to an initial natural stopping place and we are ready to take a few minutes to quietly notice and appreciate this gift of God's

presence. This is a very natural step, of just abiding in God's tender Spirit and resting in it. We do so by taking the time to notice his silent loving presence within the interior place we have come to as a result of our prayer so far. We attend to his gift of his revealed love, grace and mercy. Even if our prayer experience was not felt to be knowingly or significantly gifted or graced, God's loving presence may still be found within our prayer awareness.

However instead of moving on to the *CLOSING PRAYERS* after a few minutes, we can purposefully take more time to allow our attention, our self, to be further drawn by God into his presence. In doing so, we let ourself be drawn into the quiet movement of God abiding in our heart and in our soul. This is not an analytical or emotional exercise; it is just humbly abiding and appreciating his loving presence experienced in our heart and soul, which we are quietly attentive to. We wait in faith, hope and love – in simple surrender, and allow him to come to us, to nourish and transform us. We welcome him and allow his silent presence to be known, not in an intellectual or emotional way, but as a living reality in our spirit and soul.

We cannot make this happen, but we can willingly give ourself to this attentiveness in God. We let go into all of that, and allow ourself to be drawn into any further presence he may choose to give us. As we sit patiently waiting in inviting surrender, we simply wait in love and are attentive to his silent workings in our self. We may first notice a delicate sense or perhaps a wisp of his extraordinary Self, his real presence, his love. Or perhaps we are aware of a greater clarity of consciousness or interior light. As we sit with this, we do not do anything except continue to gratefully surrender into him. This is not a time for any doing or actions. As our thoughts come through our mind at this time, we simply ignore them and let them pass; we give them no additional energy. Just gently return to our intention of being with God, letting our awareness continue to be within his holy presence, with our thoughts perhaps in the background. As this continues, we may feel a living warmth in our heart, or perhaps an awareness of divine consciousness. We find that our attention is drawn by God into himself, into his loving presence. We welcome this and simply allow him to do what he wills. This may be very very subtle, and may take a while for us to notice. So allow lots of time to be effortlessly aware and to be with God. Let his presence be our presence. Be easy, be open; just be. In this state we are powerless; there is nothing we can do; God does it all. We may find that we want to spend a long time in his sweet gift of himself. So we do not rush, we give God the time he wishes to give us.

For Christ said, *"On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me. …And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him."* (John 14:20-21) This silent infusion of God within us, by our Lord, is an awesome grace. Be not afraid, but give yourself to him in faith and hope and love. Let yourself abide in him, for he is the way, the truth and the life.

People who have already developed a strong love of God, or people who have substantial experience with contemplative prayer, may naturally fall into this "extra step" without any additional instructions when they are in the *RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE* movement of the prayer. During this extended time, if you wish you can also use a sacred word or phrase to help gently bring your intention back to a receptivity of God's presence, as in Centering Prayer. In doing so you may wish to use the gift you have received through *BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT* as your sacred word or symbol for gentle recollection. But if you do use the Centering Prayer method in this extended time, your goal of using either a sacred word or a contemplative gift is not

to remain in that sacred word or gift, but to use it as a symbol of your intention to be with God, and to allow it to vanish so that you may simply be in God's presence beyond thoughts, feelings or images. In this additional time of silence, as for the prodigal son, out of his infinite love and compassion God comes to us and draws us into his loving Spirit, his presence.

Whether or not you choose to use the Centering Prayer method or any other prayer in this extended period, do not worry if you can or cannot *feel* God's presence. Simply be in faith that God is with you. Trust fully in God, and through the personal love of Christ allow yourself to be completely in him, surrendering in pure faith, without emotion, theology, experiences, or expectations; but simply being in God, resting in his silent presence.

Because of the additional time required for this "extra step," when you are praying with others your prayer companion should companion you to this point and then let you complete the prayer on your own from this point on. Sometimes you may plan for this extra time before your prayer group begins, or sometimes it is only during the prayer that you discover that you wish to take this extra time. If you have not made prior arrangements, simply tell your prayer companion that you will be taking extra time in this *RESTING IN GOD* movement, that you will complete the prayer on your own, (and when praying with two other people, that he or she should continue with the prayer with the other person.) When praying with one other person, the person who desires to take the extra time should pray second so that the first person (who has already prayed) can rejoin the larger group while the other person continues on their own. When three people are companioning each other, those who wish to take the additional time should be companioned first. For example, in a group of three where persons **A** and **B** wish to take the additional time and person **C** does not: **A** companions (→) **B** with **B** completing the prayer on his/her own, **C→A** with **A** completing the prayer on his/her own, and **B→C**. In this case, the pair who will next be praying may move away some distance (for example if you are all in a church nave) in order that their Companioned Prayer dialog is less intrusive to the person who is spending more quiet time in *RESTING IN GOD*.

Alternatively, when praying with one other person, you may have a prior understanding with your companion that during this extended movement, your companion will stay with you and also close their eyes and rest in God during this time. If you only realize during the prayer that you wish to take the extra time in this movement, you can keep your eyes closed and ask your companion if it is okay to do so, and to give them the choice to rejoin the group (if there is one) or to stay. If you and your companion have an understanding that you will be in this part of the prayer for a set amount of time (such as five or ten minutes), your companion can keep track of the time and when the time is up, they can ask you if this is a good time for the *CLOSING PRAYERS*. When you say Yes, the companion should give you 30 to 60 seconds before continuing to the *CLOSING PRAYERS*. This timekeeping arrangement can be repeated when switching prayer roles.

Effects of Long-term Practice: The Great Awakening

What happens as we practice this prayer regularly over many months, even years? We are healed by God's love and grace; we are called into an intimate relationship with him. We are awakened, spiritually. His presence is our most exciting possibility and reality. Our soul becomes aflame for God. We stop looking for "spiritual experiences" in our prayer and find ourselves naturally drawn to him as our silent goal. We are enveloped in wonder and awe at his power and

love, present to us now. We find profound and wonderful peace in ourselves in finding whom we are created as, in our soul, loved by God.

We find that our inner awakening is the Great Awakening. We find that our entire life becomes the most exciting journey possible, a journey of becoming one with God, begun here and now in our busy earthly life. We understand that our trials as well as our joys are all part of this transformative journey to God. And best of all, we find that this journey is one that God is making happen for us, because it is certainly beyond our ability to make happen.

We find that our faith and our appreciation for the Church become transformed from simple rational and moral belief into seeing the transformative power and love in the reality of God's presence in all of it. We understand that the value of the liturgy as a transformational sacrament is dependent upon the awakening of our soul in God. When this happens through the passion of God's presence given of Companioned Prayer, then our soul recognizes and responds to the sacraments in the reality and power of the living Spirit of God. And the Church and its faith become for us God's doorway to him given to all of us from his love.

When we pray Companioned Prayer over many months and years, we recognize from inside us that all life is a sacred blessing beyond measure. And we are in awe that we too are called into that blessing, knowing that we are loved and cherished. We can only be thankful, and praise God in our worship and service, as we continue to find ourselves responding to his love and truth in all aspects of our worship. We continue to follow his calling as he wills, and we remain open to the continual unfolding revelation of his infinite mystery, without closing ourselves off through a limited or fixed understanding of dogma, while at the same time deeply valuing the great Christian truths offered by the Church that draw us deeper into God's saving presence. We find that our understanding of the scriptures and the Church's teaching increasingly reflects our own inner prayer and worship experiences as we learn to trust God and to let ourselves be drawn into his silent presence. We appreciate that this journey is one of vibrant life, of the living God ever mysterious, ever caring, ever revealing himself, and ever calling us to him. We discover that God loves us completely, utterly, fully, that he delights in us and cherishes us, and we are whole in him. Nothing more, nothing less.

The Heart's Response to God's Love

With these experiences over time, we find that as God fills our heart with his love, our heart responds. Through his grace our heart gradually learns to love him ever more deeply and passionately. Our love for God leaps with joy, humility and awe at his magnificence and his personal love for us. We are drawn ever more into him and our heart and soul become increasingly focused on him as our most important fulfillment, in which we find divine life.

Through our time with our Lord in prayer, as we begin to appreciate how he has already sacrificed himself for us and given himself to us in love, we find ourself increasingly giving our self to him – until we discover that through his grace we have totally surrendered to him. All this happens, not because of our doing (since we cannot make any of this happen), but because he is our God who is creating us in his image, by his will, and through his love. All we need do is surrender to him, let him love us completely, and respond to his love. Companioned Prayer is a wonderful prayer to help us do that with sensitivity, openness and faith.

Be Open to What Might Come Next

The Companioned Prayer instructions described in this book are quite detailed. As you engage in Companioned Prayer ministry and in continued prayer experiences, it is important to remember that God is not found in a program. The program is not what is important. The program and its processes should not become ends in themselves to be sought, acquired or defended. God is only found in God; not in any process. When we experience the closeness and presence of God repeatedly in Companioned Prayer, and as we are enriched and enlivened by the gift of his light and love, we may find ourselves being gifted with new understandings, perspectives, or even new consciousness regarding how God might be calling us into him. This may include new ways of praying or being in our personal relationship with him, or it may be other things yet unknown. For God is so much greater than your experiences of him. And the ways he calls us are many. Therefore, while continuing to pray and practice Companioned Prayer, it is vital to continue to be open to the mystery of God as he may personally call you into being in him, awakening in him, and being present in him. This is the great divine mystery to be followed. Be open to what might come next.

Challenges to our Formation in Christ

In this most amazing faith journey, it is easy for us to get in the way of God; for us to impose our very limited ego-centric perspective, and to create challenges to our ongoing formation in Christ. Some examples of these challenges when practicing Companioned Prayer are provided below. Also see the considerations listed in chapter 13 under "Reaching Out to Those Who Stop."

Missing Follow-on Prayer Support

Because the inner graced experiences of Companioned Prayer can be subtle, and since most people come to value the prayer over time, the first month or two after completing the introductory prayer sessions is a very critical period. People should be encouraged to continue practicing the prayer with others in a Companioned Prayer ministry group or prayer circle during this formative time of new prayer awareness, in order to allow their repeated experiences to deepen and solidify. Additionally, they should be encouraged to attend a follow-on one- or two-day retreat if offered. Without this ongoing Companioned Prayer experience at this time, it is likely they will stop even though they may be intellectually enthusiastic about the Prayer, and even if they have had a personally meaningful experience in the prayer. Experiencing the prayer regularly over time is crucial in order to continue. See "A Relationship That Grows Over Time" in chapter 3.

Looking for Meaning During the Prayer

Often people new to the prayer will look for meaning within each symbol or change that they experience while they are praying. They try to discern meaning or importance in everything that comes along, grasping and holding onto what they perceive, instead of letting go and letting God provide what understanding he may wish to reveal in the overall prayer at the end. If one seeks personal meaning in each movement or change as we pray, we will be holding on to that item and not letting ourselves be open to what might come next. This point can be shared during the sharing process, as may be necessary.

Not Trusting in God

Surrendering to God in prayer means trusting God, willing to place our self in his hands; willing to not be in control, and willing to let God be in control. In Companioned Prayer we are called upon to empty ourselves of our own will. In faith we let go into God's loving heart with vulnerability; trusting and letting go in him. Some people are not ready for this vulnerability with our living God. They are not ready for this radical real trusting in our Lord. They are not ready to give up their control. They are only willing to have a relationship with God in their terms, not his. And their terms are often steeped in beautiful theology and religious feelings. However, when we are not willing to let go and let God – to give ourselves to him in loving trust, in our human weakness and vulnerability, in his terms not ours, if we are not willing to do all this – then we will not experience the grace of Companioned Prayer.

Desiring Spiritual Experiences

Another common barrier to being open to God is the desire for spiritual experiences or graces. When we let our ego or self-importance be linked to graces received, then we have become attached to the gift and not to the Giver. Then we worship the gift as an idol, as the desired object, and we are no longer open to the mystery of he who gives so freely. We are grateful for the gift, as we know that we need it and benefit from it, just as those who received Jesus' healing touch when he walked on earth needed it. But we should not worship the gift and we should not attach self-importance to ourselves because we have received it. A paramount requirement in order to be able to be continually formed by God in his image is humility. Humility is absolutely necessary in all prayer and in all faith formation, including in our Companioned Prayer journey. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* at 2559 says, "*Humility* is the foundation of prayer." In addition to the customary meaning of humility, humility is also an innocence. A child-like innocent openness to God, a letting go into him without the constraints of egotism, judgement or attachment. This discernment is essential for everyone who wishes to practice prayer.

Avoiding our Prayer Issues

In addition to humility, we also must be honest within ourselves as we pray. When we come before God to ask him, of everything going on in our life what is he calling us to listen to, we must come to him with all our sins, all our hurts, our broken relationships and promises, all our yearnings and aspirations, …everything. We must place ourselves before him in our total human condition, as we are and not as we wish to be. God is found in reality, not in fantasy or moods. This requires humility, faith and honesty. And when something comes that is in response to our inner question, we are not to avoid that which we don't like in favor of something more pleasant. We are not to skip over that which God calls us to acknowledge.

Some people will want to use Companioned Prayer to only experience the bliss or love of God. When taking their prayer subject and themselves to the loving heart of Jesus, they may wish to simply linger in that state, even when they are being guided through the remaining parts of the prayer. The prayer is not about avoiding or self-filtering what God may be calling them to listen to, even as their prayer progresses. Our prayer subject is not to be obliterated or replaced by God's love; not to be handed off to Jesus for him to take from us; or for him to fix. Instead, His love

should allow us to be closer to our prayer subject with tenderness, and with his help, his love should allow us to carry it forward into our prayer experience felt within our body.

If we habitually avoid ourselves in this prayer, if we avoid our feelings and our issues and how we carry them in our bodies, we are only deceiving ourselves, and we are not allowing God to be present to us in grace and love. Our spiritual journey will have stopped. For it is the meek who shall inherit the earth, who in their humble authenticity and truth shall know the kingdom of God here on earth, in our practical, real, living life. If you are companioning someone who seems to be self-filtering the selection of what comes, at some point you may want to discuss this with them.

Dr. Gendlin identified this habit of avoiding our issues and neglecting being with them in a manner that allows change to occur, as "process-skipping." Fathers McMahon and Cambell have significantly further developed the subtlety and importance of this finding as it applies to Christian growth and spirituality. See "Bio-Spiritual Focusing and Focusing" later in this chapter under "Influences of Other Prayer or Meditative Practices."

Escaping into Religious Concepts

Our prayer is not an escape of our personal situations or challenges. And if we begin to use it in a way that avoids our human and personal challenges, if we substitute a religious image or feeling for the grounded body-feel of our prayer subject, we will not be fully trusting in God, and our prayer experiences and our prayer journey will not develop in fullness. For example, if in *GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE* we abandon our prayer subject and simply dwell in the loving heart of Jesus, either as a religious image, theological concept or faith-filled feeling or devotion, our Companioned Prayer will have stopped. No matter how rich or blissful the loving heart of Jesus may feel, if we stop our Companioned Prayer experience, we will eventually also stop the prayer practice. This subject too, is greatly developed by Frs. McMahon and Campbell.

Approaching the Prayer from the Intellect

When becoming familiar with the prayer and continuing its practice, the experience of God's living presence in our prayer can only occur when we approach our prayer in simple humility and faith. In this sense, "faith" is an openness to the imminence of God's love, without rationalization or intellectual examination. If we base our surrender on an intellectual understanding of the details of how to do Companioned Prayer, such as all of the extensive material in this book might otherwise suggest, then we will be trying to control our prayer experiences within that intellectual framework, instead of letting God gift us with his presence in the way that he knows is best for us in our moment of prayer. We will be approaching the prayer from our intellect instead of from our heart. While understanding the nuances of how to pray in all circumstances may provide us with a degree of intellectual fulfillment, it will in fact get in the way of simply surrendering into our prayer subject within the love of our Lord. The Companioned Prayer experience is a "pre-reflective" Christian spiritual encounter, that is, before analytical thinking, as understood by William James. If a person approaches experiencing the prayer from an extensive intellectual analysis of all possible conditions and responses, their prayer experiences will typically not develop beyond intellectual, and they will not continue with the practice. This has been demonstrated repeatedly by the consistent failure of numerous teaching programs based

on learning the extensive and detailed material in this book. Therefore, reading or learning all parts of this book should be delayed for months until the person is well grounded in the simple experience of the prayer. The simplified approach discussed in chapters 4 and 9 is far superior to longer more in-depth programs.

Avoiding a Mature Faith Community

Ongoing participation in a Church or religious community is also necessary for our Christian development and ongoing prayer life. Practicing Companioned Prayer in isolation is not enough. Paradoxically, a person who has a weak formation in faith may also stop praying soon after starting if their experiences in Companioned Prayer are quite profound but the person is in general quite suspect of religion. This combination of interior revelation and distrust of religion can affect a self-centered person to think that only they have the true insight, that others simply don't understand, and that religious leaders in particular do not have the depth of experience or understanding necessary to shepherd them into a full relationship with God. Without participating in the worship, revelation and guidance of the Church, the individual is left to rely upon their own experiences and their own interpretation of those experiences, and will increasingly look for prayer results instead of a prayerful surrender in faith.

Such individuals need to be encouraged to turn in humility to all that the Church offers and to experience the amazing richness of its prayers, liturgy, word, service and Eucharist with the new insights and grace received in Companioned Prayer. They need to be shown that the Church's activities and resources all embrace the fullness of the divine; and that only by entering into these activities in faith does one discover their effect upon one's own interior life, including prayer life. Thus, Companioned Prayer does not replace the Church's other forms of prayer, it adds to them. For example, it does not replace the devotion to Jesus' Sacred Heart. And even though Companioned Prayer may be called a prayer of reconciliation it does not replace the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Being able to worship and to receive the sacraments on a regular basis is vital to our full awakening in God. We find our experiences in prayer are further revealed in worship as we respond with our heart enlivened from within by God's love.

Praying in Isolation

Without the faith formation support of our Church or religious community, we become isolated in our prayer. When we only practice Companioned Prayer by ourself, we miss a vital part of the prayer. Jesus is present to us when two or more are gathered in his name. This is integral to our Companioned Prayer experience. Therefore, we must make efforts to find others in our Church or religious community to pray with. We are one body in Christ, and when we pray together, we become spiritually whole and healthy.

The Influence of an Unhealthy Community

Likewise, another challenge to our formation in Christ occurs when we practice Companioned Prayer and we do not have the support of healthy and comprehensive faith formation from our Church or religious community. For example, if a church only puts its emphasis on people having a conversion experience or being saved, and neglects the ongoing full faith formation and spiritual growth throughout life's journey, the ongoing interior development as a

result of prayer will not have the patient nurturing and insight that allows us to continually surrender, respond, and grow in God. As we pray with the continuing support of our parish or religious community and our prayer ministry group, it becomes more valuable to have the guidance of the Church, of past saints and Christian seekers who have experienced and understood the divine Christian journey. This rich Christian tradition and understanding can help us know the path and give us necessary perspectives on our Christian journey.

An Attitude of "What's in it for me?"

A very common challenge to a growing relationship in Christ through Companioned Prayer is when a person approaches Companioned Prayer from an attitude of "What is in it for me?" This self-centered approach, even in faith, is very different from a viewpoint of "How can I participate with others and be open to God, exploring together what may happen in our faith lives in this journey of prayer, relationship and grace?" The "what is in it for me?" approach causes each prayer session to be critically judged and causes participation to always compete with whatever other personal activity might be attractive in the moment. The latter viewpoint of "How can I participate…" recognizes that our formation in Christ occurs over time with other Christians in a relationship of prayer, trust, and mutual growth when we give ourselves to that experience with each other, in Christ. It's a mutual journey of continuing to awake in God. It is not about singular experiences or entertainment. If you are humble and not full of yourself, you will do well with the prayer. If you are not humble, you will not recognize the prayer's gifts, and you will soon quit the prayer.

Not Allowing God the Time to Work in Us

Many of the Church's saints have said that we must allow ourselves the time necessary for God to work within us, whether we are aware of his works or not. If not allowed, our impatience becomes a hindrance to our further faith formation. Therefore, we must be patient, and know that God is with us always and that with faith we can continue in the journey whether our experiences are richer or poorer.

This is also a time to give up our personal desire for control over what we want from God. We must give up looking for an experience on the level that we are expecting it, on the level that we are used to. We have to stop looking; we must let go and let God. It is a time to slow down, to be open, and to wait in faith while we continue to place our self before him in humility and trust. We must accept that God is doing good for us and that we will grow only by allowing him to work in us in our present condition. In this, Companioned Prayer can be of immense help. Our transformation by him is in his terms not ours. We are called in faith to surrender to him in his terms not ours; in our practical day-to-day life (not in a hoped-for life), and not just in our mental or mystical life.

Periods of Spiritual Dryness

When we seem to be in a place of spiritual dryness, we must continue to pray regularly and continue to participate in all aspects of our Christian experience. It is a good idea to allow the whole sense of the dryness, our grappling with it and what it might portend, to be the subject of our Companioned Prayer. It is in allowing ourself to be fully present and letting go into this sense

of dryness in our Companioned Prayer, that we may discover a deeper knowing revealed to us by the Holy Spirit within the loving heart of Jesus, a way that will call us forward within the gift of what is happening in our lives at this time, buried right within the dryness.

It may also be useful during this period to ask someone to companion you using the "Checking for Effortlessness in Companioned Prayer" available under "Additional Interior Prayers" on the CPCF's supplementary resources webpage. Discussing our challenge with close friends can also help us to appreciate our situation and to then allow that recognition to be taken to Jesus in our prayer.

Influences of Other Prayer or Meditative Practices

Sometimes people who have spent significant time, perhaps years, routinely practicing other forms of prayer or spiritual exercise, will occasionally notice their established prayer practice gently intruding into their Companioned Prayer experience. This may occur especially during the first few months of practicing Companioned Prayer. It is not necessary to give up other prayer practices, but the student should gain clarity on the differences and similarities between their established practice and Companioned Prayer, as well as understand how to deal with any experiential overlaps between the practices. Some examples are discussed below.

Centering Prayer and the Jesus Prayer

Some forms of contemplative prayer, such as Centering Prayer or the Jesus Prayer, include silently repeating a special word or phrase. In Centering Prayer the practitioner lets himself be drawn inward by his intention to be with God as symbolized by the word, or in the Jesus Prayer lets himself be drawn in faith into the full inner experience of the phrase which ultimately is Jesus' actual presence. Often the sense of the special word or phrase will subtly change or even disappear during the prayer. In these practices one can find oneself carried forward into an inner unfolding quietness and sense of God's graced presence. During Companioned Prayer, particularly in response to *ASKING GOD* or *LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS*, practitioners of Centering Prayer, the Jesus Prayer, or their equivalents, may find their habitual word or phrase coming into their present Companioned Prayer experience. If this occurs there is no need to try to reject or force out what comes. Instead, let your attention go to the body-feel of such words or phrases. If there is no connection felt in the body with these, then just gently return to your prayer subject or symbol, noticing how that feels in your body. Or simply return to your prayer subject if it is obvious that there is no felt-connection with your habit word or phrase. The same is true for non-Christian forms of mediation that use a repeated word or mantra.

If the habitual prayer word or phrase does carry a particular feel in the body, notice that and be open to letting yourself shift to that body-feeling as part of your journey within the Companioned Prayer session. Let your companion know that something has come and give careful consideration to the response within you when your companion asks you, "Does this feel right, inside, to journey with some more?" If the response to the question suggests that it is not appropriate to journey with the body-feel of the word or phrase that has come (that is associated with your other prayer practice), be open to noticing whether or not it would feel right to continue with your original prayer subject as it has unfolded to that point. If so, then let your companion know by saying something like, "No, but it does feel right for me to continue." Your companion

can then assist you continue in *BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT* instead of proceeding on to the next movement of the prayer, *RESTING IN GOD'S SPIRIT*.

Another aspect of Centering Prayer and the Jesus Prayer is that the practitioner may gently come back to their special word or phrase whenever their mind wanders from their intention or whenever they are distracted by an intruding thought or feeling. In fact, a goal of Centering Prayer is to free oneself of your own thoughts and feelings until there is only a quiet presence of God. However, in Companioned Prayer we are not trying to eliminate or pass beyond our thoughts and feelings into silence. Instead, we are called by God to respond to the Holy Spirit as experienced in subtly distinctive thoughts or feelings that come, and to follow them in the prayer into God's gift of his mercy and presence. This does not mean that in Companioned Prayer the mind does not wander; it often does, particularly when praying by yourself. But, in Companioned Prayer when something comes, we pause to notice how what came feels in our body, how we carry all of it, and we sense whether or not it somehow connects or fits with how our prayer subject has progressed so far. If it does feel connected, then we let our attention stay with this new symbol, and continue to follow God's gentle call in our prayer.

So if you are used to practicing Centering Prayer, and while you are practicing Companioned Prayer you find new thoughts, feelings and symbols, do not ignore them or consider them distractions. Do not automatically return to your prayer subject, but instead pause and discern whether or not they might be the promptings of the Holy Spirit calling you deeper into your prayer subject until you discover God's grace and mercy given within the very thing which you were going to avoid.

Some people practice Centering Prayer more as a psychological practice or as a practice of mindfulness or enlightenment, rather than as a prayer of a personal relationship with our Lord. When becoming familiar with and practicing Companioned Prayer, such people must be encouraged to let go into their Companioned Prayer experiences completely within the context of a personal faith relationship with our Lord.

Lectio Divina

Other forms of Christian contemplative prayer and meditation focus more on the received meaning of scripture or the meaning of a Christian word or phrase. *Lectio divina* is an example of listening and letting go in faith into a scriptural passage, and allowing yourself to be quietly open to new personal understandings of the passage as given by God. This practice is more of an art of openness and surrender in faith, and being receptive to the movement of the Holy Spirit, than it is about analytical progression or systematic examination.

The art of *lectio divina* is a practice of subtle inner awareness of unfolding gifted understanding as the practitioner gently and reflectively listens and meditates on the meaning of the passage, especially in the *meditatio* phase of the prayer. During Companioned Prayer, practitioners of *lectio divina* and other forms of contemplative meditation may sometimes find themselves contemplating or exploring the meaning of the symbols, words or images that arise. If you discover yourself to be doing this, use the guidelines provided above under "Centering Prayer" modified for "meaning" rather than "a word or phrase." In Companioned Prayer we do not, in any

analytical or meditative way, dwell on, actively define, or explore the meaning of what comes until the meaning is made clear to us in the end.

Additionally, in the *contemplatio* phase of *lectio divina*, as with Centering Prayer or the Jesus Prayer, a person may be quietly drawn within to experience the silent presence of God. This experience can also occur during Companioned Prayer. However, one should not look for this experience, but should let it happen through God's grace and gift. If you find yourself leading your attention into silent awareness in reference to past contemplative experiences of Centering Prayer, the Jesus Prayer or *lectio divina*, return to the body-feel of your experience, inwardly turn the leading over to God, and be open to what He may be calling you to be aware of. If your experience of silent awareness occurs in the *RESTING IN GOD'S SPIRIT* part of the prayer, surrender into His gift as long as it feels right to do so or as time allows.

Guided Imagery

Some spiritual exercises use guided imagery, usually with a gospel theme. For example the person hears or reads a story from scripture and imagines himself or herself participating within the story. As an exercise led by another person, this practice is sometimes used in *lectio divina* to include significant time for pauses and reflections at various points within the narrative. Guided imagery is also central to the practice of Saint Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*. In this Jesuit practice the participant reads or listens to a sacred story, text or theme and is asked to picture it in their mind, while also being asked to imagine themselves within the story and noticing their reactions, noticing what comes, or reflecting on theological themes from a personal encounter or perspective within the story. Guided imagery is also used in secular settings in therapeutic and self-improvement sessions.

Sometimes when companioning a person who has spent a significant time in religious or secular guided imagery, you may notice that during *BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT* the person tends to skip rapidly from image to image. In such cases encourage them to slow down and notice the body-feel of each image before proceeding. In Companioned Prayer, the process is not to go from image to image, but to be aware of the whole sense and feeling about any image or other symbol that comes, and then in faith to let go into that sense. Pausing to notice how a symbol registers in the body is a good way of letting the awareness follow this inner journey of faith.

Hypnosis

An even more actively suggestive and often intrusive technique than guided imagery, which has been employed in secular practices, is hypnosis. However, hypnosis is both suggestive and intrusive in ways not present in Companioned Prayer. For example, under hypnosis a person may be asked to notice what their body feels like, but then are given further suggestions that they are getting sleepy, their limbs are heavy, et cetera. Such suggestions are never a part of Companioned Prayer. Likewise, a hypnotist may suggest or direct the person to explore a specific issue (like fear of flying or past trauma), or to adopt a particular attitude or outcome about something (such as an aversion to smoking).

Individuals who have experienced hypnosis sometimes report that their general feeling of being companioned in Companioned Prayer is similar to that of hypnosis. In fact there are some

similarities. Hypnosis also often begins with a suggested awareness of the body, can include talking or feedback between the person hypnotized and the hypnotist, suspends direct awareness of our outer reality and redirects our attention inward (as is common in all types of prayer), and can include invitational suggestions. And after hypnosis, the person usually shares their experience with their therapist.

In contrast, in Companioned Prayer the companion never suggests a particular issue or subject, and in fact is usually not even aware of what the person praying has identified or is experiencing as their prayer subject. In addition, the practice of hypnosis includes the establishment of a trance or altered state of consciousness. Companioned Prayer does not seek an altered state but asks the person praying to be authentic within themselves, honoring how they feel inside as they wait in faith upon God's presence and mercy. In hypnosis, the person being hypnotized relinquishes control of the session to the hypnotist. The hypnotist often leads the person into areas of emotional challenge or pain that the person would not otherwise allow themselves to experience. This never occurs in Companioned Prayer. Hypnosis may include a sense of loss of control and loss of free will during the session, as well as a lack of cognitive awareness of the experience after it is over; again, not something that happens in Companioned Prayer. There are other important differences as well, including the fact that the artificially relaxed state in hypnosis prevents an issue, symbol, or God's compassion from being felt in the body. And after Companioned Prayer, while there is usually an opportunity for sharing of prayer experiences, there is not an expectation that sharing must occur; and if it does, it should never include discussion and analysis of personal prayer issues, even if they are occasionally shared. Sharing is completely voluntary; and is usually limited to the prayer experience instead of personal prayer topics or issues.

All of these differences are very important, and should be made clear to someone who has had experience with hypnosis, whether in a religious or secular setting. Reiterate with the person that in Companioned Prayer we do not relinquish control to our companion. Discuss the role of the companion and the fact that the companion never suggests prayer topics and in fact rarely has a clear idea of what the person's prayer subject is. Likewise, the companion does not suggest prayer issue outcomes. The companion follows the desires of the person praying and never leads them into areas that they are uncomfortable with. In fact, just the opposite happens, as the companion frequently asks the person praying to check inside and see if it feels right or okay to continue to journey with their prayer subject as it unfolds. The person praying never loses cognitive awareness of what is happening either during the prayer or afterwards, nor loses choice or freedom of will or action at any time during the Companioned Prayer experience. And while sharing of our prayer experiences is usually offered after Companioned Prayer, it is never an expectation, and never includes discussion or analysis of personal issues. Thus, the voluntary sharing after Companioned Prayer should not be confused with the in-depth analysis or therapy associated with many hypnosis settings.

Thus, the similarity of hypnosis and Companioned Prayer is only superficial. Nevertheless, people who have experienced hypnosis may comment during their initial experiences of Companioned Prayer that the two seem similar. This may also be in part due to the pattern of experience that they encountered in hypnosis, and that this pattern has affected their initial experience of Companioned Prayer. Thus, as soon as the companion begins talking, they immediately and voluntarily give up control and assume a position of being led as in a hypnotic

session. Instead, one should be alert in prayer; not mentally slovenly or letting others direct us. It is therefore very important to respond to any suggestion of similarity to hypnosis with patience and clear instructional teaching of the differences, so that the person can experience Companioned Prayer with integrity and control, surrendering to God with total freewill, and with minimal influence from their past experience with hypnosis.

Bio-Spiritual Focusing and Focusing

Companioned Prayer was originally derived from Bio-Spiritual Focusing, which was developed by Father Ed McMahon, Ph.D. and Father Peter Campbell, Ph.D. Significant components of the practice and guidelines of Companioned Prayer were inspired by Fathers McMahon and Campbell. While Bio-Spiritual Focusing has some important similarities to Companioned Prayer, it is also very different. Bio-Spiritual Focusing and their practice of simplified noticing and nurturing are neither written nor taught as a prayer of surrender to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. McMahon and Campbell present Bio-Spiritual Focusing as a self-initiated healing practice centered in the body that invites personal and spiritual growth within a 'Larger Body of Christ.' Information about their practice is available in their books, *Bio-Spirituality, Focusing as a Way to Grow*, Loyola Press, Chicago, 1985 & 1997; *Beyond the Myth of Dominance, An Alternative to a Violent Society*, Sheed & Ward, an imprint of Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham, MD, 1993; and *Rediscovering the Lost Body-Connection within Christian Spirituality*, Itasca Books, Minneapolis, MN, 2011. Their research and discoveries include very important findings, perspectives, and practices. However, they do not incorporate the wording found in Companioned Prayer which helps us to be drawn into a personal surrender and encounter with our Lord.

While framing a physio-psychological practice of immense spiritual potential within a blending of psychological and Christian concepts may appeal to some people, it can be inadequate to the reality of the gift of divine encounter; and for many, it can create an artificial intellectual barrier to letting go into and experiencing the divine presence of our Lord. Bio-Spiritual Focusing was developed by McMahon and Campbell out of a therapeutic practice called "Focusing," which was developed by Eugene Gendlin, Ph.D. from the late 1950's to the 1970's. Practitioners of "Bio-Spirituality" or "Focusing" who take up Companioned Prayer will need to be encouraged to spend significant time nurturing all of the faith aspects of the Companioned Prayer practice within the support and teaching of a Christian community in order to make the transition from physio-psychology to Christian prayer.

Quaker Spirituality

Although Gendlin's practice is psychotherapeutic and without any spiritual orientation, one of the things that may have helped inspire him to develop Focusing was his brief participation as a young man in the Quaker spiritual practice of receptive waiting in God's presence or light. Quaker spiritual writing even includes the terms "feeling sense" and "felt sense" as used by Gendlin to describe the essence of his focusing practice. The Quaker spiritual practice, however, is not interactive, does not include specific guided steps or movements to facilitate the practitioner's experience, and for some people it may not be clearly centered within the person of Christ. Individuals who have been involved in the Quaker practice of quiet awareness should be

clearly instructed that in Companioned Prayer we are praying within the loving heart of our risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

Other Traditional Christian Spiritual Practices

The Christian church as a whole has a long and very rich history of people who have developed interior prayer practices and understandings of spiritual discernment that are even more directly applicable to the experiences of Companioned Prayer. For example see Teresa of Avila's *The Interior Castle*, 1577, especially from *The Sixth Dwelling Place* on. Discernment and understanding of personal revelations has always been a role of the Church.

Other spiritual practices established over the centuries by various Christian saints and leaders may include elements with similarities to Companioned Prayer. An example is the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, 1491–1556. Again, discussion of similarities and differences with Companioned Prayer can be useful. After the practitioner is established in Companioned Prayer, they may also wish to explore the possibility of incorporating Companioned Prayer, or elements of it, into these older traditional practices. For example, St Ignatius' Daily Examen can be practiced with a companion in the same way as in Companioned Prayer. The companion reads each step and waits for the person who is praying the Examen to let them know when they are ready to go on to hear the next part of the exercise.

There are many other practices that include similarities to Companioned Prayer. An individual with experience in such practices should feel free to discuss the similarities and differences with Companioned Prayer. Such discussion will facilitate an understanding of how their practice may influence the learning and practice of Companioned Prayer for that person.

The Effects of Companioned Prayer on Other Prayer Experiences

Just as other forms of prayer can affect our practice of Companioned Prayer, particularly when first becoming familiar with Companioned Prayer, so too Companioned Prayer can affect our experiences within other forms of prayer and spiritual engagements, particularly after considerable experience with Companioned Prayer. After some months or a year of Companioned Prayer, when we have had many experiences of God's real presence, when we know Christ and the Holy Spirit as our Companions and life source and direction within and through us, then that experience will become alive, will flow like living waters, in our other experiences of spiritual engagements. Following are just a few examples.

Companioned Centering Prayer

Many people wish to engage in a rich contemplative prayer such as Centering Prayer, but report that they have difficulty entering into it or staying with it. However, if one practices Companioned Prayer to the extent that our Companioned relationship with Christ is one of intimacy, then it can be very easy to enter into this intimacy when practicing Centering Prayer. In Centering Prayer one uses a repeated sacred word or phrase such as "Jesus" or "Jesus is love" to let go of thoughts or feelings and to bring our intention back to being open to God's presence (see Basil Pennington's and Thomas Keating's many writings about Centering Prayer). In Centering Prayer this word or phrase can be used to ever so gently let go of one's engagement in thoughts and to return or refocus (to recollect) the practitioner's intention to be with Christ, and to be drawn

into a contemplative unity with God in which the experience of the word or phrase gives way simply to the experience of the Living Presence. Within the Centering Prayer experience this goal is a silently fluid and expansively dynamic process of participating in God's presence in oneness, and of alternatively being drawn into and out of this unitive presence through continuing to be open to the personal intimacy of Jesus's love.

While the goal of Centering Prayer is wonderful, many people find that entering into Centering Prayer can be challenging and ultimately frustrating. For example, initially the use of the word or phrase may not seem to lead to the experience of the desired intimacy of God; the words become one dimensional or repetitive without an enriched experience; or the mind simply wanders too much to allow one to be drawn deeper into the Source of living water. This may be particularly true if one has approached Centering Prayer primarily as a psychological process or a meditative technique, instead of a personal relationship and surrender to our real and present Lord.

The experiences of Companioned Prayer, however, offer another approach to Centering Prayer. For example, instead of us selecting a word or phrase to use in Centering Prayer, we can be open to letting a word, phase, idea or other symbol be given to us from God as experienced within our quiet meditative prayer time in a similar way as we might receive a symbol in Companioned Prayer. In doing so we are simply open to a symbol that might come from God for our prayer time, using the attentiveness of faith that we have experienced in Companioned Prayer to let God lead us to him. For example, it might be a special word or concept, such as the real presence in the Eucharist, the loving heart of Jesus, or the intimation of Jesus as the divine Godhead; or might be a symbol previously received in Companioned Prayer, or something new just now experienced in our Centering Prayer time, including a symbol that is too subtle for words. We can check our body feel or other inner sense to see if it feels right inside to use this in a Centering Prayer way. We can see if we find ourselves drawn back to it repeatedly without effort within our prayer time. We can experience what happens when we allow ourselves to be with this symbol in our Centering Prayer, being open to God's gift of his inner light and presence. In this way we continue to be open to allowing God to gently and lovingly lead us in our Centering Prayer.

Additionally, after many experiences of Companioned Prayer over months and years, the intimacy of Real Presence and personal relationship with Christ and the Holy Spirit become a fount of God's loving presence where that Presence is intimate to our presence. Then instead of beginning Centering Prayer with a special word or phrase, we can simply close our eyes and be aware of that intimate presence, be open to the grace of God's love and presence, be drawn deeper into his loving Presence, and stay with the intimacy of relationship as God may wish to share himself. In this manner we can also be open to what symbols might come as discussed above if that happens, or we can simply continue to abide in his presence, however he chooses to lead us in prayer. When we need to bring our focus back to the Presence, we can ask God how does he want us to come back to him, and then silently respond to his call with our intention as our means of recollection.

This approach to Centering Prayer may not be considered by some people to be either Centering Prayer or Companioned Prayer as they are individually known, but may be considered by some to be a merging of the two. It may not be considered to be traditional Centering Prayer if we are not using a repeated sacred word or phrase, even though it may represent the contemplative or unitive goal of Centering Prayer. It may not be considered to be traditional Companioned Prayer

because we are not asking for a topic or issue to follow in prayer, and it is not the goal to be drawn into God's grace via a personal prayer issue. Instead, this blended Companioned-Centering Prayer takes the experience of being open to and being within God's presence gained from many times of being guided within Companioned Prayer, and uses that intimacy of relationship and openness as the way into the Centering Prayer experience. It also uses the awareness of how to simply be alert and attentive in faith, and how to allow oneself to be drawn by Christ into closeness with him, both naturally experienced through the practice of Companioned Prayer. It is simple. In faith, we close our eyes, are aware of our Lord's intimate presence, are open or attentive in faith to what might come, and simply follow his presence as he draws us into himself. Many practitioners of Centering Prayer may say that this is also their experience in Centering Prayer, and therefore any subtle differences may not be considered significant to them.

This may sound too simple, and as a description of a process, it is simplistic; there are of course other nuances. For example, this infused prayer should start in the same way as both Companioned Prayer and Centering Prayer begin, with a personal prayer of openness or devotion to our Lord, with a short period of body awareness such as breathing, and with an openness or awareness of God's love. Another nuance is that in Companioned Prayer we take frequent time to be aware of how something is felt in our body. In this new Companioned-Centering Prayer, we may instead find that the Living Presence is also experienced as silent presence in our complete self: mind, body, heart, soul, and spirit. It is not necessarily separate from our incarnational self here and now but is more of a divine infusion within our entire being as God's presence. Our experience of this same incarnational awareness in Companioned Prayer provides a natural opening to this same unitive experience within Centering Prayer as one body, mind and spirit of Christ. The Companioned Prayer experience which carries into the Companioned Centering Prayer experience is that our experience is Christ-centered: our prayer is one of relationship; where Jesus Christ is the Son of God the Father, and is our personal and collective Lord and savior, as we respond to him through the love of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord's Prayer

For many of us, when we pray the Lord's Prayer, it is often recited quickly and out loud, as during Mass. A better approach is to ponder it slowly, one phrase at a time. We can do this as an isolated prayer, or when we end Companioned Prayer, or Centering Prayer as described above, with our personal closing prayer we may wish to add a silent, slow reciting of the Lord's Prayer. In doing so, a wonderful approach is to think the words without concentrating on their meaning, and to experience the words without hurry, and with natural pauses, being attentive and open to what subtle meaning might be received. If we allow ourselves to let go of our own meaning of the prayer, and to be open to a new meaning provided in the mystery of the Lord's presence, we will experience a new inner grace of these prayers each time we pray. The ability to experience this prayer (and other prayers) in this manner is facilitated by the same alert responsiveness in faith that we have gained in our Companioned Prayer.

The Labyrinth

Some churches and retreat centers have created a walking labyrinth patterned after those found in some of the great cathedrals of Europe created in the Middle Ages. When slowly walking a labyrinth in an orientation of Christian faith and inner reflection, this brief journey can facilitate

surprising gifts of understanding and acceptance. Significantly, the sense of inner surprise and gifted grace associated with these receptive moments can be very close to the experiences in Companioned Prayer, especially when including the body-sense of what comes, all held within the tender embrace of God's love. The common understanding of how the movement of the Holy Spirit can be felt within a meditative or contemplative experience can be beneficial to appreciating Companioned Prayer.

There are many ways to pray the labyrinth. One is to simply walk slowly, being open to what comes. Another is to consider the walk as representing stages in your life's spiritual journey (who you are, how God has called you, etc.), for example being open to insights from childhood early in the walk, and progressing to the present, and then reflecting on the future.

Alternatively, you may incorporate some or all of the steps of Companioned Prayer into your labyrinth walk. One way is to do so without forcing an exact or close match to each Companioned Prayer phrase, but instead simply have the flow of the prayer in mind, recalling the phrases or their intention as appropriate, and see what comes. Another way is to more closely match your walk to each phrase, using each turn as an opportunity to inwardly say a phrase or a part of a phase.

Lectio Divina

In a similar manner to that described above in "The Lord's Prayer" our practice of Companioned Prayer can facilitate our practice of *lectio divina*. By slowly reading or listening to scripture without analysis, but with reflective awareness, open to following how the Spirit leads us, we can be drawn through all of the stages of *lectio divina*. This holy process is enriched by the faith, skill and trust we have experienced in Companioned Prayer.

Lectio divina can also be directly combined with Companioned Prayer. In this form we are open to being responsive to a reading of scripture or a similar passage, and follow what comes using Companioned Prayer. A suggested format for companioning another person in *Lectio Divina Companioned Prayer* is provided below.

Lectio Divina Companioned Prayer™

For praying with a prayer partner

OPENING PRAYERS
Begin by saying, **In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we open our hearts to you, O Lord. Amen.**

Then on behalf of the person you are praying with and yourself, say a personal prayer out loud.

> *For example: asking for Christ to be our companion as we listen to his word; for our trust in the Lord; for the guidance of the Holy Spirit; to help us listen inside to God's quiet call; or to humbly journey inside with Christ.*

Then invite the other person to also say a personal prayer silently or out loud, and to say "Amen" when they are ready to continue. [wait for the person to say "Amen"]

AS WE ARE
Then say, **Coming before God as we are, take a few minutes to notice how you physically feel, held tenderly in the loving arms of our Lord.** *[briefly pause, and then continue]* **For example, let your attention go to your back and notice what that feels like.** *[pause]* **Notice your shoulders** *[pause]***, your neck** *[pause]***, your head** *[pause]***, your arms** *[pause]***, your hands** *[pause]***, your feet** *[pause]***, your legs** *[pause]***, your stomach** *[pause]***, your heart** *[pause]***, and your breathing.** *[longer pause]* **Notice the body-sense of how you feel right now** *[pause]***; and then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait for a response, and then go to ASKING GOD]*

LECTIO – LISTENING FOR GOD
When they are ready, say: **Staying with how this feels inside, and being open to God's loving presence, listen to the reading in openness and faith, letting go into it.** *[pause] [Read the selected passage slowly but naturally two times, pausing a minute or two after each reading. Before the third reading, say,* **As you listen again, you might ask yourself, "Is God somehow calling to me, in these words, in this moment?" and then let me know if something comes.** *Read the passage a third time, and then wait for a response.]*

MEDITATIO – GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE
Notice how all this *repeat symbol if shared* **feels inside, and how you carry it.** *[pause]* **With tenderness and faith, notice how it feels to take all this to the loving heart of Jesus, and to feel his gentle love and acceptance in all of this. Take your time, and then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait]*

ORATIO – LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS
When they are ready to go on: **Notice how it feels in your body to be with this, in this gentle, caring, faith-filled way. Allow your awareness to seep into your body, to settle in, and sense how all this feels inside.** *[pause]* **Within the gentle loving heart of Jesus, wait in openness and faith to see if it feels like there is anything else that God might want you to notice, such as a word, image, feeling or memory that seems to somehow fit with the way this whole thing feels, and then let me know.** *[wait]*

ORATIO – BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT

a. *If something comes, reflect back the symbol if shared, pause, and then ask,*

b. **Does this feel right, inside, to journey with some more?** *[wait for a response]*
If "no" go to CONTEMPLATIO.

c. *If "yes," say:* **Ask yourself, "How does all this** *repeat symbol if shared* **now feel in my body held in Jesus' love?"** *[pause]* **With gentleness and faith, let go into how all this feels inside; and let me know if anything comes that fits the way this all now feels.** *[wait]*

If something comes, go back to a.

Repeat a, b, c as long as the person wants to continue, or as time allows.

When they are ready to stop, go to CONTEMPLATIO.

CONTEMPLATIO – RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE
When the person is ready to stop, or if the time has run out: **Okay; let's nurture this special place you've come to inside. Pause here and let go into God's presence within all of this, resting in the quiet tenderness of his Spirit for a while. And then let me know when we are ready to go on.** *[wait]*

CLOSING PRAYERS
When they are ready to end, say: **As you savor all of this, let yourself know that this is God's personal love and grace, experienced and felt inside us.** *[pause]* **Staying in this holy and precious gift, you may wish to silently offer a prayer in response, and then say "Amen."** *[wait]*

When they are finished, say out loud a brief prayer or blessing, also ending with "Amen."

After the prayer or blessing, you may invite the person to write in their journal if they wish.

Since *lectio divina* is often practiced in a group setting with one person reading, the following *Group Lectio Divina Companioned Prayer* can be used in that setting.

Group Lectio Divina Companioned Prayer™

OPENING PRAYER
Begin by saying, **In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we open our hearts to you, O Lord. Amen.**

Then on behalf of the group you are praying with and yourself, say a personal prayer out loud.

> *For example: Dear God, holy is your Name, holy is your Word, holy is your Spirit. Now as we come to you in prayer, we ask Jesus to be our companion, with the Holy Spirit. We ask for your help to trust in you, to listen to your Word, to humbly notice your grace, to journey inside with you, and to rest in your holy presence. Amen.*

AS WE ARE
Then say, **Coming before God as we are, take a few minutes to notice how you physically feel, held tenderly in the arms of our Lord.** *[briefly pause, and then continue]* **For example, let your attention go to your back and notice what that feels like.** *[pause]* **Notice your shoulders** *[pause]***, your neck** *[pause]***, your head** *[pause]***, your arms** *[pause]***, your hands** *[pause]***, your feet** *[pause]***, your legs** *[pause]***, your stomach** *[pause]***, your heart** *[pause]***, and your breathing.** *[longer pause]* **Notice the body-sense of how you feel right now.** *[pause, and then continue]*

LECTIO – LISTENING FOR GOD
Staying with how this feels inside, and being open to God's loving presence, listen to the reading in openness and faith, letting go into it. *[pause]* **As you listen, notice if you are drawn to any word or phrase, or if something comes in response.** *[Read the selected passage slowly but naturally two times, pausing a minute or two after each reading. Before the third reading, say,*

As you listen again, you might ask yourself, "Is God somehow calling to me, in these words, in this moment?" *Read the passage a third time, pause about 30-40 seconds, and then continue to Meditatio.]*

MEDITATIO – GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE
Notice how all this feels inside, and how you carry it. *[pause]* **With tenderness and faith, notice how it feels to take all this to the loving heart of Jesus, and to feel his gentle love and acceptance in all of this.** *[pause a minute, and then continue]*

ORATIO – LETTING GO IN THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS
Notice how it feels in your body to be with this, in this gentle, caring, faith-filled way. Allow your awareness to seep into your body, to settle in, and sense how <u>all</u> this feels inside. *[pause]* **Within the gentle loving heart of Jesus, wait in openness and faith to see if it feels like there is anything else that God might want you to notice, such as a word, image, feeling or memory that seems to somehow fit with the way this whole thing feels.** *[pause a minute, then continue]*

ORATIO – BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT

a. **If something came, ask yourself, "Does this feel right, inside, to journey with some more?"** *[pause and then continue]*

b. **If "yes", ask yourself, "How does all this now feel in my body held in Jesus' love?"** *[pause]* **With gentleness and faith, let go into how all this feels inside; and wait to see if anything comes that fits the way this all now feels; and then follow what may come.** *[wait for about two minutes, and then repeat "a" and "b" a second time.]*

c. *After the second time, say,* **Ask yourself, "Is there anything that I want to say to God, from all of this, in this moment?"** *[wait for about a minute, and then continue to Contemplatio.]*

CONTEMPLATIO – RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE
Okay; let's nurture this special place you've come to inside. Pause here and let go into God's presence within all of this, resting in the quiet tenderness of his Spirit for a while. *[pause about two minutes, and then continue]*

CLOSING PRAYERS
As you savor all of this, let yourself know that this is God's personal love and grace, experienced and felt inside us. *[pause]* **Staying in this holy and precious gift, you may wish to silently offer a prayer in response; and then slowly open the eyes.** *[wait]*

When they are finished, say out loud a brief prayer or blessing.

After the prayer or blessing, you may invite them to write in their journals if they wish; and if appropriate, then invite them to share if they would like to.

* * *

Companioned Daily Examen

A long-established Jesuit spiritual practice with significant similarities to Companioned Prayer is St Ignatius' Daily Examen. When practiced in the evening, the Daily Examen calls us to notice how God has been present in our lives that day. This inward reflection occurs in response to a series of questions or suggestions that can focus our recollection while also being open to noticing more, including how God may be calling us now. There are many variations of the Daily Examen related to what questions or suggestions are posed. The Examen is usually practiced with the eyes closed. Sometimes it is practiced with another person reading and pausing for the periods of reflection. A popular contemporary example of this is Fr. James Martin's podcast of the Daily Examen (https://examen.libsyn.com/.)

However, the Daily Examen can also be practiced with one other person, a companion. In this setting, the companion reads the words of the Examen but instead of pausing between instructions for a set period of time, the companion ends each instruction with a phrase such as, "Then let me know when you are ready to go on." This allows the person practicing the Examen to take whatever time they wish in any of the practice's movements, and to follow the inner noticing with greater fluidity and connectedness. This simple adjustment can also be augmented by adding opening prayers, instructions to notice how something feels in the body, reflection of shared symbols, taking what comes to the loving heart of Jesus, and offering the cycling movements of *BEING OPEN TO GOD'S SPIRIT* (especially near the end of the Examen), and/or incorporating other parts of Companioned Prayer.

Companioned Eucharist

Prayer is communion with God. So is the Eucharist. It is a prayer experience of the Real Presence of Christ known and felt inside us within our body, mind and heart when we are open to God in faith. In Companioned Prayer we experience this same Real Presence and come to identify with this intimate divine mystery. When we approach the Eucharist with this inner familiarity gained through Companioned Prayer, we experience an automatic and natural response of being open and welcoming to his presence in the Eucharist in the same manner that we are open and welcoming to him in Companioned Prayer. Thus, the Companioned Prayer experience provides a natural way for our hearts to experience Christ in the Eucharist. This is further facilitated by our direct Companioned Prayer experiences of Christ's presence, loving mercy and grace within us in our brokenness, in our body, in how we presently are, and the repeated experience of how we are the body of Christ. This mystery, beyond explanation but not beyond experiential knowing as revealed by God, is then integral to our Eucharist experience. We know without a doubt that in the Eucharist prayer the Real Presence of Christ is offered and received as our Companion and Lord of love.

Other Opportunities for Prayer within Worship

Similar to how surrendering into Christ's presence in the Eucharist may be facilitated by our experiences of him in Companioned Prayer, we may also open ourselves more deeply to God's presence within the many other opportunities that the church gives us in prayer, study, and service. In these we can bring some of our Companioned Prayer experience into these offerings. For example, we may have a practice of praying by lighting votive candles. In this we typically bring

our concerns or thanks to Jesus when we light a candle for a specific person, relationship, personal concern or thanksgiving. Informed by our Companioned Prayer experiences, before lighting a candle we can pause to notice what that concern feels like inside; and when we light the candle we can notice what it feels like to take all of this to the loving heart of Jesus, and to notice his love and acceptance in all of it. In this act of surrender, we can also pause within all of this to notice whether it feels like God might want us to be aware of something about all of this. In this way we not only bring our personal concerns to God, we also open our hearts to his personal grace for us within our prayer to him.

This is just one example of how our Companioned Prayer experiences can enrich our other prayers, whether they be liturgical prayers prayed in community worship or within personal prayers experienced through other church offerings. Other examples of deeper prayerful surrender could be with the Liturgy of the Hours, scripture readings, the Rosary, in adoration, and many other church offerings.

Other Forms and Translations of Companioned Prayer

The prayer and its instruction may continue to develop and open new pathways of awareness and grace beyond our current understanding as we continue to mature by God's grace and inspiration from our prayer relationship with him. While keeping the prayer practice, its discussions, and sharing open to continual inspiration and development, some basic tenants must always be followed:

- Always keep the prayer faith-centered as a personal prayer to God. This is a prayer of communion with God. It is specific to a personal prayer relationship with God, being open to the Father through the love of Christ and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is meant to be practiced and experienced within that faith relationship. Never secularize or generalize the prayer in order to make it "more accessible" to more people or to a specific group. It is not a technique. It is only by surrendering to God in faith and trust within the prayer experience, while praying and also while companioning others in the prayer, that the full meaning and gift of the prayer is received and understood. Anything less than that will severely limit the experience.

- Trust in the living presence of the Lord as experienced in the prayer. Keep the practice and the sharing of it open to this living presence. Do not intellectualize it or explain it to the point where the explanation or theories about it become the answers. The answers are ever changing and personal, and must remain so. Do not worship the explanations, theories, theologies, or answers; nor constrain God's gift to a personal or group interpretation. Our encounter with God is meant to be mystery beyond full understanding. God's reality and mystery is not supposed to be limited to our human understanding and appreciation. We are called to a process of trust and surrender, not to a fixed idea or understanding.

- The sole outcome of this prayer should be love. God's love for us is freely returned in our love of God, our love of others, and our love of creation. This prayer practice should foster this love in these relationships and its outpouring in worship, community, and service. Jesus modeled this for us, and this prayer calls us to that reality.

Special Companioned Prayer forms might possibly be considered for people who are physically sick, who are dealing with addiction or trauma, or who have other special needs. However, in any form it is important to always acknowledge God as the source of grace and inspiration, and to whom the prayer is directed. Companioned Prayer is a prayer and not a therapy, and must not endeavor to replace professional help. Also, it is very important to never develop or use alternative forms of the prayer in order to promote a specific point of view or a specific desired experience or outcome. Likewise, in this Companioned Prayer and its various versions we should not ask God for a specific outcome or understanding. Nor should the prayer become a prayer of "spiritual warfare" or used in "deliverance" ministry. In this gentle contemplative Companioned Prayer, we must trust that God will provide what we or others need, when and how we need it according to God's purpose, not ours.

This is not meant in any way to deprecate other forms of prayer in which such specific requests may be very fitting. In fact, some of the listening skills learned by practicing Companioned Prayer can be applied to other forms of prayer. For example, when engaged in a prayer of petition, after each request you might purposefully pause, take a breath (being aware of your body), and see if it feels like there is anything that God might be calling you to notice, such as a word, image, feeling or memory, that seems to somehow fit with the way your petition feels inside, and then to be open to following that in a contemplative way. These types of Companioned Prayer approaches to prayer can be used for personal prayers of adoration, thanksgiving, confession, and intercession, as well as petition.

When using a Companioned Prayer practice with others, manipulative techniques are never justified no matter how righteous the cause. For example, when leading a Bible study, you may invite the participants to quietly ask themselves (in a contemplative prayer way) to notice if in their response to the reading they find anything that God might be calling them to notice or to listen to, and then invite them to be with that in a Companioned Prayer way. Such a question and invitation are open and do not presuppose a specific outcome. It demonstrates faith that God is fully capable of inspiring and calling us in ways that are personal and unique to each individual, without presuming any "correct" answer or "best" outcome. Nor should such a question even presuppose that there is something within the reading that God is in fact calling the person to notice at this time.

From a Companioned Prayer perspective, exactly how such questions are framed is very important. Questions and prayer formats must remain open-ended and completely invitational. Nuances do make a difference. For example, it would be inappropriate to invite the participants of a Bible study to quietly ask themselves (in a contemplative prayer way) to notice which of two interpretations or meanings feels that God would deem correct, and then to be with that in a contemplative Companioned Prayer way. Such an invitation places God and the participant in a box where only two outcomes are permitted. This imposes the constraints of the interpretation or the prejudice of the person doing the inviting into the relationship between the person praying and God. Such uses are manipulative and wrong.

Likewise, religious prayer questions that imply a "right" (or righteous) response or which are designed to elicit a specific personal vulnerability should never be used, regardless of their "saving" purpose. For example, questions such as "Who is my savior?" "What is my greatest sin?" and "Am I going to hell?" are all psychologically and religiously manipulative. They assert a

specific outcome, or presume a type of outcome, over the gentle freedom of being open to however God may desire us to approach him. One should never try to force grace.

Additionally, our prayer questions should never take us away from our interior awareness of our actual situation, of how we are or what we are dealing with. Our prayer questions should not, for example, take us instead to our concept of God or to seek an answer directly from God. That type of request may be appropriate for other traditional types of prayer, but if used in Companioned Prayer, our prayer would become a passive (even if passionate) intellectual exercise, rather than an interior discovery and surrender.

When developing changes to the Companioned Prayer forms, or when developing new forms or translations, work collaboratively with the CPCF, In addition to the earlier topics of this section, respect the principles listed below. Additional principles can be derived from the material in other chapters, particularly chapters 10 and 11.

- Always keep it a prayer between the person praying and God.
- Keep the person praying focused on their inner experience and not on the companion.
- Keep the instructions brief and get out of the way. Sometimes brevity is better than clarity.
- When providing instructions, always include words that let the person praying know when they should provide feedback. For example "let me know…" et cetera.
- Never ask the person praying to disclose or share the subject of their prayer. Honor the private sanctity between the person praying and God.
- Do not use words or phrases that take the person to their intellect to try and define what is going on or what something means. Use words that are broad in meaning that let the person who is praying be comfortable in their own definitions.
- Keep the awareness of the body in the prayer. This is a vital part of the prayer. Without it, our personal prayer experience is not whole, and we are not as open to the grace of the Holy Spirit and God's love sensed and felt within us.
- Do not create instructions that sooth away or replace feelings of hurt or brokenness with images or feelings of God. Instead, use faith to help the person let go into the sense of their personal needs as they place themselves in God's loving heart.
- In the *ASKING GOD* question, note that the question is always self-directed interiorly, rather than "exteriorly" to God. If the question were directed to God, such as, "Lord, tell me…" or "Lord, what do you wish…" the person's attention would shift to his or her concept of God, and away from our inner listening within ourself that is so unique to Companioned Prayer. Thus, always refrain from using any form of a direct question to God.
- Do not add adjectives or other words that would characterize the person's interior prayer experience. Let the person have their experience as it actually is, without placing modifiers, expectations or constraints. Do not use adjectives within the question in

ASKING GOD, such as "most", "number one", et cetera, if the adjective might cause the person to either analyze or seek a specific response.

- Always begin and end with an opportunity for a personal prayer as indicated in the *Opening Prayers* and *Closing Prayers*.

When considering any changes or new prayer forms, ask what God wills for the prayer instead of what we want. Notice your desire for changes, within your own prayer experiences. Perhaps it is not what you think.

Always try out every proposed change with others multiple times. Some of the best intellectual or theological ideas fall flat when put into practice. If it seems to work, withhold judgment until it has been tried by a number of people over time. Likewise, if you are translating a form into another language, be sure that you first have a thorough sense of the prayer from plenty of experience praying it, and then take your time, carefully selecting the words, trying out various word alternatives in prayer practice with others, and getting their feedback over a period of months. Before making any changes to the prayer or translating it, the people involved should regularly practice Companioned Prayer as offered in this book for a number of years, and should thoroughly understand its many nuances, including the gifts of the mercies of God, both experientially and intellectually.

The prayer structure is delicate and nuanced, and the prayer experience can be easily impaired by subtly inappropriate changes or translations. Therefore, while promoting the use, adoption, and advancement of Companioned Prayer as widely as possible, the Companioned Prayer Christian Fellowship, Incorporated (CPCF) is compelled to also protect the integrity of the prayer. The name "Companioned Prayer" is trademarked [™] by the CPCF, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. The use of "Companioned Prayer" in any form or media, including in translation, is subject to the approval or restriction by the CPCF. All translations and changes to the prayer must have written approval by the CPCF and are subject to existing international copyright law. Silence by the CPCF regarding any changes does not imply acceptance, and acceptance or approval by the CPCF may be later revoked or constrained by the CPCF at the CPCF's sole discretion. For information and permissions, the CPCF can be contacted at info@companionedprayer.org. The prayer offers a unique way to experience God's closeness and love. The CPCF only wishes to ensure that this potential is retained.

Companioned Prayer is all about trust in God, being authentic, surrender, and being open. It is not a technique; it is a prayer. No set of instructions, no matter how perfectly crafted, can make anything happen. It is all a personal matter of the heart, and the gift of God's loving presence given in his own time and in his own way.

Chapter 13
Sharing from the Heart

They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ...Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

Luke 24:32-36

This chapter encourages you to share Companioned Prayer™ from your inner sense of the holy, from your heart and soul, and then to see what happens.

Christ Centered

Share Companioned Prayer as a personal, faith-centered, spiritual, prayer practice that through faith, can open one to reconciliation, to mystery, and to God and Christ. Do not share or offer anything less. In fact, if Companioned Prayer were to be prayed without the understanding and intention of our faith, it would cease to be a Christian prayer. Christ comes to us in this prayer because we believe in him, we long for him, we ask for his presence within our brokenness, within our humanness. And he does so from his abiding love.

You cannot do it without God. Do not take a spiritual practice and turn it into a secular one because we happen to live in a secular society. Do not water it down into a new-age practice, a motivational technique, or a psychological procedure. You must share from that depth of experience within yourself from which you know God: that core essence of your being and experience that is most special, from where he touches you; from your soul given to God. Sharing from any other place will not work. Sharing from the intellect will not work. Sharing in a medium or format that does not directly and plainly honor that holy essence and experience will not work. For example, teaching prayer as a way to relax, or as a way to be with your feelings, or as a way to solve problems or improve creativity, et cetera, when you yourself know that the experience of prayer is so much more than that, is not being truthful inside yourself, and will not work.

Do not be concerned with mass appeal and acceptance. Success should not be measured by how many people take a class, but instead should be based on facilitating the opportunity for God's grace to affect people's lives through the prayer. Companioned Prayer enlivens us with God's grace, and it is the process of nurturing the ability of people to be open to regularly knowing and experiencing spiritual grace within their lives that should constitute success. Therefore, share

from the prayer's strength: the divine depths of its transforming experience. Honor that. Inspire from that and from nothing else.

Do not share because it gives you intellectual satisfaction or provides you with emotional reinforcement. For example, do not share out of a need to be considered by others, or by yourself, to be a spiritual leader. Instead, share because you feel called by God to do so. Share with joy and humility. Know that the gifts and insights that you share are not yours, but are shared with you out of God's loving grace. Therefore, share in His name only.

You do not need to be a "whole person" or "perfect" in order to share with others. Sharing from open brokenness is much more valuable than sharing from some sense of purity or from a sense of having all the answers. From the perspective of incompleteness, personal challenges and trials owned and shared with Christ, it is okay to be a leader. When you feel called by God to share Companioned Prayer, you must encourage, guide and inspire. You can do it without controlling. You can do it in a way that encourages and invites each person to be open to the mystery of growth and gift from within. Know that you are not responsible for the student's inner experiences. You are powerless to make anything happen. It is between the person and God.

More important than any actual instruction, is the attitude of the companion. You must let go of wanting to fix people, of wanting them to have wonderful prayer experiences, of wanting them to adopt Companioned Prayer as their means to personal salvation or as some kind of supercharged spiritual path. You are not the savior. You must let all of that go; and instead just be very genuinely happy to be with each person on a very personal level, to offer to share the prayer and some guidance, but most of all simply to be loving, personal, and caring for one another. That is the goal of sharing Companioned Prayer: to create that kind of environment and those kinds of relationships. This environment and these relationships are built on mutual trust, vulnerability, humility, compassion, and friendship, all within the context of Christ's loving presence within all of us and his love for all of us. Abide in his tender love felt within us, and share his love with others in the reality of our actual presence to one another. Then within that very authentic Christen love and fellowship, let God do what he wills with respect to the sharing and personal experiences of Companioned Prayer, and don't be concerned about the results.

Faith

It is our faith in the reality of the living God that allows prayer to work. Without faith imagine letting go into, what?… your psyche?… your feelings?… your body? Now consider letting go into your personal issues within faith, within the love and compassion of Jesus' living presence. With God's help you can risk being more inside your prayer subject, acknowledging your brokenness and your needs, to risk being more open to God's presence within you, and to accept his gift of grace and change. After Christ healed someone, he did not say, "Your understanding of yourself healed you." He said, "Your faith has healed you;" and not "faith" as one's concepts or theology, but faith as borne of real need, turning to God, revelation, recognition, and personal trust and surrender to our Lord.

Remember you are sharing prayer based on faith and love; not sharing faith based on prayer. In other words, don't use sharing of Companioned Prayer as an excuse to teach your particular faith orientation or your personal religious views. Your goal is not to convert anyone to

your religious beliefs. Your role is not to "save" anyone. Share Companioned Prayer as a prayer of inner personal spiritual unfoldment, mystery, gift, growth, discovery, and grace. A way to experience God's love from within – to know his presence and to be open to listening for his encouragement, tender love and direction. And within all this, let God do the "converting." He will be much better at it than you. Give your students the freedom to have their own personal relationship with God as he chooses to reveal himself within their prayer. Have faith that God will do whatever is right for each person.

Do not get drawn into theological or biblical debates or justifications. The justification is God's self-revelation within the prayer experience itself. The purpose of sharing in a faith-centered manner is to support the experience of letting go into trusting God, not to intellectually justify the prayer. Jesus was sentenced to death because the religious leaders did not recognize that the miracles that he performed were from God. They ignored the reality of the miracles in favor of defending their theology with religious argument and debate. Every time we pray to God in Companioned Prayer we experience some small or special miracle. Do not turn away from the reality of God within those miracles. Surrender into the miracle of God and into a living relationship with him. Share from there, and from that living faith, and not from religious argument and debate. We have received a gift from God. Jesus comes to us in this prayer. Do not reject him again; do not crucify Jesus a second time.

Some people in your faith community may want to challenge you and reject your sharing Companioned Prayer based on their theological interpretations. You do not need to struggle with such people. Just abide in Christ in your heart, and answer them silently with your non-judgmental love, in God's love given within you. Have faith and trust in God's will. And continue to offer this most precious gift of God's presence, his mercy, love and grace. Offer it from the simple faith and tender love experienced and known in your heart.

Other Faiths

Can this prayer be practiced by people of non-Christian faiths? Possibly it can. God's ability to reveal his presence and share his grace is not limited to only one faith. Companioned Prayer is suitable for all people open to the truth of God from within their personal faith. However, many attributes of the prayer are uniquely Christian, including the loving heart of Jesus, the incarnational aspect of the prayer, the personal relationship with our Lord, and of course the Holy Trinity. If people can in some way – perhaps as only known by God – be open to any of these possibilities, then Companioned Prayer can be presented in ways that allow people to open themselves up to the living presence of our Lord within their personal experiences, including within their own deep appreciation and meaning of faith in their own cultural and religious context and personal story.

Once they discover their personal relationship with God as experienced in Companioned Prayer, they will be drawn to God's truths contained in their faith and also contained in the Christian faith, as God calls them into the fullness of His relationship with them. Therefore, the purposeful conversion of anyone learning the prayer, from their own faith to the Christian faith, should never be part of offering the prayer. As experienced companions we must have faith that through the Companioned Prayer experiences, God can and will most effectively call each person to his or her own relationship with Him as best for that individual. For the reality of the Trinity is

broad and deep, beyond our limited appreciation. And, "*The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.*" – Psalm 145:18.

Sharing Your Personal Testimony

When sharing Companioned Prayer, it is not only okay to share some of your own prayer experiences and growth, it is necessary. Your personal testimony will help people to learn to trust and value their own prayer experiences, as well as the prayer process. Or you may wish to share your experiences anonymously; that is, without necessarily saying that they are yours. Similarly, you can share some experiences of others just as long as you do not identify who they belong to. Just as hearing our symbols reflected back to us in the prayer grounds us in the experience and invites us to continue our prayer journey in faith, when we hear others share their prayer experiences we often hear similarities with our own experiences. And that reinforces our experiences and promotes understanding within us and between us of what this prayer is all about, how spiritual growth happens, and why this is a spiritual process. It builds trust in letting go into all of it, into surrendering to God within the prayer experience, and inspires us to continue.

When sharing experiences, be humble and respectful of others. Let them know that you do not expect them to share if they do not feel comfortable doing so. Always choose your opportunities to share in relation to illustrating some point about the prayer practice that will help them learn to trust God. Let people know that everyone's experiences are different and that specific experiences are not a measure of anything, and certainly not an indication of holiness. They are in fact more indicative of our state of sin – our separation from God, our wounded and broken life, and our profound spiritual needs; together with the undeserved and underappreciated gift of God's mercy given out from his complete lovingness. Thus, one prayer experience is not better than another. Our goal is not any particular experience. What we receive each time in prayer is what we need most.

Another benefit of witnessing some aspect of your or others' prayer experiences, and of relating these experiences and the prayer process to the Christian experience, is that it helps convey the sense of mystery, grace, and God's presence within the prayer. It will allow you to communicate the essence of this practice – that it offers a way to be open to the divine, completely as personal gift. Those becoming familiar with the prayer will catch the sense of this, supported by their own personal spiritual experiences, as they risk being close to their issues within the power of their faith in God.

Our Primary Challenge

The primary challenge to effectively sharing the prayer, is our wanting to create and support a program of consequential prayer experiences. Our own desire for others to have significant spiritual experiences, or for them to share their experiences, or for them to recognize the value of the prayer, or to personally know Jesus, can all be material impediments for others to be fully present in their trust in the experience of the personal presence of God. These primary desires of ours can be very subtle, and if they serve our self-worth, they may be sensed as a form of control, as an expectation or hope which we have for the person. Thus, our presence to them is perceived as "with strings attached" or "with an agenda." We ourselves are not fully trusting in God's grace for them in his own way and in his own time, and as personally best for them.

The answer to this dilemma is very simple. While offering and supporting others in the prayer, we should simply be fully present to each other with genuine acceptance, interest, and kindness. We do not need much more than that. It is our love for one another without outcomes that allows grace to be experienced, and for others to know Christ. It is not our programs, goals, or instructions. It is not about a program; it is about presence. Being present to each other and in ourselves, and thus to God. And present in the love of God, in the loving heart of Jesus. This simple presence is the joy of Christ offered and extended to others. For if you have love for one another, everyone will know that you are his disciples, that is, they will be open to and recognize his presence. (John 13:35)

This presence is not recognized as a result of a program. It is recognized because God offers it. So let him do it. Have trust, have faith. Let go and let God.

Intellectual Discussion

When sharing with others, do not try to define your prayer experiences or those of your participants, theologically or any other way. Don't put their experiences into a box and constrain them to your definitions. For example, do not try and define "grace" or "God." Keep it open and mysterious. Let people define their own experiences from the nature of their experiences, recognizing that such definitions are personal and will change as the individual changes and grows. In this respect, one definition is not more "right" than another, so just don't get into it. Leave figuring out the meaning of prayer experiences to outside of sharing the prayer. In fact, it is best to refer theological discourse to the church or religious organization of which your group is a part.

In addition, thorough or detailed discourse about the prayer practice within the introductory prayer sessions can make the learning of the prayer feel like an extensive intellectual explanation, which can get in the way of letting go. Extensive explanation establishes the context of learning to pray to be analytical thinking, and reinforces the feeling that analytical thinking and logic should be the medium of the experience, thereby causing the learning of surrender to God within the prayer, and openness to the experience of surprising mystery and grace, to be more problematic. Sharing Companioned Prayer is actually more "personal accompaniment" than what we might otherwise think of as "teaching" or "instruction."

This does not mean that questions should not be answered, or that inquisitive discussion should be stifled. Intellectual understanding should be clear and satisfied. However, let many of the answers come from the beginners' experiences within their prayers, instead of all through explanations or group discussions. Encourage your students to take their doubts, intellectual issues and curiosity into their prayer experience, being open to allowing those very questions and issues to be their prayer subjects, unfolding and developing over time.

Similarly, providing people with copies of this book, or many handouts or similar material when they are being introduced to the prayer or anytime soon after they have begun the practice, is usually not helpful. It can actually hinder their walk with God with this prayer. While we do want to nurture their ongoing prayer practice, it is important not to try to engineer their growth and learning. Someone who shares Companioned Prayer is more like a gardener who tends the garden but who realizes that God is the one who actually makes it grow. You can rely upon God. It is his mercy and grace, experienced through our encounter with the Father, the Son and the Holy

Spirit through faithful Companied Prayer experiences, that will provide the spiritual awakening and growth that is just right for each individual. It is God who ultimately calls each person to Himself. It is not a book full of information or an exhaustive intellectual program that will do it. Create a space to let God do it, and encourage participants to open their hearts to him in faith.

Resistance to Companioned Prayer

It is not uncommon for those who are responsible for prayer ministries and the religious health of a parish, a religious community, a ministry, or a program to initially oppose having Companioned Prayer within their environment. There can be many reasons for this. The faith leader may be too busy to consider another program, or they may have other plans or spiritual ideas. They may simply not feel drawn to contemplative or quiet practices, or believe such practices are inappropriate for parishioners, instead emphasizing preaching, catechesis, or service ministries. Additionally, there may be other significant reasons for rejection of a prayer that they are not familiar with.

Faith leaders may be keen to protect others from practices which they deem to be religiously questionable, religiously invalid, or essentially secular in nature. There are many kinds of practices in the world which are secular, manipulative, non-Christian, or use some expression of belief or superstition (e.g., new-age practices), sometimes within a cloak or presentation of Christian faith. Within the established Christian tradition, there are also a number of well-known and accepted prayer and spiritual practices that due to their subtly can be inappropriately practiced in a manner which does not honor the essence of Christianity and which can then result in a personal turning away from the true source of Christian experience and faith. For example, a prayer can be practiced without any personal relationship with Jesus Christ, or practiced in a way that relegates Christ to a state of peacefulness or quiet without any attribution of Jesus the divine person. Practiced in this way, these prayers often become mental techniques akin to the practice of mindfulness meditation; which perhaps can be of some value in themselves, but are not essentially Christian.

Based on their experiences of other unique or unorthodox programs or practices, faith leaders may suspect that Companioned Prayer promotes a new theology or emphasizes one perspective of theology at the expense of a traditional, balanced, and healthy theology. Or they may be suspicious that a new program or group may desire to isolate itself from the Church or that it may instigate controversy. Some other Chrisitan groups or programs, both current and in the past, have deviated from the Church's teachings and led their practitioners into isolated or harmful factions or sects. Faith leaders are right to protect their parishes from unorthodox theologies or practices that may represent such non-healthy perspectives and outcomes.

Another reason that a faith leader may initially reject Companioned Prayer is because he or she may feel that in some contemplative or similar practices the person praying may get in touch with deep hurting places of emotional trauma or challenges, and then finds themself in a state of emotional despair or anxiety. The ministry leader may also feel challenged to deal with these personal situations, and therefore may consider that it is better to avoid this situation by not allowing any spiritual practices that can result in personal emotional distress. For example, the experience of past trauma can occur during extended periods of silence in which the trauma is

surfaced without any resolution or grace because the silence was simply mindful without the personal grace and mercy of our living God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Thus, when first offering Companioned Prayer to a religious community, you may experience resistance or rejection. These kinds of responses are often simply an attempt to protect the welfare of those who would be involved in these or similar practices. In many cases these responses are not inappropriate or unjustified since they are often based on actual experience. Faith leaders may be naturally suspect of new prayer or spiritual practices, or even of traditional contemplative practices which in their view may be only appropriate under very controlled or limited circumstances.

With respect to Companioned Prayer, some ostensible similarities to other practices may prompt a faith leader to mistakenly assume that Companioned Prayer is either essentially non-Christian, or that it may result in emotional distress, or both. However, an assumption that Companioned Prayer may not be Christian would be incorrect since it is centered within the personal experience of Jesus and his personal love for us. Companioned Prayer is not a secular technique, but is a prayer of surrender into the love of God expressed in the loving heart of Jesus. This is a very personal encounter of depth and mystery totally oriented within our Christian faith. There is nothing more essentially Christian than the personal prayer experience of Christ himself and his mercy, love and grace. For more about the relationship between Companioned Prayer and the Christian experience, see chapter 14.

Regarding their concerns about suspect or unconventional theologies, it is important to let faith leaders know that Companioned Prayer does not offer any new or different theology, nor promote any theological emphasis at the expense of others. In fact, Companioned Prayer does not offer any specific theology, but emphasizes that theology and preaching are the responsibility of the Church, and are not the task of any Companioned Prayer group or ministry. Companioned Prayer ministries prefer to let the trained and qualified church leadership present our faith's theology and understandings. Likewise, Companioned Prayer ministries do not separate themselves from the Church, or meet in secret. Instead, they transparently embrace full participation in the Church's faith life and activities, seeking not only to be nourished by the Church's many offerings, but to also have the Companioned Prayer participants appreciate and participate in the Church's faith traditions, teachings, and ministries. Companioned Prayer ministries desire to fully integrate into the Church's rich offerings, under the direction and guidance of Church leadership.

Regarding personal emotional challenges, some practitioners of several established contemplative prayers and spiritual practices may experience personal emotional distress within those practices, either from actively seeking such personal challenges, or more often, simply as a result of extended periods of silence in which past traumas and scars are relived. For example, it is surprising how often a contemplative prayer is practiced without any practical orientation to Christ, but only consists of long periods of mindful silence or technique. When practiced in this way it is not unusual that some people sometimes find themselves reflecting upon and reliving emotional scars and hurts. In periods of twenty, forty or sixty minutes, these strong emotions can come to the surface of the mind with significant force, where they can carry over into daily life after the prayer session. While some people may consider this to be a kind of "working out" or "working through" personal issues, it is not the kind of quiet gentle healing experienced as a result

of Christ's personal love for us in prayer. Even within a strong Christian faith orientation, such as within the silent hours-long meditations of some spiritual exercises, very extensive periods of silence can cause emotional challenges to arise. Within a context of guided personal spiritual oversight, such challenges can be appropriately managed and in fact used to further our understanding of the Christian message as it applies to our personal situation. However, this is not something that local parishes or religious communities are usually equipped for.

In contrast, Companioned Prayer includes no intention or instruction to seek emotional pain or to provide any self-care. Our surrender into God's loving presence includes his inspiration of how we come to him and open our hearts and minds to him, but never through self-identified emotional pain, and never without his loving presence and guidance. Additionally, Companioned Prayer does not include long periods of silence. The companion offers silent pauses of only ten to fifteen seconds. The duration of any reflective time longer than that is solely determined by the person praying, is usually only a minute or two, and is almost never longer than just a few minutes. The person praying sets their own time according to what they are comfortable with and what they are experiencing in their prayer. Furthermore, these brief periods of reflective quiet are always experienced within our surrender into the grace and tender love of the personal presence of God. Companioned Prayer is not a contemplative prayer of lengthy silence or introspection.

Nevertheless, even if emotional issues were to arise in Companioned Prayer, the prayer includes many nuanced steps to encourage our faith in the living presence of God's love for us. Additionally, some further guidelines are offered within chapter 12 in the sections "Trauma and Major Illness" through "Stopping with Feelings of Unfinishedness," and the Disclaimer on page v is also important.

This section has attempted to show that Companioned Prayer is not the kind of spiritual practice that strays from our faith centered in Christ, that fosters an alternative theology, or that fosters emotional distress. Nevertheless, for a variety of reasons, faith leaders may be justifiably cautious of new practices which they are not familiar with or have not experienced themselves. Therefore, while having the above understanding is important in order to be able to respond to specific misconceptions, regardless of the reason for rejection, a more helpful approach may be to offer a simple prayer that might give the faith leader an insight into the Companioned Prayer experience. The following brief prayer can be offered when first meeting to discuss Companioned Prayer, or at any time. Immediately after this prayer (after the person has opened their eyes) you can ask the person what their experience was like, and then indicate that this is similar to the experience of Companioned Prayer.

> **Would you mind if we begin with me saying a prayer for our time together?**
>
> **In this prayer we will briefly pause for a few seconds before we end.**
>
> **In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Dear Lord, we thank you for this opportunity to find ways to be close to you. We ask that you help us listen inside to how you may be calling us into your loving presence, into your loving heart. We pause now to notice the gift of yourself within us in that special way that you touch our hearts, in your gentle quiet love**. *[pause 10 to 15 seconds, then continue]*

Lord, let us always be nourished by your quiet grace, and thankful for your gift of yourself. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen *[sign of the cross; pause, then say]*

May I ask, what was that like? *[wait for a response; then reflect back what was shared; and then say]*

This is similar to Companioned Prayer

Perhaps this approach will help others to be open to the experience of interior prayer and our offering of Companioned Prayer as a gift of love, not of control or opposition.

Misuse of the Prayer

In practicing Companioned Prayer and understanding its experiences, we should personally avoid trying to absolutely fix, define or limit various terms of faith and experience, such as "God," "mercy," "sin," and so forth, because our understanding of those terms will change and deepen as we continue to have various experiences in the prayer, and as we change and grow according to how God forms us. We should not rush to define but instead should remain open to the mystery of God's reality, knowing that it is always larger and beyond our limited comprehension.

In fact, although some understandings and graces received in the prayer may feel to be complete within a single prayer, we may find that months or years later, the revelation may continue to unfold through the same symbols and showings into gifts of continued or greater meaning and personal significance. Therefore, we usually do not make life-changing decisions based on a single prayer experience or even a few prayer experiences. Instead, we know that God reveals his love for us over time, and in his time not ours, as best for us, not necessarily according to our script or our desired schedule. He calls on us in faith, for us to love and trust him. Our growth as a human spiritual being is an ongoing process and a lifelong personal journey. A journey with many surprising twists and turns, of celebrations and sadness, of trust and surrender. As our journey unfolds and expands, we are in awe to find that his mystery and presence is real.

Other people's visions, experiences, or proclaimed truths should not be adopted as one's own. They are personal only for the person who actually experienced them. Their mystery and validity are best appreciated as described in chapter 14. Likewise, we should never impose our personal vision on others, even if we believe it to be of great benefit or good. Love is not a justification for lack of honoring others' intellectual, emotional, or spiritual freedom. Our personal prayer experiences, understandings, or visions must not be used or promoted in ways that do not let people have full freedom to learn their own inner truth in their own time and in their own way, with the support and guidance of the Church. No matter how profound your own experience, it is personal to you. God calls each of us in a unique way to our own unique truth in him. The power of that truth is experienced as compelling and authentic only when it is congruent with our inner personal story, with who we are as a unique person. Just because your experiences are authentic, doesn't mean that other people's experiences must be similar to yours in order to be authentic. In faith, your truth is authentic only within the truth and spirit of Jesus. But the truth and spirit of Jesus is in the Trinity and is deep and broad, beyond our own limited comprehension and experiences, and in his love and grace, is uniquely and personally authentic to each of us. It is

within our embrace of the unity of Jesus, and his grace and truth given to us, that we discover our truth and our unity in him. And in him, we find fulfillment.

Therefore, let God speak this truth in each of our hearts, and do not assume that your personal truth must be understood or agreed upon by everyone else. Using the divine grace of your personal prayer experience in ways that result in feelings of power over others, in feelings of aggrandizement, pride, self-importance or being better or more special than others, or in imposition of your personal will, beliefs or vision upon others (such as narrow theological views, personal prophecies, or judgmental behaviors), are all a misuse of God's gentle grace and love for you. Nor should anyone give such authority or status to another individual who might display or claim such self-importance or exclusive vision. God gives true authority and understanding only to the humble and vulnerable; and which is authentically expressed simply in love and service to others as shown by the Church. Likewise, use of the prayer within any ministries that engage in conflict, control, intimidation or manipulation, such as "spiritual warfare" and "deliverance" ministries, regardless of the justification, is a misuse of the prayer. Associating the prayer with political goals, or political-religious causes, must also be avoided. Therefore, do not use either affection or knowledge as a justification for personal, political, social, or religious power over others.

This does not mean that the expression of our prayer experiences cannot be manifested in community. As Christians we are naturally called to share our experience of God's personal presence and love. In fact, one of the best expressions of the reality of our prayer experiences is within our practical and daily relationships with others. The inner truth and vision known within us can be expressed in loving and caring non-codependent and non-controlling relationships, out of the gifted grace of our own inner freedom and Christ's loving presence within us. In spending time being authentic and caring, by giving and sharing of ourselves, our faith and experiences of grace and mercy are made concrete within ourselves and others.

Creating an Open Environment

When sharing the prayer with others, you and your participants are all involved in a mutual process of discovery and learning. Let them know that unlike learning traditional subjects like history, math or philosophy, we are not here to learn about facts or ideas. Rather we are here to experience how to be open to new discovery from within – from God.

When arranging an introductory experience, you should not charge for your time. However, you might want to ask for donations for materials (handouts, journals, et cetera) and for any out-of-pocket expenses, food and facilities that must be paid for, such as retreat center accommodations. However, no one should be turned away for lack of money. If you absolutely need some stipend, try to arrange it from the sponsoring organization rather than from the individuals initially experiencing the prayer. When people directly pay for something, they usually expect some specific results. The prayer is then turned into a consumer item instead of the gift of grace from God. In addition, when people pay you, their focus may be more on what they are getting from you, i.e., are they getting their money's worth from you and from their experience, instead of just being open to what comes from God. "*You received without payment; give without payment.*" – Matthew 10:8b.

The ability to personally share Companioned Prayer should not be based on any organization's approval. There should be no approval, certification or other authorization of status of anyone who wishes to share or companion others in Companioned Prayer. The criteria are within the person who wishes to share with others: humility, faith, love, and a personal sense of being called by God to do so. However, this should not diminish an organization's ability to decide when, how or by whom it offers its Companioned Prayer experiences. If you feel ready, but an organization is not ready to sponsor your desired activity, you may wish to allow ample time for further discernment regarding your own readiness. If after such unhurried consideration, you feel you still are called to share the prayer, there are many other people of need or organizations that you may wish to consider.

Long Term Spiritual Growth

The support of the Church and the understanding of how Companioned Prayer and our prayer experiences fit into our overall ongoing Christian spiritual development are vitally important in facilitating our prayer practice and our ongoing transformation by God's love. This understanding and support enlivens and deepens our dedication to our lifelong prayer journey with Christ.

Therefore, people need to know from the outset that Companioned Prayer is meant to be experienced over a long period of time, and with full participation in the Church. People of faith seek overall spiritual wholeness and closeness to God that enriches and enlivens their lives and their faith on a continuing basis as they are drawn to union with God over time. They do not simply desire a technique or temporary experience.

For most people contemplative prayer is so different from their training and orientation, and so non-supported by our action/achievement orientated society, that it can be difficult for them to easily absorb it into their daily lives and to regularly practice it. And yet for most people, it is only through its regular practice that recognition of its deep personal significance and spiritual potential becomes grounded. It is this follow-on support and practice, from a person's first introduction to the prayer, which must also be given the highest priority and nurturing.

Reaching Out to Those Who Stop

It is not unusual for some people to stop practicing the prayer shortly after they have experienced it. People stop for a variety of reasons. Some of these can be addressed by an experienced companion in response to personal needs that may be expressed at any time. In any case, whenever a person stops practicing Companioned Prayer, it is a good idea to reach out to the person with friendship and compassion, to see if you can be of assistance. Perhaps just your friendly interaction is what is needed.

Do not be surprised to find that after a while some people stop practicing the prayer. You need to acknowledge that everyone is at a different point in their faith journey, and that some people may not be ready to take their next step, or that their next step might be different than what you think it is. You must allow them the grace to not go forward as you might perceive it. Do not consider it a failure either of you or of them if they have stopped practicing the prayer, or if they are intermittent in their participation in a prayer group or with a prayer partner. Have faith that

God will call them back at the time when they are ready, and that he continues to lead them. In the meantime, be glad that you were able to share with them the prayer practice and experiences that they did have. Continue to be positive with them and invitational without any pressure or guilt.

Sometimes when someone stops participating, or misses a number of times after being very regular, it can be helpful to reach out to see if you can help the person with any misunderstandings about the practice or issues with the group. Perhaps you will find that it is a simple matter of logistics; for example a new job has made it difficult for them to arrive at the meetings' regular start time. Or the person may have some personal issue they are dealing with that they are not sure they want to spend time with in prayer or are not sure they want to take into the prayer group, even privately. Or perhaps they might have some misunderstanding of the prayer process and what it means. If someone has missed a few prayer meetings, do not rule out the simple possibility that they are sick, and should be called on (refer to chapter 6 on service ministry). Often, meeting with them outside of the group time is just the extra personal care needed for them to be strengthened and encouraged to also hope that your love and care will be present to them as a prayer partner or in your prayer group.

Therefore, anyone involved in sharing Companioned Prayer should hold the view that the prayer is not simply a technique to be learned, something simply taught and handed off. A more nurturing individual approach should be embraced, recognizing it takes commitment and time on our part. This prayer is shared and practiced one person at a time. This one-on-one approach needs to be appreciated even when sharing and meeting within a group experience, and even when the prayer is practiced within a church or other Christian community.

In addition to the discussion above under "Our Primary Challenge," some common reasons for stopping the practice are offered below. Additional possible reasons are discussed in "Challenges to our Formation in Christ" in chapter 12.

<u>Expecting to share experiences</u>

Some people may stop during or after the introductory prayer sessions if they think they will be expected to share and discuss their prayer experiences. Therefore, it is important to make clear during the introductory prayer sessions and during the regular prayer meetings, that they will never need to share their prayer experiences if they do not wish to. They will always be able to keep their prayer experiences completely private.

<u>Hesitancy in sharing difficulties</u>

One of the most common reasons is that sometimes people are hesitant to share their challenges with the prayer process itself, thereby limiting the ability of an experienced companion to address their challenge. Examples of these challenges include their mind wandering, difficulty accepting or recognizing symbols, looking for meaning in a symbol instead of the inner felt sense of it, abandoning their prayer subject for religious images or feelings, dealing with distractions, and so on. So instead of learning the nuances of the prayer process as it specifically relates to them, they keep quiet and just assume that they are not right for the prayer, that the prayer is more suited to people other than themselves. Even if this situation is experienced during the introductory

prayer sessions, the person will usually get something positive from the prayer such as quietness, restfulness, or fellowship with the other participants. As a result, they may remain positive during the introductory prayer sessions but then stop practicing afterward.

Therefore, those who are sharing the prayer need to convey how to recognize the common subtle challenges to the prayer, and to encourage people who are becoming familiar with the prayer to share their personal difficulties or uncertainties with their prayer process during the introductory prayer sessions, especially during the question-and-answer periods. Only in this way can an experienced companion give them the specifically personal information necessary for them to appreciate the fullness of the prayer and to truly surrender to the presence of God in their prayer practice.

The subtlety of their experiences

Often people soon stop, even after having a very personally meaningful, faith-filled prayer experience, simply because the prayer experiences are subtle. We perceive and feel the experiences at a subtle level of awareness, which can be easily dismissed or even forgotten once we are thinking, perceiving and functioning at a more tangible, everyday level of activity and awareness. Thus, we may need to affirm that routine prayer experiences – of being drawn into the awareness of God's subtle graces – are necessary in order to allow our awareness and perception of him to develop over time with deeper awareness and clarity, both within the prayer and outside of it. Without this regular prayer practice, it may be easy to initially dismiss the value of the prayer, and to not return to it. This especially occurs when people liken their prayer experiences to the subtly of dreams, which of course are later routinely dismissed and forgotten. Thus, it may also be necessary to point out the differences between everyday dreams and our prayer experiences; prayer in which we consciously open ourselves to the very real presence of our Lord and savior.

A temporary response to a crisis

Many people turn to a new prayer practice only at a point of crisis or transition in their life. They are turning to God in response to finding themselves in a specific time of trial or at a turning point in their life. When that trial or transition is over, they may feel less inclined to continue listening for God's call within their needs. This happens even when their response to their challenge is assuaged through a personally significant, even life-changing, spiritual experience in prayer itself. Such people usually are not aware of the deep personal rewards of continuing the prayer practice over time. Personally connecting with the individual is the best response to this.

Equating prayer experiences with spirituality

Sometimes people stop because they confuse their new understandings received through the prayer with spirituality. They are so taken by their new religious or spiritual insights or experiences that they perceive they have reached some kind of inner intellectual or relational plateau or goal. They are not aware that God's call goes beyond our intellectual and emotional zeal; that true conversion is a lifelong ongoing divine transformation in which we are changed and grow in our soul by God's real presence within us as we surrender to him in continuous prayer, service, worship and love of others. Reflecting the varied experiences of others not only in our

prayer group but also as traditionally experienced in the history of the Church, may help these individuals appreciate the many varieties and dimensions of Christian spiritual growth.

Prayer "emptiness"

People may stop practicing Companioned Prayer when they do not have a foundational appreciation for how the prayer fits within the larger context of Christian faith and formation. For example, a person's Companioned Prayer experiences may change over time with experiences becoming less vivid, with symbols and showings becoming more subtle, while God quietly invites them into his presence for his continual silent work within their soul and encourages their response. Without knowing how these changing experiences relate to Christ's ongoing spiritual development of us, a person may become impatient, or may continue to focus on God's gifts received in prayer instead of God's presence and his transformation within them. As a consequence, they may cease to pray regularly. Therefore, it is important that Companioned Prayer be offered within an established Christian church or religious community that provides informed access to and support of ongoing personal formation in Christ, especially personal friendship and encouragement, patience, and gentleness.

Wanting only to feel good in prayer

Other people stop practicing the prayer when they do not want to get in touch with their feelings or issues. This prayer asks us to be present to our issues and feelings in order to carry them forward to God in prayer, listening for his word and mercy. The prayer asks us to be fully present to who we are and how we are carrying our burdens. We allow ourselves to be open to an inner confessional as called by God. Even though we do so in surrender to God and in his presence, awaiting his mercy and grace, some individuals find themselves not comfortable or ready for such vulnerability. Some people carry an expectation that spiritual growth should be available as a technique, devoid of sacrifice or emotional demands. Yet as humans, spiritual growth only comes with an acknowledgement of our human condition, an ongoing realness. To allow ourselves to be fully present to our brokenness, to our real human condition, requires faith that God is and will be present to us in our need. It usually requires a faith-centered, loving and supportive prayer group or prayer partner as well. Then it is easier to be present to whatever we find God is calling us to listen to. In Companioned Prayer, with humility, honesty and faith, we allow God to identify those personal needs and limitations that challenge our spiritual growth. God invites us to acknowledge them and to mature and be transformed through them by his loving healing grace.

This idea that personal spiritual growth requires an openness to inner vulnerability, that our ongoing walk with Christ requires us to willingly pick up and carry our own cross, is not often taught in our churches these days. It is a Christian truth that is often ignored in favor of a Christian message of feeling good in Christ. Yet look at Jesus' life. His own spiritual journey called on him to be fully present to the trials that God called him to face. And just as God was present to Jesus in his trials, Jesus is present to us in our life and in our prayer; we are not alone.

Companioned Prayer takes us to the heart of this Christian truth, where we can experience God's mercy and grace from within our challenges. However, some people are not aware that true prayer includes acknowledging our needs. Consequently, they are not expecting to do so or are not comfortable in doing so. Without understanding why such ongoing acknowledgement is

necessary, they withdraw from the prayer practice and revert to using religion to "feel good" and to avoid their inner truth, instead of using it to grow spiritually in Christ.

Thus, being personally present to others, with compassion and without judgement, is crucial to encouraging ongoing participation and prayer.

A technique to generate a result

Sometimes people stop if they begin to treat the prayer as a technique. In a technique, we do something to get a result. If Companioned Prayer begins to be viewed as a means to receive something, or to gain grace, to alleviate suffering, or for some other outcome, then we are using faith and prayer for our own will. But in Companioned Prayer we give our self in faith to God with humility, authentically as who we are and how we are, without manipulation or expectation. If we begin to practice the prayer as a technique to gain grace, grace will cease to happen and eventually we will stop the practice. (Actually, we will have stopped practicing it as a prayer long before we stop reciting the words.)

Not accepting that God is personal

Other people may stop practicing the prayer because they are not ready to accept that God can be so personal to them. They may have had a view that God is entirely transcendent, ethereal or other worldly, and their faith is more of an understanding of spirituality or doctrine without personal experiences or without a personal relationship with Christ. It can be quite disruptive to experience that God is also personal. The implications can be staggering, and some people will choose to avoid a prayer that facilitates a personal relationship with Christ. Being present and close with the person with gentleness and grace, and listening to their story, is the best response.

Having a fixed understanding of faith

Sometimes very religious people are not open to the prayer because they place their highest value on clearly defining their faith in terms of certainty. To them faith is about being certain of, and committed to, a clearly articulated theology which defines their understanding and relationship with God. While the idea that God is mystery may be acceptable, they may be uncomfortable actually experiencing God as mystery, as it might challenge the comfort of a fixed or certain understanding of God, regardless of their degree of devotion. Associated with this can be a response to the prayer that they simply do not like, or are uncomfortable with, the interior experience of Companioned Prayer. When sharing Companioned Prayer with any such individuals, they should be approached with patience and love, emphasizing that this is a prayer within the loving heart of Jesus, and they should be encouraged to listen to their doubts and challenges in prayer, if that is what God is calling them to listen to.

Seeking a transcendent experience

Some people are familiar with, and are seeking, the experience of pure awareness. They are drawn to the still alertness of the transcendent, and may not be as interested in the kind of personal encounter or relationship offered through Companioned Prayer. When they experience Companioned Prayer, they may initially assume that the prayer experience, which usually involves a personal prayer subject, will never lead to an experience of pure being. So, it is easy for them to

not realize that in the personal encounter with Christ in Companioned Prayer, they may be gifted with an experience of the pure holy spirit transcendent and infinite, if that is His will. Because Jesus is the divine I AM, of one being with the Father and the Holy Spirit, he is able to draw us home into the oneness of being, giving us in prayer what we need, in accordance with his will. So rather than assume that Companioned Prayer cannot lead to the experience of the transcendent, it can be helpful to understand that even this is possible with Christ as our Companion. A person seeking this can also be encouraged to take longer in the *RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE* movement of the prayer, as offered in "Abiding in God's Presence" in chapter 12.

Not willing to let go and fully trust in God

Authentic prayer requires that we trust in God, and let go into his presence and will for us. This means we must let go of our own control. We are called to do this in Companioned Prayer if we wish to have a personally meaningful prayer experience. However, many people are not ready to trust and let go. They hold on to so many things within themselves. People who begin Companioned Prayer but never really allow themselves to surrender into God in the prayer, will eventually stop practicing the prayer. Regular participation in a Companioned Prayer ministry group in which participants share their prayer experiences, can help such a person to appreciate the inner prayer experience, and to learn to trust God in their own prayer. Personally reaching out to those who may need encouragement to continue participation, may help them to continue to hear the sharing of others which may help them to eventually accept prayerfully letting go, and to accept a more personal faith in our living Lord as can be experienced in Companioned Prayer.

Chapter 14
Companioned Prayer and the Church

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians 3:16-21

How do we know that the Companioned Prayer™ experience is of God? Because our prayer is made to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; because we are praying God's will, not ours; by the nature of the experiences; by the relationship of the experiences to scripture and the teachings of the Church; and by the prayer's fruits. Not just one, but all of these together form our knowing.

If this discernment has your attention, it is best to be with it based on your overall experience of your prayers, rather than just individual experiences. A singular experience can continue over time. Plus, our own growth occurs over time. If you are in a prayer group you may also wish to consider the shared experiences of the others in the group with respect to the above five criteria. Additionally, do not hesitate to let this discernment be your prayer issue when praying the prayer. As Thomas discovered, good things can happen when you take your doubts to Jesus.

A Prayer to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

What makes any prayer a way of communing with God, and not simply a self-serving expression, is our intention and our faith. We believe in God and his accessibility, and we enter into a communion with him through a relationship of faith, love and hope. This is what we are doing in Companioned Prayer. We pray to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is how we begin and continue our prayer. This is absolutely central to what we are doing, and it is within this that we experience our prayer.

Within this personal relationship of faith, love and hope we listen inside to what it feels like God is calling us to be aware of in our life, to those challenges, trials, concerns, joys, thanksgivings and aspirations that are personal to us. We open ourselves to God, and trusting in him we bear our soul, our all. We allow ourselves to be present to one of our most personal and

private aspects of our life because we know that in prayer, God may let his love and mercy be known to us from right within our very intimate and tender concern or aspiration.

In essence, we are bringing this personal and private part of our self to God, taking our hurts and our joys to the tender loving heart of Jesus and our self along with them. In his presence in community and within us, we wait in faith for God's will and his grace to be felt and known, for the movement of the Holy Spirit. And then we rest in whatever blessing or understanding we may have received, and pray a prayer of thankfulness or other response as appropriate.

Praying in God's Will

Some people may wonder why this prayer seems to be so efficacious. Why does it seem that God answers our Companioned Prayer so often compared with our awareness of his response to our other prayers? This may be in part because Companioned Prayer is primarily a prayer of listening instead of speaking, in which we seek to actively pray God's will instead of our own will:

1. By allowing God to pick our prayer subject we are following his will instead of our own.
2. By following and letting go into the movement of the Holy Spirit as our prayer subject shifts and evolves, we continue to follow his will instead of our own.
3. By being in our prayer with simple humility and faith, we are surrendering to his will instead of our own.
4. By letting go into the loving heart of Jesus, we are surrendering into the love of God, which is his nature and will.
5. By continually taking the time to just be with what comes from God and to notice and nurture our awareness of it, we are letting go into what God wills for us instead of our own will.

We do all this with full freewill, in faith and simple humble trust in the love of the living, ever-present God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God personally knows us, loves us, and wills only the best for us. As we give ourself to him in Companioned Prayer by conforming our prayer to his will, it is our experience that he reveals his will in us through his grace and his love.

The Prayer Experience

When we pray in this way, we can find ourselves surprisingly open to God's mystery and loving personal gift. Over and over again, people describe their experiences as gaining insight and understanding, new directions and discernments, a realization that what was received was given as gift, that we did not make it happen and in fact we could never have made it happen; and that what did happen was very personal and private healing, reconciliation, understanding, love and grace. We experience all this with a sense of mercy and often a strong sense of the personal divine presence. God's very real mystery, of his being deeply and actively involved in our life beyond our appreciation for this personal love, is usually an overall quality of our prayer experiences. As revealed by God in our prayer experience, we may also gain direct awareness of his awesome power as well as his awesome loving tenderness, forgiveness and care.

Symbols and showings that come to us in the prayer may often be related to scripture. Sometimes the appreciation that they are scripturally based may not happen until later when we read or hear the relevant passage. Sometimes their scriptural relevance is clearly understood immediately. The presence of God may also be felt more than through symbols. We may find Jesus gently revealing himself, healing us and calling us to a new life in him. God may choose to open our hearts to his mystery and love in personal ways beyond our rational expectations or understandings; ways that call directly to our hearts and souls.

Christian Scripture, Faith and Tradition

These interior Companioned Prayer experiences reflect many fundamental tenets of Christianity. By experiencing these directly, interiorly and with both personal and universal applicability, the prayer experiences are confirmed over and over again to reveal the living waters of the faith. We find our own prayer experiences directly reflected in scripture and in the teachings of the Church. Just a few of the many Christian tenets affirmed interiorly in this way include:

- God's mercy, grace and love felt and known inside as gift;
- Sin, forgiveness, redemption, acceptance and reconciliation;
- The beatitudes;
- Honesty of what is real in ourselves (our brokenness, vulnerability, hopes, etc.) as doorways to Christ and God's grace;
- In weakness I am strong in Christ;
- We are the body of Christ here on Earth;
- The Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit;
- Healing (physical, emotional & spiritual);
- Trust in God and he will guide and protect your soul;
- Where two are gathered in his name;
- Be still and know... truth as revelation;
- The experience of the risen Christ in prayer and contemplation, and in the Eucharist;
- It is not through laws or works that we are saved, but by God's love;
- Incarnational spirituality: God's living presence in Christ, in us and the world;
- Revelation as spiritual mystery, divine vision and gift;
- Walking with Christ; carrying our cross;
- Responding to God's personal call;
- Prayer and reverent listening; Humility
- The gentle loving Sacred Heart of Jesus;
- Personal salvation, and Christ our personal savior;
- Spirituality as more than a belief in a mental concept or emotion; but as an ongoing living relationship with God;
- The grace and presence of Mary to the church and to us;
- The role of love and compassion in faith;
- Love God and one another as ourselves;
- Being a servant to each other;
- Thankfulness and worship as a personal response to an interior reality.

Are these experiences something new? No. They have been going on for 2000 years. The Church has an incredibly rich and well documented history of people of faith who have recorded such experiences and expressions over the centuries. In addition, it is now and always has been the common experience of Christians everywhere that God is personal and universal, awesome and loving, that he gives us freewill but is also merciful and saving. You don't have to be a saint in order to know the simple yet profound truths of Christianity. You can know them directly through prayer. And if any of your individual prayer experiences do not have clarity of meaning, do not try to create your own clarity. Trust that the knowledge you need will be revealed by God, with your faith, given to you out of his mercy and grace in the manner and time when it is best for

you. This may occur when you least expect it. It can occur within another prayer, or during worship, as a result of service, or within a loving relationship. Within all this, we find that the reflections of our prayerful experiences and our ongoing Christian formation are crucially and wonderfully supported by the rich teachings and traditions of the Church. Reflection and discernment are most valuable within a Christian community established in faith and supported by history, tradition, and others who understand the tender whisper of Christ within.

The Church has wonderful resources and writings of spiritual teachers who have followed the inward journey of Christ's call. Examples are Julian of Norwich, Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, Therese of Lisieux, Thomas Merton, Meister Eckhart, and many many others. And certainly read and listen to the scriptures. But with the awakening of your awareness of God within your heart, trust and follow God's loving draw and expression within you. Your spiritual path will be unique to you. It will be your living, personal relationship with God as revealed by him. It will not be the identical path of another saint. Whether your journey follows a traditional form or is more uncommon, it will be your own path, your own journey, because it will be God personally calling and revealing himself in you. Therefore have trust and faith in his very special loving presence as he beckons, pulls and fulfills you in his ways. Be sensitive to this loving presence with a sensitivity learned and nurtured in Companioned Prayer, and with the many other aspects of the Church's worship, prayer and traditions. Be continually open to the living mystery of God within you.

It is not the singular experiences of Companioned Prayer that are the objective of our spiritual journeys. It is God's loving presence revealed within us and his drawing us into him in our heart, and our responsive expression of that love, which is the goal of our spiritual journey. Companioned Prayer is just one wonderful way to discover and nurture that joy within a full life of faith.

The Prayer's Fruits

After praying do you find yourself to be kinder, more open to accepting others? Or are you more irritable and judgmental? Are you friendlier? Do you spontaneously give your joy and tenderness to others? Do you cherish who they are? Do you welcome everyone? Or do you find yourself more isolated? Do you find your faith enlivened from within, and your responses to church worship more meaningful, and your participation more fulfilling? Or is your response to church more critical, and your participation more constrained? What is the outcome of the prayer in our life? What is the effect of regular practice over time?

With regular practice of once or twice a week, we find that we become more whole and our life is more balanced. We appreciate and enjoy all aspects: our friends, our creativity, the wonder of our life, and our faith. This occurs naturally by God's grace; it happens without any adopted attitude or singular emphasis. Joy, beauty, peace, and security become deep and thorough, experienced in who we are and through everything and everyone; a balanced life all inwardly felt as wonderful, and experienced and known as the grace and gift of the life of God in everything.

Prayer that is authentic, that is based in the grace of our Lord, will bring about changes in us and in our relationships. With true prayer we will find ourselves silently being in God's love and giving love to others, and serving them. God's real loving kindness, compassion, humility,

and appreciation of others find expression through us. We feel more fulfilled, free, normal, peaceful, and whole. We find it easier to connect and communicate with other people with empathy and delight. We are naturally more present. Our gratitude and playfulness are enhanced; and our sense of belonging and of being a part of God's loving mystery is our daily experience.

Our relationship with church, and our participation and service, also naturally grow in gratitude and wonder, as we find the church's teachings and sacraments reflected within us in ever deepening ways. We experience our personal faith becoming increasingly enlivened, cherished, and fulfilling.

These are the fruits of a regular practice of Companioned Prayer. Love and charity will grow in us, as will our discipleship. This discipleship will be not only a personal relationship with our savior, but will be increasingly identified with our Christian community, our brothers and sisters in Christ, his Church, his body – but with a wider and deeper acceptance.

A Living Faith

Our Companioned Prayer experience affirms that God is with us and active in us now, in this moment. In prayer we find that we are alive in God, and are called to new awareness and new journeys beyond our limited comprehension as he deepens our relationship with him. In this way God calls the Church into ever renewed spirituality born of the living presence of God within us through Christ revealed by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, follow this inner holy expression, prompting and call. Do not be afraid to live in God's Spirit with Christ, and to make his authentic presence, revealed in you, real in the Church through loving one another. Do not wait to love. Do not think that to be a real Christian you must wait to have an advanced theological appreciation of the faith. The Holy Spirit was given to us by Christ to keep us current, alive in the present presence of the living God; that we might learn, grow, share and love in his revealed fullness, which is beyond our intellectual knowing. With this prayer, allow yourself to let God call you into a living, ever deeper, faith in him and him in you. And in his grace, live in love now. God creates all life anew in him in the present. Live in his trust, in faith, and above all in love, all through his grace and gift of himself revealed within us by him. So pray and love, and be ever new in the fullness of Christ, and be not afraid to let his grace be revealed in and through you and the Church.

Christian Community

As Christians we are the body of Christ, and our experiences of Companioned Prayer call us to be a Christian community to each other. Church is present when we come together in faith in Christ's presence to support each other in prayer, worship and service. This has been the Christian experience since the earliest times when Christ walked among us and afterwards: the grace and mercy of God experienced through the love of Jesus in the Holy Spirit, personally and in community. Therefore, you do not need to wait for your local church to officially establish a Companioned Prayer ministry before, with the support of your pastor or religious leader, introducing the prayer or before finding prayer partners. All baptized Christians are called directly by God to believe and serve him, and to support each other's walk with Christ. It doesn't necessarily have to happen inside a church building. It can happen when we gather in a living room, or when we call on someone in need. It happens in friendship and sharing. It happens when we create welcoming communities of compassion, tenderness, acceptance, friendship, and faith in

which we experience the love and grace of God amongst us. This is what we can be for each other, can give to each other, and can accept from each other.

The possibilities for church, for Christ to be present in our midst, can be found amongst us in Companioned Prayer in numerous ways. In addition to new prayer groups and prayer partners, Companioned Prayer can be incorporated into existing church and religious activities such as seminaries, spiritual direction, contemplative worship, service ministries, small groups, retreats, Bible study, catechesis, Sunday school, and teen youth programs. In fact, the practice of Companioned Prayer should be only one facet of a balanced approach to Christian spiritual formation, and should not be practiced in isolation from the church. A full life of faith includes regular engagement in other forms of Christian prayer and Christian life, including worship, study, service, fellowship, and creativity. But with Companioned Prayer we find ourselves becoming increasingly open to being called into the living fullness of Christ within these activities in answer to God's tender presence within us.

It is possible that resistance to Companioned Prayer can occur from those who only feel comfortable if they are the ones who define what God wants for us or how God may be available to us. But do not let that stop you from praying and listening to God, and letting Christ and the Holy Spirit be known within you. We pray for the will of God to be known in our hearts. Respond to his call in faith, and actively support each other in prayer. It is really all about faith, trust, surrender to God, and letting him be active in our life. We should all forgo our persistent controlling, and learn to listen and respond to God's personal love and concerns for us. Jesus lived and modeled this trust in God, even in his trials and challenges and even unto death. Companioned Prayer can open the door in our life to divine gift and love, known and felt intimately in our soul.

What This Means for the Church

What does all this mean for the Church? Well, first it means that it is possible to foster a prayer designed for Christian community (in prayer ministry groups, prayer partners, and prayer service) that can connect people to God and enliven the understanding and appreciation of the faith, all from within very personal and private prayer experiences and our presence to each other. It is not a matter of theological explanations and constructs. The reality is revealed and known directly. Our faith becomes alive from within and the Church will be transformed.

This awakening can happen within the Church's ongoing worship, formation and ministry programs and can be further supported by a dedicated Companioned Prayer ministry and Companioned Prayer service outreach. Priests, pastors, religious, deacons, lay ministers and others can simply incorporate the prayer into their regular programs. It is easy to include a few introductory prayer sessions within your church's programs of worship, education and service. Most church programs lack time or resources for personal prayer, and instead focus on reading, discussion and corporate prayer. Personal exploration of God's presence within us is often relegated to an intellectual understanding. Time devoted to quiet personal prayer and reflection is usually relinquished for time spent on information, with the unstated and usually mistaken hope that people will take time for prayer and reflection on their own while at home. Even small groups and Bible studies usually try to develop our Christian formation largely through discussion. Yet, it is in the inner quiet of a listening personal prayer that faith allows us to go beyond our limited intellect and controlling behavior, and allows us to be open to the experience of God's real

presence in our life. Companioned Prayer offers an excellent way to include personal, quiet, contemplative prayer within the Church's many programs, whether they are worship, education, ministry or service. In doing so, whether in only one or two sessions or throughout the program, participants will receive an introduction to the inner life of Companioned Prayer within their Christian community.

Although our Companioned Prayer experiences can carry specific personal meaning, they are also experienced as mystery. We intuitively know that what is revealed and understood is only partial. It becomes clear that our understanding is limited by our humanness. Even though that humanness is far more capable of receiving God's gifts than we think, the divine reality of the gifts and mystery will always be far more than our understanding and appreciation. God is God and we are not. We are simply his children, his creation, born and given life from his love. That in itself is amazing, but it pales to nothing in significance to Him. Yet we and the Church are both called by God into a growing relationship of trust in living in the Spirit, and to risk being open to change and new understanding from our challenges and grace received as we are called into a new realness beyond measure.

Beyond Experiences and Theologies

As we respond to his call and as our spiritual journey unfolds, we should not limit ourselves to our current understanding of our theology or our experiences, because the fullness of God is beyond our present understandings and it is also beyond our present experiences. It is God who, in drawing us into his fullness, will reveal his truth to us in ways that only he knows. How he will be calling us into the gift of himself and how we will respond, are at present beyond our understanding. But in faith we give ourself to him, we abide in him with our whole being, and we willingly let him carry us beyond our current understandings and experiences – thereby opening for us his divine way, his truth, and his life in an ultimate glory only known by him. Therefore we are called not to a fixed understanding of "truth" as much as into a living and ever deepening relationship with God and God's creation.

Companioned Prayer gives the Church another way to promote how people can be open to the reality of that personal relationship, rather than trying to define the experience and its outcomes for them. Ultimately we are saved by our Lord's personally transforming power, mystery and love – his presence revealed as gift within us by him over time as we acknowledge our natural human yearnings and vulnerabilities, in trust and openness within God's Spirit. The Church can encourage us to be open to this ongoing possibility of trust and transformation within its teachings and sacraments, and within a personal prayer relationship with God. When that personal relationship is experienced through Companioned Prayer, and as it matures through continued prayer experiences, the teaching and support of the Church at the same time become personally tremendously meaningful. We find the gift of God's presence and grace universally experienced in Companioned Prayer occurring and being fulfilled in us within our Church worship; in the liturgy, in song, in the Word, in each other, in prayer, and in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. Then the fullness of our faith becomes our living reality, and we are continuously surprised to discover anew the fullness and joy of God's love for us.

In this way we are inspired beyond continued interpretation and explanation, into the reality of a constant living and expanding relationship with our loving God. Jesus' primary message was

not to ask us to re-analyze the scriptures or theology, nor was it to re-interpret the experience of God's people or our own personal experiences. Instead, he asked us to know the Father, through him and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said: *Abide in me; if you know me you know my Father; believe in me; I am the way, the truth and the life* (John 15:4; 8:19; 14:1; 14:6). He called us personally to become new in him and to be ever called into God by him. And in God, we find love and are called to love.

Called to a New Hope

But how are we to know and accept this possibility? How can we be personally called to God? Our Companioned Prayer experiences broaden our awareness of what the possibilities are. Our view of God and reality is expanded. Our own prayer experiences are often felt to be miraculous and divine. We then also inwardly understand how the miracles of the Bible are also within the realm of divine reality, and we know that the truth is more than we had dared to hope.

Our personal awakening to God's loving presence in our life, realized through the quiet experience of his grace, opens us to a new way of living. We discover that for us the risen Jesus can be more than a belief in an understanding of him; he can be personally known. In this prayer and in life we find Christ has been and is forever our Companion. We begin to know this gift of divine love and presence continually. When we are quietly sensitive to his will and love, our choices and actions are based on a greater, natural purpose and hope. We find him calling us, and guiding us into an ever closer relationship with him, into a lifelong journey of becoming in him. And in him and through him, all of our life can become an expression of God's love. The possibilities for reconciliation and renewal offered through this prayer, to each of us personally, to each other, to the Church, and to all society, are incomprehensibly immeasurable.

This is not just another interpretation of theology. It is actually opening our hearts to His divinity – a healing and making whole in Christ by his grace. By being authentic to our yearnings, limitations, vulnerabilities, sins, brokenness, and needs – by listening, acknowledging and holding these in prayer with God's help, and simultaneously in faith being open to Jesus' caring loving presence, we find over and over again his mercy and grace given and received, and we are changed.

A Prayer of Reconciliation and Renewal

Whatever the understandings or gifts we receive in Companioned Prayer, whether it is that we know that we are no longer alone, or that it is okay to trust in God, or that mercy and healing are God's gift to us, that we are a child of God, that Jesus is our personal savior, that God ever calls us to himself and reveals his grace within us, that it is okay to love others, that we are forgiven, that we are one,… no matter what specifically happens in our journeys in prayer, we will not be the same. We find that over time we become more complete, more of who we authentically are. But at the same time we find that who we are means being a part of something wonderfully more, a divine mystery and presence, not only transcendent and beyond all knowing, but also very personal and caring. When that is known, not just intellectually, but experienced as basic to our soul, then we are changed.

Then we sing out in praise and worship. We are free to love and serve God, our fellow humans and our planet home. We are renewed in Christ.

Postscript

If you have read parts of this book and still have not gotten together with someone else to try out Companioned Prayer, I commend you for actively seeking a deeper understanding of the wonder of Christ. But an intellectual understanding as a result of reading this book will not tell you much about what the prayer experience is like, and especially what it is like to practice it over time with friends. So honor your desire, and take the next step. Experience the gift of God's living grace flowering within you.

If you have already begun to experience Companioned Prayer, I encourage you to continue the prayer with regularity, and to especially continue within the mutual support and discovery of a Companioned Prayer ministry group associated with your church or religious community. I hope you too experience Jesus' love within this prayer in ways that transform you. The depth of faith and experience awaiting your prayer journey in Christ is the precious gift of his divine self.

Come; let us discover all of this together.

Let God do it

www.CompanionedPrayer.org