Confidentiality and Sharing in Companioned Prayer™

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. For sharing and discussion the following guidelines are offered:

- 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.

- 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 the separate handout "A Safe and Accessible Environment.")

- 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 outside of the time set aside for Companioned Prayer.

- 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. 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. 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 narrative or doctrine.

These guidelines are 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.

For further information, see *Sharing and Discussion* in chapter five of the book, Companioned Prayer, available on the CPCF website.