

How often will you aim to meet?

How long will the sessions be?

Where will they be?

What charge, if any, would there be for sessions?

There are some basic boundaries on this relationship that barely need discussion, but are worth pointing out:

- Conversations are confidential
- You can terminate the relationship at any time
- The intention is to give you space to look at your relationship with God

Journeying on with them

Once all this is concluded, it's a matter of getting on with the relationship. It is not unusual for the first few sessions to feel a bit strange, particularly if this is your first accompaniment relationship. It can take several sessions for things to settle down and for you to find how it works for you.

Review

It is healthy to give a bit of time every year or two to review the relationship together. To reflect on how it is going, what has been helpful, what has been difficult? This reviewing can give an important opportunity to clarify understanding.

Termination

However, it is your journey and you have the freedom to terminate the relationship if you find it isn't working for you, or if things happen in the relationship that are inappropriate.

Finishing

Even good relationships have a shelf life and the time may come when for no reason other than it seems right that its time to move on. It's good for you to finish well – to have a time to reflect on the relationship, the journey travelled together and the things that you have appreciated, so that it can be brought to a positive end.

Finding an Ignatian Guide

Finding good Spiritual Accompaniment is seldom simple. However, to find a good Spiritual Accompanier is to gain vital support for your journey with God, so it's well worth persevering in the search!

These notes offer some guidance to help your search, things to consider, questions to ask, steps to take. This is neither a checklist that means you need to address every point, nor does it cover every point that you might need. Use it as a stimulus in so far as it helps!

Where to look

Ask around! Are you aware of people you know who have an accompanier. How did they find them? Are they helpful? Might they be able to point to others?

Networks: There are a number of networks and access points to finding Accompaniers. Some will be 'Ignatian' others wider. The two national 'networks' are:

The Spiritual Exercises Network (SEN) – a national group that seeks to link those involved in the ministry of the Spiritual Exercises. Their website www.thepilgrim.com gives a listing of members and their region in the country with email contact details. This is at present of limited value, but it gives some potential starting points.

The Retreat Association – This national group offers a service to people seeking accompaniment. It is an ecumenical group and has spiritual breadth, so the local contact you are put in touch with may or may not have an Ignatian understanding, but they might know someone who does!

Regional Groups

These groups gather people involved in Ignatian accompaniment:

- Birmingham – Manresa Link
- Manchester – Salford Prayer Guides
- Sheffield – Inspir Sheffield
- Ignatian Spirituality Course – London
- Cenacle Prayer Guides - Liverpool

Anglican Dioceses: Most dioceses have some contact person who can help anyone seeking accompaniment to find someone. Again they may or may not have an Ignatian understanding, but they might know someone who does!

Things to consider

There are things to think through as you seek someone.

What are you looking for?

There are some general points worth thinking about:

- *Geography* – where is reasonable for you to travel to see someone.
- *Gender* – does the gender of the accompanier matter to you?
- *Maturity & Experience* – would the age and life and spiritual experience of someone make a difference? (you may not be able to answer until you have met someone, but its worth pondering)

Given that this relationship, to work well, needs to be open and trusting it is worth giving attention to factors that may help or hinder this. But its also important to think about where you are at.

Do you have any particular needs that you hope this relationship will be able to help you with? (eg to undertake the Spiritual Exercises, explore particular ways of praying, finding prayer that works for you...)

What are they offering?

Its good practice to have a preliminary meeting with a potential accompanier to explore things and help come to a mind as to whether this would be appropriate or not. Things to ask them include:

How do they come to offer this? This can give you a sense of them as a person, their journey and whether you find their story one that reveals a sense of God's movement in their life in a way that is encouraging to you.

How do they approach accompaniment? Everyone has their own 'practice' and their own way of describing it. Listen to what is said – does this make sense to you, does it feel it would be helpful to you? Do you have any concerns? Notice how comfortable and safe you felt. How focussed and attentive were they? Did you feel listened to? Where there interruptions or distractions that disrupted the time?

What supports do they have in place? Do they have supervision? (This is an essential support). How is their ongoing spiritual life sustained?, Do they have their own spiritual accompanier? (It would be rather strange for someone offering accompaniment not to have one, but it happens!)

Chemistry between you

In addition to feeling comfortable with the conclusions you draw from the above questions, its worth pondering the 'chemistry'.

Was the language used by them comfortable for you – or did they blind you with jargon?

Did a sense of mutual respect and trust emerge? Can you see this going deeper? Can you imagine yourself sharing more of your inner self with them?

It is common to have such a meeting and take some time afterwards to make a decision, or it may be clear enough that you feel you can make it there and then.

Agreement

Assuming you are comfortable with all that has emerged, then it is worth clarifying expectations and understandings about the relationship.