

A relationship with a spiritual companion is entirely confidential, and unlike the Baptist mentoring scheme for newly accredited ministers, it has no links with or report system back to the Ministry Department of the Baptist Union.

What are the benefits of spiritual accompaniment?

Here are a few people's experiences of the benefits of spiritual accompaniment.

'It's a regular reminder for me that the heart of ministry – bar nothing – is my personal walk with God. I can so easily deceive myself that my diligence and full diary, my skill and experience, my passion and busyness are what make an effective minister. And in times of pressure and suffering, that invariably comes with ministry, to have a safe place where I can discern the presence and will of God, has been a life-line. I only wish I had been guided to this early in my ministry.'

'After 20 years in local church ministry, I felt my spiritual life had stagnated. It wasn't a crisis, but I did feel stuck. I began to see a spiritual director regularly. He understood the pressures and issues of local church ministry, and that was helpful, but the focus of our conversations was not the church, but where I was at with God. He often asked perceptive and searching questions. I found it easier to be open with him because I had no other contact with him, and he had no relationship at all with the church I was serving. I wish I had discovered this route of support and growth earlier!'

'It has been invaluable. My spiritual companion challenges, teaches, inspires and prays for/with me. I can talk with her about anything. Knowing there's someone who understands confidentiality, and who will listen without judging, in a warm & loving way is so important.'

What do I do if I'm interested?

In the first instance you need to contact Stephen Ibbotson – the co-ordinator of this EMBA initiative. He will chat with you about what you are looking for and suggest you contact a certain person. He holds full profiles of each spiritual companion and can match your requirement with those offering accompaniment.

It will then be your responsibility to contact them even though s/he will be aware you have been suggested to them. This must work for you and you must feel comfortable with them. Most spiritual companions will agree with you a period of time when you can mutually assess whether this is working for you. At that point you can either continue or you would be free to seek another spiritual companion if you wanted to do so. How frequently you meet will be agreed between you, but generally it would be every two to three months, and not as frequently as a client would their counsellor.

While some spiritual companions do not charge, there are costs involved in offering spiritual accompaniment and your companion will explain any fee they charge or suggested donation level.



Contact Stephen on
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Introducing Spiritual Accompaniment

We are glad to be able to offer the ministry of spiritual accompaniment to ministers, leaders and members of churches in our region. As spiritual accompaniment is not a wide-spread practice amongst our churches this leaflet offers a brief explanation and how you can access it for yourself. The term 'spiritual accompaniment' raises a number of questions precisely because of this unfamiliarity.

Serving East Midlands Baptists in mission



What is spiritual accompaniment?

There are different names for being accompanied on our spiritual journey – it has variously been called spiritual direction, accompaniment, guidance, companionship and soul friendship. While recognising distinctions made in how this ministry is named, we use ‘spiritual accompaniment’ to cover all these ideas which share a basic understanding.

Simply, its focus is on a person’s relationship with and experience of God. It is *not* mentoring in which a person more experienced in church leadership, after listening and conversation, offers comment and advice to someone less experienced. Here the focus is on the practice of being a leader in a church. The conversation revolves around the issues that arise. In spiritual accompaniment, while church may be one context of conversation – especially if the person is a church minister – the spiritual companion will steer the conversation back to how the person’s experience or view of God is influencing or being affected by the circumstances in which the person finds themselves.

Neither is it an alternative to counselling. In counselling there are external circumstances in a person’s life or relationships, or internal feelings and thoughts, which are proving to be overwhelming, and so the person seeks help. It is essentially responsive to issues or problems identified by the client. Spiritual accompaniment may touch on any of these at times, but the interest is in how God is present or felt to be absent in all those things.

It is more than friends having a chat about spiritual matters because as well as being more disciplined, organised and focused in the way described, it has a one-way focus on the person seeking spiritual accompaniment and their relationship with God. It is a hospitable place where you have no responsibility for the person accompanying you.

It is more than listening, although that is the bedrock of any adequate spiritual accompaniment.

Lastly, it is not a theological exchange of ideas. But there will always be a theological dimension within the conversation. However, it will not analyse ideas, but rather explore a person’s experience of God or even an apparent absence of God.

One classic definition of spiritual accompaniment is ‘help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God’s personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship.’

Why seek spiritual accompaniment?

There’s always a specific story behind why someone seeks spiritual accompaniment. It will usually be an awakening desire to grow further in relationship with God. However this will have a more specific character. For instance one may feel they have stagnated in their Christian experience. Others have gone through a personal or church crisis resulting in feelings of frustration or failure. Or after many years of coasting along quite happily there’s a growing sense ‘there *must* be something more than this.’ Whether any of these describe you or not, it could be summed up as a feeling of being drawn to explore this. We hope you will act on that feeling.

Who is it for?

While it is open to anyone who wants to explore their relationship with God, we believe there is a special need and opportunity for anyone involved in Christian

leadership, whether as minister or church leader. Because we have limited spiritual directors we do want to specifically encourage ministers and church leaders to consider this. Jesus highlighted the danger of practicing our ‘piety’ in front of others, and the need for his disciples to go into a place of solitude and secrecy with our heavenly Father. Ministers and leaders spend much of their time in front of others, and so there is special need for us to spend time in what Jesus called ‘the inner room’, which was clearly a metaphor, because he himself went out into the hills and the wilderness in order to be alone with the One he called ‘Father’.

Who are the spiritual companions?

There are a number of spiritual companions within our Baptist family, spread throughout the East Midlands, both women and men, who are able to offer spiritual accompaniment. They have been trained in a variety of contexts and have varying emphases. Our spiritual companions operate within organised structures of spiritual accompaniment in various Anglican diocese.

A number have undertaken their local Anglican diocesan course training spiritual directors. A majority are Baptist ministers but a few are not. One of the most developed traditions in spiritual accompaniment is the Ignatian tradition. Some are familiar with its particular approach of spiritual discernment and the emphasis on contemplation in the midst of action. Others have considerable experience of the practice of contemplative or silent prayer, understanding how it helps effective daily living. There are those that emphasise the Celtic practice of ‘soul friend’ which is about accompanying someone on their life journey. Some have experience of leading retreats and quiet days. Others have been involved in ministerial training. There will almost certainly be someone who is appropriate for you.