

Getting Started Guide

This Getting Started Guide will help you promote, recruit, encourage, and sustain *Companions in Christ*. It includes suggestions to help you start a spiritual formation group that we believe can change lives and strengthen your congregation. The suggestions that follow are for use with starting 28-week *Companions* groups.

Promotion

What Is *Companions in Christ*?

Companions in Christ is

- a small group of people praying together.
- an opportunity for daily individual reading and reflection.
- a focus on how you experience God.
- a group supporting your spiritual growth.
- a group reaching out to other *Companions* groups.
- an opportunity to learn various styles and forms of prayer.
- a record or journal of your walk with Christ.
- an invitation to let scripture form your faith.
- a time to reflect on where God is calling you and to affirm the gifts God has given you.
- a discovery of spiritual friends who will listen to and pray for you.

What Is a Spiritual Formation Group?

Through *Companions in Christ*,

- You will explore the depths of scripture, learn to listen to God through it, and allow your life to be shaped by the Word.
- You will experience new dimensions of prayer, try fresh ways of opening to God, and learn what it means to practice the presence of God.
- You will reflect on Christ's call in your life and discover anew the gifts that God is giving you for living out your personal ministry.
- You and members of your group will grow together as a Christian community and gain skills in learning how small groups in the church become settings for spiritual guidance.

A spiritual formation group encourages individuals to focus on deep questions such as:

How is God working in my life?

How am I being formed in the likeness of Christ?

What practices will open me to God's leading?

A spiritual formation group provides ways for you to open yourself to the Spirit.

A spiritual formation group helps you listen to the "still small voice" of God.

A spiritual formation group is a community marked by gratitude for the surprising ways God works in our lives and in the world.

A spiritual formation group honors each person's sharing, refrains from fixing or solving problems, and trusts the Spirit to guide each one.

A spiritual formation group is an adventure of growing and maturing in your faith.

Forming a Core Group for Promotion

Pray for a couple of people who will help you promote, plan, and initiate *Companions in Christ* in your church. Here are some questions to help you:

- Whom do you see as leaders in prayer in your congregation?
- Are there people who have been through an Academy for Spiritual Formation?
- Are there people who have gone through a spiritual-renewal experience such as Walk to Emmaus or Cursillo?
- Do you know of people in the congregation who have gone on one or more spiritual formation retreats?
- Is there a leader of prayer or spirituality among the women's or men's groups of your congregation?
- Could the church staff suggest several people who might become members of a prayer and planning group?
- Is there a spiritual formation committee in the church?

Invite two or three others from the above list to work with you in praying for and planning for *Companions in Christ*.

- Use "A Prayer for Recruiting" on page 214 or other prayers to place this program before God and the church.
- Discuss ways to promote *Companions in Christ*. Make use of the suggestions and resources in this book.
- List the names of people you wish to invite to participate.
- Coordinate your planning with the church staff and any other appropriate groups in your congregation.
- Make personal calls and send personal letters to those who might be interested. This guide includes sample letters.
- Pray for God's guidance.

Ideas for Promoting Companions in Christ

Ask someone to give a testimony during a Sunday morning worship service about his or her experience with prayer and invite the congregation to deepen its walk with God through *Companions in Christ*.

Hang a *Companions in Christ* flyer/poster in a prominent place in your church. This book includes two sample posters. The *Companions in Christ* Church Pack includes two four-color printed posters. These are also available free by calling The Upper Room and asking for M106 (telephone 1-800-972-0433).

Use the prayers on pages 214 and 218 in meetings, classes, and worship.

Hold an information meeting. This *Getting Started Guide* includes an outline for such a meeting.

Visit Sunday school classes, women's and men's groups, and any other small groups in your church to talk about *Companions in Christ*.

Mail an invitation to members of the congregation you think would be interested in a spiritual formation group. Follow up with phone calls.

Write a newsletter article about *Companions in Christ* or a series of articles that will generate ongoing interest.

Prepare and use a bulletin insert. Use the ideas in this *Getting Started Guide*.

Set up a display table with the Participant's Book, information about *Companions in Christ*, and some of the resource books.

Create a bulletin board with information about *Companions in Christ*.

Duplicate testimonials from other group participants that are printed on the *Companions in Christ* minicatalog or download them from the *Companions* Web site.

Finding a leader for Companions in Christ

QUALITIES OR EXPERIENCES TO LOOK FOR

A person steeped in prayer. One who is familiar with a variety of ways of prayer and has a well-developed life of prayer;

A person who knows not only information about the Bible but is also familiar with the ways the Bible shapes and forms faith;

A person who is comfortable with silence, who doesn't have to answer every question, fill every silence;

A person who has experienced groups as a place for sharing, caring, and growth;

A person who is comfortable with differences and is able to be accepting of people at different stages of faith;

A person who can genuinely listen and who is attentive to the movements of the Spirit.

WHERE TO FIND A LEADER

To whom do people in the congregation go for help in prayer or for guidance in making decisions?

Who has shown leadership ability in other small-group settings? Has anyone been involved with the Academy for Spiritual Formation, Disciple, Emmaus, Cursillo?

Who has exhibited hunger for spiritual growth by asking questions, attending classes, going on retreats?

Just a Closer Walk?

Are you yearning for a deeper experience of God?

Would you like to be part of a small group
of people with whom you can share
questions of faith?

Come walk with

COMPANIONS *in Christ*

- A journey in prayer, scripture, sharing, spiritual friendship, and meditation.
- A spiritual-formation group designed to deepen your spiritual growth.
- An invitation from God to come close.

For more information, contact:

**RESTLESS?
SEARCHING?**

**If you experience a spiritual hunger ...
If you desire to bring a deeper dimension
to your faith ...**

we invite you to

COMPANIONS *in Christ*

**A new small group that will provide support for your search.
A path to explore prayer, scripture, and the spiritual journey.
An experience of God's grace and love in daily times of
reflection.**

Contact:

COMPANIONS
in Christ

Creating a Companions in Christ Bulletin Board

Copy the cover of the Participant's Book.

Use the posters and fliers in this Guide.

Copy "What Is *Companions in Christ*?" from page 198.

List the time, date, and place for the beginning of *Companions in Christ*.

Feature some quotes on spiritual formation. This Guide provides several.

Put up the name of the contact person(s) with phone numbers.

Use the image of footsteps or a path to emphasize the spiritual journey.

Write in bold letters the following (the five study areas in *Companions in Christ*):

Spiritual Journey

Prayer

Scripture

Vocation and Gifts

Spiritual Friendship

Include a sign-up list.

Use photographs, pictures, or images of people praying or reading the Bible or meeting in small groups or groups of people involved in common activities of discussion or outreach.

**Deepen Your Prayer
Pray with Scripture
Identify Your Spiritual Gifts
Become a Spiritual Friend**

It is all part of
Companions in Christ

A new small group opportunity that is beginning here on

We invite you to become part of *Companions in Christ*, a small-group journey that focuses on deepening your relationship with God. Through daily readings, reflection, and weekly meetings, you will be guided in exploring prayer, scripture, vocation, and spiritual friendship as avenues to deepen your faith.

We promise that it will make a difference in your life.

For information, contact

[or]

For information, see the display in the fellowship hall.

[or]

For information, come to the information meeting on

[or]

For information, see the bulletin board.

(Adapt this last part as it best fits your congregation and your promotion.)

An Invitation to Sign Up for Companions in Christ

Companions in Christ is

- A small group committed to deepening prayer and listening for the Spirit.
- Individuals who study each day about prayer, scripture, and discernment, and who keep a personal notebook or journal of their learnings and questions.
- A small group of people that meets weekly to support one another, share about what God is revealing in their reflections, and open themselves to exploring on a deeper level the theme of the week.
- Individuals who know that daily spiritual disciplines and weekly meetings offer a good balance and provide holy ground for growing in faith.

If you wish to develop your daily disciplines and long for a small group with which to share the journey of faith, then come join *Companions in Christ*. For twenty-eight weeks, you will journey in a small group and be enriched, challenged, supported, and loved.

Will you accept?

If yes, sign below and we will contact you about the formation of the group.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

(Use an invitation like this on a bulletin board or display table.)

For a Presentation about *Companions in Christ and Its Five Gifts*

One way to promote interest in *Companions in Christ* is to present the study to various church groups. Consider your congregation and choose groups that may have people who are interested in spiritual formation. Look at Sunday school classes, women's groups, prayer groups, men's groups, fellowship and study groups.

You may shape your presentation using the material in this Guide with an emphasis on the two components:

1. the daily readings and exercises and
2. the weekly small group for sharing and deepening the journey.

Or you may use this material on the gifts of *Companions in Christ*. As a visual, you may wish to gift wrap five boxes that you then unwrap as you talk about the five gifts.

FIRST GIFT: SPIRITUAL PRACTICES OR DISCIPLINES

Many people struggle with developing a daily time of prayer, scripture reading, meditation, and reflection. We know the longing to grow closer to God; and we know that prayer and silence, scripture and reflection are time-tested ways to open ourselves up to the movement of the Holy Spirit. Yet the busyness of life crowds in on us, and we do not follow through on our intentions.

Spiritual growth is honed and perfected only through practice. Like an instrument, it must be played. Like a path, it must be walked. Whether through prayer or meditation or worship or good works, you must move yourself in the direction of spiritual betterment. Spiritual understanding never becomes deep unless you subject yourself to the spiritual discipline of practicing your belief.

—Kent Nerburn, *Simple Truths*
Novato, Calif.: New World Library, 1996, 93

Companions in Christ will give you a guide and a community to help you develop your spiritual practices. The guide will come in the form of your Participant's Book. Each day offers a reading or an exercise that takes about thirty minutes. The exercises will help you develop ways of prayer and meditation, inviting you into silence and reflection as well as reading and praying with the Bible. Your faithfulness to the thirty minutes each day will help pattern your life. Once you have established that daily pattern of prayer and reflection, you will discover that you can find the time to do it, and you will see the fruits of giving God that time each day.

You also will have a community to help, support, and challenge you. The members of this group will expect you faithfully to set aside time for prayer, daily exercises, and reflection. They can offer suggestions as to what works for them. They will pray for you to develop your own spiritual disciplines. You can trust there will be abundant grace when you have a bad week, and a measure of gentle, encouraging grace to keep you on the journey to a deeper walk with God and to developing your own spiritual practices.

SECOND GIFT: JOURNALING—KEEPING A PERSONAL NOTEBOOK

This may be a hard gift for some. Writing often does not come easily, and you can be so critical about what you write. With a busy schedule, you may find it difficult to make time to journal or you may resist putting what you think and feel into words on paper (or on a computer screen).

Yet journaling is one of the gifts of *Companions in Christ* and one of the gifts of the spiritual life. Writing is an inward and outward experience. It connects the world inside your mind and heart with a world that is larger than your thoughts. Putting words on paper and sharing them with others connects your inner prayer with the prayer of a community. This type of written reflection can help us understand our struggles. Putting your experiences and feelings into words helps you reflect on your relationship with God.

Journaling is also a way to record or keep track of what God is doing in your life. Over a period of time you may notice some common themes that reappear—God may be trying to get your attention. Or you may notice that you are not where you started. You may have forgotten to give thanks for the new place to which God has brought you. A personal journal becomes a gift for learning and gratitude.

Your journal is for your eyes only. You do not have to write complete sentences or full paragraphs or have perfect punctuation. It is meant for you to write your responses to the daily exercises. If you enter more into reflection and worry less about style or form, you will move toward perceiving journaling as one of your companions on the spiritual journey.

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You will be invited to write prayers, write about your experiences, wrestle with new ideas, write to God and about God. Such variety of exercises will open you to the possibilities of continuing with the practice of journaling.

At weekly meetings, the participants will have time to talk about their responses to the daily exercises. You can decide what and how much you wish to share of your personal reflections.

Journaling can be a significant tool in deepening our spiritual lives because by its nature it leads us to further revelation of who we are and who God is in our lives.

—Anne Broyles, *Journaling: A Spiritual Journey*
Nashville, Tenn.: Upper Room Books, 1999, 11.

THIRD GIFT: READING SCRIPTURE FOR FORMATION

Most Christians are familiar with Bible study. In many churches, substantial Bible studies such as Kerygma, Bethel, and Disciple Bible Study have had a profound and lasting effect on many people. We commend Bible study to you.

In *Companions in Christ*, the concern is not so much with information about the who, when, and why of the Bible as with letting scripture form you. “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). You read scripture to let the images and words shape you in the likeness of Christ. You want to do more than *think* about God’s Word; you want to let that Word enter and transform you.

You will be introduced to several formational ways of reading scripture. One is the classic practice of *lectio divina*, which means holy or “divine reading.” It is a slow, meditative, repetitive reading of scripture and letting a word or image from the passage descend to your heart and guide your prayer. You will learn, like Mary, to ponder these things deeply in your heart (Luke 2:19).

You will also be invited to use your imagination in reading scripture. This approach works particularly well with narrative or story portions of scripture as you imagine yourself back in the text with Jesus and Zacchaeus or on the road to Emmaus. Entering into the story with your imagination frees God to reveal new insights and truths.

You will read scripture with new eyes.

God’s word will speak to us and transform our lives if we will come to it in a spirit of prayer and expectancy. The invitation is for us to seek the living presence of God in the Bible and to come ready to listen and respond.

—E. Glenn Hinson, *Companions in Christ*, Participant’s Book

FOURTH GIFT: SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP

This gift of *Companions in Christ* goes by many names. It is called spiritual direction, spiritual guidance, or spiritual friendship. Though there are differences, all of them involve another person with whom you can share your prayer life, your growing closer to God. You long to know if there is another who experiences what you experience, who can help you see the way to go or notice where you have been. You sometimes want someone to help you pay attention to the movements of the Holy Spirit in your life.

I began to pray for someone who would guide me in the essential, formative parts of my life: my sense of God, my practice of prayer, my understanding of grace. I wanted someone who would take my life of prayer and my pilgrimage with Christ as seriously (or more seriously) than I did, who was capable of shutting up long enough to hear the distinct uniqueness of my spirituality, and who had enough disciplined restraint not to impose an outside form on me.

—Eugene Peterson. *Working the Angles*
Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987, 117.

An essential part of being a spiritual friend is the ability to listen. A spiritual friend, guide, or director does a lot of listening—listening for common themes, listening for hints of the Spirit, listening for openings to growth in closeness to God. It is a great gift to listen to another without worrying about what you will say, while learning to trust the Holy Spirit as the ultimate guide.

Spiritual guidance is not primarily about problem solving as is usually the case in therapy or counseling. Rather, spiritual guidance helps the person find God's hand or the Spirit's guidance in the midst of the issue. Spiritual guidance is not about theological instruction though a person may be invited to explore his or her image of God or enter into a meditative reading of scripture.

Companions in Christ will acquaint you with the practice of listening (some call it holy listening) for the movement of the Spirit and how to befriend another on their journey. You also will learn about and practice group spiritual guidance and patterns of discernment.

FIFTH GIFT: BEFRIENDING YOUR VOCATION

God calls you to be active in the world. For many people, the key question is, "Where can I get a good job that pays a lot of money?" *Companions in Christ* will invite you to ask different questions, to see that your "job" in the Christian tradition is an opportunity to explore what God would have you do in the world and how to use your God-given gifts.

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Every Christian has been given a spiritual gift. Simply defined, spiritual gifts are particular abilities given by Christ through the Holy Spirit for the good of the whole church so it may do Christ's work in the world.

—Gerrit Scott Dawson, *Companions in Christ*, Participant's Book

You will be introduced to looking at your life through the gifts given by the Holy Spirit. You will be invited to identify your own gifts and also receive the wisdom of the group members as they name some gifts they see in you. Knowing and claiming your gifts enables you to see ways God might use you in the world.

A key part of this gift of befriending your vocation is to look at how the spiritual gifts given by God are meant not only for individuals and their careers but for use in building up the kingdom of God. You will also have a chance to reflect on what gifts the congregation has as it seeks to carry out its ministry and mission in the community and the world.

Recruiting

A Prayer for Recruiting

God of the heights and depths,
we open ourselves to an outpouring of your grace.
Move among us and place in your people a desire
to enter into a closer walk with you.
Set our hearts on fire with longing to dwell in your holy word
and deepen our prayer.

As we thirst for you, O God,
raise up a group who will be our companions in Christ
and be a witness to your presence in all of life
and especially in our community of faith.

God of the heights and depths,
bless our congregation with a new group of faithful disciples,
your companions on the way.

Amen.

Dear Friend(s),

A minister told of a church she served where people wanted Bible study. She would arrange wonderful studies with good teachers and advertise widely. Yet few people showed up, even though people consistently said they wanted Bible study. Finally it dawned on her that what people really wanted was not information about the Bible but an experience of God.

I think that is what we all want, to experience some intimacy with God, to have a deep relationship with Christ. Worship is a part of that journey to God and so is study. But one of the clearest paths to experiencing God is a small group that knows how to share and care, that values prayer and silence, that listens for the movement of the Spirit.

I want to invite you to become part of *Companions in Christ*—a new spiritual formation group that will provide ways and paths for you to grow closer to God. Through daily reading and reflections from your Participant's Book and with a weekly meeting with fellow companions, you will have created the space for God to draw near and abide with you.

To learn more about this opportunity, please talk to me or attend an information meeting on

I believe it will make a difference in your life and bring about renewal in the life of the congregation.

Your companion in Christ,

A letter of invitation to those who might be interested in Companions in Christ

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Dear _____,

Thank you for your interest in *Companions in Christ*. I am glad that God has led you to inquire about participating. Here are the main components of this resource and some idea of what you would be committing yourself to:

1. Daily reading and reflecting

On the day after the group meeting, you would read the chapter for the coming week. For the next five days you would work on the daily exercises that invite your reflection, prayer, and exploration of the theme. Many of the exercises ask that you reflect on a scripture passage, so you will need your Bible. You will want to record your responses to questions, insights, and musings in a notebook or journal. Before you come to the weekly meetings, read through your journal to see the ways God has been at work in you. On an average, the daily reading and reflection may take thirty minutes. Sometimes the Spirit really stirs, and you will want to spend more time with the exercises.

2. Weekly meetings

The small group will gather for two hours each week. After a time of centering and worship, the first part of the meeting will be spent in sharing responses to the exercises. Bring your journal. There is not time for everyone to share all of his or her responses to the exercises, but it is expected that each person will have done all the daily work. Tell where you experienced God's speaking to you, where you have questions, where you believe God is leading. Also be prepared to listen for common themes that emerge in the sharing.

The second major component of the weekly meeting is time for "Deeper Explorations." This will expand on a part of the week's theme or offer further practice in spiritual exercises being taught in the unit. The leader will guide this portion and will appreciate your openness and willingness to participate. Bring your Bible as well as your journal to the weekly meetings.

The weekly meeting will close with perhaps a word about next week, but always with a time of prayer, worship, or song. Most group members share in prayer for one another, a wonderful gift we rarely offer face to face.

3. Openness

You agree to be open to God's leading through the readings, reflections, and the small-group experience. Having the sense of opening your hands and heart to God is an important way to begin this journey of allowing your life to be formed in the image of Christ.

I trust this gives you some idea of your commitment to this wonderful opportunity to be companions in Christ. I look forward to your registration and participation. If I can be of further assistance, please do call.

Another companion in Christ,

A letter of invitation to those who have expressed interest in Companions in Christ

Companions in Christ Registration Form

Name _____

Address _____

Phone: Day _____ Night _____

Fax _____ E-mail _____ Birthday _____

I would like to be part of *Companions in Christ*.

I want more information on *Companions in Christ*.

My preferred meeting time for the weekly two-hour meeting is (check all that work for you):

Sunday Morning Afternoon Evening

Monday Morning Afternoon Evening

Tuesday Morning Afternoon Evening

Wednesday Morning Afternoon Evening

Thursday Morning Afternoon Evening

Friday Morning Afternoon Evening

Saturday Morning Afternoon Evening

I will need help with childcare.

Other concerns or special needs:

Candle Prayer

Use the following as an opening prayer for your information meeting and/or for each time *Companions in Christ* meets. Light a candle or several, and invite everyone to join in the prayer.

Light of Christ
Shine on our path
Chase away all darkness
and lead us to the heart of God.

Amen.

Information Meeting Outline

OPENING

- Light a candle and use the Candle Prayer (page 218)
- Sing a song or have a period of silence
- Pray this prayer:

God of Love, embrace us in this sacred time and let our restless hearts find their rest in you. Move in our midst and open us to the possibilities for a closer walk with you. Thank you for these people who long to see your face. Bless our time together. Amen.

WELCOME

Welcome all and express appreciation for their coming to this information meeting. God is always drawing us closer. Thank people for paying attention to the work of the Spirit.

SHARING

Invite people to share their names and what drew them to this meeting. If a large group shows up, you may want to do this exercise in smaller groups, later inviting each small group to present a summary report to the whole group.

PRESENTATION/INFORMATION

Do an overview of *Companions in Christ* and speak on these points:

1. *Companions in Christ* is a small-group resource for spiritual formation. It focuses on experience: the experience of the participants as they study, pray, reflect, and share in the group; and the experience of the group members as they take their learnings into the church and community.
2. *Companions in Christ* has two main components:
 - Individual reading and daily exercises from the Participant's Book

Information Meeting

- A weekly two-hour meeting to share responses to the weekly exercises and to explore at a deeper level the theme for the week, which is facilitated by a leader using the Leader's Guide.
3. Journaling will be introduced as the primary way to record and reflect on the movement of the Spirit in each person through the week and at the group session.
 4. The five parts cover five major themes:
 - Embracing the Journey: The Way of Christ—looking at spirituality as a journey toward wholeness and holiness
 - Feeding on the Word: The Mind of Christ—an introduction to several ways of praying and meditating on Scripture
 - Deepening Our Prayer: The Heart of Christ—experiencing different ways of prayer
 - Responding to Our Call: The Work of Christ—looking at our vocation as Christians and the spiritual gifts we have to share
 - Exploring Spiritual Guidance: The Spirit of Christ—an overview of different ways of receiving and giving spiritual guidance as individuals or in groups

If you have the Participant's Book(s) and the Leader's Guide, you may wish to display them, inviting group members to peruse them at the meeting's conclusion.

A TIME OF LISTENING AND SHARING

Invite those present to experience the style of sharing that will be present in *Companions in Christ*. Suggest an amount of time in which to do the exercise that gives each person time to reflect, talk, and listen.

In twos or threes, reflect on a time you felt close to God. Spend a couple of minutes writing in a journal or notebook and then share with those who are in your group. Where was it? What did you experience? Was there any sense that God wanted you do something?

INVITATION

Invite commitment to entering the *Companions in Christ* group.

Have a sign-up sheet that persons may sign or copies of the registration form found in this book. Talk about when you will begin *Companions in Christ* if that has been decided and if appropriate.

CLOSING SONG AND PRAYER

Supporting

Training Events

To lead a small group through the formational process of *Companions in Christ* effectively, a leader will benefit from having a clear understanding of the resource and a basic experience of the process embodied in the resource. Leaders will also benefit from developing some distinctive leadership skills. Leading formational groups calls for skills such as listening, patience, accepting differences, and working with process more than content. Upper Room Ministries offers one-day and three-day training events for leaders of *Companions in Christ*. While training is not mandatory, we strongly recommend that you attend a training event, especially if your experience with formational small groups or spiritual practice is limited.

Both the one-day and three-day training events will provide guidance for leaders in the following areas:

- Understanding the *Companions in Christ* vision
- Experiencing various aspects of *Companions in Christ*
- Using ongoing leadership support through the *Companions in Christ* Network
- Implementing the process in local congregations

Leader Orientations are basic one-day training events offered around the country. In addition to the areas mentioned above, the Leader Orientations will offer basic training in leadership qualities and skills for leading spiritual formation groups.

Leader Trainings are advanced three-day events. In addition to the above areas, the Leader Trainings will provide advanced training in the leadership qualities and skills for leading spiritual formation groups (including practice in guiding the small-group process).

For additional information about dates and locations of Leader Orientations or Leader Trainings, see the *Companions in Christ* Web page (www.companionsinchrist.org) or contact Upper Room Ministries at 1-800-972-0433.

Sustaining a Spiritual Formation Group

The circumstances and details of daily life can impact each individual as well as the whole of a small group. Some events cannot be anticipated or prevented, but there are ways to help sustain the group over the course of many weeks.

1. Pray for the group members.

As a leader or a member of *Companions in Christ*, remember one another in prayer.

2. Communicate the schedule clearly.

Make sure everyone knows about changes in meeting dates or in assignments.

3. Make calls, and send cards.

If a person misses a meeting, ask someone in the group to call. You may wish to save handouts for that person and ask one participant to provide a summary of what happened. Groups may also remember the person by lighting a candle during the meeting. If a person misses several of the group sessions, a call and a card from the leader is appropriate. If your group is small, try to check in with members during the week.

4. Observe group process.

Make sure all participants have a chance to share, that no one monopolizes the conversations or tries to fix someone else's problem. The Leader's Guide contains more information on small-group process and the Leader Training Events will provide experiential help with small-group dynamics.

5. Pray in the meeting room.

As you set up for each meeting, offer a prayer for all who will enter that holy space. Bernard of Clairvaux once said, "God loves both more than you and before you." Pray that in this space the group will discover the reality of God who is already here.

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6. Check in with the group.

Do participants need vacation or holiday breaks? a coffee/refreshment/meal after each meeting? Would a field trip to a retreat center or some special worship experience be helpful? Would a social gathering to strengthen the bonds of community beyond the weekly meetings be important to schedule? Is there a time to invite other family members for a social evening or gathering?

7. Plan the environment.

Comfortable chairs and a small table are important aspects of setting up the meeting space. Consider displaying art and pictures in the room and developing a visual focus for the table. Flowers, tablecloths, candles, or thematic symbols can help people enter into the sharing. Music to sing and music for meditation are also essential elements.

8. Consider prayer partners.

At each meeting, each participant could draw the name of another group member. That person would be his or her special prayer focus for the coming week. Or participants could draw a name for each unit of study, remembering that person and her or his prayer requests for five to six weeks.

9. Planning

Circumstances or life patterns may cause some persons to show up late for the beginning of the meeting. Conversations, insights, or concerns may cause a meeting to go longer than the two hours. Therefore the leader needs to plan carefully for the various time blocks in each meeting and be prepared to adjust as necessary.

Above all, to help the group be faithful to the two-hour meeting, the leader should stress the importance of a covenant of expectations.

Congregational Prayer Support

As a *Companions in Christ* group forms in the congregation, invite the congregation into prayerful support.

- Invite the congregation to pray for the group's initial formation.
- Publish "A Prayer for Recruiting" in your church bulletin and church newsletter.
- Develop a "church breath prayer"—a short sentence prayer focused on the new group. You could create your own or use one of these:
 - “Holy God, call us forth to walk with you.”
 - “Loving God, raise from among us *companions in Christ*.”
- Enlist members of the congregation who are not involved in the study to pray whenever the group meets. This ministry allows housebound or shut-in persons to play an active part.

Linking Up with Other Companions

An additional dimension of *Companions in Christ* is the network. While your group is experiencing *Companions*, groups in other congregations also will be meeting. By providing a Web site (www.companionsinchrist.org), The Upper Room will establish a network link among the *Companions in Christ* groups. The network provides opportunities for groups to share their experiences with one another and to communicate in a variety of meaningful ways. As you move through the resource, there will be occasions when you are asked to pray for another group, send greetings or words of encouragement, or receive their support for your group. You may discover that your group will find additional ways it wants to relate to other *Companions in Christ* groups. We encourage you to do so and to share your experiences. Here are some ideas:

Visit www.companionsinchrist.org and encourage members of your group to do likewise.

From the Web, print out the list of other *Companions* groups and bring it to your group meeting. Decide if you want to select a *Companions* group from another congregation to be your partner. If you decide to partner with another group, consider the benefits of partnering with a group that is geographically close or distant.

Pray for your *Companions* partner group.

Send letters of encouragement to them.

Make or purchase small, inexpensive gifts to send to your partner group.

Take a photo of your group and include it in a card to your *Companions* partner group.

If geographically close, ask your partner group to share a special activity with you, such as providing gifts for a needy family at Christmas or joining in a summer mission project.

Introduce your *Companions* partner group to the rest of your congregation through your church newsletter or bulletin inserts.

Visit the *Companions* discussion room on the Web site. Let other groups benefit from your learnings and experiences or offer testimonies from your group.

Discover what ministries you share with your *Companions* partner group.

If the Leader Must Miss a Weekly Meeting

- Choose a group member to lead the session. Meet with that member and supply a copy of all appropriate material from the Leader's Guide. Go over the general outline of the session, including the time for reflecting on weekly exercises and the time for the deeper exploration of the theme. Give special attention to preparation details such as set-up, materials, and handouts.
- Another possibility is to ask two members to share leadership. One could do the opening worship and sharing on the exercises, while the other leads the deeper explorations and closing worship. In this case, the two would need to work closely on set-up and preparation details.
- If no one can lead the group, adjust the schedule until the leader returns.

Resources

A Possible Schedule for the 28-Week Experience

Second week of September	Preparatory Meeting
Third week of September	Embracing the Journey 1
Fourth week of September	Embracing the Journey 2
First week of October	Embracing the Journey 3
Second week of October	Embracing the Journey 4
Third week of October	Embracing the Journey 5
Fourth week of October	Feeding on the Word 1
First week of November	Feeding on the Word 2
Second week of November	Feeding on the Word 3
Third week of November	Feeding on the Word 4
Fourth week of November	Thanksgiving Break
First week of December	Feeding on the Word 5
Christmas break	1–4 weeks

(If you started after the second week of September, you could do one or two more sessions before Christmas. Also if it fits your schedule better, you could begin the next part—Deepening our Prayer)

First week of January	Deepening Our Prayer 1
Second week of January	Deepening Our Prayer 2
Third week of January	Deepening Our Prayer 3
Fourth week of January	Deepening Our Prayer 4
First week of February	Deepening Our Prayer 5
Second week of February	Deepening Our Prayer 6
Third week of February	Responding to Our Call 1

Fourth week of February	Responding to Our Call 2
First week of March	Responding to Our Call 3
Second week of March	Responding to Our Call 4
Third week of March	Responding to Our Call 5
Fourth week of March	Exploring Spiritual Guidance 1
Easter Break	

(Depending on the date of Easter, you may wish to postpone beginning the fifth part on Exploring Spiritual Guidance until after Easter. If Easter is late, you may be able to finish most of the unit before Easter. Be conscious of school vacation schedules)

Second week of April	Exploring Spiritual Guidance 2
Third week of April	Exploring Spiritual Guidance 3
Fourth week of April	Exploring Spiritual Guidance 4
First week of May	Exploring Spiritual Guidance 5
Second week of May	A Closing Retreat

Tailor the schedule to your group's church and community circumstances. You may wish to take a break between each part (though it is recommended that you do not take a break between Parts 1 and 2 as the group is just beginning its formation) as well as taking breaks for the holidays.

A List of Group Participants

Name _____
Address _____
Home phone _____ Work phone _____
E-mail _____

Name _____
Address _____
Home phone _____ Work phone _____
E-mail _____

Name _____
Address _____
Home phone _____ Work phone _____
E-mail _____

Name _____
Address _____
Home phone _____ Work phone _____
E-mail _____

Name _____
Address _____
Home phone _____ Work phone _____
E-mail _____

Recommended Bibles

The Spiritual Formation Bible: Growing in Intimacy with God through Scripture

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Available from Upper Room Books Customer Service, PO Box 340012 Nashville, TN 37203-9540 or call 1-800-972-0433. This Bible features articles on spiritual formation, quotes, and meditations on each page that suggest ways to let scripture guide your prayer and life. Introductory notes and articles on spiritual disciplines make this a valuable tool for spiritual growth and an especially appropriate Bible for use with *Companions in Christ*.

New Interpreter's Study Bible

New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha. Extensive notes on text, guides for interpretation, glossary, chronologies, and maps make this a helpful study guide. Published by Abingdon Press.

Oxford Annotated Study Bible

This Bible has annotations and explanatory notes on each page, introductions to every book of the Bible, and a full set of New Oxford Bible maps. New Revised Standard Version.

Harper Collins Study Bible

Contains verse-by-verse annotation of key words or phrases, and offers cross-references to other passages.

The Access Bible

A New Revised Standard Version that features running commentary interspersed with the biblical text. In-text maps, charts, and sidebar essays provide extensive background information.

Helpful Background Resources

A more expanded resource list is found in the Participant's Book(s).

Jones, W. Paul. *The Art of Spiritual Direction: Giving and Receiving Spiritual Guidance*. What is spiritual direction? What is the difference between spiritual direction and counseling? How can you know if you are called to the ministry of spiritual direction? What should happen in spiritual direction sessions? Jones answers these and other questions in this overview of spiritual direction.

Miller, Wendy J. *Jesus, Our Spiritual Director: A Pilgrimage through the Gospels* (#9876). The reader encounters Jesus as personal spiritual guide and also learns how to encourage others in their sacred journey through life. Wendy Miller brings the Gospel texts to life as a continuing conversation between Jesus and his disciples then and now. She demonstrates the deep biblical roots of spiritual direction.

Morris, Robert Corin. *Wrestling with Grace: A Spirituality for the Rough Edges of Daily Life*. Morris offers liberating news to anyone who longs for everyday spiritual practice. He nudges us toward new ways of looking at our own behavior and state of mind, showing us how to let God's grace into daily life. Ten prayer exercises at the end of the book provide ongoing guidance for searchers.

Mulholland Jr., M. Robert. *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation, revised*. Nashville, Tenn.: Upper Room Books, 2000. An exploration of using scripture as a guide to prayer and spiritual formation.

Steere, Douglas V. *Dimensions of Prayer: Cultivating a Relationship with God*, revised. Nashville, Tenn.: Upper Room Books, 2002. A classic work that inspires and educates people on deepening their prayer life.

Helpful Background Resources

Thompson, Marjorie. *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005. A good introduction to the basic spiritual disciplines that are part of *Companions in Christ*. It could also serve as a preparatory study resource for a group before members begin the more in-depth commitment of *Companions in Christ*.

Vest, Norvene. *Gathered in the Word: Praying the Scripture in Small Groups*. Nashville, Tenn.: Upper Room Books, 1996. Vest describes an age-old form of devotional reading intended specifically for spiritual nourishment, called *lectio divina*.

Wolpert, Daniel. *Creating a Life with God: The Call of Ancient Prayer Practices*. Nashville, Tenn.: Upper Room Books, 2003. A basic resource that offers the opportunity to learn and adopt 12 prayer practices.

Quotes

The hunger of the heart is. . . always a beginning. Either it is an opportunity to let God into our lives for the first time, or it is a chance to move further along the path of spiritual growth with God at our side.

—Ron DelBene

The Hunger of the Heart, A Workbook (Nashville, Tenn.: Upper Room Books, 1995), 16.

Whether you like it or no, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way: else you will be trifler all your days. . . . Do justice to your own soul; give it time and means to grow. Do not starve yourself any longer.

—John Wesley

John Wesley and Modern Religion, Umphrey Lee
(Nashville, Tenn.: Cokesbury, 1936), 107–8

All your love, your stretching out, your hope, your thirst, God is creating in you so that [God] may fill you. . . . God is on the inside of the longing.

—Maria Boulding

The Coming of God
(Collegedale, Maine: Liturgical Press, 1986), 167

Next Steps

Suggested Next Steps

When the group completes the twenty-eight-week journey of *Companions in Christ*, participants may wonder what to do next. Here are some suggestions. Trust the Spirit to open new possibilities and trust the Spirit to lead the group participants to a new sense of call and discernment.

- Nurture anyone who feels called to lead another group of *Companions in Christ*. It is possible to have several spiritual formation groups going at the same time. Some of those who have been through the journey may now be ready to lead a group. Others may wish to participate in the *Companions in Christ* training and then begin a group.
- After completing Part 4 on vocation and gifts, some group members may have a greater clarity as to a new ministry they want to begin or be involved in. Provide support and encouragement.
- New ministries of prayer could develop at the completion of *Companions in Christ*: a prayer support group, a group committed to intercession, a group that meets for silence and contemplation, a Covenant Discipleship group.
- A group of people who would like to continue meditating weekly on scripture, perhaps using the lectionary readings as a basis for “Group *Lectio*” (see Part 2, week 5) or using directed imagination (Part 2, week 4) could emerge.
- A group may wish to explore the annotated resource list found in the back of the Participant’s Book(s). This list offers additional small group and individual resources that expand on the themes of the five parts.
- A worship experience that uses the meditative approach to scripture could be offered.
- Persons may be led to seek further training in spiritual direction. Contact Spiritual Directors International, PO Box 3584, Bellevue, WA 98009-3584. Phone: 425-455-1565. E-mail presence@sdiworld.org for a list of training programs.
- With guidance from the participants in *Companions in Christ*, the church could establish a program of prayer partners.