

SPIRITUAL FORMATION  
SEED PACKET



COMPANIONS *in Christ*<sup>®</sup>

# Seed Kit for Spiritual Formation in Your Congregation

*Here are some common church settings and practices to help us become more aware of God's presence and activity among us. Use these ideas to spark your own; expand on them creatively with others in your congregation. Such tools are ways of opening ourselves to God's grace, not of producing our own spiritual growth.*

**Bible or other study groups:** Offer these with a formational intent and style.

- Believe that behind the words we study there is a living Word ready to address us personally and corporately.
- Help participants learn to identify with characters in scripture, connecting the great faith story with their own life journeys. Ask, "When have I experienced something like this in my life?" "Why do I identify with this person?"
- Encourage people to hear Jesus' great questions personally: "Who do you say that I am?" "What are you looking for?"

**Church meetings:**

- Open and close with prayerful, reflective attention to God's presence. Ask simple questions to help focus attention on divine presence and the larger purpose of the meeting: "Where have you felt God's presence during the past week?" "How have you sensed the Spirit's guidance since our last meeting?" "What is God doing among us right now?" After quiet reflection time, talk about what you feel, sense, or perceive.
- Invite silence, prayer, or simple songs at points of impasse, tension, or difficulty in the meeting.
- Help church staff/committees/task forces learn to make decisions and plans in a discerning way. Before discussing ideas, use contemplative practices to listen to God: guided imagery with scripture, silence, reflecting on pictures, or the device of a "talking piece" (described in *Companions in Christ: The Way of Forgiveness* Leader's Guide, p.30). Plans will begin to emerge from the richness of prayer and listening deeply to one another in community.

**Service and outreach groups:** Invite members to take time to reflect and pray together.

- Reflect on the biblical and theological roots of your work together.
- Share how you have seen God at work in the people you serve.
- Witness to the joys and evidences of grace, but also share challenges, burdens, and struggles, offering encouragement and support to each other.

**Sunday worship:** Begin training the whole congregation to listen to God by leavening worship with short periods of quiet reflection.

- Give members a non-threatening way to be in silence with reflection questions. For example, after the sermon invite reflection for a few moments on what felt most significant in the scripture or preached word: "What spoke to your heart?" "What invitation is God extending to you today?"



- Guide the congregation through a simple process of examen in place of a printed confession. (See *Companions in Christ* Participant's Book, Part 5, Daily Exercise #5 of each week for examen processes to adapt.)
- Start with short silences (30 seconds), and allow them to expand (up to 2-3 minutes) as people begin to request more time.

**Families:** Build an understanding of family life as a setting for spiritual growth and practice.

- Teach families to include children in the practice of “group lectio” with short scripture passages (see *Companions* Leader's Guide, pp. 78-79).
- Invite parents to learn the art of asking simple questions to help children become aware of their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in relation to faith: “Was there anything that happened today that made you wonder about God?” “Is anything happening in our world that you think about a lot? How do you think God feels about it?” “Who do you think God is like? Not like?”
- Guide children into a simple practice of examen at bedtime. Invite them to reflect on three questions: Did anything happen today that made you really glad? Did anything happen today that made you sad or mad? Did you do anything today that makes you feel bad? Let their responses lead into simple prayers of thanks, petition, and confession.
- Choose to show the love of Christ to those in need together: go on a mission trip as a family, get involved in a Habitat for Humanity project, serve in a soup kitchen. Reflect on the experience together.



## QUESTIONS FOR RETREAT AND/OR SMALL-GROUP SHARING

When in my life has God become more than a concept?

What are my images of God? Where do they come from?

Who in my life is God like?

Who is walking with me in my faith journey right now?

What has happened to me that has been life-giving or empowering?

Where do I sense movement or change in my faith?

What are the greatest obstacles in my life to growing spiritually?

When do I “lie down in green pastures” and let God “restore my soul”?

What most sustains and renews me in my faith journey?

How do I most often express my love for God?



## AWARENESS EXAMEN

### A Prayer of Discernment

The awareness examen helps us trace God's presence and call in the "here and now" details of everyday living.

Ask God to go with you over the last church meeting or worship you attended, and help you discover your response to the following questions:

When did I feel most alive?

When did I feel least alive?

When did I feel most free?

When did I feel least free?

For what moment am I most grateful?

For what moment am I least grateful?

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Questions may be modified to suit context. They draw on *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life*, by Dennis, Sheila, and Matthew Linn (Paulist Press, 1995).

This examen adapts the work of Mark Yaconelli, Youth Ministry Spirituality Project (2/27/02) and is used by permission in the 2004 Companions in Christ trainings. Permission granted to make one copy each for training participants.



## BEYOND THE *Companions in Christ* EXPERIENCE

A Sampling of Follow-Up Options within the Congregation

### Small Group Study and Reflection (recommended examples)

#### Book Studies

- Further titles in the *Companions in Christ* Series (recommended order)  
*The Way of Grace*  
*The Way of Blessedness*  
*The Way of Forgiveness*
- Devotional Reading  
Devotional Classics (*Upper Room Spiritual Classics* Series, or Richard Foster's collection)  
*Weavings* articles (see Reading Group process on website or in packet)  
*A Testament of Devotion* (Thomas Kelly)  
*Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Steve Harper)
- Books on Prayer  
*Prayer: The Heart's True Home* (Richard Foster)  
*Creating a Life with God* (Daniel Wolpert)  
*Praying with Body and Soul* (Jane Vennard)  
*Prayer, Stress, and Our Inner Wounds* (Flora Wuellner)  
*Dimensions of Prayer* (Douglas Steere)
- Books on Spiritual Reading/Lectio  
*Shaped by the Word* (Robert Mulholland)  
*No Moment Too Small* (Norvene Vest)  
*Gathered in the Word* (Norvene Vest)
- Film Viewing and Reflection  
*Babette's Feast*  
*Places in the Heart*  
*O Brother, Where Art Thou?*  
*Dead Man Walking*  
*Jesus of Nazareth*



## Prayer and Accountability Groups

- Intercessory prayer groups
- Prayer chains
- “Covenant Discipleship” Groups
- Sharing and Support Groups

## Lectio Groups—meeting to practice group lectio with scripture

- Lectionary-based
- Books of the Bible with sequential passages

## Other Options

- Plan church-wide spiritual life retreat
- Plan and guide spiritual retreats for church staff, governing council, youth, men/women, families, etc.
- Join or initiate “Spiritual Life Task Force” for congregation

## Action/Reflection Groups

- Group engage in community outreach together monthly; set time to reflect biblically and spiritually within a week after
- Individuals serve in community as personally called; group gathers monthly to report on experiences in relation to God’s presence, call, and guidance

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## IDEAS FOR “*Companions* CELL GROUPS”

Some churches have developed small group structures called “cell groups,” a way of naming smaller components in the Body of Christ. Such groups are generally guided and supported by an official structure within the congregation, such as a “Spiritual Life Task Force” or “Small Group Life Committee.” Cell groups may be conceived of differently from one congregation to another. Some meet for study and prayer, others for mutual spiritual guidance; some meet for fellowship, others to support call and mission.

Here are a few suggestions for developing “*Companions* Cell Groups.” For those who have completed the 28-week *Companions* experience, such groups offer a way to continue in small communities of prayerful discernment, mutual support, guidance, and service, undergirded by daily spiritual practice.

As participants near the conclusion of *Companions in Christ* in Part 5, invite them to pay attention to their particular sense of call from God. Is God issuing them an invitation: Perhaps joining with others in or outside the church to grow deeper in spirit by continuing or teaching a spiritual practice? Perhaps serving in a certain ministry or mission either within or beyond the congregation?

Encourage participants to talk with each other about their emerging sense of call, and to connect with others who share their vision. Clusters of 2-5 persons may form to explore, clarify, and implement this sense of call. Here are some possible “pictures” of such *Companions* Cell Groups:

- Four members of the *Companions* group feel drawn to continue practicing centering prayer. They agree to meet weekly for one hour at noon. After devoting half an hour to the prayer practice, they share their experiences and struggles, eating sack lunches in the second half hour. They agree to a daily practice of intercessory prayer for each other and for the spiritual revitalization of their church and neighborhood.
- Three members of the group feel called to an active expression of Christ’s love in their community. Each one has a different sense of particular ministry: one in a local soup kitchen, one in a shelter for the homeless, and one in a ministry of prison visitation. They agree to exercise their service once a week and to meet as a cell group monthly to share stories, struggles, and spiritual resources. They also covenant to keep a daily devotional practice of scriptural reflection and prayer by using *Upper Room Disciplines*.
- Five group members are strongly attracted to a ministry within the congregation called “In-reach.” They agree to a daily practice of intercession for their church leaders and congregants, with a special focus on the sick and those in personal crisis. Each person commits to visit ill or needy church members (in homes, hospitals, nursing homes) once a week. As a cell group they agree to meet twice a month to share concerns and intercessory prayer for one another. They also offer a monthly time for healing prayers with the anointing of oil in their congregation.
- Two group members feel drawn to develop further a practice of spiritual discernment and guidance. They agree to a daily practice of personal lectio with scripture and journaling. They choose to meet together every two weeks for an hour and a half to share insights, questions, and their sense of God’s leading in their daily lives. They listen together to God and to each other, offering each other support, accountability, and prayer. They also offer to meet with/pray for other individuals at various times who seek greater clarity in their Christian vocation.



As you can see, there are many variations of why a *Companions* Cell Group might form and how it could be structured for its particular purpose. Within the variables are two mainstays: a clear sense of the purpose of the meeting for each cell and some kind of daily practice that supports the meeting process.

Take time to consider other possibilities. You may wish to brainstorm options with your *Companions* group as you move toward the conclusion of the 28-week resource. It would be an appropriate exercise for the Closing Retreat.

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## CONGREGATIONAL ASSESSMENT: WHERE IS GOD LEADING US?

*Every church should undertake an annual “spiritual exam” just as individuals get physical exams. As a Christian body, we need a clear sense of where we are spiritually and where we can grow. Here are a few questions to consider together:*

1. Where do you see God moving in your church? When do you experience God’s presence vividly in your life together? When do you listen deeply to God and respond in loving obedience? List specific settings where you find clear evidence of the Spirit moving among you.
2. What areas of your church have real potential for maturing spiritually? Where do you see circles that are ripe for spiritual formation? Identify specific settings such as church staff/leadership, worship committee, adult classes, youth or singles groups, families at home, men’s or women’s organizations, etc.
3. What would be the three strongest “inroads” for spiritual formation in your congregation at this time? Who would be the best people to help direct and shape these avenues in your church?
4. Identify the key spiritual practices you believe could give content and shape to spiritual formation in each of these settings. For example: expand traditional Bible study with lectio divina; place decision-making meetings in context of worship and discernment; teach youth contemplative forms of prayer; build short periods of quiet or guided reflection into corporate worship.

*Next Steps: Gather the people you identified in #3 above. Invite them to pray with you over a period of time to discern how God is stirring in your congregation to form spiritually mature Christians. Commit to testing at least one or two new practices.*

