

Mission, Ministry and Communications

Spiritual Accompaniment

This article arises from a presentation given by the Revds Jean Boulton-Reynolds and Helier Exon to a meeting of the Rural Deans and Bishops' Staff on 26th January 2021.

Spiritual Accompaniment is one of the hidden gems of the Christian Church and has a long pedigree dating back to the desert fathers and mothers. It has been defined as, 'essentially a relationship in which God is at work using one person to help another on their journey of faith.' In other words, it is a confidential conversation with an accompanier in the presence of God, a trusted place in which to share thoughts and reflections. It is a place to express both the highs and lows of life and one's relationship with God. The accompaniers are trained and skilled listeners who help those who meet them to explore and discern for themselves where God is in their lives and where their lives may be going.

There are some 80-plus accompaniers in Dorset and Wiltshire who are registered with the Diocese of Salisbury Spiritual Accompaniers' Network. There are also a number from neighbouring counties who have joined the network. They are all very different, not all Anglican, not all ordained or in religious orders. But they have all signed up to the network guidelines, have a DBS certificate and have undergone specialist safeguarding training. The frequency of meetings between the accompanier and those they meet are arranged by mutual agreement and may vary from monthly to quarterly. This ministry is available to all, clerical or lay, in licensed or authorised ministry or not, in a church or on the margins.

The Bishop of Salisbury appointed us, Jean Boulton-Reynolds and Helier Exon, as Spiritual Accompaniment Advisers to facilitate the ministry in the Diocese. We are volunteers who give a nominal 40 days a year to the ministry and not only facilitate the ministry in the Diocese but also represent the Diocese at the Association for Promoting Retreats and the Retreat Association – both national organisations – and at the South Central Regional Training Partnership of Anglican Dioceses. We hold the register of spiritual accompaniers and help those who are seeking accompaniment to find someone who suits them.

We do not see ourselves as ministering in isolation but as part of a greater whole. We hold regular network days or half days for the accompaniers for training and for sharing experiences and expertise and have become aware of the rich tapestry of spiritual gifts not only in spiritual accompaniment. Half the accompaniers also lead quiet days, a quarter lead preached retreats, a similar number lead Ignatian Retreats, of whom 7 are equipped to offer the 19th Annotation in the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. 9 are professionals in the talking therapies and one-fifth are trained in supervision. A handful are drawn to those on the fringes and hard edges of the church. All offer their skills and time to the wider church.

Each year we ask our accompaniers to let us know what new skills they have acquired during the year and we are astounded by the variety. We keep these records and believe that the skills recorded could be of great benefit to parishes. However, we do not as yet have permission from our accompaniers to share their records more widely or publish lists of names and skills and so

must ask parishes to contact us if they need help and we will ask the relevant individuals to respond.

If you would like to know more, are seeking a spiritual accompanier or would like to offer your services as an accompanier please do get in touch with either Jean or Helier. In general, Jean covers people who live in Wiltshire and Helier those who live in Dorset, but these are not hard and fast boundaries. Our contact details are below.

Jean

The Revd Jean Boulton-Reynolds

jean.boulton-reynolds@salisbury.anglican.org

07921 924499

Helier

The Revd Helier Exon

helier.exon@salisbury.anglican.org

07785 117773