

Spiritual Accompaniment in the Diocese of Chester

Guidelines for those offering and receiving this ministry

Revised January 2026
Version 1

Foreword

I am hugely grateful to Wendy and Andrew Rudd for their diligent and prayer-filled oversight of the ministry of Spiritual Accompaniment in the Diocese of Chester. Their wisdom and experience is reflected in these guidelines which are a real help and blessing to us all; I am very grateful to them, and to those who have worked with them, for producing this document.

Companionship as a word has a rich history. Literally meaning '*to break bread with*', it points to the depth of what it means to be with another person made in God's image, and the mutual dynamic of sharing as host and guest that deepens community and fuels life and hope as we chew and digest together.

To exercise Spiritual Accompaniment is to share in the ministry of the Spirit of Christ, and to engage with it is to open ourselves afresh to the possibility of encountering that same Spirit through the gifts of wisdom and understanding, counsel and inward strength, knowledge and true godliness, and delight in the fear of the Lord which the people of God have recognised as the seven particular gifts or qualities of the Spirit of God since at least the time of Isaiah (cf Isaiah chapter 11 – and recited at every confirmation service immediately prior to the laying on of hands).

Thank you for being willing to explore your part within this ministry. My prayer for all of us is that we may be shaped by these guidelines in a manner that makes us more open to receive the Spirit of Christ for ourselves and more confident in enabling others to recognise, receive and respond to the work of that same Spirit in their own lives.

The Right Reverend Sam Corley
Bishop of Stockport
Chair of the Ministry Committee

Key Contacts

Spiritual Accompaniment Network Co-Ordinator

Wendy Rudd

Email via: ministry@chester.anglican.org

Spiritual Accompaniment Learning Together Course Convenor

Andrew Rudd

Email via: ministry@chester.anglican.org

Director of Ministry

Jenny Bridgman

jenny.bridgman@chester.anglican.org

Contents

Foreword	2
Key Contacts	2
Introduction to the Guidelines.....	4
1.1 Spiritual Accompaniment in the Diocese of Chester.....	5
1.2 Accessing Spiritual Accompaniment.....	6
1.3 Choosing a Spiritual Companion	7
2.1 Spiritual Accompaniment: Expectations, Boundaries and Safeguarding	9
2.2 When a Safeguarding Concern Arises in Spiritual Accompaniment.....	11
3.1 Joining the Spiritual Accompaniment Network.....	13
3.2 Role Description: Spiritual Companion (Volunteer)	14
3.4 Spiritual Accompaniment Reflection Template	18
3.5 Supervision in Spiritual Accompaniment	20
3.6 Spiritual Accompaniment Annual Review	22
4.1 Spiritual Accompaniment Learning Together (SALT) Course	23

Introduction to the Guidelines

Spiritual Accompaniment, sometimes known as Spiritual Direction, is a prayerful and attentive practice in which one person accompanies another as they seek to notice and respond to the presence and activity of God in their life. It is a ministry rooted in listening, trust, and discernment, and is offered with care, generosity, and humility.

In the Diocese of Chester, Spiritual Accompaniment is understood as a gift to the whole Church. It is offered freely, held with seriousness, and shaped by a deep commitment to the wellbeing of all involved. Whether you are seeking Spiritual Accompaniment, or offering it as a Spiritual Companion, this ministry is never undertaken lightly or in isolation. It is held within a wider community of practice, formation, supervision, and accountability.

These guidelines are therefore written for both those receiving and those offering Spiritual Accompaniment. They set out how this ministry is understood, accessed, and practised within the Diocese of Chester, and they describe the expectations, boundaries, and safeguarding principles that enable it to be exercised safely and well. Clear agreements, appropriate boundaries, and robust safeguarding are not constraints on this ministry, but essential conditions for trust, freedom, and depth.

Section 1 is relevant to everyone and sets out the nature and purpose of Spiritual Accompaniment.

Section 2 focuses particularly on how this ministry is held safely and accountably, including safeguarding, boundaries, and good practice.

Section 3 is written primarily for those offering Spiritual Accompaniment, although, in the interests of transparency, those receiving this ministry may also find it helpful to read.

Section 4 provides further information for those who are considering training to offer Spiritual Accompaniment.

Together, the sections that follow aim to support a shared understanding of Spiritual Accompaniment as a ministry that is attentive, responsible, and grounded in prayer. They are offered to help ensure that this work is carried out with integrity, care, and faithfulness, so that those who offer and those who receive Spiritual Accompaniment may do so in a way that is life-giving, safe, and open to God's grace.

Jenny Bridgman
Director of Ministry

1.1 Spiritual Accompaniment in the Diocese of Chester

What is Spiritual Accompaniment?

In Spiritual Accompaniment, sometimes called Spiritual Direction, you meet with another person, a Spiritual Companion, to share your story, thoughts and reflections about your life and faith.

A Spiritual Companion listens attentively and offers a safe, prayerful space in which you can reflect on what is happening in your life and seek to recognise the presence and activity of God.

You would normally meet together regularly, typically every 6–12 weeks, for around an hour.

Who is a Spiritual Companion?

A Spiritual Companion is someone who:

- listens deeply and attentively
- helps you reflect on your faith journey
- supports you in reflecting on your relationship with God
- does not seek to solve problems or give advice

Spiritual Companions have received specific training for this ministry, including training in Spiritual Accompaniment and safeguarding. They come from a wide range of ages and Christian traditions, and may be lay or ordained. It is important to find someone with whom you feel comfortable.

Who is Spiritual Accompaniment for?

Spiritual Accompaniment is open to everyone. There are no expectations or special requirements, simply a willingness to share your story with another person and an openness to God.

Is there a charge for Spiritual Accompaniment?

Spiritual Companions in the Diocese of Chester do not charge for this ministry.

How do I find a Spiritual Companion?

The Diocese of Chester holds a list of people who offer Spiritual Accompaniment and can support individuals in choosing one, if that would be helpful.

To request a copy of the list, or to talk through the process of choosing a Spiritual Companion, please email ministry@chester.anglican.org.

1.2 Accessing Spiritual Accompaniment

Who can ask for Spiritual Accompaniment?

Anyone can ask for Spiritual Accompaniment. It is not limited to ordained or licensed ministers, for example. Meeting with another person in this way offers an opportunity to recognise the presence of God in everyday life.

Why do people ask for Spiritual Accompaniment?

Many people seek Spiritual Accompaniment during significant changes in life. This may include experiences of loss, changes in circumstances, retirement, times of doubt or confusion, or the beginning of training for lay or ordained ministry.

Some people will have a clear sense of what they hope for from Spiritual Accompaniment, while others may be less certain. Some may have been asked to explore Spiritual Accompaniment, for example as part of a training or discernment process.

How do you access Spiritual Accompaniment?

The usual process is for individuals to contact the Ministry Team by emailing ministry@chester.anglican.org and requesting the Spiritual Accompaniment Network list. You will then receive the list, which is for personal use only, along with information about Spiritual Accompaniment and guidance on the next steps. In addition, you will be offered the name of someone who can be contacted for support during this process, if that would be helpful.

What happens next?

After reviewing the list, the person seeking accompaniment may contact more than one potential Spiritual Companion for an initial conversation. This may include asking questions such as, *What do you understand Spiritual Accompaniment to be?* before deciding whether to arrange a first meeting.

The first meeting is exploratory and offers an opportunity to get to know one another and to explore whether what is being sought is something the Spiritual Companion can offer. It is common to meet once or twice before deciding whether to continue. Both people need to feel comfortable. It is entirely acceptable to decide not to continue and to explore other options. Support is available if it would be helpful to talk this through or to consider alternatives.

Once an agreement is reached to meet regularly, a Spiritual Accompaniment Agreement (template in the appendix) is completed together to clarify expectations and how the arrangement will work. An annual review is encouraged, to reflect on how the relationship is developing and to consider whether any changes are needed.

The following section offers more detailed guidance to support the process of choosing a Spiritual Companion.

1.3 Choosing a Spiritual Companion

The questions below are offered to support reflection as you consider who might be the right Spiritual Companion for you.

Those included on the diocesan list of Spiritual Companions have received training in listening and Spiritual Accompaniment, have a Spiritual Companion themselves, have completed relevant safeguarding training, and receive supervision. All are committed to maintaining appropriate confidentiality.

What qualities are you looking for?

You may wish to consider some of the following questions:

- Would you prefer a female or male Spiritual Companion, or does this not matter?
- Would you prefer a lay person or someone who is ordained, or does this not matter?
- Would you prefer someone from a similar church tradition, or does this not matter?
- Is it important that a Spiritual Companion is grounded in a particular tradition, or would a more eclectic approach be welcome?
- Does the age of a Spiritual Companion feel significant, or does this not matter?

Spiritual Accompaniment is not the same as friendship. Some social or geographical distance may be helpful. Paths may occasionally cross, and normal recognition and acknowledgement are entirely appropriate.

Practicalities

You may also wish to reflect on some practical considerations:

- How often would you hope to meet, for example every six weeks or every three months?
- How far would you be willing to travel? Would meeting online, using Zoom or a similar platform, be appropriate?

Initial exploration

When the list is received, it can be helpful to read through it initially with general interest. Reading it again more carefully may help to identify one or more people who feel like possible options.

From these possibilities, choose two or three people and contact them, explaining that you are seeking a Spiritual Companion and would welcome an initial conversation. This could take place in person, by telephone, or online. It may be helpful to ask how they understand Spiritual Accompaniment.

Preparing for regular meetings

Spiritual Accompaniment meetings are often most fruitful when some preparation is made. Looking back over recent weeks may be helpful. The following questions may offer a starting point:

- What has been happening in your life?
- How have you been feeling?
- Have there been moments of particular awareness of God's presence? How did those moments feel?
- Have there been any surprises?
- Are there struggles or difficulties? Does God feel absent at times?
- What currently occupies your thoughts?
- What do you most hope for? What do you desire?

2.1 Spiritual Accompaniment: Expectations, Boundaries and Safeguarding

Spiritual Accompaniment is a specialist ministry that requires a careful and attentive approach in order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of everyone involved. It is a ministry of trust and responsibility, grounded in listening, prayer, and reflection.

While Spiritual Accompaniment is usually offered one to one, it is never practised in isolation. It is held within a wider community of practice, accountability, and care. For this reason, Spiritual Accompaniment offered through the Diocese of Chester operates within a clear safeguarding framework and shared expectations.

Those who practise as Spiritual Companions within the Diocese of Chester and who are included on the diocesan list are recruited carefully and supported to offer their ministry safely and consistently. These guidelines seek to ensure clarity, shared understanding, and good practice for all who are engaged in, or accessing, this ministry.

Guidance and shared expectations

The expectations for Spiritual Accompaniment in the Diocese of Chester are set out across the earlier sections of this document:

- What is Spiritual Accompaniment?
- Accessing Spiritual Accompaniment
- Choosing a Spiritual Companion

Together, these sections describe how Spiritual Accompaniment is understood, accessed, and practised, and outline the principles that shape this ministry.

In addition, the Spiritual Accompaniment Agreement, included as an appendix, provides a shared framework for each ongoing Spiritual Accompaniment relationship, clarifying expectations, boundaries, and practical arrangements.

Safeguarding and good practice

All Spiritual Companions included on the diocesan list are required to meet safeguarding and good practice expectations. These include the following:

- Holding a Basic DBS check, noting that many Spiritual Companions will hold an Enhanced DBS by virtue of other roles undertaken within the diocese.
- Completion of Church of England safeguarding training, kept up to date, including:
 - Basic Awareness
 - Foundation
 - Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse
 - or
 - Completion of the Leadership Pathway, for which Basic and Foundation training are prerequisites, alongside Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse.
- Engagement in regular supervision of their ministry.
- Having a Spiritual Companion of their own.

Those who are ordained clergy in the Church of England will additionally need to hold either the Bishop's License, or the Bishop's Permission to Officiate.

These expectations exist to safeguard both those offering and those receiving Spiritual Accompaniment, and to ensure that this ministry is exercised with integrity, care, and accountability.

Further expectations of Spiritual Companions

Those who practise as Spiritual Companions on the diocesan list also agree to the following principles.

- Spiritual Accompaniment offered through the diocesan list is provided free of charge.
- Each new Spiritual Accompaniment relationship is carefully agreed at the outset, with clear expectations and appropriate boundaries.
- A Spiritual Accompaniment Agreement is completed for each ongoing relationship, clarifying how the arrangement will work.
- Spiritual Companions take responsibility for their own safety and the safety of those they accompany, including awareness of potential risks and the ability to assess and manage these appropriately. This may include, for example, holding initial meetings in public spaces and maintaining appropriate boundaries.
- Spiritual Companions are able to respond calmly and professionally to safeguarding or other disclosures, and to follow diocesan safeguarding procedures, working with the Diocesan Safeguarding Team and other appropriate agencies as required.
- Any significant changes in circumstances, such as withdrawing from offering Spiritual Accompaniment, are communicated appropriately.
- Ongoing learning, training, and engagement within the network are seen as part of responsible practice.

A ministry held in community

Spiritual Companions in the Diocese of Chester are part of a wider network that offers support, accountability, and shared learning. Practising this ministry safely and well includes recognising personal limits and seeking guidance or support at an early stage. Supervision is the primary space in which questions, challenges, or concerns are explored. Where additional support is needed, further guidance is available through the diocesan structures outlined elsewhere in this document.

2.2 When a Safeguarding Concern Arises in Spiritual Accompaniment

Safeguarding concerns may arise unexpectedly within Spiritual Accompaniment. They may relate to current or past experiences of harm, abuse, or neglect, and may be shared directly or indirectly, sometimes gradually or tentatively. Because Spiritual Accompaniment is a ministry of trust, attentiveness, and deep listening, it is a context in which such concerns may emerge.

Spiritual Accompaniment is offered with care and confidentiality. However, confidentiality is not absolute. Where a safeguarding concern arises, the safety and wellbeing of those at risk must take priority. This applies to both those receiving and those offering this ministry and is an essential part of practising Spiritual Accompaniment responsibly and faithfully.

When a safeguarding concern arises, all those ministering within the Diocese, including Spiritual Companions, are guided by five clear principles:

Recognise, Respond, Record, Refer, Reflect.

Recognise

A safeguarding concern may be shared explicitly or hinted at indirectly. It may relate to past or present harm, or to situations where there is ongoing risk. Recognising a safeguarding concern does not require certainty or proof. It involves noticing when something raises concern about safety or wellbeing and taking that concern seriously. Spiritual Companions are not expected to investigate, diagnose, or assess risk themselves.

Respond

When a safeguarding concern is shared, the immediate response should be calm, attentive, and respectful. The Spiritual Companion should listen carefully, allow the person to speak in their own words, and acknowledge what has been shared.

Spiritual Companions should not ask leading questions, probe for detail, promise confidentiality, or make assurances about outcomes. Where appropriate, they should explain clearly and gently that the information cannot be kept private, and that steps will need to be taken to ensure safety.

Record

Safeguarding concerns must be recorded promptly and accurately. Records should be factual, using the person's own words as far as possible.

As a minimum, records should note:

- **Who** was involved
- **What** happened or was shared
- **When** it happened or was disclosed
- **Who** the concern has been referred to

Recording is about clarity and responsibility, not interpretation or judgement.

Refer

Safeguarding concerns must be referred without delay, in line with diocesan safeguarding procedures. Spiritual companions are not expected to decide alone whether a concern meets a threshold for action.

Concerns should be shared with the Diocesan Safeguarding Team by emailing safeguarding@chester.anglican.org. Where there is immediate risk of harm, emergency services should be contacted.

Referring a concern is not a failure of Spiritual Accompaniment. It is a necessary and faithful response to risk or harm.

Reflect

Safeguarding concerns can be unsettling and emotionally demanding. Reflection is an important part of practising this ministry safely and well.

For Spiritual Companions, supervision provides a vital space to reflect on what has been shared, to process personal responses, and to receive guidance and support. Reflection does not replace recording or referral but follows them.

For those receiving Spiritual Accompaniment, reflection may include holding difficult spiritual or theological questions that arise in the context of harm or disclosure. Spiritual Accompaniment can offer space for these questions to be named and held prayerfully, alongside appropriate safeguarding action.

What happens if I share something concerning?

If you share something that raises a safeguarding concern, you will be listened to with care and taken seriously. Wherever possible, what happens next will be explained clearly and calmly. Information will only be shared where necessary to ensure safety, and support will be available throughout the process. Safeguarding action is not a judgement or a punishment. It is about care, protection, and responsibility.

Reassurance for Spiritual Companions

You are not expected to handle safeguarding concerns alone. If a concern arises, support and guidance are available and responsibility is shared. Acting promptly, recording clearly, and referring appropriately are part of faithful practice and help to protect both those receiving and those offering Spiritual Accompaniment. Supervision and diocesan safeguarding support exist to ensure that this ministry is exercised with care, integrity, and accountability.

Safeguarding within Spiritual Accompaniment is not separate from the ministry itself, but integral to it. Recognising concerns, responding with care, recording clearly, referring appropriately, and reflecting faithfully are all part of offering this ministry with integrity, accountability, and trust.

3.1 Joining the Spiritual Accompaniment Network

People joining the Spiritual Accompaniment Network may be doing so after offering this ministry in another diocese or following successful completion of the Diocese of Chester Spiritual Accompaniment Learning Together course.

Spiritual Companions included on the diocesan list are part of a supported and accountable network. Before joining the list, individuals are expected to meet the following requirements.

- To have a Spiritual Companion of their own.
- To be willing to take part in regular supervision, normally through a supervision group.
- To be willing to engage with network support days provided by the diocese and to commit to ongoing learning and development.
- To provide evidence of a current DBS check.
- To provide evidence of up-to-date safeguarding training, including Basic and Foundation training, or the Leadership Pathway, and training in recognising domestic abuse.
- To provide details of relevant training in Spiritual Accompaniment.
- To provide details of two appropriate referees, one of which will usually be a church leader.
- To respond promptly to enquiries, even if the answer is “no” or “not at present” (see below).

These expectations reflect the safeguarding principles and good practice outlined earlier in this document and help to ensure that Spiritual Accompaniment offered through the diocesan network is safe, well supported, and exercised with care and integrity.

We hold two lists of those offering Spiritual Accompaniment. The “Primary List” is for those who are accepting referrals. Once a companion is at capacity, they can ask to move to the “Secondary List”, which means they remain on the database but removed from the public list, to avoid disappointment from enquirers.

3.2 Role Description: Spiritual Companion (Volunteer)

Accountable to:

The Diocese of Chester, through the Directors of Ministry and the Spiritual Accompaniment Network Co-ordinator

Key relationships:

Those receiving Spiritual Accompaniment; supervision group; own Spiritual Companion; Spiritual Accompaniment Network

Overall Purpose of the Role

A Spiritual Companion offers a prayerful, attentive, and safe space in which another person is supported to notice and respond to the presence and activity of God in their life.

This ministry is rooted in listening, discernment, and trust. It is not about giving advice or solving problems, but about accompanying another person as they reflect on their faith journey and relationship with God.

Spiritual Companions exercise this ministry within a wider diocesan framework of formation, supervision, safeguarding, and accountability, and as part of a supportive community of practice.

Key Responsibilities

A Spiritual Companion is expected to:

- Meet regularly with those they accompany, typically every 6–12 weeks, offering a prayerful and attentive listening presence
- Create and maintain a safe, respectful, and appropriately boundaried space for Spiritual Accompaniment
- Support those they accompany in reflecting on their experience of God, faith, and life
- Agree clear arrangements at the outset of each relationship, using the Spiritual Accompaniment Agreement
- Practise Spiritual Accompaniment free of charge, in line with diocesan expectations
- Respond promptly to enquiries, even if working at capacity and unable to take on more

Safeguarding, Boundaries, and Accountability

Those offering Spiritual Accompaniment within the Diocese of Chester are required to:

- Hold appropriate DBS clearance and keep safeguarding training up to date
- Practise within diocesan safeguarding policies and procedures, and respond appropriately to any safeguarding concerns
- Participate in regular supervision of their ministry
- Have a Spiritual Companion of their own
- Engage in ongoing learning, reflection, and formation

- Remain connected to the wider Spiritual Accompaniment Network and communicate any significant changes in circumstances

Safeguarding, supervision, and clear boundaries are integral to this ministry and essential conditions for trust, freedom, and depth.

Skills, Qualities, and Experience

A Spiritual Companion will typically demonstrate:

- Training in Spiritual Accompaniment, or equivalent formation recognised by the diocese
- A deep, prayerful attentiveness to God and a reflective awareness of self
- The ability to listen well, with patience, humility, and respect
- Sensitivity to difference and diversity in others' experiences of God
- An understanding of professional boundaries and safeguarding responsibilities
- A willingness to practise this ministry collaboratively and accountably within the diocesan network and frameworks

Date: Jan 2026

There is an Occupational Requirement that the post holder is a practising Christian, in accordance with the Equality Act, 2010.

A Basic DBS Disclosure will be required for the post-holder.

It is not intended that this document be contractual in nature as this is a voluntary role.

3.3 Spiritual Accompaniment Agreement Template

As your Spiritual Companion

- I will listen carefully to whatever you wish to tell me about what is going on in your life.
- I offer a space where you can reflect on your faith journey and relationship with God.
- I may ask questions to clarify.
- I will not give advice or seek to solve problems.
- I will generally avoid talking about my own experiences.

As one offering Spiritual Accompaniment

I have received training in Spiritual Accompaniment.

I keep up to date with safeguarding training, have received appropriate DBS clearance and am committed to on-going learning and development in Spiritual Accompaniment.

I have my own Spiritual Companion and have regular supervision to reflect on my own practice.

Payment

I offer Spiritual Accompaniment as part of the Diocese of Chester and do not charge. However, please feel free to donate to a charity of your choice, if you wish.

Timing

The first two or three sessions are trial sessions, and at any point within or beyond the trial period, either of us can decide not to continue.

I suggest that we meet regularly usually every six to twelve weeks for roughly one hour. You decide how often. I like to arrange the next meeting at the end of our time together.

Each year, I will offer review questions so that we can discuss if each of us would like to continue or if changes are needed.

Cancellation

Circumstances mean that dates may need to be changed or occasionally moved from in-person to Zoom. Both of us should try to give as much notice as possible.

However, if the session needs to be cancelled within a day or two, a phone call, text or WhatsApp message would be helpful.

Confidentiality

I will always maintain complete confidentiality, but I do have legal and ethical duties to involve others

should issues arise which involve serious harm to yourself or another, or the safeguarding of children or adults. In such situations I would usually talk to you about this first.

If we meet in another context I will recognise and engage with you in a professional manner but will not continue a conversation we have had in a previous session.

For reasons of confidentiality, I don't write references.

Your contact information will be held in a confidential and secure place. This information can only be accessed by the Directors of Ministry, and will only be used in extraordinary circumstances, for example the death or incapacitation of your Spiritual Companion.

Date of this agreement (preferably first meeting):

Signatures and Contact details

Person offering Spiritual Accompaniment.
Name, address, phone and email.

Signed:

Person receiving Spiritual Accompaniment.
Name, address, phone and email.

Signed:

Where will we meet?

e.g. home, Zoom, other location? Give address.

Copy for both parties

Please return to one of:

simon.chesters@chester.anglican.org

jenny.bridgman@chester.anglican.org

By completing this form you are confirming that you are consenting to the Diocese of Chester holding and processing your personal data for Spiritual Accompaniment. You can read our full privacy policy on our website: <https://www.chesterdiocese.org/content/privacy-notice>

3.4 Spiritual Accompaniment Reflection Template

A template for reflection after a session (for use by the person offering Spiritual Accompaniment)

Session with [Initials]:

Date:

A sentence to describe how you felt as you prepared for this session

A sentence to describe the beginning

A sentence to describe what you sense was important during the session

A sentence to describe how you feel the session ended

As you reflect on the session do you feel (1, 2, 3 or 4):

1 Very comfortable

2 Reasonably comfortable

3 Not comfortable but OK [what would you take to supervision?]

4 Not comfortable and not OK [you may want to contact your supervision group coordinator]

Consider:

How would you describe your listening? Did you talk too much/too little?

Did what you hear tap into your own story? How did you respond to that?

Did you want to offer advice? How did you handle this?

Overall how do you feel about your role in the session?

Is there anything you would like to talk through in your supervision group?

Next meeting date

Further notes:

3.5 Supervision in Spiritual Accompaniment

What is supervision?

Supervision is an essential part of offering Spiritual Accompaniment safely and well. It provides a structured and reflective space in which Spiritual Companions can look honestly at what is happening for them as they accompany another person. Supervision may take place in a group or, in some circumstances, one to one.

The focus of supervision is not on the detail of another person's story, but on the Spiritual Companion's own experience as they listen and accompany. It attends to what is being stirred, noticed, or held within the companion, so that the ministry offered remains attentive, present, and appropriately boundaried.

In supervision, questions may arise such as:

- Were you fully present and attentive as you listened?
- Did what was shared connect with your own experiences, memories, or emotions, whether positive or difficult?
- Did you feel a desire to tell your own story, to give advice, or to offer solutions?
- Did you notice distraction, discomfort, resistance, or a wish not to hear what was being shared?

Exploring these questions helps Spiritual Companions to recognise how their own experiences, opinions, assumptions, or vulnerabilities may be influencing their listening. Supervision supports the Companion to remain fully present to the other, without being unduly shaped by their own responses or prejudices.

The role of the Spiritual Companion

In Spiritual Accompaniment, the role of the Spiritual Companion is:

- to create a safe and prayerful space for the other
- to listen carefully and deeply
- to ask questions occasionally, and only for clarity
- to be attentive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit
- to support the other in recognising the presence and voice of God in their life

The Spiritual Companion does not bring an agenda to the conversation, but takes their lead from the person who comes to see them. This requires an ongoing awareness of what is happening internally for the companion as they listen, and a commitment to reflective practice.

Reflection after a session

After a session of Spiritual Accompaniment, it is helpful for the Spiritual Companion to allow some time for reflection. This may involve noticing how they are feeling, what has stayed with them, and what they recognise about their own responses.

Structured reflection soon after a session can help to identify what may be important to bring to supervision. Over time, this reflective practice may also reveal patterns in emotional responses, recurring reactions, or areas of particular sensitivity.

The supervision meeting

Confidentiality is maintained at all times in supervision. This means that when situations are described, anonymity is preserved and detail is kept to a minimum.

For example, a Spiritual Companion might say, “I am accompanying someone who is experiencing low mood,” without sharing personal details or narrative. The focus remains on the impact this is having on the companion, rather than on the other person’s story.

Supervision is not a space for telling another person’s story, nor for seeking advice on how to do the ministry “better.” Instead, it is a place to attend to what is happening internally for the Spiritual Companion, and to reflect on how this shapes their presence, listening, and boundaries.

Supervision is not an optional extra. It is an essential part of offering Spiritual Accompaniment responsibly and sustainably. This applies regardless of experience, and reflects a shared commitment to safe practice, accountability, and ongoing formation.

3.6 Spiritual Accompaniment Annual Review

It is good practice for the Spiritual Companion to offer an annual review to those they accompany. This could be at the beginning of each year, or another appropriate time of year. It may be helpful to send out some questions in advance of the session.

Below are some possible questions, although those offering Spiritual Accompaniment will adopt their own style in conducting a review, and are free to approach this however they would like to.

As a starter, we recommend sending out the following text prior to the review meeting:

Dear *Name*

Once a year, we are invited to reflect together on and review our arrangement. It may be helpful to explore the following questions at the start of our next session. Please feel free to adapt these as is most helpful for you, and to raise any other questions, issues or concerns you'd like to discuss.

- How do you feel before, during and after a session of Spiritual Accompaniment?
- What do you find particularly helpful? Is there anything you find unhelpful?
- What topics do you bring to Spiritual Accompaniment, are there areas of your life which you don't take but would like to.
- Are there any changes that you would find helpful in your sessions of Spiritual Accompaniment?
- Do you wish to continue with this Spiritual Accompaniment or is it time for a change?

I look forward to seeing you then.

Name

4.1 Spiritual Accompaniment Learning Together (SALT) Course

The Diocese of Chester offers a course for those who feel called to explore the ministry of Spiritual Accompaniment.

Several courses in Spiritual Accompaniment have taken place in this diocese in recent years. Initiated by the Diocesan Spirituality Group, the current course began in 2023 and continues as a rolling programme. As new participants join the course, others complete their formation and move on to offer this ministry within the diocesan network.

SALT is designed to be flexible and responsive. Because it operates as a rolling programme, it may be possible to begin at a time that is appropriate to individual circumstances.

Course description and duration

The course offers up to two years of formation, although these timeframes are open to discussion. Participants arrive with a wide range of experience, background, and formation. Some may have substantial theological education and ministry experience, while others may be newer to formal study but bring deep life experience and attentiveness to others. Some, including clergy, may have little prior exposure to Spiritual Accompaniment as a distinct practice.

The course seeks to honour this diversity. There is no single pathway that fits everyone. Each participant works with a mentor to design a personalised and appropriately paced learning journey, shaped to address both strengths and areas for development. Throughout the course, attention is given not only to skills and understanding, but also to formation, boundaries, safeguarding, and the safe exercise of this ministry.

Joining the course

Those interested in joining the course are asked to submit an application form, including details of referees. This is followed by an interview or discernment conversation.

The course is open to lay and ordained people who sense a call to offer Spiritual Accompaniment. This may be recognised through experience of listening deeply to others, being trusted with personal stories, or a growing awareness of a call to accompany others prayerfully. Participants are expected to have significant and current experience of receiving Spiritual Accompaniment themselves.

Completion of the SALT course does not automatically guarantee inclusion on the diocesan list of Spiritual Companions. Movement towards offering this ministry within the diocesan network is a discerned process, held with care and prayer, and takes into account formation, readiness, safeguarding requirements, and the ability to practise this ministry safely and responsibly within the diocesan framework.

Before practicing this ministry or joining the list of those available, participants must be up to date with safeguarding training and DBS requirements, in line with diocesan expectations.

Safeguarding is not treated simply as a prerequisite for participation, but as an integral part of formation for this ministry. Throughout the course, safeguarding awareness, boundaries, accountability, and good practice are revisited and deepened.

Before the course begins, participants are also given pre-course questions to take to their own Spiritual Accompaniment, along with required preparatory reading.

Course learning opportunities

Mentoring

Mentoring lies at the heart of the SALT course. Each participant is assigned a mentor, who may meet with individuals or small groups, to help shape and review the learning journey.

Meetings usually take place approximately once a month, either face to face or online. Mentoring provides a space to reflect on learning, practice, formation, and the challenges of offering Spiritual Accompaniment well and safely.

Taught and formational sessions

An initial gathering introduces good practice in Spiritual Accompaniment and establishes shared expectations around boundaries, safeguarding, and reflective practice.

Training days and quiet days for Spiritual Companions in the diocese are planned annually by the Diocesan Spirituality Group, and participants on the SALT course are invited to join these as part of their formation.

In addition, a small number of formation days, specifically for course participants, are offered at Foxhill. These focus on key aspects of the ministry, including attentive listening, discernment, and practice, often using triads of speaker, listener, and observer. Online evening sessions are also offered during each term.

Participants are encouraged to engage with wider learning opportunities beyond the diocese where these will support their formation.

Personal experience of Spiritual Accompaniment

Participants' own experience of receiving Spiritual Accompaniment is a vital part of the course. This relationship offers a lived model of practice and is often the deepest place of formation.

Mentors may suggest themes or questions to bring to these conversations, particularly where issues of boundaries, safeguarding, or discernment arise.

Learning journal

Participants are required to keep a learning journal. This provides a space for reflective integration of learning, experience, reading, and prayer, and may also contribute to any assessment processes where required.

Personal study, reflection, and theological engagement are understood to be essential to the formation of a Spiritual Companion.

Ethos of the course

The SALT course sits within a wider diocesan commitment to ongoing formation and learning. It is community focused, sustainable, and rooted in shared practice.

While the course offers information and skills relevant to Spiritual Accompaniment, its primary emphasis is on the formation of the qualities needed for this ministry. Learning takes place through relationship, reflection, and participation in a wider community of practice.

The community of Spiritual Companions acts as a shared learning environment, enabling good practice to be learned alongside experienced practitioners, within a culture of accountability, care, and safeguarding.

For further information about the SALT course, please contact the course convenor by email: ministry@chester.anglican.org.