

Being a Faith Companion



These handouts are provided as part of the Accompaniment Project provided by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry and the Center for Ministry Development.

Being a Companion

To name a friend as a companion is to quite literally name another as **“the one who brings to you, or who is bread for you.”** It is the highest compliment you can bestow upon a person. This is a person who sustains you.

John Flaherty
Catholic Collective



Reflection

Who is a companion for you, someone who is bread for you? How does this person lead you to Christ?



Young people are more disconnected than ever from their communities

Springtide – Belonging Research – March 2020

- Nearly 40% of young people do not have anyone to talk to
 - Attending religious groups or gatherings doesn't have any affect unless they have a relationship with an adult who cares.
- 20% of young people who attend a religious service at least once a week feel completely alone
- The secret is in the relationships.

https://www.springtideresearch.org/belonging?gclid=Cj0KCQiAs5eCBhCBARIsAEhk4r4ymjuGdI5BCw3W78gM5ITtOBeBI1w0IDzIF98YuKHkpRBmO86TjvsaAiP8EALw_wcB

Be a Faith Companion to Youth

“A good accompanier is a person who is balanced, a listener, a person of faith and prayer, who has the measure of his own weaknesses and frailties. Hence, he knows how to be accepting of the young people he accompanies, without moralizing and without false indulgence. When necessary he also knows how to offer a word of fraternal correction.

The awareness that accompanying is a mission that requires a profound spiritual rootedness will help him to remain free in his dealings with the young people he accompanies: he will respect the outcome of their journey, supporting them with prayer and rejoicing in the fruits that the Spirit produces in those who open their hearts to him, without seeking to impose his own will and his own preferences. Equally he will be capable of placing himself at their service, not taking centre stage or adopting possessive and manipulative attitudes that create dependence rather than freedom in others.”

Final Document for the Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment, # 102

The Synod insisted that “the **family continues to be the principal point of reference** for young people. Children appreciate the love and care of their parents, they give importance to family bonds, and they hope to succeed in forming a family when it is their time. Often, **grandparents are a crucial aid in affection and religious education**: with their wisdom they are a vital link in the relationship between generations”.

Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 2019, # 26

In such places...the person-to-person contact indispensable for passing on the message can happen, something whose place cannot be taken by any pastoral resource or strategy.

Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 2019, # 218

The Qualities of a Mentor

The same young people described to us the qualities they hope to find in a mentor, and they expressed this with much clarity.

“The qualities of such a mentor include:

- being a faithful Christian who engages with the Church and the world; someone who constantly seeks holiness.
- someone who is a confidant without judging.
- Similarly, someone who actively listens to the needs of young people and responds in kind.
- someone deeply loving and self-aware.
- someone who recognizes his or her limits and knows the joys and sorrows of the spiritual journey.
- An especially important quality in mentors is the acknowledgement of their own humanity – the fact that they are human beings who make mistakes: not perfect people but forgiven sinners. Sometimes mentors are put on a pedestal, and when they fall, it may have a devastating impact on young people’s ability to continue to engage with the Church.

Mentors should not lead young people as passive followers, but walk alongside them, allowing them to be active participants in the journey.

They should respect the freedom that comes with a young person’s process of discernment and equip them with tools to do so well.

A mentor should believe wholeheartedly in a young person’s ability to participate in the life of the Church.

A mentor should therefore nurture the seeds of faith in young people, without expecting to immediately see the fruits of the work of the Holy Spirit.

This role is not and cannot be limited to priests and consecrated life, but the laity should also be empowered to take on such a role.

All such mentors should benefit from being well-formed, and engage in ongoing formation”.

Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 2019, # 246

Faith Companion Tasks

Prays

Faith Companions pray for young people in their care.

Connects

Faith Companions connect with young people. This includes initiating contact and finding regular ways to connect for conversation.

Listens

Faith Companions listen to questions, concerns, hopes, wonderings, and experiences.

Empathizes

Faith Companions empathize with young people.

Cares

Faith Companions provide care for young people, providing practical good news for their life situations.

Witnesses

Faith Companions witness to their faith with young people.

Calls

Faith Companions challenge young people to grow and share their gifts; they help young people to hear God's call.

Empathy

Theresa Wiseman's four attributes of empathy:

- ***To be able to see the world as others see it***—This requires putting your own "stuff" aside to see the situation through your loved one's eyes.
- ***To be nonjudgmental***—Judgement of another person's situation discounts the experience and is an attempt to protect ourselves from the pain of the situation.
- ***To understand another person's feelings***—We have to be in touch with our own feelings in order to understand someone else's. Again, this requires putting your own "stuff" aside to focus on your loved one.

- **To communicate your understanding of that person's feelings**—Rather than saying, "At least you..." or "It could be worse..." try, "I've been there, and that really hurts," or (to quote an example from Brown) "It sounds like you are in a hard place now. Tell me more about it."

Brene Brown explains that empathy is a skill that strengthens with practice and encourages people to both give and receive it often. By receiving empathy, not only do we understand how good it feels to be heard and accepted, we also come to better understand the strength and courage it takes to be vulnerable and share that need for empathy in the first place.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/partnering-in-mental-health/201408/bren-brown-empathy-vs-sympathy-0>

Reflection

Recall a faith conversation you've had with a young person.

- *What was hard?*

- *What was easy?*

- *What worked?*

- *What doesn't work?*

Watch Out For

We spend a lot of time talking about the charity model of mentoring, where the young person is this empty vessel, and the adult has all of the answers and will pour that information into the willing vessel. And just how problematic that is and how sometimes, the idea of mentoring has some intense power dynamics that are just about fulfilling or acting out that sort of idea. So, when adults come to a relationship also with the idea that they're receiving, not just giving, and that they are building some sort of scaffolding but they're also learning, thinking about things in a different way, and valuing the context that the student is in, instead of judging the context the student is in, I think those are really different types of relationships.

"Getting Relationships Right" – Search Institute, page 14.

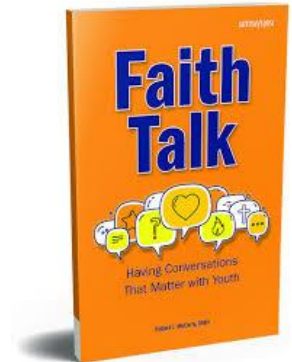
- **Judgement**
- **Adulthood**
- **Coercion**
- **Lecturing**

Create Safe Places

We need to create safe places for doubt, remembering that doubt is a sign that young people are struggling with God questions. We must be confident that this struggle will take them into a deeper relationship with Jesus.

Hold questions as a sacred trust

Creating a space in which such questions can be asked involves being able to 'hold' young people's question as a sacred trust. Rather than declaring what a young person must believe, we need to adopt a position of patient accompaniment, of inviting dialogue, of proposing rather than imposing faith.



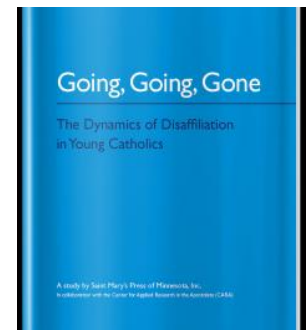
Use only love

We must relinquish any means other than love to persuade young people to the truth of the Gospel and the inherent value of a life lived in service of Christ and neighbor.

Robert J. McCarty, *Faith Talk – Having Conversations that Matter with Youth*. Winona, Minnesota: Saint Mary's Press, 2018, page 42.

Going, Going, Gone – The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics

A study by Saint Mary's Press of Minnesota, Inc. In collaboration with the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA). September 2017



Three Categories

Summarized from pages 13 to 24.

The Injured

- Disruptions in family life
- Witnessing inauthentic or hypocritical expressions of faith
- Feeling forced to participate
- Unanswered prayer



The Drifter

- Lack of connection between faith and life
- Lack of companions on the faith journey
- Families with marginal practice of faith
- Unable to find answers to "so what?"

The Dissenter

- Active resistance to the faith, particularly around social issues like same-sex marriage, abortion, and birth control
- Disillusionment and frustration that questions were never answered or heard
- Difficulty in reconciling faith with science



Reflection

In your role play:

- *What was hard?*
- *What was easy?*
- *What worked?*
- *What doesn't work?*

Empower All of the Contacts

Parents / Aunts / Uncles / Grandparents / Siblings / Cousins

Ministry Leaders / Catechists / Teachers / Coaches / Group leaders

Sponsors / Godparents

Peers

5 to 1 Ratio instead of 1 to 5

We really need a 5 to 1 ratio. Many children's and youth ministries wish they had one teacher for every five kids. But researchers Kara Powell and Chap Clark have found that to see students remain in church into adulthood, there should be five adults for each student.

This is a research-based reversed ratio. Ideally, there should be five people praying for one student by name and showing up at their sporting events throughout the year. It's a paradigm shift. It's not about finding five small group leaders per student, it's about finding five adults who show an interest in a teen.

The key is to motivate and equip parents to create that team around their child. Then the youth pastor can focus on the kids who don't have parents at home who are able to do this. They need to look for teachable moments along with modelling a healthy relationship with Christ.

The Team

Here are some people that can be part of this team

1. **A committed youth leader:** You were expecting this one. This person would connect with the student with the parents' permission every week. They connect at youth meetings and various ways, much like big brother big sisters.
2. **An uncle or an aunt.** Some people have God parents. How can you encourage them to be more involved in a teen's life? Some may be at a distance
3. **A coach.** Coaches can plan a role in a student's life, believing in them and bringing the best out of them.
4. **Small group members.** If you are part of a small group of other parents' natural connections can be made between them and a teen. We have always been blessed with "aunties and uncles" within our church who have shown an interest in our kids.
5. **Sunday School Teachers.** Lilly was such a blessing to our family. She taught our girls and continued to stay in touch after they left her class. She gave them gifts on their birthdays and always went out of her way to connect with them at church
6. **Grandparents** can play a significant role in a teen's life. They may be at a distance, but their visits can be very meaningful if they stay in contact throughout the year.

(Ron Powell, Youth Ministry Unleashed, March 3, 2016)

From: <http://youthministryunleashed.com/how-to-get-the-ratio-right/>

See Also: <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/articles/moving-away-from-the-kid-table>

What do you need next as a parent and/or as a faith companion?

Parents and faith companions need ongoing support for this important and challenging role.

Please circle your response to indicate the importance of each of these on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being low and 5 being high.

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|-------------|
| 1. Getting together with other parents and faith companions for networking and support | | | | | |
| <i>Low</i> | | | | | <i>High</i> |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| | | | | | |
| 2. Having someone to talk to about companioning youth in faith | | | | | |
| <i>Low</i> | | | | | <i>High</i> |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| | | | | | |
| 3. Resources for knowing how to answer tough faith questions and for understanding the adolescent faith journey | | | | | |
| <i>Low</i> | | | | | <i>High</i> |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| | | | | | |
| 4. Training for knowing how to answer tough faith questions and for understanding the adolescent faith journey | | | | | |
| <i>Low</i> | | | | | <i>High</i> |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| | | | | | |
| 5. Resources to help youth with pastoral care issues like anxiety, stress, and depression | | | | | |
| <i>Low</i> | | | | | <i>High</i> |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| | | | | | |
| 6. Training to help youth with pastoral care issues like anxiety, stress, and depression | | | | | |
| <i>Low</i> | | | | | <i>High</i> |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |

Comments / Other support needed: