

## Conversation # 2

# Being a Faith Companion – Leader Outline



By Tom East, Director of the Center for Ministry Development

*These resources are provided as part of the Accompaniment Project from the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry and the Center for Ministry Development.*

This conversation presents a vision for accompanying youth in faith and life. Participants will experience a vision for being a faith companion and will be provided with resources for responding to youth through listening, empathy, witness, and prayer. This process should take 75 to 90 minutes and is intended to be used with parents, Confirmation sponsors, Godparents, family members, ministry leaders, catechists, teachers, coach and all who care for young people.

### Prepare in Advance.

- Set up a prayer space with a cloth, bible, candle and cross.
- Invite someone to be a reader for prayer. The gospel is Luke 24:29-31.
- Duplicate handouts and the “Toolkit for Parents and Faith Companions”, one per person.

### Introduction (7 minutes)

(Slide 1) Introduce yourself, welcome participants and distribute the handouts.

Introduce this conversation:

**Introduce yourself and the workshop. Share the purpose for our gathering:**

Parents and all adults who care about and work with youth have an opportunity to talk with and walk with young people to connect faith and life. Youth today are making big decisions about their lives. They are deciding who to be with, where they are going, and how they will prepare for their future. They are also making decisions about faith. Young people in our parishes need someone to accompany them; they need faith companions. This is a big job! You deserve support and tools to help you make the faith connection. As Jesus walked with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we can accompany youth, listen to their questions, witness to faith, lead them to encounter Jesus, and empower them for mission.

(Slide 2) Begin by sharing a story of accompanying youth in their journey of life and faith. Consider this story:

Kristen, a High Ropes specialist for a Catholic summer camp shared this story. During one of the camp weeks, one of the youth had attention issues and some counselors were nervous about allowing him on the apparatus. Kristen kept her eyes on him. Persons on the apparatus always have two clipped connections to their harness. When they move from one section to the next, they are instructed to keep one harness clipped to the place they are moving from, while they move one clip to the new section. At one point, she noticed that the young man had both clips off while he was moving. She realized that the worst thing to do was to yell and startle him. She walked over to him and told him to clip himself before moving. She let him know what he did and the risk he was taking, then she supervised him in moving one clip at a time.

This story is a lot like the adolescent journey. Youth are making choices about faith and identity and friendships and their future all of the time. Sometimes they unclip their harness. They need us, parents, caring adults, loving communities to guide them (without startling them) to move safely to the next step.

(Slide 3) Continue by sharing about messages to parents:

It can be challenging to accompany youth because we hear a lot of messages that tell us to stay out of it.

Parents have been told by many sources in our media and culture to:

- Back off
- Let the culture and peers raise youth

(Slide 4) Continue by sharing about messages to caring adults:

Caring adults also experience negative feedback. We are told:

- Youth don't like adults
- It's not natural for adults to spend time with youth
- It's unsafe to be a mentor

(Slide 5) Reiterate the need for faith companions:

The truth is: Youth Need Guides in this Journey!

- When youth are isolated, and without caring adults in their life, they are more vulnerable.
- Humans were created to guide each other. It's the nature of family and community.
- **We can care about young people, allow them to grow, and keep them safe.**

(Slide 6) Present a summary of this research:

Springtide Research is a ministry of the Christian Brothers that focuses on listening to youth and helping those who care about young people understand and address

the loneliness and isolation that many youth feel. In their recent research, they reported that nearly 40% of young people don't have anyone to talk to. This number is true whether or not a young person is attending religious groups or gatherings unless youth 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.

(Slide 7) Reiterate the need for faith companions:

Youth's needs are not as obvious or simple now as when they were a baby, toddler, or in grade school.

**But actually, they need us now, more than ever.**

## Opening Prayer and Faith Sharing (15 minutes)

(Slide 8) Read this quotation about being a companion then invite participants to think about someone who is their companion, who is bread for them.

Take a moment of silence to prepare for prayer. Continue with prayer

Let us gather, as we always gather, in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

All: Amen

Generous God, You Care for us, You comfort us.

You are our Bread, You are Our Hope.

Open our eyes to see you.

Open the ear of our hearts to truly hear your word.

Help us to follow you without hesitation.

We ask this as we will continue to listen and pray in Jesus name.

All: Amen

(Slide 9) Ask reader to proclaim Luke 24:29-31.

A reading from the Gospel according to Luke.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

*But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table,*

(Slide 10) reader continues:

*he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.*

(Slide 11) Provide a brief reflection about Christ as our bread and the companions who lead us to him.

(Slide 12) Provide an opportunity for faith sharing:

Share with your partner about someone who is your companion, someone who is bread for you. *How does this person lead you to Christ?*

After several minutes for sharing, invite a few people to share responses with the large group about ways that we are led to Christ by our companions.

(Slide 13) Lead the group in prayer petitions:

Our response is: *Nourish Us, Loving God*

Generous God, you feed us and call us to be bread for each other. We pray now for those who are our companions. Fill their hearts with your peace and give them strength for their journey. For this we pray.

All: *Nourish Us, Loving God*

For what else shall we pray?

After each petition from the community, join in the response:

All: *Nourish Us, Loving God*

(Slide 14) Lead the group in this closing for the opening prayer:

Triune God, as many grains of wheat become one bread, may our communities always strive to become one, as a witness to Your unity. May we continue to accompany others in our mission to serve You—May we be companions who lead others to you. May we be a witness to Your Kingdom. May we become bread for a hungry world.

We ask this prayer in the name of Jesus, our bread.

All: *Amen*

## Presentation about Faith Companionship (25 minutes)

(Slide 15) Ask participants to reflect on this question:

*What do you hope for youth and their faith?*

Collect some responses with the large group.

The vision for accompaniment tells us that the way to achieve this hopes is by surrounding youth with faith companions.

(Slide 16) Continue:

*We are called upon to be a faith companion for youth.*

(Slide 17) Continue with your presentation about accompaniment.

In *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis describes the person-to-person contact of accompaniment as indispensable for passing on the message of faith.

(Slide 18) Ask the group to respond to this question:

What are the qualities of someone who accompanies youth?

Note: If you have a larger group, you may want to consider using a tool such as mentimeter to collect these responses online. [www.mentimeter.com](http://www.mentimeter.com)

(Slide 19) Share this description of an Accompanier and connect to the responses from the group sharing.

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.

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

(Slide 20) Share the ideas on this slide that describe “seeing” young people.

“Seeing” young people happens when we spend time with them, listen to them, and are responsive to their experience and their story. Seeing a young person with empathy allows us to enter their experience without controlling it, without bringing our agenda to it.

(Slide 21) Share this short video about empathy.

What does empathy mean? 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. In this video, she provides a contrast between empathy and sympathy.

(Slide 22) Ask the group what they heard in the video that is important for our role as companions.

Brene Brown mentions the work of Theresa Wiseman, who studied professions that rely on empathy. These are 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."

(Slide 23) Continue in your explanation about empathy, introducing the importance of vulnerability.

Our experiences, including those things that are hard and painful, help us to empathize, not because we try to compete or even share our own experience. The things we've been through help us to try to be with another in their pain and suffering. Our Crosses Become Bridges. When we recall challenging times, we make room in our heart to listen to someone else. This is why we sometimes prefer to give solutions or tell people that "it is not so bad" or that they should "look at the sunny side". Sometimes we don't want to really hear someone else's pain because we have to remember our own. When we truly listen, we are aware of our vulnerability. That is what is so healing!

(Slide 24) Remind the participants about the importance of providing a safe environment.

We always provide a safe place to walk as we accompany.

Be sure to consider your diocesan guidelines for safe environment as you develop your strategies.

For example, if part of the way that we connect with youth as faith companions includes connecting through technology by text or message, we could create a way to provide "public/private space." If you were meeting with a young person, you wouldn't go into an office with locked, solid door. You would meet in a way where others could see you. Similarly, we can bring a "team" approach to our communications with youth. Choose another member of your team to partner with. Get permission from parents to text, email or message. Include the other adult leader in all of your communications. That way, you have each other's back.

(Slide 25) Share these tasks of faith companions.

We accompany young people by being a faith companion. Earlier, we brainstormed the qualities of someone who accompanies youth. These are some of the things we do as faith companions.

### **Prays**

Faith Companions prays for young people in their care.

### **Connects**

Faith Companions connects 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.

(Slide 26) Explain about the importance of prescribing the most needed task for your companion.

As faith companions, we are constantly prescribing the next thing we can do to accompany. We ask ourselves, what does our companion need to hear God's voice and respond? Do they need prayer? (they always need prayer.) What is a way I can connect with them in their life situation? A way to "Go out" to them? What are some patterns of connection we can create? How can I truly listen, understand and strive to empathize? What is the care that they need right now? What is the practical, touchable, tangible Good News they are longing for? How can I be a witness? How can I share a little bit of the story of God in my life? How can I join with God in calling this young person?

(Slide 27) Share a story of being in a faith conversation with a young person and invite the participants to reflect.

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

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

Allow a couple of minutes of silence, then ask participants to share in pairs. Collect responses with the large group and provide some coaching as people share what is hard. After the large group sharing, provide summarizing comments.

(Slide 28) Present these four things to watch for provided by the Search Institute's "Getting Relationships Right"

Watch for these four things as you companion youth:

**Judgement** – Sometimes the most important thing we can do is hold our tongue and stop our finger from wagging.

**Adulthood** – Which is the belief that our adult experience is the answer to every problem. We need to admit that we were never their age because we were never 15 in 2021.

**Coercion** – Sometimes we can be tempted to be coercive with a young person because it is for their own good. We should remember that there is no coercion in the love of God. There is lots of persistence, but no coercion.

**Lecturing** – Someone once asked how to know when you have started to lecture – you will see it in their eyes!

When we fall into one of these, we can name it, and then restart the conversation. For example, “I realize that I started to go into a lecture. I really want to understand your experience. Tell me more about what happened...”

For more information, see “Getting Relationships Right” from the Search Institute, especially pages 12-22. Adulthood is referenced on page 14.

<https://www.search-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Getting-Relationships-Right.pdf>

(Slide 29) Talk about some ideas for parents and caring adults to create space for conversation. Some examples:

- One dad shared that he talks to his teen daughters when they take the dog for a walk.
- Lots of parents share that their best talking time is car time – there is something about facing forward that creates a way to talk.
- One mom shared that when she irons her clothes, she sets the ironing board behind the couch that is facing the TV. For some reason, this is the time that her son opens up. He comes and sits down on the couch and pretends to watch tv when he hears the groan of the ironing board opening. She shared, “I almost scorched my favorite blouse when I ironed it five times just to keep the conversation going!”

(Slide 20) Share about families.

Families can create patterns and regular times to check in about faith. In our family, we did special activities with each of our daughters at Holy Week. It gave me a chance as a parent to talk about faith and find out where my daughters were.

(Slide 31) Present some ideas from *Faith Talk*.

In his book, *Faith Talk*, Dr. Robert McCarty speaks to all of us who are privileged to walk with youth in faith.

### **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.

(Slide 32) Share about the research study, "Going, Going, Gone..."

Dr. McCarty wrote his book in response to the study completed by Saint Mary's Press and the Center for Applied Research on the Apostolate (CARA). This research studied the stories of young adults who chose to disaffiliate from the practice of the Catholic Faith. The average age that a young person made that decision was 13. One way to understand these young people would be looking at three groups: The injured – the drifters, and the dissenters. Oftentimes, these concerns overlap.

(Slide 33) Review some ideas about "the injured."

The injured have experienced things in their life and in their faith life that felt inconsistent with faith in a loving God.

Provide a personal example.

(Slide 34) Share some ideas about "the drifter."

The drifters lack a commitment to faith. They aren't hostile to religion, but no one has answered their questions and they have little experience with people of vibrant faith.

(Slide 35) Share some ideas about "the dissenter."

The dissenter disagrees with church teachings and struggles to reconcile their knowledge of science with the mystery of faith.

(Slide 36) Check in with group:

How does this information match with your experience of youth?

Provide some summarizing comments about the research.

We should assume that the youth we care about are walking around with one or more of these kinds of questions and experiences. These kinds of concerns and

doubts are a natural part of faith maturity. When youth begin to ask questions about the faith, it is a sign of their growth and readiness to accept a more mature faith stance. I've always thought that, instead of being bothered or annoyed by youth questions, we should stop and bless the holy questions when youth begin to share their insights about the faith that we love. In this midst of these questions, they need us more than ever. The faith journey was always intended to be a guided journey. We are privileged to be those guides.

## Role Play and Discussion (15 minutes)

(Slide 37) Explain the Role Playh

I am going to ask us to practice listening and guiding. Please divide into pairs. In your pair, one of you will be the parent or faith companion and one of you will be the youth. Once you have decided, I am going to ask the youth to face the screen and the parents to face away from the screen and face your young person.

Advance animation to share the descriptions (do not read this aloud.)

Youth situations:

- "Sometimes I feel silly praying to God. I don't know that God is really there."
- "Mom and dad are fighting all the time now. I think it might be my fault. I don't know what to do."
- "I really don't like going to youth ministry, or religious education. I feel like I've already heard this stuff. I don't have anything in common with the other youth there."
- "God couldn't care about me now. Not after the things I've done."

Youth – please read over and choose one of these situations to discuss with your parent or faith companion.

Once you've decided, please begin.

Think about the policies, the communities, the practices, the challenges, and tensions.

Reflect on these questions and then work in pairs and write your ideas on the large sticky notes, then post them here on the wall.

Allow several minutes for conversation.

(Slide 38) Collect participant feedback on the role play.

First, I am going to ask reactions from the young people:

- How did that feel?
- What was hard for you?
- What was easy?
- What worked?

- What didn't work?
- If you felt listened to, what was it that your companion did?

For the Faith Companions and parents:

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

(Slide 39) Provide a vision for a community of faith companions.

Imagine engaging a whole community of faith contacts for our young people!  
Consider these possibilities.

(Slide 40) Continue presenting about a community of faith companions.

*Note: This slide has animation to allow you to share one element at a time.*

What if each young person had five faith companions? Five people who were "echoes of faith"?

Present the five examples.

Some of the young people with whom we minister don't have parents that are faith companions. In these situations, we are called to help create the web of support, to create the five people who can walk with youth.

(Slide 41) Provide some summarizing comments and encourage parents and faith companions to keep their eyes out to look for the holy. Provide a personal example.

(Slide 42) Take a few minutes and review the resources the Parent and Faith Companion Toolkit.

(Slide 43) Challenge the participants to consider further support that they may need. Ask participants to take a minute to reflect on this suggestion and write down some ideas. Ask participants to share sample responses with the large group. (question is this in the handouts?)

## Conclusion and Prayer (10 minutes)

(Slide 44) Provide some summarizing comments and review the tasks of faith companions.

We accompany young people by being a faith companion. As we shared earlier, these are some of the things we do as faith companions.

**Prays** - Faith Companions prays for young people in their care.

**Connects** - Faith Companions connects 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.

(Slide 45) Lead the group in this closing prayer.

Take a moment to think about a young person with whom you are a faith companion, (Or with whom you could be a faith companion.)

What does she or he need at this moment?

What is your next step as a faith companion?

What is something you would pray for this young person?

### Sharing

Without sharing personal details, take a moment to share about this young person with a partner at your table.

Invite participants to pray silently.

Now, let's take a moment to pray for these young people.

### Communal Prayer

Join me in prayer:

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

As a way for us to gather our prayers, let us say aloud the names of these youth whom we accompany.

After community shares the names, continue with the closing prayer.

We come before you humbly as echoes of your word of love.

Help us to be a companion, help us to be bread for the young people you entrust to our care.

- Bless us with the discipline to pray for them.
- Bless us with the courage to connect with them.
- Bless us with the humility to listen to them.
- Bless us with the strength of heart to empathize with them.
- Bless us with the compassion to care for them.
- Bless us with the clarity of faith to witness to them.
- Bless us with the love to join our voice to your call to them.

Open the ears of our heart to hear you and to follow you as we walk with young people to your waiting arms.

We ask this in the name of the one who walks with us in our questions, who warms our hearts and who sends us in mission. In Jesus name, we pray.

All: Amen