



# Companion Guidelines

## Introduction

All intercultural workers and candidates will foster a relationship with a companion for the purpose of contributing to their personal and spiritual formation.

The model in which people of faith offer spiritual friendship or nurture has been practiced throughout the centuries and many Christians have benefited and grown in their faith and life. Our need to understand ourselves as whole and soulful people, means we must nurture our whole self. This encompasses our relational self, our physical self, and our spiritual self. This nurturing of whole self enhances our spiritual and personal formation.

In Genesis Chapter 12, we read Abraham's story of such formation. Abraham is transformed as he connects with God who is our ultimate companion. Yet we also need to live within community.

Dr David Benner in his book *Sacred Companions* expresses the essence of Christian spirituality is to follow Christ on a journey of personal transformation. "The Christian spiritual journey is a journey we take with others. Each of us must take our own journey, and for each of us that journey will be unique. But none of us is intended to make that journey alone". He adds, "We cannot make the journey apart from spiritual companions and community".

**The task of a companion is to accompany others on a journey. They help others discover the presence of God in everyday life, and they help others discern the will and leading of the Spirit of God.**

## Biblical Framework

Barnabas had some time with Paul before he sponsored the apostle Paul into the mother church in Jerusalem. The whole congregation were sceptical about the integrity of Paul's conversion. They had been wary of this man who had public murderous intentions for Christians who now claimed to be completely transformed. Their caution had seemed sensible. However, due to his relationship with Paul, Barnabas went out on a limb to sponsor Paul into the church, convincing his sisters and brothers that Paul now remarkably belonged to the people of the Way (Acts 9: 26-27).

The later Antioch church story (Acts 11: 25-30) gives us a window into how Barnabas encouraged and companioned Paul resulting in a growing community of believers. Barnabas went and sought out Paul and together, as partners in ministry they worked to instruct and equip the new congregation in the things of God and in ministry practice.

As we read the story, we see that all of this flows out of the character of Barnabas – *for he was a good man full of the Holy Spirit.* (24). His godliness also led him into a place of gratitude and joy before God as he saw people growing in their focus on Jesus. Note the context. It is in influencing the lives of others and teaching them the things of God that they embody the Spirit of God. Barnabas and Paul taught the theory and the actions that followed. They taught their brothers and sisters to increasingly turn from selfishness to service, from parochialism to a wider worldview of God's work. This companionship contributes to the shaping one of the greatest missionary statesmen's strategies and ministry practices.

When involving themselves in this companionship ministry, Paul and Barnabas followed the examples of Jonathan and David of Old Testament fame. They also imitated the practice of Jesus himself who accompanied the apostles and others throughout his journeys. Jesus listened, taught, and modelled obedience to the Father's agenda for a needy world and thus became an empowering companion for his followers.

**This companion model is ONE aspect of a multifaceted approach to personal and spiritual formation. This is a relational aspect that sits alongside others including team retreat, personal retreat, theological study, devotional study, reading, reflection and fellowship.**

## Wellbeing Plan

The companion relationship is one element of an intercultural worker or candidates wellbeing plan. It addresses both the Personal and Pastoral elements. Please contact the Baptist Mission Australia team if you'd like more information about the whole plan.



## Characteristics of the companion relationship

### It is a place to:

- Discover God's voice and listen to the Spirit of God
- Explore and reflect on God at work in all aspects of everyday life
- Be attentive to God in ministry, themselves, and the world
- Share hopes, struggles, losses, and gains

### What the companion relationship is not

- Directive, problem solving, answer-finding
- Formal counselling or therapy
- Formal coaching
- An avenue for a companion to advocate as a representative for the intercultural worker

## Attributes of a companion

- God-centred, faithful in prayer
- A reflective listener, intuitive
- Someone who empowers and motivates others toward growth
- Wise, a person of integrity
- Non-judgemental
- Holds information respectfully and confidentially (with exceptions if the worker or candidate is at risk or harm to themselves or others)
- Has a capacity for empathy of the intercultural worker as they live and work within the intercultural context (intercultural experience not essential)
- Has a preparedness of a world view which tries to understand an intercultural worker's context
- External from Baptist Mission Australia, their immediate family and their current and past team members.
- Where possible companions will be of the same gender as intercultural workers and candidates
- Companions give their time on a volunteer basis, as a way of contributing to intercultural mission.

## Context

- While Baptist Mission Australia tries to ensure that the process is functioning, the content of the monthly discussions does not need to be disclosed to our leadership.
- If you and the intercultural worker find that major issues of either personal difficulties or work-related situations for the intercultural worker were evident, you will help the intercultural worker to identify steps and address the restoration of relationships or situations.
- If the intercultural worker neglects the companion meetings after four consecutive months, you can let the intercultural worker know that you will inform the Baptist Mission Australia State Leader that the current companion process is not progressing.
- Some of the locations in which intercultural workers live and work are in locations with security issues. This adds another dimension to contend with during online sessions. The choosing of words around the area of faith and mission may need to be coded to keep workers secure in location.

## Process

**Beginning:** During candidacy, the candidate works with their State Leader to identify a suitable companion from their home state. A companion's details are recorded in Baptist Mission Australia's database so we can ensure communication is maintained.

**Maintaining:** You and the candidate or intercultural worker meet monthly for one hour face-to-face (preferable) during candidacy and home assignment periods, and via Skype/WhatsApp/Zoom/Teams during periods on-location.

**Reviewing:** Ideally, you would meet with an intercultural worker for a long-term period, however this is reviewed annually. An initial three-month trial period is advised to determine if both you and the intercultural worker connect relationally and agree to move forward into a longer-term companion relationship. Each December/January, it is recommended that both parties discuss if they are finding the process helpful and ways that it may be improved. It is also an opportunity for both parties to pause or end the relationship if necessary. Review questions include:

1. What are you finding helpful in our sessions?
2. What are you finding unhelpful in our sessions?
3. How is this relationship going? Is there anything needing to be addressed?
4. Are you finding growth and encouragement because of these sessions?
5. In what other ways could growth be promoted?

Baptist Mission Australia will initiate a bi-annual evaluation via a simple survey for the purpose of ascertaining how we can support the companion process.

## Equipping

Baptist Mission Australia facilitates regular webinars on various topics related to the pastoral care of intercultural workers. These are online, ninety-minute, interactive conversations with experienced facilitators. Companions are strongly encouraged to participate in these events to learn and grow in your capacity.

We have some other resources that might help you in your role. These include recordings of past webinars, a recording of a companion and worker discussing how their relationship works, and a list of excellent questions companions can ask workers. Please contact [info@baptistmissionaustralia.org.au](mailto:info@baptistmissionaustralia.org.au) for any of these resources.

If you want to discuss any aspect of the companion process, please contact your Baptist Mission Australia State Leader (details on our website).

## A Personal Reflection

I remember the first time I sat in a companion type relationship. I was initially uncomfortable with the fact that this hour was one way, a time of someone listening intently to what I was saying, feeling, and experiencing. This hour was for me alone but once I dealt with this concept the hour became a sacred space. Here I sat with another who was genuinely interested in the person I was, they understood things that mattered most to me and were interested to know about my walk-in life and in God. The things that were offered to me were the gift of hospitality in the form of their preserved time and energy for me. They gave me their gift of a genuine presence by showing me great attentiveness and setting aside their own things for the moment. Then finally to be given the gift of dialogue with its respect and shared inquiry. This felt deeply whole.

## Thankyou!

We greatly appreciate the investment of your time, energy, skill and heart into the companion process. It is a vital part of building effective intercultural workers and participating in global mission.