

Proposal for a Leadership Lab: “Companions on The Way”, from Darrow Woods, Trinity United, Oakville  
I have been talking with Pete Hoyle about how to offer some of what I have been learning about Spiritual Formation, Spiritual Direction, and Contemplative Prayer, to people in paid accountable ministry. In our most recent conversation, I made a proposal, for which I am now seeking the approval and support of the Halton Presbytery Executive.

I would like to offer a 10 month program for people in ministry. “*Companions on The Way*” would run from September 2012 to June 2013, meeting one Monday each month.

We would gather for 2 ½ hours, at Trinity in Oakville. The first half of each meeting would be a teaching/experiential time about a contemplative prayer practice. There is growing interest in ancient prayer practices, and there are many good resources. I would use two books by Daniel Wolpert, an American Presbyterian: “*Creating a Life with God*”, and “*Leading a Life with God*”. These books offer insight into 12 ancient prayer practices.

After an all-purpose break, the second half of the meeting would be group spiritual direction. In the initial meetings, I would teach a process for group spiritual direction, and establish a covenant about respect, and confidentiality.

Group spiritual direction can be an excellent format for those who are accustomed to being care-givers. It can be a context in which to learn another way to be present with people, and to allow others to be present for them. In spiritual direction we try to pay attention to how God is active in another person’s life. We are not trying to fix people or solve their problems, but to help them see God at work in and with them. We spend more time listening than talking. We also have opportunity to pay attention to God at work in our own lives.

Over the course of ten months, each person would have the opportunity to talk about their spiritual journey, while the other members practice deep listening. Along the way, all group members could benefit from gathering with a shared desire to seek God, to rest in times of silence, to offer intercessory prayer, and to learn about and practice discernment. The process allows time to listen to the person telling their story, to listen to God, and to offer helpful insights.

Members of the “*Companions on the Way*” group would be encouraged to develop/maintain a daily prayer practice, to experiment with journaling, and offer support to a prayer partner in the group. I would be available on a limited basis to meet with members individually, and to refer them to a spiritual director if that seemed helpful. I would commit, as I do with the other people I work with, to pray for the group members.

My experience with group spiritual direction has come through involvement with the Ontario Jubilee Program in Spiritual Formation and Direction. I completed the intensive two year program in 2010. With the blessing and encouragement of the Trinity congregation, I now have a small practice in the ministry of spiritual direction. Most of the directees I meet with are either in active ministry, or in some form of discernment about a call to ministry. (Trinity folks are supportive of this ministry, which informs and deepens my work with them. They also support my using my study leave and allowance to continue to learn about this aspect of ministry.)

I recently accepted an invitation to join the staff of the Ontario Jubilee Program. Beginning with a week-long residential retreat in June I will offer leadership, support and mentoring to new students in the program.

I am a member of Spiritual Directors International, which provides ethical standards, ongoing support and resources for the ministry of Spiritual Direction. I adhere to their guidelines, as well as the ethical standards for the practice of ministry in the United Church of Canada.

I am a member of the Fellowship of United Methodist Spiritual Directors and Retreat Leaders.

I serve on the Listening Ministries Team at Five Oaks, and offer spiritual direction for their Wednesday “Day Away” program, as well as for weekend silent retreats.

I have met regularly with my own spiritual director since 2008, and also meet with a spiritual direction supervisor.

The primary focus of “*Companions on The Way*” would be to encourage colleagues in their own spiritual journey. We don’t have to agree on every point of doctrine to pray with and for each other. My hope would be that walking together in this way would nurture and strengthen us, and help us to offer more authentic leadership in our own unique settings.

There are two things I am seeking from the Halton Presbytery Executive:

1) Endorsement/support of the idea, and help in promoting it to people in ministry in our presbytery, and perhaps in neighbouring presbyteries. Oakville is a reasonably central meeting place for a fairly wide catchment area.

2) Financial support to subsidize the program. I would propose that each person who registers for the program pay \$250.00 to Trinity United Church, but have the option of requesting a “grant” from Halton Presbytery to cover half of that amount. I would be looking for 6-8 registrants to make the program viable, with an upper limit of 10-12. I am asking our presbytery to support this program to a maximum amount of \$1500.00. This investment would show that we consider the spiritual lives of ministers to be a priority.

If the Executive felt able to support “*Companions on the Way*” as a leadership lab for 2012-2013, I could imagine beginning to promote it this spring. It might make sense to talk about it at the 4<sup>th</sup> at 4 in April, when our Conference president will talk about spiritual practices, and then maybe follow up at the 4<sup>th</sup> at 4 in September. I am willing to come to a meeting to talk about this proposal, if that would be helpful.

Peace,

Darrow Woods