

## Integration Thirteen

# ACCOMPANIMENT

“To accompany is to help the person take their own destiny in their hands and allow that their voice is heard.”

- Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez

Oftentimes when people talk about changing the world, they focus on quantifying impact and “solving” problems like poverty. While there is a time and place for that level of strategy, it is not the focus of this exercise. Nor is the goal to “serve” someone in need, *per se*, since this can create a divide between the “service provider” and the “service recipient”. The goal is to be one with the other, to be present in mutual kinship.

For your Integration this week, you are to accompany someone else, preferably someone struggling and/or on the margins of society.

### Example

Our friend Steve Reifenberg teaches [a class on Life Design at Notre Dame](#) that discusses accompaniment in depth. He defines accompaniment as:

“...a partnership with the other, walking together. No matter the duration of the relationship, accompaniment encourages and cares for all dimensions of another person, and in the process recognizes our shared dignity. Building on the centrality of relationships for a happy and healthy life, accompaniment is a valuable concept for engaging constructively with others in a complex world.”

Accompaniment etymologically means “to break bread together”, and we are taking the literal meaning as the crux of this activity. We recommend having meals and discussion with people you wouldn’t normally eat with, such as guests at homeless centers, random people from work, members of different or opposing belief systems, or guests at soup kitchens or similar venues.

We realize that this is more difficult in the time of COVID-19. But try to accompany more broadly and often in the future.

<sup>1</sup> There is some dispute as to the specifics of the story, but the general point holds up.

<sup>2</sup> Brooks, David, *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life*, Random House Publishing Group, Kindle Edition, pg. 51.



“Kinship— not serving the other, but being one with the other. Jesus was not ‘a man for others’; he was one with them. There is a world of difference in that.”

- Fr. Greg Boyle, SJ

## Accompaniment Tips

- **Get Started:** Just get started! It can be intimidating to enter into new spaces, but the only way you will get comfortable with it is by doing it.
- **Mystery over Control:** Paul Farmer talks about the importance of “an element of mystery, of openness, of trust in accompaniment.”<sup>1</sup> You can’t fix or have a plan for everything, but you can approach the relationship with an open mind and heart.
- **The Long Haul:** In addition, Dr. Farmer further explains the breadth of accompaniment in his seminal *Foreign Affairs* article:
  - “The companion, the *accompagneur*, says: ‘I’ll go with you and support you on your journey wherever it leads; I’ll share your fate for a while. And by “a while,” I don’t mean a little while.’ Accompaniment is about sticking with a task until it’s deemed completed, not by the *accompagneur* but by the person being accompanied.”<sup>2</sup>
- **Come and Eat:** Remember that Jesus didn’t tell people to obey or believe in him, but rather asked them to follow him and to eat with him (e.g., Mark 1:17-20 and John 21:12-17).
- **Papal Theology:** Pope Francis describes the concept this way: “Here we enter into the mystery of the human being. In life, God accompanies persons, and we must accompany them, starting from their situation. It is necessary to accompany them with mercy.”<sup>3</sup>
- **Dialogue:** You can extend this practice by additionally having [dialogue](#) and [dynamic gatherings](#) with people from other ethnicities, political beliefs, sexual orientation, etc.

<sup>1</sup> Farmer, Paul, “[Partners in Help](#)”, *Foreign Affairs*, 24 May 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Reifenberg, Steve, “[We Are All Accompagneurs](#)”, *Notre Dame Magazine*, 29 Nov. 2018.

“Christianity...a religion rooted in the most ordinary yet sub-  
versive practice: a dinner table where everyone is welcome,  
where the despised and outcast are honored.”

- Sara Miles

## Scientific Foundations

- **Reduce Prejudice:** While not a panacea, the contact hypothesis argues that intergroup association between majority and minority group members can effectively reduce prejudice and increase understanding and trust.<sup>4</sup>
- **Building Trust:** Eating meals with other people and groups increases their trust and cooperation.<sup>5</sup>
- **Stay Proximate:** Accompaniment is closely related to Bryan Stevenson’s insistence on staying “proximate” to the issues you want to solve.<sup>6</sup>
- **Catholic Social Teaching:** Accompaniment also correlates with the Catholic Social Teaching principle of subsidiarity in the insistence of being as close to a problem as possible.<sup>7</sup>
- **Further Research:** To learn more about the theological and analytical foundations of accompaniment, explore Paul Farmer and Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez’s [collaborative work on accompaniment](#).<sup>8</sup>

“Jesus doesn’t lose any sleep that we  
will forget that the Eucharist is sa-  
cred. He is anxious that we might  
forget that it’s ordinary, that it’s  
a meal shared among friends, and  
that’s the Incarnation...”

- Fr. Greg Boyle, SJ

<sup>4</sup> Hopper, Elizabeth, “[What Is the Contact Hypothesis in Psychology?](#),” *ThoughtCo*, 26 Oct. 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Vedantam, Shankar, “[Why Eating The Same Food Increases People’s Trust And Cooperation](#),” *NPR*, 2 Feb. 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Stevenson, Bryan, and Krista Tippett, “[Bryan Stevenson - Love Is the Motive](#),” *The On Being Project*, 4 Dec. 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Kammer, S.J., Fred, “[Catholic Social Thought \(CST\) and Subsidiarity](#),” *JustSouth Quarterly*, Jesuit Social Research Institute, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Farmer, Paul, “[In the Company of the Poor](#)”: *Book by Paul Farmer and Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez*, *Partners In Health*, 11 Nov. 2013.