

SPIRITUAL COMPANIONING WITH WORKING PEOPLE

An innovative program called “Spiritual Companioning for Working People” has been developed to care for the spirits of working people. The program will be led by Richard Arnold.

The demands of work, together with other issues of life, can often strain the spirit of working people. Sometimes people struggle to find meaning in their work or they become distracted from their values and true calling whilst at work. Spiritual Companioning recognizes that all people live out of a spiritual reality as they develop relationships with the mystery of life and the realities encountered on life’s journey.

Spiritual Companioning involves one person, a “guide”, journeying with another, a “traveler”, in an intentional relationship as companions. The word “companion” comes from the Latin “sharing bread”, so as companions there is sharing in the “stuff of life”. Therefore spiritual companioning has a whole- of-life approach in which all matters of life can be shared: for example family issues, crises of faith, the search for meaning and vocation, and work issues.

Spiritual Companioning has the unique gift of holding and supporting people in all the challenges and joys of everyday life, and to help people discover meaning and purpose in their lives whatever their circumstances. The role of the guide is to be fully present for the traveler and create a safe space in which a traveler can become open to the whole of life, and discern the movement of the life-spirit in their lives.

In the first year of the program, participants will meet individually with a guide for one hour each month. They may be congregational members working in the wider community (for example engineers, builders, farmers, nurses, teachers, assembly line workers, etc), UnitingCare agency workers, or other interested people in the workplace. The program will be evaluated after one year, using reflections from the guide and travelers, and these will become part of an action-reflection-action process leading to further development of the program.

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I am an ordained minister in the Uniting Church. In 2012 I became part of the Creative Ministries Network team to lead the “Spiritual Companioning with Working People” program. Prior to this, I have worked in positions within agencies and congregations of the church which have brought me into relationships with many people ‘at the margins’ of our society.

In fourteen years of ordained ministry I have been involved in outreach activities with congregations and agencies in Brunswick, Werribee, Footscray and Broadmeadows. I have worked with asylum seekers, residents of boarding houses, clients of an emergency relief service, and lonely and homeless people living ‘on the street’. In these activities I have sought to encourage the people themselves to use their gifts and ‘own’ the resulting services.

Prior to being employed by the church I worked in a local government community development program for five years. For seventeen years before this I worked for a number of manufacturing and utilities industries as a chemist and occupational health specialist.

I have developed a deep interest in supporting people in the workplace as they seek to balance many competing demands, as well as discovering their true calling in life and experiencing fulfillment in their work. I hope to contribute to this support through the Spiritual Companioning program.