

# Intentional Accompaniment

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*How to walk with disciples as they grow closer to Christ*



Catholic Christian  
O U T R E A C H

# What is Intentional Accompaniment?

The main goal of the ministry of a Multiplying Missionary is to make a new generation of Multiplying Missionaries. This is accomplished through Intentional Accompaniment, which is defined by three modes of action: to Witness, Proclaim, and Multiply.

At the heart of all Intentional Accompaniment is relationships of trust. As St. Paul wrote, “So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:8). Without genuine relationships of trust, we risk our Intentional Accompaniment becoming a task to be completed, and we run the risk of the people we wish to accompany becoming goals to be accomplished rather than brothers and sisters with transcendent dignity. Relationships of trust are necessary if we are to be granted the privilege of having influence in the life of someone else, and through this influence be granted the opportunity to Intentionally Accompany them on their pilgrimage to the Father. It is from this basis that we can start our exploration of Intentional Accompaniment.

## The Art of Accompaniment

*“In a culture paradoxically suffering from anonymity and at the same time obsessed with the details of other people’s lives ... the Church must look more closely and sympathetically at others whenever necessary. In our world, ordained ministers and other pastoral workers can make present the fragrance of Christ’s closeness and his personal gaze. The Church will have to initiate everyone — priests, religious, laity — into this “art of accompaniment,” which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Ex 3:5).”*  
*Evangelii Gaudium, 169*

Accompaniment is walking along side another on their pilgrimage to the Father. The missionary cannot walk this pilgrimage for anyone. Each person must walk their own pilgrimage. However, the missionary can act as a guide along the way. Like a mountain climbing guide, the missionary has been through this journey before, and continues their own personal journey. Through the wisdom gleaned from their own guides and from experience, the missionary can help others navigate their pilgrimage to their final destination, which is Christ himself. The missionary has not reached the final destination of eternal communion with God, nor have they achieved perfection in their own pilgrimage. They are, however, further along the path and that means they can guide new pilgrims who are just starting their pilgrimage. As the missionary continues further down the pilgrimage route, they can continue to direct pilgrims along the paths they already have travelled.

The goal is not for the pilgrim to follow the missionary. We are not building our own disciples. We are building disciples of Christ. Christ himself is the leader on the pilgrimage of discipleship, and, therefore, the missionary must always keep the pilgrim focused on Christ. As *Evangelii Gaudium* states, “spiritual accompaniment must lead others ever closer to God, in whom we attain true freedom” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 170).

## Why Intentional?

In one of his post-resurrection appearances, Jesus commissioned his Apostles to share in his ministry to the world: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). The Church therefore shares in Christ’s ministry to reconcile the world to the Father. It is Jesus who has accomplished this reconciliation through the Paschal Mystery, but he invites us to be a part of the mission to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:18-21). One of the ways we help accomplish this mission is through accompaniment. However, our accompaniment should not be aimless. When Jesus gives the Apostles the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), he specifically commands for them to **make** disciples. To make something requires an intention and a plan. This is why we refer to our ministry specifically as **Intentional Accompaniment**. Of course, one cannot make a disciple

on their own, it is a work of the Holy Spirit in both the individual and the missionary. However, the Multiplying Missionary cannot simply walk alongside someone and hope they become a disciple of Christ. There must be an intentional plan of how to make a disciple, and, ultimately, a Multiplying Missionary.

Consider a gardening analogy: A seed has all the potential it needs to grow into what is meant to be, it just needs the right environment. A gardener intentionally plants the seed in fertile ground, and in a place where it will get the right mix of sun and water. He or she takes the time to pick out the weeds around the plant to ensure its growth. The gardeners continually evaluate what can be done to provide an optimal environment for that plant to thrive. However, the gardener does not actually grow the seed; he or she simply fosters the right environment for the seed to get the right access to the sun, water, and nutrients that it needs to grow. In a similar way, our role as Multiplying Missionaries is to intentionally create the right environment for people to grow into Multiplying Missionaries. Through the Holy Spirit, each baptised individual already has all the potential to become a Multiplying Missionary, and the Holy Spirit will be the one who gives the needed graces to activate this potential. The missionary's job is to support the work of the Holy Spirit by intentionally fostering an optimal environment for growth, and we do this in the context of a relationship of Intentional Accompaniment.

## Prophetic Listening

This plan does not strictly belong to us. It has been said many times that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization (Blessed Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 75; St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 21; cf. Vatican II, *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*), but Blessed Pope Paul VI also exhorted the missionary to “to pray without ceasing to the Holy Spirit with faith and fervor and to let themselves prudently be guided by Him as the decisive inspirer of their plans, their initiatives and their evangelizing activity” (Blessed Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 75). This is the basis of what we call “Prophetic Listening.” While we do make plans for those we accompany, it is Christ who is ultimately forming the disciple. He is the Master, so we should let Him tell us the plan!

Prophetic Listening starts with listening to the one we are accompanying and to the Holy Spirit. We pay attention to the way the person we are accompanying describes their spiritual state and their attitudes towards God, faith, and the world, looking for clues and insights into where they are in their pilgrimage to the Lord. As we listen and seek to understand, we also listen to insights the Holy Spirit gives us. We trust that God wants to tell us how to best accompany this person. If the Lord has asked us to participate in the mission to make disciples, then it makes sense that he would let us in on his plan to make it happen. Our prayer for the one we are accompanying, therefore, becomes more than just intercession on their behalf. As we pray for them, we ask the Lord for specific direction in how he wants us to lead them. In prayer, we can ask the Lord about those we are accompanying, “What is the next step on their pilgrimage,” and, “How can I help them take that step?” As the Holy Spirit gives us insight into the next step for our friend, we can begin prayerfully plan to help make this next step a reality. This might sound like an over-spiritualization of accompaniment, but it doesn't need to be complicated. Sometimes, the next step will be very natural or even seem obvious given what has happened before. This is usually a good sign. The key is that we do not make our own plan and ask the Lord to bless it, but that we come to the Lord and give him permission to lead the way. In this way, we place ourselves under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as the “decisive inspirer” of the plans for our accompaniment.

## The Framework of Intentional Accompaniment

The goal of Intentional Accompaniment is to help people encounter Jesus Christ and assist their growth in holiness and mission. However, like any good first responder, before we can help anyone, we must gauge the situation. It would be unwise for a paramedic to treat someone's high blood pressure before dealing with a gaping wound. Similarly, it is unproductive for missionaries to train someone to share the Gospel if this person has not accepted Jesus as his or her saviour. We must gauge someone's spiritual situation in order to be able to help foster their spiritual growth.

CCO has developed the Framework of Intentional Accompaniment as a tool to help missionaries gauge where people are in their journey towards becoming a Multiplying Missionary. This illustration is like a map in a national park indicating where we are along a trail with a “you are here” sign. Through the help of the Holy Spirit and the more experienced missionaries around us, we can gauge at what stage someone might be.

## The Three Modes of Action

Intentional Accompaniment is the constant mindset of the Multiplying Missionary. They recognize that no matter how far along their pilgrimage someone might be, the call of the missionary is to intentionally lead the pilgrim towards their destination, walking alongside them as a leader, guide, and support. As *Evangelii Gaudium* states, “Today more than ever we need men and women who, on the basis of their experience of accompanying others, are familiar with processes which call for prudence, understanding, patience and docility to the Spirit, so that they can protect the sheep from wolves who would scatter the flock” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 171). This is the role of the Multiplying Missionary.

The Modes of Action are the part of Intentional Accompaniment that are under the missionary’s control. We cannot control the growth of any other person, nor can we generate curiosity or openness to the faith. But we can control the ways we approach our relationship with others. While every person’s pilgrimage is unique, we can generally classify the approach of the Missionary into three Modes of Action: to Witness, Proclaim, or Multiply. These distinctions are important. For the Missionary to know how to form a plan, they must know what it is they are trying to achieve. The goals of Witnessing, Proclaiming, and Multiplying are different, and so it is important to identify those goals and gauge which of the goals best applies to the person you are accompanying.

### Witness: Building the Relationship

The foundation of all Intentional Accompaniment is relationship. Without this solid foundation of personal investment in others, it is unlikely that we will be granted the privilege of having influence in the life of another. The work of Witnessing is, put simply, to make friends! It is to put in the personal investment of developing relationships of trust that can develop into relationships of influence. These relationships must be genuine. We should never befriend someone simply with the ulterior motive to evangelize. The missionary should always be seeking to build loving, genuine relationships that are based in the personal care for another. Love and care for others should be the basis for our evangelization. We know that the most loving thing that we can do for another is to introduce them to Christ, who can bring them ultimate fulfillment and happiness in this life and the next. Our love for others should therefore compel us to want to share the Gospel with them.

Our Witnessing is therefore two-fold. We want to build solid friendships with others for their own sake, first and foremost. As these relationships develop, we should always be mindful to be offering an inviting and contagious witness to the faith that might help our friend begin to develop a curiosity towards the faith. It is important to note the speed at which these relationships will grow will vary. It may take five minutes or five years to establish a relationship of trust. Prophetic Listening will help us to determine how quickly the relationship is progressing. Witnessing is, therefore, most identified with the Trust and Curiosity stages of the Framework. Witnessing also will be very important in the Openness stage, but there begins to be a crossover with Proclamation. We should constantly be witnessing to people at all stages of Intentional Accompaniment, but it is our primary way of relating to people in Trust and Curiosity.

### Proclaim: Introducing Jesus

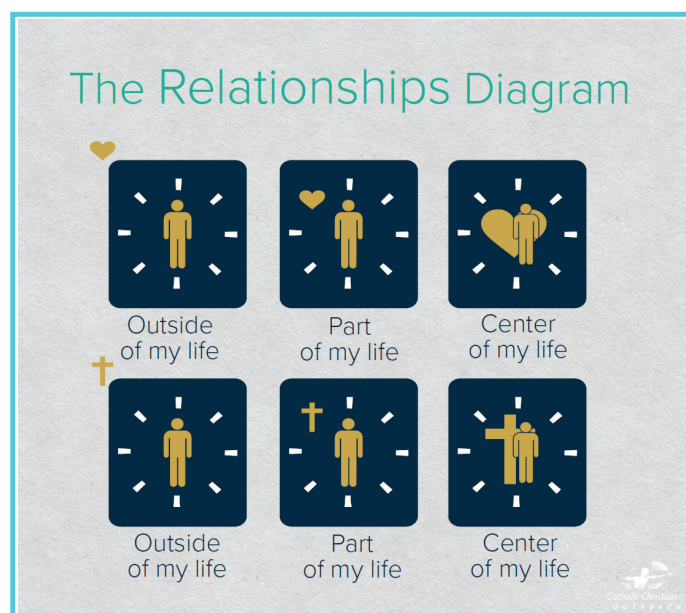
As we build relationships, whether quickly or over extended periods of time, we should expect that our witness of life will provide opportunities for the proclamation of the *kerygma*. We should expect these opportunities to arise as we see individuals grow from spiritual curiosity to a spiritual openness and seeking. As this shift occurs, the individual we are accompanying will begin to demonstrate more openness to spiritual matters, and may even

show interest in small levels of commitment in this search, such as joining a CCO *Discovery Faith Study* or an Alpha program. These, and many others, can be indicators that we have established a relationship of trust that gives us the opportunity to proclaim the Gospel in a clear and simple way. Our primary mode of action then shifts to an active proclamation of the Gospel. Here, we will intentionally seek opportunities to have spiritual conversations with the intention of introducing others to the person of Jesus through the proclamation of the *kerygma*.

## The Tipping Point: Decision

The tipping point between Proclaiming and Multiplying is the decision to embrace a Christ-centred life. When a person chooses to become a disciple, they have begun the process of discipleship: their pilgrimage of following Christ, growing in maturity in holiness and mission. A disciple is “one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another” (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). To accept the doctrine of another requires a deliberate decision, you cannot be forced to accept the doctrine of another. Therefore, you cannot become a disciple by accident. It is always a choice. Since it is a choice, we can work to pinpoint when this choice was made. The choice may have been in a particular moment, or it may have been over a period of time. But if one is a disciple, there is a choice that was made at some point along the way that brought that person to the decision to begin living as a disciple.

It is important to note that the Missionary cannot decide whether or not someone else has made a decision to become a disciple of Christ. It is up to them to determine if they have or have not made that commitment. This is where CCO’s Relationship Diagram can be a very useful tool to help people self-assess whether or not they have made a decision to follow Christ. Using the Relationships Diagram, the person can identify on their own what image best represents their relationship with Christ. When an individual chooses the Christ-centred relationship, then they are indicating that they have, in some way, made a decision to become a disciple. This decision may be built upon a strong foundation or a weak one, but the desire to choose a relationship with Christ is the first step along the pilgrimage of discipleship. Their response to the question of which image best represents their relationship with Christ indicates the lens with which the missionary should approach this relationship. If their response is not the Christ-centred image, then the Mode of Action is still Proclamation because the Missionary should continue to encourage the person towards making a decision to become a disciple of Christ. If their response is the Christ-centred image, then the Mode of Action is Multiplication. As our friend is now beginning the pilgrimage of discipleship, we can start to help them grow in Holiness and Mission, the two essential pillars of a Multiplying Missionary.



The *Relationships Diagram* helps us to identify how we are living our relationship with Jesus. It also helps us to understand the kind of relationship he desires to have with us: a relationship of friendship, intimacy, commitment, fidelity, mercy and love.

The top three images represent levels of commitment in three kinds of human relationships. The dashes around the person represent various aspects of their life such as: career, school, family, recreation, etc. The first image represents someone who is single; there is no romantic relationship in their life. The second image represents someone who is dating. This relationship is a part of their life, but commitment is limited. The third image represents someone who is married. There is an intimate relationship and a permanent mutual commitment.

Let's compare this to our relationship with God. The bottom three images represent levels of commitment in a relationship with God. The first image represents someone who does not have a relationship with Jesus. As far as this person is concerned, Jesus is outside their life. The second image represents someone who acknowledges Jesus as a part of their life, but has not completely committed to him. Jesus is just one aspect of their life among many others. The third image represents a Christ-centred relationship. This relationship is primary and central, influencing all decisions and every aspect of their life.

Two key questions can accompany the explanation of this diagram. The response to these questions will help you understand where the person you are accompanying would gauge their relationship with God.

*Which image best represents your relationship with God?*

*Which image would you like to have represent your relationship with God?*

## Multiply: Forming a Missionary

Multiplication can be summarized as the invitation to Missionary Formation. Once someone has decided to become a disciple of Christ, they now are called to walk the road of discipleship. All disciples of Christ are called to grow in holiness (the call to become more conformed to Christ in our heart, mind, soul, and actions) and to the mission of evangelization. The role of the Multiplying Missionary is to multiply the attitudes, skills, and knowledge they have acquired in their discipleship pilgrimage with those they are accompanying. They are intentionally accompanying disciples on their pilgrimage towards maturity in holiness and mission.

The goal of Multiplication is to build a disciple into one who is ready to make disciples themselves. It follows St. Paul's ministry model from 2 Timothy 2:2: "And what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well." The Framework of Intentional Accompaniment outlines the three stages for both holiness and mission that disciples will progress through in their journey towards maturity as a disciple.

## Holiness

**Child:** The people at this stage have responded favourably to the Gospel message: They have accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour and have made a decision to place Jesus at the centre of their life. This commitment is still at its early stage. Therefore they often need some help from the missionary in orienting the different aspects of their life toward Christ. They are beginning to develop a regular commitment to prayer and the sacraments.

**Adolescent:** Adolescents in holiness are more knowledgeable about the faith and are less dependent on the guidance and accountability of others to make good decisions and grow in their prayer life. They are better able to articulate what God is doing in their life and are committed to a regular practice of daily prayer and to the sacramental life.

**Adult:** Adults in the spiritual life are those who have a deep and intimate relationship with God. People at this stage have taken responsibility for their own spiritual growth. They seek the sacraments and personal prayer time without much accountability. Adults are taking initiative to grow deeper in their relationship with God.

## Mission

**Witnessing:** They are witnessing to their faith in both words and deeds. Essentially, they are growing in openness about their faith but are not yet equipped to invite people to respond to the Gospel message in any concrete way. At this stage, the missionary helps them articulate their own experience of faith and how to start spiritual conversations with friends, family, and co-workers as appropriate.



**Proclaiming:** They are inviting people to respond to the invitation to put Jesus at the centre of their lives. These people are seeking opportunities to proclaim the Gospel in a clear and simple way through their words. The missionary is there to accompany them in gaining the attitude, skills, and knowledge necessary to do this well.

**Multiplication:** They are no longer just evangelizing. They understand the importance of passing on the message and the mission. They are not only teaching others about Jesus, but are equipping and commissioning others to evangelize. More and more, those we are accompanying become peers in the ministry, but as missionaries we can't forget to equip them for the all important task of multiplication: teaching them how to do for others what was done for them.

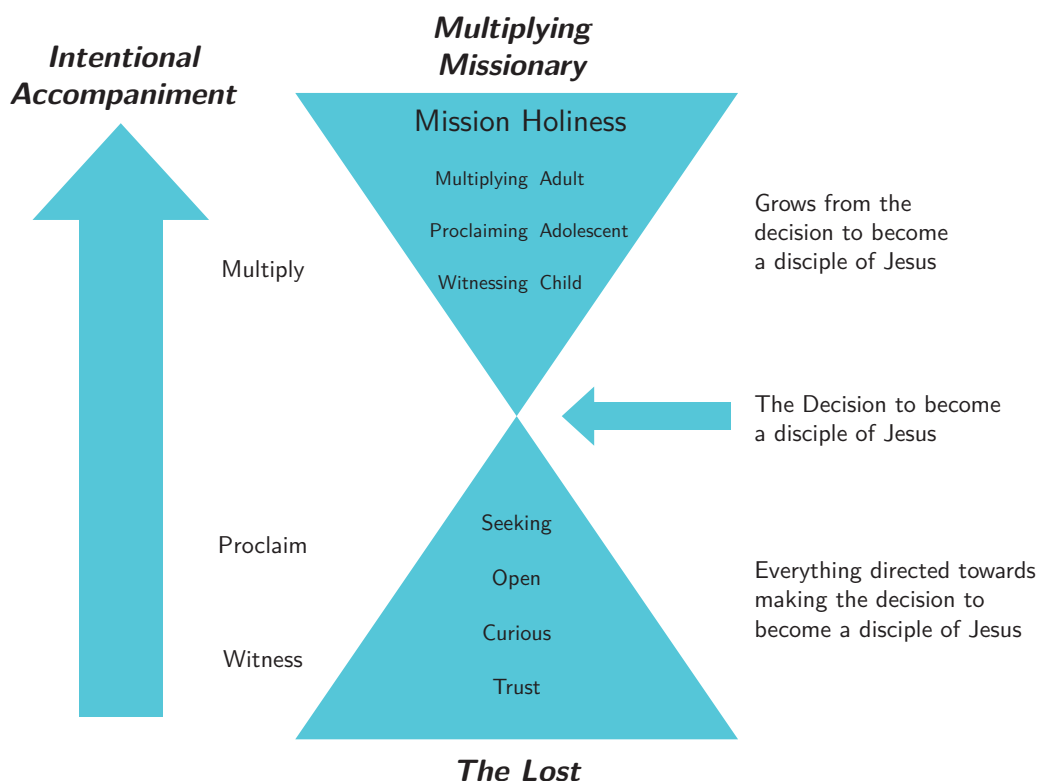
The culmination of the Multiplication relationship is when the disciple becomes a Multiplying Missionary themselves. The pilgrimage of discipleship is not yet done, as the Multiplying Missionary will never cease growing in discipleship until they reach their eternal destiny in heaven. In the meantime, the new Multiplying Missionary now is prepared to join the ministry of Intentional Accompaniment as a Multiplying Missionary; seeking to lead others to choose to become a disciple of Christ and ultimately to become a Multiplying Missionary.

## The Hourglass

The Framework of Intentional Accompaniment has the distinctive shape of an hourglass with two key elements:

**First**, at the centre of the diagram, is the Decision Point where an individual makes a decision to become a disciple of Jesus. This decision is the tipping point of the whole Framework.

**Second**, since the decision to become a disciple is the tipping point, we can see that all our actions in Witnessing and Proclaiming flow towards the point of decision, and all our multiplying efforts after a decision has been made flow from the decision to become a disciple.



# The Stages of the Framework

The Framework diagram draws heavily from CCO's 30 years experience in evangelization and accompaniment, as well as from the "Five Thresholds of Conversion" outlined in Sherry Weddell's foundational book, *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus*<sup>1</sup>. The missionary cannot control where someone's relationship with Christ is, nor can they move someone forward to a new stage. We can, however, observe and gauge where others are and help to foster the environment for them to progress in their movement towards becoming a disciple of Christ or growing in maturity as a disciple. The following will offer a brief explanation of the stages outlined in the Framework.

Starting from the bottom of the Framework, we see The Lost, those who have yet to meet Christ and choose to become his disciple. They may be searching for God or they may have no interest in faith. What they have in common is that they have yet to make a personal decision to embrace a relationship with Christ. Having a Heart for the Lost is a crucial mindset for any missionary. Our desire should be for all people to have the opportunity to encounter Christ and become his disciple.

The first stage in any person's journey to faith begins with trust. The Lost often do not have any relationship of trust with the Church, and so finding even one individual within the Church whom they can trust is a step in the right direction. We must make the personal investment in relationships so we can be that person for them. As stated earlier, our accompaniment relationships should be characterized by St. Paul's relationships with the Thessalonians: "So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us" (1 Thessalonians 2:8). If we hope to someday share the Gospel with someone, we must first earn the right to be heard, and that starts with building genuine relationships of trust.

Once trust is established, the remaining stages now can take place. An individual's progress through these stages is not necessarily going to be linear, nor is there any expected timeline. Each person's progress will happen in its own time as the person opens themselves to respond to God's promptings in their life. The missionary's job is to accompany them along the way. While much could be said about each stage, for the purposes of this document, we will offer a short summary of each:

**Curiosity:** People are naturally curious, but this specifically refers to when they start to show some curiosity about questions of faith. As Sherry Weddell puts it, their curiosity is still casual and passive and not yet open to change in their life. They have questions, but are not yet on a sustained spiritual journey (see Weddell, p. 149). The missionary's role at this threshold is to match their level of curiosity in our answers and the questions we ask in return, listening prophetically so that we neither overwhelm them with too much information, nor hold them back when they're ready for more.

**Openness:** When curiosity moves from asking questions to being open to the potential of making changes in one's life, we enter into the Openness stage. They have not yet made the decision to make changes, but their curiosity has led them to the point where they are open to consider changes. Here we can expect questions about the faith to move from isolated questions to a more sustained interest in growing in understanding. This can be a great time to invite people to consider joining a small group such as CCO's *Discovery Faith Study* or an Alpha program.

**Seeking:** Seeking moves from an openness to change to asking the more pointed question: do I want to become a disciple of Jesus? The seeker is now actively wrestling with the prospect of making a decision to place Jesus at the centre of his or her life. Providing a variety of opportunities to respond to the Gospel is often helpful in making the transition from Seeker to Intentional Disciple.

(For more detailed explanations of these stages, see chapters 5-8 of Weddell's *Forming Intentional Disciples*).

<sup>1</sup> Sherry A. Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Inc., 2012).



## Summary:

Intentional Accompaniment is the framework in which all ministry is accomplished. Whether it is in meeting someone for the first time, or a long-time member of your ministry who is seeking to grow in maturity, the mindset of a Multiplying Missionary is to walk alongside another person as they walk on their pilgrimage towards the relationship with God that they have been created for. The Missionary not only walks alongside, but acts as a guide who has an intentional plan to bring a person to conversion or, after conversion, to an ever-deepening experience of discipleship, which leads to maturity in holiness and mission. This is the call that Jesus gave to all his disciples at the Ascension when he commanded his disciples to go out and “make disciples of all nations.”

Robert Coleman provides an apt summary of the importance of this ministry of Intentional Accompaniment:

“His [Jesus] whole evangelistic strategy — indeed, the fulfillment of his very purpose for coming into the world, dying on the cross, and rising from the grave — depended on the faithfulness of his chosen disciples to this task. It did not matter how small the group was to start with so long as they reproduced and taught their disciples to reproduce. This was the way his Church was to win — through the dedicated lives of those who knew the Savior so well that his Spirit and method constrained them to tell others. As simple as it may seem, this was the way the gospel would conquer. He had no other plan.” (Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 2nd Edition, p. 102)

For more information about Intentional Accompaniment, contact Catholic Christian Outreach at [www.cco.ca/parish](http://www.cco.ca/parish).

# intentional accompaniment

## **WALKING ALONGSIDE DISCIPLES AS THEY GROW CLOSER TO CHRIST.**

When expedition groups travel ambitious terrain, they often invite local guides. Missionaries are like these elite mountaineers, showing disciples the way. Disciples still climb the mountain themselves; with God's grace, they make their own progress. But they have the assurance of a confident and caring expert on the journey.

### **INTENTIONALLY INVEST IN THE RELATIONSHIP.**

Missionaries are clear about their intentions, and the disciple can freely choose to participate in the relationship.

### **SPEND TIME TOGETHER.**

Can be casual—as simple as getting coffee, playing sports, or serving together in ministry.

### **MINISTER THROUGH SCRIPTURE.**

The missionary diligently presents Scripture, knowing God may use it to speak to the disciple.

*Evangelii Gaudium 174:*  
The sacred Scriptures are the very source of evangelization.

**THE JOURNEY BEGINS WITH CONVERSION.**

### **Qualities of an elite mountaineering guide (and of missionaries):**

**1**

Can persevere and thrive even in difficult conditions.

**2**

Has the abilities, skills and knowledge to traverse the terrain.

**3**

Experience in travelling this path; they know the way.

# accompaniment

“ The Church will have to initiate everyone—priests, religious and laity—into this ‘art of accompaniment’ which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Ex 3:5). ”

—POPE FRANCIS,  
*EVANGELII GAUDIUM* 169

## PROPHETIC LISTENING.

The missionary carefully listens to the Lord for direction on how to lead this particular disciple.

## MODEL A CHRIST-CENTRED LIFE.

## KEEP THE PATH THROUGH ENCOURAGEMENT AND ADMONISHMENT.

## ACTIVELY DEMONSTRATE MINISTRY.

*Evangelii Gaudium* 173:  
Genuine spiritual accompaniment always begins and flourishes in the context of service to the mission of evangelization. Paul's relationship with Timothy and Titus provides an example of this accompaniment and formation which takes place in the midst of apostolic activity. ... Missionary disciples accompany missionary disciples.

**“THE PACE OF THIS ACCOMPANIMENT MUST BE STEADY AND REASSURING, REFLECTING OUR CLOSENESS AND OUR COMPASSIONATE GAZE WHICH ALSO HEALS, LIBERATES AND ENCOURAGES GROWTH IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.”**

—Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 169



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