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INTRODUCTION

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” How do we put Jesus’ command into action today? Pope Francis tells us that we can do this by “sharing the lives of all, listening to their concerns, helping them materially and spiritually in their needs, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep; arm in arm with others.” The Holy Father gives this a name: the art of accompaniment. He urgently calls on all Catholic parishes everywhere to lead the world in this way of walking with others. You—and your parish—are part of this holy and exciting movement to bring the Good News of Jesus’ love and salvation to all people in our world.

Here in these pages you will find some reflections and prayers to say as you travel this journey. Many begin with some papal wisdom and a passage from Scripture for you to reflect on, and they end with ideas for sharing and action. Most were created to be said in community with others, but the COVID-19 pandemic has changed so much of how we worship and work together, so feel free to adapt them to your situation. You might pray them in an online group, or you can say them by yourself. May these and all of your prayers bring you closer to Christ on your journey of accompaniment.

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The Art of Accompaniment

DRAW US CLOSER TO YOU

READ (SILENTLY, OR CHOOSE SOMEONE TO READ ALOUD)

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ. ♦ **POPE FRANCIS, THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL**

Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni,” which means Teacher. Jesus said to her, “Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary of Magdala went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and what he told her. ♦ **JOHN 20:16–18**

REFLECT SILENTLY

Place yourself at the empty tomb with Mary of Magdala. Hear your name being called. Turn, as Mary does. See Jesus before you. What does he say? What does he want you to do?

PRAY TOGETHER

LEADER: Jesus, we often feel alone, unsure, and afraid. Speak to us, Lord, that we might turn to you in friendship, love, and complete trust, as Mary of Magdala did. Draw us close to you as we seek you in prayer, listen to your holy word, and sit at your table to receive your Body and Blood in the Eucharist. Help us see that we are never alone, but together—walking with all of our brothers and sisters—in your divine, merciful heart.

ALL: My Father and your Father; our Father.

LEADER: Rabbouni, Teacher, help us to be aware of our own sinfulness. Help us “stop holding on” to all that keeps us from you: our selfish desires; our prejudices and biases; the false images we have built of ourselves, of others, and of you.

ALL: My Father and your Father; our Father. *(Pause to reflect on what Jesus asks you to let go of right now.)*

LEADER: God of endless mercy, open our hearts to your immeasurable love. Let our experience of your forgiveness and love move us to greater love and mercy for others every day.

ALL: My Father and your Father; our Father. *(Pause to reflect on the many ways God has shown you mercy and love.)*

LEADER: Risen Lord, send us out to meet your disciples, as you sent Mary. Walk with us on the way. Give us ears to listen with your compassion, voices to speak your healing words, hands to do your works of mercy, feet to go where you send us, and hearts to seek and trust you always.

ALL: My Father and your Father; our Father. Amen.

SHARE

What does it mean for you that the risen Jesus says, “My Father and your Father...my God and your God”? What do these words mean for your parish?

Becoming an Accompanying Parish

GUIDE US AS WE LEARN, DECIDE,
AND PLAN TOGETHER

READ (SILENTLY, OR CHOOSE SOMEONE TO READ ALOUD)

It is the whole Church that receives the mission to evangelize, and the work of each individual member is important for the whole.

♦ **POPE PAUL VI, EVANGELII NUNTIANDI**

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.

Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need.

Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. ♦ **ACTS 2:42-47**

REFLECT SILENTLY

Read the account again. Which word or phrase describing the early Church community stands out to you? Reflect on what it means for your parish community right now.

PRAY TOGETHER

LEADER: Holy Spirit of God, help our parish embrace the work of accompanying all people. Start us on this path by giving us your wisdom and knowledge. Help us devote time and prayer to all that you teach us—through the Church and through the successors of the Apostles. Help us discover your presence and action here in our own time and place.

ALL: Make us your light for the world.

LEADER: Help us decide—together—to be a parish of accompaniment, recognizing that we do so in a thousand decisions every day—decisions to love, forgive, listen, be merciful, and lead others to you.

ALL: Make us your light for the world.

LEADER: Renew us each day with increased patience and watchful love as we make plans to be a parish of accompaniment. Give us an attitude of welcome, so that everyone—whether outside on the margins, or inside these doors—knows that this parish is their home, our home, and your home.

ALL: Make us your light for the world. Amen.

SHARE

If you are not familiar with the apostolic exhortations *The Joy of the Gospel* and *The Joy of Love*, begin reading them together as a community of faith.