

Scenario 1:

Staughton Lynd and his wife Alice are in their 80s and have spent years working in prisons, unions, the black freedom movement, and for peace.

He says that in all his years of experience, accompaniment or companioning is the most effective way to do social change.

Companioning, Staughton says, is more than allies helping people oppressed by the systems and policies of society. Instead, it is two people exploring the way forward together.¹

Two experts (or equals) walking together in a loving, respectful, trusting relationship.

He says companioning is a challenge for many of us, because it requires we unlearn our patterns of dominance - our patterns of taking charge and getting things done. It insists that we learn to struggle together with someone.²

Take 2 minutes of silence to write what it would look like if you did these things as you make visits to the detention center.

Each person takes 3 minutes to describe for your group the experience you imagine.

Together, summarize your group's insight (in 5 or 6 sentences) to share with the larger group.

¹ Lynd, Staughton. 2012. *Companioning: Pathways to Social Change*, 6.

² Todd, Julie. 2012. *Evaluating Violence and (Non)violence: A Critical, Practical Theology of Social Change*, Chapter 6: 16-17.

Scenario 2:

Dr. Vincent Harding is a historian who was a speech writer and confidante of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He recalls the Mississippi Summer of 1964.

It was important then, he says, for the volunteers who were coming from the north to realize that they were coming with a very real burden of white, class and academic superiority.

They were coming to the black community of Mississippi which was by and large working class.

They had to find out how to recognize what they were bringing with them - which was an attitude of how much they'd be able to offer and give and do - and then they had to find a way to transpose that into a spirit of coming and giving thanks for the gift they were going to receive.

Dr. Harding says the fundamental model for the social change work we all do together now looks like listening more than speaking. Partnering instead of helping. People, holding onto and being held by people. Singing together. Being absolutely befuddled together.

All of these actions are what grows out of us simply being on the path together - walking hand in hand.

Take 2 minutes of silence to write what it would look like if you did these things as you make visits to the detention center.
Each person takes 3 minutes to describe for your group the experience you imagine.

Together, summarize your group's insight (in 5 or 6 sentences) to share with the larger group.

Scenario 3

Rev. John Fife was co-founder of the Sanctuary Movement in the 1980s and more recently No More Deaths hosted in the Unitarian Universalist church in Tucson. He advises that our work for social change must make the traditionally marginalized the teacher. Otherwise, our dominance prevails. Dominance is the way we've learned to operate. We make decisions, take charge. It's natural. Our practice needs to be: "I don't know anything. I'm educated, but really don't know what I'm doing here. Would you be willing to help me?"

Rev. Fife says that the oppressed need to see us as their sibling. The surest mark of an authentic life is if the oppressed show up at your funeral. Would that happen for you?

Because if so, then you are companioning.

Rev. John Fife says that if you are doing committee work in the community, make sure you are following the voices of the oppressed. Don't serve on any action committee in the community that isn't led by those voices. And listen. Always listen.

We can come back to our church committees to share our experiences - and there we can set the agenda and use our language. But when we're companioning, we don't set the agenda.

The people oppressed by our society do.

He also says companioning has to lead to disrupting the systems of oppression. It has to move to raising our voices, resisting, confronting, challenging - together. But always following the voice of the oppressed.

Take 2 minutes of silence to write what it would look like if you did these things as you make visits to the detention center.

Each person takes 3 minutes to describe for your group the experience you imagine. Together, summarize your group's insight (in 5 or 6 sentences) to share with the larger group.

Scenario 4:

Two undocumented immigrants who are social activists say what they want from their solidarity partners:

Don't take over when we're trying to get something done. Don't act out of control at a rally. Be someone we can trust. Be someone who just wants to get to know us. We want to be viewed as experts. And we need the help of partners to get access to decision makers, do some of the dirty work like fund raising, donate, and rally their people. The most important thing is the person wants to be in it for the long haul. And be our friends.

Take 2 minutes of silence to write what it would look like if you did these things as part of this detention center visitation program.

Each person takes 3 minutes to describe for your group the experience you imagine. Together, summarize your group's insight (in 5 or 6 sentences) to share with the larger group.

Tenets of Companionship for Social Change

1. Being in communion with traditionally marginalized people (showing up), and staying in the relationships for the long haul.
2. Remembering that the liberation of everyone and everything is inherently connected, and together, we are on a journey toward it
3. Walking together in covenant - as equals with marginalized people in a loving, respectful, trusting relationship
4. Struggling together
5. Contemplating the gifts you are going to receive when companionship, instead of how you will give, help, teach, tell, or fix
6. Unlearning your patterns of dominance like taking charge, leading, making decisions, etc.
7. Asking and listening (The practice becomes: “I don’t know anything. I’m educated, but really don’t know what I’m doing here. Would you be willing to help me?”)
8. Moving beyond asking to acting
9. Getting out of your comfort zone (materially, emotionally, and physically)
10. Disrupting the systems and structures of oppression - in community with the marginalized, following their leadership

*The Latin roots of “companionship” are:
to be together (“com”) in eating bread (“panis”), face to face.*

Derived from academic and pastoral care resource on the topic along with interviews by Kelly Dignan with Dr. Vincent Harding, Staughton Lynd, Rev. John Fife, Rev. Dr. Thandeka, Rev. Julie Todd, PhD, and companions in the struggle.