

Part 3

Accompaniment

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Foregrounding the voices of concrete people from dispossessed communities requires a preliminary methodological step: accompaniment. In many ways, this is just a different name for the practices lifted up in Part 2—practices of befriending, living with, listening to, and dwelling among the poor. As with many of Farmer’s conceptual innovations, the genesis of his notion of accompaniment was simultaneously theoretical and practical. Early in its history, Partners In Health’s Haitian partner, Zanmi Lasante, began naming local community health workers *accompagnateurs*. Part 3 explores the concept of accompaniment as a theoretical and praxical hallmark of Farmer’s work. Closely allied to accompaniment is his concept of pragmatic solidarity. In addition to explicating the concept itself, these chapters explore key components of the practice—local listening, empowerment, and a companionship with the poor which allows us to learn from them.

The section opens with Chapter Nine, “From *Amoris Laetitia* to Ebola: Accompaniment as a Model for Medical and Pastoral Care.” Here James Keenan, SJ, details both Farmer’s theoretical account of accompaniment as well as his concrete practice thereof—in contexts as diverse as Boston and the Kissi Triangle (a region in West Africa). Linking it to insights in the work of Pope Francis, particularly in *Amoris Laetitia*, he advocates for accompaniment as a key practice for both theology and ecclesial ministry.

Among the arguments that are often leveled against the praxis of accompaniment—be it in health care, theology, or policy—is that it is hard to quantify or to measure outcomes, it is often inefficient, open-ended, and can be time consuming. And time is, as we know, money. Brian Volck takes on these assumptions in Chapter Ten, “Wasting Time with the World’s Poor: Theological and Scriptural Foundations for Paul Farmer’s Praxis of Accompaniment.” Drawing on his own experience as a physician

working in the US, Honduras, and the Navajo Nation, Volck homes in on, again, the economic assumptions that have such a stranglehold on our lives and relationships as well as the alternative theological economics embodied in Farmer's witness. Echoing Guardado's observation that in US departments of theology, fieldwork is often considered to be "a waste of time," Farmer challenges us, Volck argues, to practically reimagine of our sense of time and value, letting it be shaped not by a "world of efficiency" but rather by a "world of love" (of charity theologically—not capitalistically—construed). And, as noted in the previous section, such a praxis of accompaniment is epistemological, teaching us (again echoing Lutz) "that the poor must be privileged partners and active participants in any work of liberation." This is not only what real solidarity looks like; it also helps relativize our own over-vaunted self-understandings—it is kenosis. And it is scriptural and sacramental. For accompaniment requires bodily presence, real presence: "For Catholics today, this discernment entails the Real Presence both in the Eucharist and in the gathered Body of Christ, particularly in the poor. Then and now, that the privileged fail to discern Christ's body arises from divisions and factions that keep rich and poor apart."

Finally, in Chapter Eleven, "Practicing Local Listening with Village Midwives in Sudan: A Case Study for Theological Ethics," Meghan Clark offers an extended exemplar of the practice of accompaniment. Drawing on her experience with Helping Babies Breathe Sudan, a training for a national program to train village midwives or traditional birth attendants in basic newborn care, Clark homes in on and details a central aspect of accompaniment already mentioned in this volume: local listening. She demonstrates what local listening, or prioritizing the voices of those excluded from access and thus from outcomes, looks like in practice. How does it look? Not always easy, sometimes hilarious, facing friction due to the social divides identified by Lutz, challenging assumptions, extraordinarily empowering, noetically essential, practically fruitful. In the end she poses a challenge to theology: what would it look like and take to center the voices of the excluded by practicing local listening as a

foundation for our moral and theological analysis? It's very hard to "listen enough." Farmer acknowledges how difficult it is to listen, "especially when the subject at hand is social suffering." But he sees listening as necessary for the development of health care and for creating partnerships in which the poor are agents of transformation.