

Formed by the Spirit

The Newsletter of the Southwark Diocesan Spiritual Formation Group

Opportunities, events, resources
and articles on prayer and spirituality

Issue 4: April 2010



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What's On?

Courses on prayer and spirituality

Friendship as a way to God

Monday May 10th and 17th, 7pm to 9pm in Trinity House, Led by Sheila Grimwood, Through the writings of Aelred of Rievaulx, a 12th century Cistercian monk, we look at friendship both as a model and a means to loving God. Aelred speaks of our relationship with God and God's relationship with us in the very human terms of 'embrace'. Friends are valued as 'guardians' or 'keepers' of our love and friendship itself as an expression of the presence of Christ among us.

The Conversational Scripture: Using the Bible in Prayer

Thursdays June 17th, 24th and July 1st, 7.30pm to 9pm in Trinity House, led by Richard Lane,

There is a long and creative tradition of using the bible as food for prayer. Within the bible itself we witness the people of God remembering their story of salvation. The monastic tradition of prayer centred on meditation upon the psalms. In a later age Ignatius Loyola encouraged use of the imagination in prayer to enter into the Christ story and let it speak to our own. These sessions will explore these and other ways in which we converse with God through the Scriptures.

The Heart in Pilgrimage: Meeting God through the poetry of Gerard Manley

Hopkins and George Herbert: Tuesday June 8th and Tuesday June 15th, 10am to 1pm in Trinity House, led by Chris Chapman. These sessions will explore how poetry can draw us into contemplation of God, who is revealed, yet hidden, within creation and within the dark and light of our experience.

Show me the way I should go: Tools for making life choices

Mondays September 20th and 27th, 7pm to 9pm in Trinity House

- How do learn to become more aware of the presence and guidance of God in the midst of daily life?
- How do we discern the Spirit when we have to make choices about the work we'll do, the focus of our ministry, our relationships or our priorities?
- What is 'God's will', and how much freedom does God give us to make our own choices?

God-Search: Explorations in Christian Spirituality

Thursdays, 7pm to 9pm: 23rd September, 30th September, October 7, October 14, October 21, November 4 and November 11 in St. Matthew's House, Croydon [Close to East Croydon Station] From a Christian perspective spirituality has to do with the work of the Spirit within us, drawing us deeper into the life of God and leading us to act with God in the world. These sessions introduce some key dimensions of our search for God, and God's search for us, for example:

- How and why do we experience God?
- What is the shape of the spiritual journey? What do we do, what does God do?
- The inter-relationship of prayer, action and transformation
- The place of mystery within our experience of God.

To book for any of these courses contact: Chris Chapman, 020 79399474, chris.chapman@southwark.anglican.org

The cost of 2–3 session courses is £10; the 7 session God–Search course £20, with concessions for those who are unwaged.

St. Alphege Southwark: A dedicated space for prayer and spiritual renewal.

St. Alphege church in Southwark is beginning a new life as a dedicated space for prayer and spiritual exploration. From July 3rd, there will be a **quiet morning**, open to all, held on the first Saturday of each month. The days will begin at 10am and finish at 1pm and you are welcome to attend for all or part of this time. To mark this new beginning for St. Alphege, the July 3rd day will end with a Eucharist at 12 noon.

On Wednesday evenings from early July there will be weekly time of contemplative prayer from 6.30pm to 7.30pm with tea and coffee available from 6pm onwards

St Alphege will also be available for use by churches and related groups for activities related to prayer and spiritual exploration. St Alphege is easily accessible from Southwark tube station on the Jubilee Line. More details will follow, but if you want to know more contact Chris Chapman.

Quiet days at Wychcroft: Days to be refreshed in the presence of God

- Wednesday June 23rd, 10am to 4 pm
- Saturday November 20th, 10am to 4pm

Wychcroft is the Retreat and Conference Centre for the Diocese of Southwark, set in beautiful countryside near Bletchingley, Redhill, Surrey.

During each day there will be input, a variety of prayer exercises and free time to rest in God. The cost for each day is £25 which includes lunch. Spaces are limited so early booking is advised. Contact: Chris Chapman for more details and to book.

chris.chapman@southwark.anglican.org

Community of the Sisters of the Church, St Michael's Convent, Ham

Quiet Garden Days on Tuesday 27 April, 18 May, 22 June and 27 July. Come and enjoy the peaceful gardens from 10am – 4pm. Suggested donation £4

Vocations Weekend 4 – 6 June – led by Sr Sue and team. A weekend of consideration of God's calling to the religious life; through discussion, prayer and participation in daily worship, and in the life of the community. No donation required

Labyrinth Quiet Day on Saturday 12 June – led by Revd Catherine Wood. A day spent praying with the Labyrinth in the convent garden and learning the history of this mystical journey. £15

Painting and Prayer Day on Friday 2 July – led by Scilla Ansell and Sr Teresa Mary. Using art as therapy, expressing feelings and communicating with God. Art materials provided. £15

Further information: tel 020 8940 8711 or email hospitality@sistersofthechurch.org.uk

MA in Christian Spirituality, Heythrop College, University of London

An opportunity to examine the insights of Christian spiritual traditions and to develop the ability to evaluate the key ideas and forms of Christian spirituality. The MA can be taken on a full time or part time basis. An appropriate first degree is normally required. For details see: www.heythrop.ac.uk

A recommendation for a retreat location comes from one reader: 'Hilfield

Franciscan Friary in Dorset 'we felt loved, welcomed and allowed to do / not do as we wished. They have both catering and catered accommodation...the surrounding area and the

friary grounds are beautiful, with cream teas and the coast just a short drive away'. Their website is <http://www.hilfieldproject.co.uk>

For those living in South East London **Aylesford Friary**, near Maidstone in Kent is easily accessible by car. They offer regular days with a suggested £10 donation, for example:

- 24th April: **Words of the Spirit**: A practical workshop exploring a variety of Christian poets and expressing our own spirituality in poetry.
- 1st May: **Introducing Centering Prayer** – A method from the Cloud of Unknowing to help us respond more fully to God in prayer and life.
- 2nd May: **The False Self**: : A day to look at tools to remove obstacles on the spiritual journey.
- 15th May: **Quiet Day in the Gatehouse**: An experience of silent prayer and space in a safe environment, embracing Lectio Divina, spiritual reading & silent attentiveness
- 5th June: **Talking with God**: Exploring a variety of ways of prayer

The full programme is on their website www.thefriars.org.uk click 'Retreats', then click 'Retreat Programme 2010'.

The Art and Spirituality Network hosts regular events in the London area, for example:

- Saturday 5th June, 10am to 4pm, **Art and Prayer**: an exploration of how artistic creation can give expression to our spiritual life, at St. Laurence's Church Catford, led by Sara MacVane and Sarah Liebert
- Saturday 3rd July, 10.30am to 4.30pm, **Acorns and Oaks**: An all age workshop on a summer's day at Deen City Farm, Merton Abbey, London SW19 2RR led by Marianne Zeck and Alison Wallace

Website: <http://www.artandspirituality.net> email: artandspirituality@gmail.com

Some useful websites:

The Retreat Association: www.retreats.org.uk: details of retreat houses and their programmes, plus information on different ways of prayer

The Retreat Association also produce an annual publication 'Retreats' giving listings of facilities offered by retreat houses and programmes of events [see website for how to obtain].

The Quiet Garden Trust: outdoor spaces available for prayerful reflection, open on particular days or by arrangement: www.quietgarden.co.uk.

For example: Mortlake Quiet Garden is hosting A Walk of Discovery led by Caroline Edelin on Saturday July 10th, The afternoon begins with tea/coffee at 1.30pm, then led meditation at 2pm, time for personal reflection, final worship and tea to finish by 4pm. For details go to www.mortlakeparish.org.uk click on Activities, then Mortlake Quiet Gardens.

There are also regular Quiet Garden Days at St. Michael's Convent, Ham Common [see page 3 for details]

Resources for Daily Prayer:

www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/dailyprayer

Daily Common Worship morning and evening prayer online

<http://Sacredspace.ie>

Daily guided reflection drawing on the Ignatian spiritual tradition

www.pray-as-you-go.org

Daily audio-guided prayer for your MP3 player [or by computer]

Have you found other websites that have been helpful?

On praying for others

To intercede is to 'go between' – to hold another person or situation before God in prayer. In Mark's Gospel when the friends of a paralysed man find they can't physically reach Jesus because of the crowd that surrounds him they strip the roof in the house where Jesus is and lower him down into his presence. They can't know exactly what Jesus will do, but they love their friend and place their trust in Jesus' compassionate care. The prayer of intercession is something like this – we consciously bring a person, a place, a situation into God's presence. Prayer of this kind is not an attempt to manipulate God into doing what we think is right; rather we open ourselves, and the one we pray for to the work of the life-giving Spirit of God. Aligning ourselves with God in this way we will sometimes find ourselves moved to become part of the answer to our prayer: to pray for another is to be willing to also act on their behalf. Prayer asks us: 'in all that I see happening about me in my church, workplace, family, neighbourhood, nation, world.... how am I to respond?' We look at life with fresh eyes and can then engage more purposefully, with greater direction.

Why is it some of our prayers feel 'answered' and some seem unheard, the situation we have prayed for unchanged? There is mystery here that is often hard to make sense of. It helps to remember how God is: God does not answer suffering by removing it from the world but by transforming it through his own costly presence. In the life, death and resurrection of Christ all our experiences, past and future are held and are being made new, whether or not we perceive this. It is in the power of this dying and rising that we make our prayer and set ourselves to work with God in the world.

So how are we to pray for others?

The Spirit prays within: Prayer is not just something we do – it is something the Spirit of God does in us and through us – therefore we can ask God to help us to pray and not worry too much about having the right words:

'In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will' [Romans 8:26 –27]

Remember who we pray to: We do not seek to win things from a mean, uncaring God. This prayer is about an act of trust, choosing to place the ones we care for into the presence of God who cares most deeply.

Using symbols for our prayer:

- Light a candle as a physical sign of your prayer. Place it by a cross as an expression of your letting this person or situation into God's hands.
- As you pray hold a pebble in your open hands, then when you are ready place it by a cross or candle.

Make your own prayer-board: At the centre of the board paste a picture or a verse from the bible that reminds you of God's presence and care. Add names of people you want to pray for on post its, or photos of people you want to regularly remember. Paste on newspaper pictures or headlines to remind you of current events you want to hold in prayer. Use your board as a regular focus for your prayer, updating it as appropriate.

Using your imagination: Read the story of how friends of a paralysed man bring him to Jesus [Mark 2:1–12]. Now imagine you are bringing someone you feel concern for into Jesus' presence. The depth of your care is expressed in your commitment to bring the one you pray for to this place, to the one who loves most deeply and knows what is needed.

A time for all seasons

There is a constant sense of movement in the garden: seeds sprout, then grow tall, flower, set seed and fade. As a gardener there are always tasks to be done in season – planting bulbs, pruning, feeding the soil, raking up leaves. There are times of rapid visible growth, and times of rest or dormancy. Gardening sensitises us to the passing of the seasons.

In our life with God there will be seasons too – time to act, and time to rest, time to change direction or try new things, times to let go. Listening to, and watching, the passing of times and seasons can make us alive to what movement is needed in our life in God.



This prayer exercise helps explore what ‘season’ it is in your life at this time. It may help you discern how God is at work in your life and how can you co-operate with this.

You may find it helps to physically turn in the directions suggested as you prayerfully reflect.

Autumn: face West [the setting sun]

- Where in your life do you sense the need to let go?
- Where do you see a process of letting go already taking place in your life?
- Some things have always deserved to be let go, for they are lifeless and life-denying;
- Others have been valuable to you but now it is time to put them down and move on

Winter: face North [the sun at its lowest point]

- Where in your life do you sense the need to ‘let be’ –for now is a time for waiting and resting?
- What in you is dormant, maybe feels stuck, but perhaps there are the first stirrings of life here?

Spring: face East [the rising sun]

- What in you is springing to life or bubbling up from deep down inside?
- Where in your life do you sense energy – perhaps fleeting, faint and easy to miss?
- What new sense of direction do you begin to see taking shape within you?

Summer: face South [the sun at its highest point]

- What in you feels alive, free, and fully formed within you?
- What within you do you long to share with others?
- Where do you see you are able to make a difference to others?

Reflection: Meeting the Easter Jesus

On Easter day and through the Easter season it feels as if we should be living with a constant alleluia on our lips, throwing off our struggles and doubts as the joy of resurrection surges through our bones. But if this is not the case for you – at least not all the time – then you are not alone. The Gospel accounts of meetings with the risen Jesus tell the story of lost, fearful and confused people surprised by unexpected and fleeting joy.

Jesus appears to different individuals and groups when they least expect, and often when they are feeling at their lowest

- Mary of Magdala weeping in the garden [John 20: 11–18]
- The disciples hidden in the upper room, fearful of the world outside [John 20: 19–31]
- The disciples walking away from their hopes on the road to Emmaus [Luke 24:13–35]
- Peter and his companions returning to their former life as fishermen [John 21]

The risen Jesus meets us at unexpected moments, and often in the dark times of our lives – our fears, failures, and losses become gateways to new beginnings.

The disciples struggle to recognise Jesus

- Mary of Magdala sees Jesus as the gardener
- The friends on the road to Emmaus see Jesus as a stranger who shares their journey
- Peter and his companions fail to recognise Jesus on the lakeside as morning dawns

Whilst some accounts of the risen Lord emphasise his glory, in these appearances the risen Jesus is hidden in the ordinary. If we turn our hearts to Christ he will meet us in the ‘ordinary’ of our lives – in what we see, hear and feel, through people we meet, in our resting and in our work. Christ is present in this ‘here’ and ‘now’ place, and awaits our awareness.

The experience of Jesus’ presence is very real but also fleeting.

- Mary of Magdala is told not to hold on to Jesus
- When the friends on the road to Emmaus recognise Jesus he disappears

For many of us there have been moments when we’ve recognised God’s presence, everything has become clear, life is sorted, we know our direction...and then...we lose that moment, are thrown back into confusion, lose whatever plot we had! This is normal. These moments of revelation are gifts to be gratefully received but we cannot grasp them or make them happen. What we can do is ponder them, go back to them, remember what we saw in that time, use them as signposts for the journey when the fog closes in and we can no longer see our way. If we stay faithful in our attentiveness another moment of revelation will come – but probably when we least expect.

A number of the appearances have a Eucharistic flavour

- Jesus is recognised at Emmaus when he breaks bread
- Jesus prepares breakfast for Peter and the disciples on the sea shore.

The Eucharist tells us of the hospitality of God who bids us welcome, feeds and restores us. Each Eucharist reminds us of the risen Christ present, but hidden, in ordinary things – there in the midst of each day and each encounter.

We are invited to offer who we are and what we have with Christ in thanksgiving to the Father, [bringing not just our strength but our weakness], in faith that in Christ we become life giving bread to share.

Drawn into life

Easter is not just a day in the year that quickly passes us by or a memory of a past event. The Easter season reminds us of how God is continually drawing us and all creation into life. What is broken is being made whole, what is trapped is being set free, what is in conflict is being reconciled and what is dead is being brought to life. We experience this in our own lives, and we are drawn by the Spirit to share in this work of Easter, in our own small ways summoning one another into life



These words, taken from an ancient homily for Holy Saturday express the enduring and resourceful Love of God alongside all. Christ is imagined as seeking out Adam [who represents everyone], lost in the tomb. Christ grasps Adam's hand, raises him up and says:

Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead,
and Christ shall give you light.
I am your God, who for your sake became your son,
who for you and your descendants now speak
and command with authority those in prison: Come forth!
and those in darkness: Have light!
and those who sleep: Rise!
I command you: Awake sleeper,
I have not made you to be held a prisoner in the underworld.
Arise from the dead; I am the life of the dead.
Arise, O work of my hands,
Arise you were fashioned in my image.
Rise let us go hence;
for you in me and I in you,
together we are one undivided person.'