

Formed by the Spirit

The Newsletter of the Southwark Diocesan Spiritual Formation Group

Opportunities, events, resources
and articles on prayer and spirituality

Issue 5: June 2010



Contents:

What's On? ...events, courses, opportunities	2-4
Tools for Prayer: for your prayer, or to share with others: Caring for God's World	5
A prayer table for your church	6
Reflection: Prayer: A poem by George Herbert	7-8

What's On?

Courses on prayer and spirituality

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.

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.

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

Mondays September 20th and 27th, 7pm to 9pm in Trinity House, led by Chris Chapman

- 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.

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. Contact: Chris Chapman for more details and to book. chris.chapman@southwark.anglican.org

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 14th 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.

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

Quiet Garden Days on 22 June and 27 July. Come and enjoy the peaceful gardens from 10am - 4pm. Suggested donation £4

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

St Michael's Chorale sing 16th and 17th Century sacred music. 8pm on Wednesday 7 July in the Convent Chapel. No need to book.

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

Pop in to Pray: St. Matthew's Croydon: Every Tuesday lunchtime from 12 noon to 2pm, St. Matthew's House Chapel at 100 George Street [opposite East Croydon Station] opens its doors to shoppers, commuters, office-workers, students and passers-by! The invitation to everyone is to 'pop in to pray.' St Matthews House Chapel provides an oasis of calm at the heart of a busy town. In it there is space for people to sit quietly and pray in any way they want to. Some light candles; some write prayers on the prayer boards; some read the bible; some draw using coloured crayons; some simply just sit and be.

Contemplative Rhythms: A safe space for busy people to stop, think and worship.

Contemplative Rhythms begins a new life based in St. George's Southwark on Monday June 28th at 7pm. All are welcome to come, pray and share what they'd hope for in the future.

Prayer through dance: St Mary's, Cuddington [near Worcester Park] A regular group meeting to explore the possibilities of praying through movement and dance. These are gentle sessions, suitable for all ages, and include, for example, hand prayers and simple circle dances. We normally meet 7.30-9pm on a Wednesday, and our next two dates are 30 June and 28 July. For details, phone Isobel Robinson on 020 8546 5931 or Sue Ayling on 020 8337 6347.

SPIDIR [Spiritual Direction Network] Annual Conference: June 17th, 11am to 3.30pm led by Henry Morgan, author of 'Approaches to Prayer' and 'the God you already know' in St. George's Southwark. All are welcome. The cost of the day is £10. The day is preceded by the SPIDIR AGM at 10.30am with coffee available from 10am

Training course for new spiritual directors: St. Matthew's Church Hall, Chichester Rd, Croydon CR0 5NQ. The course takes place on the second Friday of each month beginning in January 2011. There are interviews for those interested taking place on Friday 18th June and Friday 2nd July. For details contact Caterina Brown caterina.brown@ntlworld.com 01737 211727 or contact Canon Nicky Tredinnick, 01342 843570

Quiet meditation in Southwark Cathedral: Monthly lunchtime sessions, 1.15pm-2.00pm, in the prayerful stillness of the Harvard Chapel in Southwark Cathedral, for people wishing to explore Christian meditation and contemplation with an experienced spiritual guide. After some initial advice about the art of meditation, with guidance about posture, breathing and mental focus, the larger part of each session will then be for participants to explore their own deeply refreshing silence. Beginners welcome. Thursdays 22 July, 26 August, 23 September, 28 October, 25 November.

The Isaiah Community: A weekday opportunity for prayer with an emphasis on God's justice in the world. St John's Church, Waterloo, London SE1 8UD, Tuesdays, 6pm, followed by refreshments. A simple Evening Prayer with Taize chants, psalms, a reading and reflection followed by a chance to chat, ending around 7 pm. For further information contact Giles Goddard, gileswgoddard@googlemail.com

Mortlake Quiet Gardens Quiet Afternoon: *Reflecting on God's World*, Saturday 10th July, 2 until 4 pm, with tea and coffee available from 1.30 pm. See www.mortlakeparish.org.uk for details.

The Big Silence: BBC 2, June 25th, July 2nd and July 9th, 9pm. This new series of three one-hour programmes follows two men and three women as they build silence and prayer into their daily busy lives. The programmes give moving accounts of life-changing experiences simply through becoming silent, although there were quite a few struggles to get there!

Highways, Byways and Stillness, A Quiet Evening at St James, Riddlesdown [Purley] Thursday 19th August 7pm-9.30pm, An opportunity to step aside from the busy-ness of daily living. Leader: Jane Hoskins. Cost: £6. To book please e-mail j.hoskins233@btinternet.com or phone: 020 8660 7796.

Some useful websites: In addition to those noted in the last issue readers have suggested:

The Christian Meditation website:- www.christian-meditation.org.uk. The website contains an introduction to this way of prayer, details of related events and a list of local meditation groups – there's likely to be one not too far away from you.

<http://www.benedictinenuns.org.uk/index.html> This is the website of a small Roman Catholic Benedictine community of nuns which includes a regular blog and podcasts – it has some temporary communication difficulties which limit these for the moment.

Caring for God's World



To see a world in a grain of sand
And heaven in a wild flower [William Blake]

In the Creation story in the bible God summons each being into life by name; God looks at what he has made and sees that it is good [Genesis 1].

Caring for creation begins not so much with switching off lights, or remembering not to leave the television on standby, but with appreciating what it is we care for. Then our action for our environment will be moved not so much by fear of what might happen if we don't do so, but by respect for, and wonder at the created world we are part of.

What is this life if, full of care,

We have no time to stand and stare... [William Henry Davies]

1. Remember a particular time / place when you felt a sense of wonder awoken by the created world: walking by the sea, a small seed that became a flower, birdsong at twilight, snow wrapping the earth in silence, stars at night... Go back to that time or place in your prayer – be present to it again in your imagination, getting in touch with what you heard, saw, felt, sensed then.

2. God is in all things; all creation sings God's song. You too are made in God's likeness. Go for a walk outside – along the streets, in a local park. Ask God for the gift of awareness of his presence as you walk. As you walk stay in your senses, more than in your thoughts. Take in what you see – sky, trees, water, people....feel the wind, or feeling of freshness on your face...touch leaves or the bark of trees...listen to voices, water moving, wind blowing leaves. Pause for a while if a sight, or sound draws you...take time to 'stand and stare'.

3. Buy and sow a packet of seeds – you don't have to be 'green-fingered', just read the instructions on the packet! Read Mark 4: 26-32 [the parables of the seed growing by itself and the mustard seed] as you sow.

Later in the summer you can begin to look out for seedheads on most flowers and vegetables. Once they are dry and brown, break open the pods and save the seed for the year to come in a cool, dry place.

A prayer table in your church

At the back of our churches we find much useful information – details of local organisations, rotas, who to contact if we have questions. What about setting aside a prayer table – a space with resources, tools and guides to prayer that people can use while they are in the church? It need not be complicated or expensive to set up. You can use some of the 'tools for prayer' issued in copies of this newsletter, perhaps laminating them so they have a longer life. At a recent event I set up a prayer table on which was included:

- A basket of 'prayer stones' pebbles of different size and colour, with a guide to their use
- Some 'holding crosses' with a guide to their use [simple crosses can be made using sticks tied with coloured ribbon].
- A set of 'prayers for your prayer' – words of prayers from the bible and other sources, expressing different moods and feelings, with each prayer on a separate sheet.
- Some icons and prayer pictures on small cards as visual starting points for prayer
- Some laminated prayer guides, introducing different ways of prayer, as in the 'tools for prayer' in this and past copies of the newsletter.

Above the table I placed a visible, A4 laminated sheet with 'prayer table: Ideas and resources to help you pray', and on the table itself a sheet indicating 'Please use any of these resources whilst you are in the church, and return them here'.

From time to time you may want to refresh your prayer table, adding new resources. If nothing on the table is expensive then if things do disappear it won't be the end of the world and in any case, hopefully they will be helping someone, somewhere to pray.

A holding cross

You may find it helpful to hold a cross in your hand as you pray



The cross is a symbol of how God is with us in times of trouble. God understands and shares our pain.

As you hold the cross you may sense how God is holding you and holding those you love and care for.

The cross is also a symbol of hope. Having shared our sufferings and struggles Jesus rose from death to life.

As you hold the cross, be aware how God is with you as One who is turning all sorrow into joy, and every ending into a new beginning.

Prayer stones



You may wish to take a prayer stone as a focus for your prayer.

Spend a few moments quietly resting in God's presence.

Look at your stone: see its colour and shape. Feel its texture and its weight. How does it feel in your hand?

Think about the story of this stone: the rock from which it came, the wind, sun, frost and water that shaped it into its current form. Think about your own story, and what has led you to today.

As you hold your stone know that your yesterday, today and tomorrow are held in the palm of God's hand.

You may wish to leave your stone within this house of God as a symbol of entrusting your life to God's care, or take your stone home with you and use it again when you pray.

Prayer: A poem by George Herbert 1593 to 1633]

George Herbert was an Anglican priest who expressed his experience and understanding of God through poetry. In this poem, he seeks to communicate the experience of prayer through a series of overlapping images

*Prayer, the Church's Banquet, Angel's age,
God's breath in man returning to his birth
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet, sounding heaven
and earth;
Engine against the almighty, sinner's tower,
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
The six days' world transposing in an hour,
A kind of tune that all things hear and fear;
Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and
bliss,
Exalted manna, gladness of the best,
Heaven in ordinary, man well drest,
The milky way, the bird of Paradise,
Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the
soul's blood,
The land of spices; something understood*

Prayer, the Church's Banquet: Prayer is something we share together as church, as well as something private and individual. The 'banquet' of the Eucharist reminds us that God is our generous provider, who says to us all:

*'O come to the waters all you who are
thirsty and you who have no money come,
buy and eat!'* [Isaiah 55]

God's breath in man returning to his birth

Breathing is the rhythm of life. In the story of creation God breathed life into Adam.

'Breath' and 'spirit' come from the same Hebrew word 'ruah'. Prayer is becoming aware of God as our breath and our life. The Spirit of God that breathes us to life, is also the Spirit that leads us deeper into God.

- Listen to your breathing
- Sense how this breath is the rhythm of your life
- We breathe in the life and love of God
- We breathe out our love and yearning for God

The heart in pilgrimage: The heart is the place of our deepest desires. All our lives our heart has been in pilgrimage, searching out what can satisfy us, fulfil us, make us whole, give our life meaning. At the heart of prayer is desire and longing for God, sometimes expressed in words and sometimes too deep for words. Augustine said; You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in You."

- Listen to your heartbeat
- Bring the desire of your heart to God
- Be aware of your restlessness, not as something negative, but something that draws you deeper, further into God.

Engine against the almighty, sinner's tower, Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,

Prayer is also a wrestling with God, hurling our hopes, fears, pains and questions to One beyond our grasp and our control. Sometimes our desire is for answers, resolution, clarity, anything but this not knowing, not seeing, having to let go. Jacob wrestled with God, refusing to let him go until he gave him his name [Genesis 32]. Desire for God can be painful too – yet God is in the pain and in the silence, and with us as we let go in the face of mystery.

- What feelings, what questions are within your prayer to God today?

A kind of tune that all things hear and fear

In all that is we can sense God; all creation carries God's song. Another poet, Hopkins expressed how 'Christ plays in ten thousand places'. Prayer leads us into a deeper awareness of God's presence in all things.

- Where and when do you hear God's song?
- As you walk today, or meet different people, be open to hear echoes of God's presence and working.

Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,

Sometimes prayer is this...but only sometimes! Whatever we receive through prayer is a gift. We can't control God, or look for a particular result from prayer. All is gift.

Bring back to mind a time of 'softness, peace, joy, love, bliss' in God. What we glimpse in a moment and then lose again is eternally true, no less true when we have lost the experience, and do not feel these things. Moments of clear joy are moments of a truth deeper than all that disturbs us. We are held, wanted, loved, brought to life, *whether at this moment we feel it or not.* Jesus promised joy that no-one could take away. [John 16:20-22]

- Rest for a while in the memory of a time when you glimpsed this joy.

Exalted manna, gladness of the best: When Jesus taught his disciples to pray he told them to ask for their 'daily bread'. Manna was the bread-like food provided by God for the Israelites' journey through the wilderness in the book of Exodus. It was given for each day's need but couldn't be stored. Each day was dependent on a new gift from God. Prayer is the acknowledgement of our dependence on God and our trust in his generosity.

- Say to God: 'Give me this day my daily bread'
- Repeat the words slowly and rhythmically.
- Let go your worries and concerns into this prayer

Heaven in ordinary We do not need to go far away to find God, or to have extraordinary experiences. God is present in the ordinary and everyday. God is found within as well as outside us. Through prayer we receive the gift of a different kind of seeing and awareness.

- Ask God today to make you alive to his presence

- Dedicate some of your 'ordinary things' today to God [preparing or eating a meal, meeting with your friends or family, travelling home...]

The milky way, the bird of Paradise, Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's blood:

Whilst God is within all things, yet God is also beyond: beyond in beauty, truth and love; infinitely beyond all our imaginings. Sometimes we have a sense of otherness, and our prayer is caught up in awe and wonder at mystery beyond what we can touch and feel with our senses.

- When have you sensed this otherness of God?
- Step back as far as you can into this experience
- Read and reflect on these words from Psalm 8

When I look at the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them?

Something understood How do we understand God? Though at times we may see God more clearly, or through God's help understand something that has been puzzling us, we can never 'understand' God in the sense of knowing all about God intellectually. God will always be beyond; and the more we know the more we recognise how small our knowledge is. Yet Love enters where the mind cannot. Love, of the Spirit of Love, leads us into God and into a relationship where we are known and know. We understand and are understood not through words or concepts but in the experience of Love: *'I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you are filled with all the fullness of God* [Ephesians 3: 18-19].

- Ask God to lead you into an understanding of Love.