

# Formed by the Spirit

The Newsletter of the Southwark Diocesan Spiritual Formation Group

Opportunities, events, resources  
and articles on prayer and spirituality

## Issue 6: September 2010



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## **What's On?** *Courses on prayer and spirituality*

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

We will draw on insights from the Ignatian spiritual tradition and include practical exercises related to listening to God in the midst of life and discernment. Mondays, September 20<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, 7pm to 9pm in Trinity House, led by Chris Chapman.

### **Words and Life: A short course on Poetry and Spirituality.**

We will explore some of the links between poetry and spirituality, mostly by reading and discussing various texts and taking a thematic approach. The focus will be on the work of recent or contemporary poets of the last two or three generations.

Wednesdays 20<sup>th</sup> October and 3<sup>rd</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> November, from 7 to 9 pm at Trinity House, led by Tony Lucas, Chair of the SPIDIR Spiritual Direction network.

### **God-Search: Explorations in Christian Spirituality**

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. Many people have walked these paths in the past and left us their testimony to help us make sense of our own journey. These sessions introduce some key dimensions of our search for God, and God's search for us:

- What is spirituality?
- 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. Learning to let go.
- The freedom to love: entering into a new way of relating

We will use the insights of spiritual wisdom from the past, for example Benedict, Francis of Assisi, Julian of Norwich, The Cloud of Unknowing and Teresa of Avila



The course takes place in two venues:

Thursdays, 7pm to 9pm: September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>, October 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, November 4<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> in **St. Matthew's House, Croydon** [Close to East Croydon Station].

Mondays, 7pm to 9pm January 24<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup>, February 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, March 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> in **Trinity House** [close to London Bridge / Borough]

## **Letting Go, Letting God: An introduction to Christian Meditation**

Quietening the body...Stilling the Mind... Receiving God's Love.

Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> January, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> February in St. Matthew's House, Croydon, 7 to 9pm,  
Led by Caterina Brown and Chris Chapman.

### **Quiet spaces for prayer and meditation**



**Quiet mornings at St. Alphege Southwark:** 10am to 1pm on the following Saturdays: September 4<sup>th</sup>, October 2<sup>nd</sup>, November 6<sup>th</sup>, and December 4<sup>th</sup>.

There is also a weekly quiet space for prayer on Wednesdays between 6.30 and 7.30pm. St Alphege is easily accessible from Southwark tube station [Jubilee Line].

### **Quiet day at Wychcroft: Abiding in God**

A day of prayerful reflection, with input and quiet spaces. Saturday November 20<sup>th</sup>, 10am to 4pm. Led by Chris Chapman. Cost: £25 which includes lunch. Wychcroft is the Retreat and Conference Centre for the Diocese set in beautiful countryside near Bletchingley, Redhill, Surrey.

### **Dates for Quiet Days in Wychcroft in 2011:**

- 16<sup>th</sup> April, '**Sunset, Silence and Sunrise**': An opportunity to step aside from the busy-ness of daily living, and to meet with God in Stillness, as we prepare for Holy Week and Easter, led by Jane Hoskins
- June 4<sup>th</sup>, '**Martha, Mary... and Abraham: new implications from old ikons**', led by John Ansell
- November 12<sup>th</sup>, led by Ray Andrews. More details to follow.

**To book for any of these courses or quiet days, or for more information,** contact: Chris Chapman, Diocesan Spiritual Formation Adviser, 020 7939 9474,  
[chris.chapman@southwark.anglican.org](mailto:chris.chapman@southwark.anglican.org)

### **Fruits in due Season: An Autumnal Quiet Day**

An opportunity to spend time with God in stillness, walking, reflections and music.  
at Elmore Pond Cottage, High Road, Chipstead, led by Jane Hoskins

Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 10am to 4pm. The cost is £8

Bring a packed lunch and your bible! Coffee/tea/fruit juice available throughout the day. To book please e-mail [j.hoskins233@btinternet.com](mailto:j.hoskins233@btinternet.com) or phone 020 8660 7796

## Events at St. Michael's Convent, Ham Common Richmond

- September 24-26 **Praying with the Saints**, a weekend to explore ways of praying with and through the Saints. Led by Sr Teresa Mary CSC. Cost: £100
- September 28<sup>th</sup> , 10am - 4pm **Quiet Garden** - come and enjoy our beautiful garden. £4
- October 7, 14 & 21 **Freedom Songs**, Dr Alwyn Marriage, 10am - 12noon

For further information on any of our programmed items, please contact Hospitality Team, 020 8940 8711, ext 102

## Leading Quiet Days and Retreats

Are you interested in taking part in some way in an initiative to explore ways of resourcing, networking and equipping those who currently [or potentially] have a ministry of leading quiet days and retreats within or close to the Anglican Diocese of Southwark [which covers South London and parts of East Surrey]. Possible developments include:

**1] Creating an informal database of leaders:** to help with signposting for groups and local churches seeking someone to lead their quiet day or retreat

**2] Enabling the sharing of ideas, resources and approaches between those who currently lead retreats and quiet days:** Is there a need for networking opportunities where ideas for prayer exercises, creating prayer space, and insights from different spiritual traditions can be shared and explored?

**3] Training / Resourcing for those who wish to lead quiet days:** Is there a local need for a one off or more regular training / resourcing opportunity for those who feel drawn to lead days of prayer but need help and support?

If you are interested in taking part in some way, or have suggestions please contact Chris Chapman.



## Refresher Evening for Spiritual Directors

Monday 11<sup>th</sup> October, 7pm to 9pm

in St. Matthew's House Croydon [Close to East Croydon station]

- We will use a framework based on Isaiah 55 to explore what God is doing in the lives of those we support as spiritual directors, and what our part is in helping them co-operate with God's invitation.
- We will explore how to connect, and reconnect with God, the source of our life and rest, and the meaning of our ministry.

For more information about this refresher evening or the Quiet Day initiative contact Chris Chapman 020 7939 9474 [chris.chapman@southwark.anglican.org](mailto:chris.chapman@southwark.anglican.org)

## **A School for Prayer**

*He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples' [Luke 11:1]*

We have lessons for many things – to learn to cook, or to drive, or to play a musical instrument. Somehow there's an assumption that we all know intuitively how to pray without any help or guidance. To an extent that's true: prayer is fruitful through our desire, and God's gift, not the slickness of our technique! However there is wisdom, passed down through generations, that can help us.

When I first started to grow vegetables I was grateful for the simple words of guidance on the seed packets. They told me how deep to place the seeds in the earth, and how to water them and care for them as they developed. Without those words I might have planted them too deep to germinate, or washed them away with my initial over-enthusiastic watering. The power of life is in the seeds themselves, but some helpful advice can enable that life to be released. As with gardening, so with prayer: the guidance is no more than a servant of the life that is there, but it can help all the same.

As a student I remember attending a 'school for prayer'. We met from 7am to 8 am every morning for a week, with breakfast to follow. Each morning we would receive some simple guidance on a way of prayer, followed by the opportunity to put it into practice. As someone finding my way with prayer it was immensely helpful. I've often wondered why so few churches offer such guidance: perhaps it's time we did! It doesn't have to be early morning, or concentrated into a week – a weekly evening course over Advent, Lent or any other time of year can work just as well.



### **Planning a School for Prayer:**

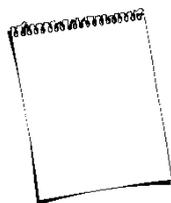
Would you like help and resources for running a School for Prayer in your local area or church? I have resource material: simple guidance sheets on different ways into prayer plus suggestions on how to use them.

Would you like to be part of developing and / or delivering local School for Prayer opportunities? I would be pleased to hear from you.

Contact Chris Chapman 020 7939 9474 [chris.chapman@southwark.anglican.org](mailto:chris.chapman@southwark.anglican.org)

## Keeping a prayer journal

*Incline your ear and come to me; listen so that you may live [Isaiah 55:3]*



'Listen so that you may live'...how do we listen, and what is it we are listening for? We rarely, if ever, hear God 'speak' in a direct and audible way. In the first place it's helpful to recognise what things we might receive guidance from God about. The work of the Spirit is to enable each of us to live fully and freely, in a way that gives life to those around us through an ever-deepening relationship with God. So, in all we experience, think and feel, God invites each one of us to 'incline our ears' so as to discern:

- What will help me become more truly, freely and effectively 'me' in the way that God desires?
- How can my life best 'bear fruit', making a positive difference to the world I am part of and the people around me?
- What will help me become more deeply rooted in God, so all I do and am flows from the life I receive from God?

What is asked of us then is to 'pay attention' to the events of our lives, and the changing pattern of our thoughts and our feelings with these questions in our minds. At one moment or other we might sense the invitation to let go a little more into God's hands, or to leave behind a way of thinking or acting that is life-denying, or to make a difference to something or someone around us.

One way of paying attention is to keep a journal. The journal is a way of noticing, remembering and reflecting on the significant things we experience, learn, think, and feel as we go through life. It can take any form – a notebook, a computer file, a ring binder. You can write in it, draw in it, include pictures, prayers, bible passages, poems, or notes of memorable dreams.

It is a prayer journal, not because you only focus on insights you receive in formal times of prayer but because this act of remembering is a consciously prayerful activity. Before you write in your journal ask God to bring to mind the significant happenings in your days: whether conversations, your own actions or those of people round you or things you saw, thought, read or felt. Your writing and remembering will thus become a conversation with God about what you have experienced and its meaning. Keep writing regularly in your journal and from time to time look back at what you have recorded. You'll begin to sense patterns in your reflections and have a growing sense of how you can cooperate with the work of God in your life.

## Reflection: The river of life

I recently spent a week in the house of a friend, on the bank of the river Monnow, in the Welsh borders. The sky arches over rich pastureland and rising hills. As the light of day fades, bats tumble and spin across the darkening sky. And night and day the river runs, playing over the rocks and shaping the land. Back in my London office I remember and am stilled by the sound of that river. The river is movement and presence, ever new yet older by far than I who hear it. The prophet Ezekiel, writing in exile from his homeland, wrote of another river, flowing from the Temple, the dwelling place of God:

... water was flowing from below the threshold of the temple...and it was a river that could not be crossed...This water flows towards the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah; and when it enters the sea, the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh. Wherever the river flows, every living creature that swarms will live...everything will live where the river goes. On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food...their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing. [From Ezekiel 47]

The river of the life of God brings life to the place of death and decay; it is ever-creative, fruitful and medicinal.

Perhaps one way of thinking about the incarnation is as the pouring out of the life of God into all being like Ezekiel's river. This river of the Word made flesh flows not only through green pastures but desert places, and because of the river, barren wastelands live. Because of Christ's life, suffering, dying and rising there is no place of human struggle and despair where the river of hope will not, does not flow. This does not mean that we do not continue to experience pain, or no longer struggle to make sense of suffering. Christ still feels the pain of nails in his hands and the rejection of those who had been his followers; yet Christ is also risen, the tombstone rolled definitively away. In the Gospel of John, as Jesus dies, blood and water flow from his side. This moment of death is also the outpouring of life. A river flows.

The story of one who loved, suffered, died and rose again, a story told in time and place, is the flow of the life of God for whom every moment and every point of space is now and here. God is ever creative, ever alongside us in joy and in pain, ever making a new beginning in the place of ending.

The river always runs, and we are caught up in its flow; more than this, through the gift of God we discover this same river flowing within us. As Jesus told the Samaritan woman:

If only you knew what God is offering...you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water...Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again; but anyone who drinks the water that I shall give will never be thirsty again; the water that I shall give will turn into a spring within, welling up to eternal life. [John 4: 10-14]

It was at night, when the last sheep call faded into the twilight, and the earth stilled that I heard most clearly the river running. Not that it wasn't always flowing, but the sounds of day and the noise of my own activity prevented me from hearing it clearly. There are moments in the world of here and now when we hear the river flowing within all things and know this same river is the source of our own being, becoming and giving.

The river flows from the Temple of God, and sometimes, sometimes even at night, we hear it running. Wherever the river flows, through our own meanness and narrowness of heart, through the pain of loss or cruelty of others, unexpected trees grow with fruit for healing:– for our own easing, and to be shared with others.



## Following Christ along the way

### *A prayer for pilgrims*

The Lord said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you'. [Genesis 12:1]

Lord of the journey, **give us courage to set out with you.**

By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light [Exodus 13: 21]

Lord of the journey, **give us light for our path.**

Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it. How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven [Genesis 28: 16-17]

Lord of the journey, **give us awareness of your presence.**

Then Jacob made a vow saying: 'If God will be with me and watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the Lord will be my God [Genesis 28: 20-21]

Lord of the journey, **give us trust in you.**

As the time came for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem [Luke 9: 51]

Lord of the journey, **give us courage in the face of opposition.**

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him [Luke 10:38]

Lord of the journey, **give us places to rest.**

Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on our road and opened the Scriptures to us [Luke 24:32]

Lord of the journey, **give us hearts that burns within as we walk with you.**