

Growing Roots

Spirituality and Prayer in Suffolk

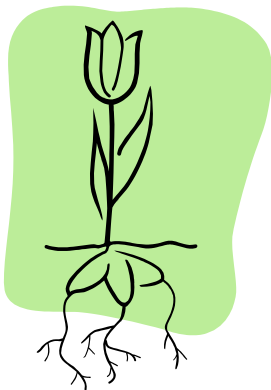
Welcome to the first e-newsletter on prayer and spirituality in Suffolk.

Prayer is a human response to the wonder and difficulties of life. Many of us pray, almost without noticing. Growing in prayer helps us to draw on God's life and to flourish in our particular circumstances and for the benefit of others.



Bishop David, our acting Diocesan Bishop, says:

Pray as you can, not as you can't! Prayer includes the set words that we use in church, and the arrow prayers we send off when troubles close in, but is much more besides. It is the communication at the heart of a relationship. And that can include sitting quietly in each other's presence, remembering together, imagining together ... just think of all the things you do with one you love. Just as every human relationship is unique so is every relationship with God in prayer.



Pray as you can, not as you can't – but pray! It is the “root treatment” that nourishes our life in Christ and so our discipleship and service. It gives us the confidence, direction and strength to share in God's mission of love to a world in need. No roots, no shoots, no fruits.

This new newsletter will, I hope, give you encouragement and new ideas, create a sense of companionship on the journey, and fill you afresh with the good news that St Felix brought us – especially if right now you are more conscious of the arrows St Edmund bore for us. Praying for you is a big part of my job. Please pray for me too.

As Bishop David says, *Growing Roots* is intended to encourage one another in prayer and in seeing God's grace around us. Feel free to pass on *Growing Roots* to others if it is helpful.

There is clearly a wonderful range of prayer and Christian spiritual practice in Suffolk and in this issue several people share a little of their preferred approaches. Different approaches will be explored more deeply in future issues. Here some people have also shared their questions and hopes.

If you want to respond to these, or to encourage the rest of us by sharing ways you have found to draw closer to God, or to comment in other ways, please contact the Spirituality Advisor, Anne Spalding, on anne.spalding@cofesuffolk.org or 01394 610065.



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Spirituality Advisor in Suffolk

Anne Spalding was appointed as (part-time) Spirituality Advisor in June 2013 to support and encourage our prayer and our responses to God's grace, as individuals, as churches, and as clergy.

The need for a Spirituality Advisor was identified by the Diocesan Spirituality Group, praying together over a period of time, and the Group continues to support Anne in the role. The Spirituality Group also enables people to find a spiritual companion, and supports people who offer spiritual accompaniment: for more information see the Spirituality pages of the Diocesan website (<http://www.cofesuffolk.org/index.cfm?page=landf.content&cmid=299>). Look out for experiences of spiritual accompaniment in a future issue of *Growing Roots*!

Since her appointment Anne has been visiting Rural Deans and others to hear about the prayer and spirituality in different parts of Suffolk. She is beginning to work with churches and deaneries to explore ways of praying, and ways to notice and respond to God where we are.



For herself, Anne says: *I have been grateful for a variety of approaches to coming closer to God. At times in my life one approach has been particularly helpful. At other times different approaches help me draw a little nearer to God.*

In my parish church people pour out their hearts in song and in words to God. The sense of the love of God and friendship of Jesus is often strong and touches people – sometimes even me!

At home I usually use a set form of words (The Daily Office SSF). I find the words of the prayers and of the Bible can raise questions, challenge and inspire, and the form has helped me pray when prayer seems beyond me. I am reassured that others (in this case Anglican Franciscans) are praying the same words so my small prayer can join with theirs.

I used to work in the clothing industry in London and more recently with voluntary and community organisations in Suffolk. I have always wanted to see other people flourish through my work and gradually I have come to see that these were my efforts of prayer in action.

Underlying all, I value times of silence and stillness. Sometimes these are on my own, sometimes more formally with others. And I often find God's presence in the open air, and especially on water! Suffolk is a great place for that.



In the past months I have enjoyed beginning to meet more people who pray in the county. I look forward to our praying and sharing our prayer more in Suffolk day by day.

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Exploring Ways of Praying

Praying in silence

Going around Suffolk, many people have said how important silent prayer is for them. This is Pat House's experience:

Silent Prayer or Prayer Without Words is a means of deepening our relationship with God. Thankfully there isn't a set method involved. This kind of prayer is about allowing God to draw us into His Presence in the secret place within us. During Silent Prayer we do nothing and say nothing. He longs for us to seek Him, to enjoy just being with Him. In stillness we become truly alive.

Preparation is important to pray in this way. Sitting comfortably with your back straight, let your body relax and tensions drain away. A regular rhythm of breathing should be adopted. Sit still until your mind becomes still. It is helpful to use some music to help this process.

To help take you to the inner place where you can rest in God, you can choose a sacred word. It could be "Jesus", "Lord", "Spirit", "Abba", "fire". Thoughts can be a huge problem for those beginning the practice of Silent Prayer. It is quite common. As soon as you become aware of wandering thoughts, return to your sacred word. God knows the intention of your heart; He knows you are seeking Him. The usual time to engage with God in this way is usually 20 - 25 minutes, every day if possible. Finish with music and thank God for being with you.



Pat has found these books helpful:

- Benignus O'Rourke, *Finding Your Hidden Treasure* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 2011)
- Simon Small, *From the Bottom of the Pond* (O books, 2007)
- Ivan Mann, *Breathing I Pray* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005)

Many people pray in silence on their own, but (like Pat) may invite people to pray with them. And you can take up other opportunities to pray silently together, for example:

- Silent Meditation at St Edmundsbury Cathedral, 12.30 – 1.0pm Thursdays.
- Clare Priory 'Be Still' days: <http://www.clarepriory.org.uk/retreats.html>.
- Julian Groups: <http://www.julianmeetings.org/> has a list of meetings by county.
- A Fellowship of Contemplative Prayer group (<http://www.contemplative-prayer.org.uk/>). For the group in Woodbridge contact Michael Stagg (michael.h.stagg@btinternet.com).

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Prayer as relationship

Tricia Leverington describes her experience of prayer:

I find it difficult to know where I would be or how I would manage if I didn't have the absolute essential desire and resource to come to our Heavenly Father in prayer. It is so natural to want to be close to Him and there is no better way than through prayer and worship.

'Prayer for me comes through many opportunities. Times of quiet prayer give me the opportunity to talk to Him and spend time listening too! Listening was something I had to learn. It is pointless asking God to speak to you if don't give Him a chance to respond. Praying for others during times of prayer ministry is an absolute privilege. Sometimes we need others to intercede for us and in praying for people I always find it to be a blessing to me also!



'I know I am very fortunate to have family and friends in my life with whom I can pray. This wasn't always the case and I now really appreciate that support. Through difficult times we have experienced God's grace and faithfulness which helps us to understand His love for us more. We have experienced some wonderful answers to prayer and through times of joy we have come together too to give Him thanks and praise. It is not possible to put a value on prayer. It isn't all about prayers of asking or praise, as I once thought. It is much deeper and more meaningful than that. For me the purpose of prayer is to have a deeper and close communion with the God who loves us.

Developing a relationship with God in this way is simply a matter of taking up the opportunities to talk and listen to God. We may do that on our own, on the spur of the moment, and / or plan these times regularly. We may, like Tricia, find it easier to pray with others so we can ask one or two friends or family to join us and / or we can look out for prayer groups in churches.



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Praying with written words

Words carefully put together are another way to express ourselves in prayer. The Church of England daily prayers (both traditional and contemporary) can be found via

<http://www.cofesuffolk.org/index.cfm?page=landf.content&cmid=356>. Church of England clergy and others pray this way, so we may be able to find (or make) opportunities to pray together.



Other forms of prayer are also based on Scripture and Christian tradition. Rosalind Paul values Celtic Daily Prayer and she explains its context and emphasis:

After the Romans left Britain, Christianity was preserved by monasteries on the fringes of our islands, where the Celts had survived. Nowadays the communities on Iona and Holy Island, and in our own region, the remains of the 9th century chapel of St Cedd of Lindisfarne at Bradwell in Essex, still speak of the widespread influence of Celtic Christianity.

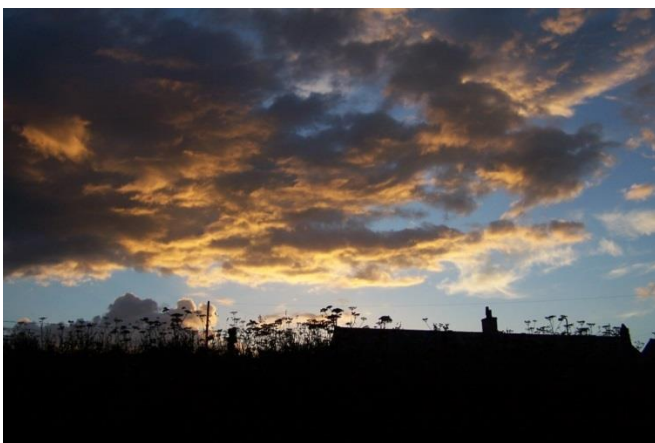
The Northumbria Community's Celtic Daily Prayer is a beautiful example of modern Celtic Christian worship, with readings and prayers for every season of the year. Like many modern monastic communities, this Community does not require you to be physically tied to a monastery but asks simply that you follow a rule of life, committing yourself throughout the day to being with God, both formally and informally, and in prayer developing your relationship with your Creator.

Paul wrote to the Romans (12.1, The Message), "Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering". This was beautifully echoed recently by Abbot Christopher Jamison (Finding Sanctuary [Orion, 2006]): "Finding the sacred space begins with the recognition of the sacred in your daily living."

So Celtic writers talk about worshipping God with all five senses, the "five stringed harp":

*There's no plant in the ground but is full of his blessing.
There's no thing in the sea but is full of his life.
There is nought in the sky but proclaims his goodness.
Jesu! O Jesu! It's good to praise thee!"*

For David Adam, until recently Vicar of Lindisfarne, "Celtic Christians saw a universe ablaze with God's glory, suffused with a presence that calls, nods and beckons – a creation personally united with its Creator in every atom and fibre."



'In an echo of the Celtic notion of 'thin places' – places where one can almost tangibly feel God's presence – Thomas Merton says that the gate of heaven is everywhere. So for me, the appeal of Celtic daily prayer is that it reminds me at every moment of the day that God is with me. All I have to do to make my daily life sacred – to create a 'thin place' where he can be with me wherever I am – is to make time to talk and listen to him in prayer and meditation, either by using a prayer book such as Celtic Daily Prayer or simply by spending time with him in silence in the beauty of his creation.

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A Diocesan Prayer for Growth



God who brings life
to creation and to people,
help us to see you at work
in Suffolk
and to work with you
so your kingdom grows here.

By the grace of your Spirit
be the source of our love,
our energy and our songs
so that,
separately and together,
we may draw closer to you.

May we speak of you
and share your life
with people
who live, work and visit here,
bringing glory to your name
through Jesus Christ our Lord
and in the
power of the Spirit.

Amen.

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Spirituality in Action

We sometimes think of spirituality only in terms of formal prayers and times in church or in creation. But some of us need an active spirituality, to bring transformation and justice in the world. Kathleen ben Rabha, Diocesan Community Affairs Advisor shares her experience:

If I am honest, I wonder sometimes if the spirituality mostly presented by churches really connects with me at all as, for me, the spirituality of doing God's will through social action is what matters most. For me, when a church or a deanery undertakes a project that brings them in touch with the unloved and the marginalised, that is when I sense a resonance with God's will and joy at how the Holy Spirit works with ordinary people. To play my part in that, however small, answers or affirms my vocation. Equally, to be able to address injustice through some kind of transformation in the context, also brings a sense of purpose and meaning to my life.



Action for me is the channel through which I interpret and understand faith. We all seek meaning, and action for me makes sense of what God calls us to do, in his strength. This may sound to some like a very practical kind of spirituality, and even, not spiritual at all. But God made each one of us for his glory and for the furtherance of the kingdom. He made us all different and he delights in furnishing us with the necessary gifts and seeing us make full use of them!

I feel God's presence more in nature than in a building, more when I work with God's creation, than with human invention, more doing my garden than doing the shopping. Somehow I touch the creator through the creation. And people are God's invention and seeing

them use their gifts to communicate through action the message that God is a God of love is wonderful. To be able to witness the results of this connection makes my soul sing.

So my spirituality is about the inclusion of everyone in this adventure of faith. God is everywhere and in everyone, and surprises us constantly. I try to always maintain an open mind, a questioning search and, at the same time, an acceptance of the times when God is seemingly absent. Then I go to scripture or I reflect on what I have experienced so far and quietly give thanks that God is in charge. My task is to go where he is leading, trusting that eventually things will come clear.

In Suffolk, examples of people taking action in their local communities include:

- Credit unions
- Food banks
- Town Pastors

You may well know of particular ways you want to take action, and have the necessary contacts but Kathleen is happy to help (kathleen.benrabha@cofesuffolk.org). Kathleen has worked with local authorities, hospitals and healthcare organisations, with parish nurses, with the criminal justice system, and with charities including Age UK Suffolk.

Beyond Suffolk, we could be part of campaigns and action through, for example:

- Christian Aid
- Tearfund

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Your help please ...

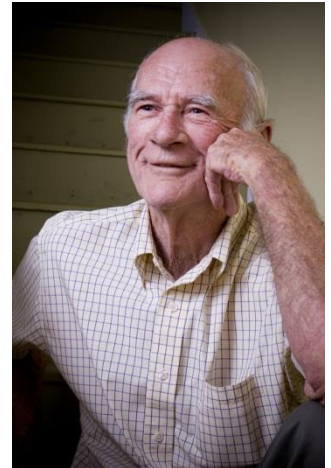
Prayer Cells / Triplets

Many people find it helpful to pray with others, whatever their preferred way of praying. This is clear from many of the Spirituality Advisor's conversations and from stories in this *Growing Roots*.

In particular several people have said they would like to be part of a prayer cell again, that is people regularly praying in twos, threes and fours. The obvious way to form a prayer cell is to ask people around you.

But if you would like to be part of a prayer cell with people away from your local patch, contact the Spirituality Advisor

(anne.spalding@cofesuffolk.org) with information on how far you could travel and how you prefer to pray. The idea is to introduce you to one another to form prayer cells.



Spirituality in older years

Many people in Suffolk live long! And in some parts of Suffolk the numbers of older people are increased by those who (understandably) came here to retire.



Some churches recognise the need to support the spiritual life of these people, who cannot do what they used to but who are not immediately facing death, even if many around them are.

If you have relevant knowledge and experiences to help, please contact Anne on anne.spalding@cofesuffolk.org.

Events

Retreat Day at the Simeon Centre:

The Day of the Lord:

You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied

Saturday November 23rd, 2013

10am– 4pm at Ridley Hall, Cambridge CB 3 9HG

Book your place at: www.simeoncentre.co.uk

Or call Rosemary Kew on 01223 746593

Registration Fee: £20 (Please bring a packed lunch with you; drinks will be provided.)

