Welcome to the third e-newsletter on prayer and spirituality in Suffolk. This time we are exploring **people who walk with us** on our spiritual journey.

Much of the time we may pray alone – over the washing up, in the car, on a walk, in a special place. Praying with other people is good too, whether in formal services or in our own words. But when we have questions about prayer, and about life and God, where do we go?

We might find books and / or church groups helpful but they are not necessarily shaped for our own questions, struggles and joys. Friends or colleagues with whom we can share and pray can be really valuable. Another approach is to find an individual (already known or outside our situation) with whom to talk about our own spiritual journey and prayer, and who helps us in finding God’s presence and leading. This relationship is known as spiritual direction or spiritual accompaniment.*

In this issue four people share their experience of receiving and, in one case giving, spiritual direction (pages 2, 3, 5 & 6). Another of these has also shared a painting and a friend’s poem from their prayers (page 4), and on page 7 there are updates on spirituality in older years and events that might help reflection and prayer.

The examples of spiritual direction here are a taster. To explore more, come to the day on ‘Exploring Spiritual Direction’ on Thursday 6 November at Otley Hall (see page 7).

As usual, if this e-newsletter was passed on to you and you want to receive it directly please contact me, Anne Spalding, Spirituality Advisor, on anne.spalding@cofesuffolk.org or 01394 610065.

Growing in Faith and Understanding

MB describes exploring her own faith:

I talk to people about my “spiritual director” and I always think it sounds posh, makes me sound special or important. And I read a book by a parish priest who said everyone should have one on offer, but it’s not something much talked about. I think it’s assumed you’ll get everything you need from your parish priest, but that’s getting harder to do in this age of part-time clergy over several parishes. If only 5 members of a congregation wanted this service, a priest would be run off their feet.

I always come away feeling uplifted, joyful, revitalised, spiritually refreshed.

It’s about sharing Jesus with a like-minded friend, when perhaps like-minded friends are few and far between.

It’s about having someone to talk with, face-to-face, about your spiritual problems, issues, delights.

It’s about, if you have an enquiring mind, having someone to talk through your questions about the church, services, relationship with God and to talk through issues facing your church. As a new, adult member of the church, the confirmation course was great but didn’t, of course, cover everything and I don’t know my alb from my surplice.

As Trevor Beeson, Dean of Winchester wrote in his book “the educated layperson needs theological fare”.

My experience is that although you’re very welcome in a church, there is an assumption that if you’re an adult you’ll know what’s going on, what’s called what, what each part of the service means. I don’t see how you can be a committed church-going Christian without knowing what’s going on in church. Yes you can buy books on it, but that’s not always an easy way to learn. Although you get that vital bit of equipment, a Bible, you don’t get a Handbook to Church (Note to clergy – handbook would be useful) and for me, having someone to talk to about that has been useful.

It’s not easy coming to the church as an adult, and although I like to think I’d have persevered, my faith would have held strong, there is no doubt that having my spiritual director’s support has made that easy, kept me on the path and is to be counted, every day, as a blessing.
Finding Balance in Life

Jonathan McNabb values regular reviews of his life and prayer:

People will seek to find a spiritual director for various reasons. My reason was becoming a Franciscan Tertiary, where it is part of your Rule of Life to have a spiritual director.* I contacted the clergy at the church I attend and was put in contact with the Diocesan Spirituality Group.** I engaged in a correspondence to help find the correct person to be my spiritual director. I contacted the person who I thought best suited my situation practically and theologically. We met and examined if we thought that we could build a positive relationship.

We now meet four times a year. The sessions revolve around a review of what has been happening since we last met, exploring various aspects of my life including my work, my life as a Tertiary, my home situation, my interests and my church life. We also review my situation concerning issues relating to my discipleship, spiritual and prayer life. This is helpful in terms of helping find directions in making decisions and in exploring directions in developing my spiritual and prayer life. I find by exploring each aspect of my life with my spiritual director helps to provide a balance by examining how they can become unbalanced and finding ways of righting them again.

I suspect each person will have a different relationship with their spiritual director. Because of the great diversity of viewpoints, personalities and experiences, hopefully everyone who needs spiritual direction should be able to find the relationship they need.

* ‘Rules of life’ will be explored in the next issue of Growing Roots.

** See http://www.cofesuffolk.org/index.cfm?page=landf.content&cmid=447.
Difficult days

Life and faith can be challenging. From the Bible to today, people have expressed this in words, music and art. This painting (Liz Kirby) and these words (Jane Butler) were inspired by Allegri’s Miserere (a setting of Psalm 51; e.g. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=36Y_ztEW1NE), and particularly Psalm 51.17.

You have broken me, scattered me;
You have left me
  wounded and empty.
Dark
  waters overwhelm me.
You ask too much.
Growing through reflection

Liz Kirby describes the experience of spiritual direction in her journey of faith and ministry:

My first experience of spiritual direction was at the start of exploring my call to ordination and I had no idea what to expect. I was happy to talk about spiritual life and prayer in general; but to spend time talking deeply about my own spiritual life was initially uncomfortable and at times vaguely threatening!

However, once I learned that I could trust my director; that she was working with me to gain a deeper understanding of where God was in my life, I began to look forward to the meetings: meeting once a month was the right time interval for me, and one which I continue to use.

The sessions with my director have become a lifeline; a place where I can untangle what has been happening over the past month. Meetings give me time for deep reflection in a safe space with no outside interruptions and, most importantly, where I will be gently encouraged to keep reflecting even when reflection is painful or brings up difficult situations.

Spiritual direction holds me to account about my prayer life and stops me dissembling or glossing over problems! It helps me to remain open to God and, through that, find clarity about the events of the past month, putting them into perspective and showing me specifically where God is working in my life.

Ten years of direction has led me to places I would never have gone alone and has been a deeply fulfilling and richly rewarding journey.

(Painting: Liz Kirby)
Growing to accompanying others

Fred Woods knows what it is like both to have a spiritual director and to be one:

I never imagined I’d be asked to be a spiritual director, but I’m glad I was. It’s a privilege and a pleasure to accompany others on the Christian journey we share. And I’ve been greatly blessed by the spiritual director I’ve had for many years, years which have included two moves to very different parishes, bereavement and a new marriage, and retirement.

Having a spiritual director is totally confidential; no reports are made or information disclosed. We first meet up to see whether the relationship feels “right” – or not. Then we usually meet every three or four months, for about an hour and a half, in the spiritual director’s home. It’s relaxed with coffee and biscuits, but we try to make good use of the time.

As clergy and lay ministers (other people too) we may go through times of spiritual dryness, doubts, boredom or exhaustion. Work – life balance may go awry, relationships may be difficult. Or we may want to talk over a new project or job, or a theological issue that excites us. My own spiritual director has sometimes recommended to me a book on prayer, or even a different way of praying, which has really invigorated my prayer life. We include a time of silence, waiting on God, and prayer.

One of the great writers on the spiritual life is Henri Nouwen – you may know his books. He is very open about his own need for spiritual companionship. “A small rejection, a slight criticism might be enough to make me doubt my self-worth and even lose my self-confidence … we need to visit each other and offer each other a safe place where we can claim our freedom and celebrate our gifts.” (from Sabbatical Journey)

Is spiritual direction something you might find valuable – or perhaps God might be calling you to become a spiritual director yourself?

More spiritual directors are needed in Suffolk, so please consider this calling. For information about becoming a spiritual director, see leaflet on http://www.cofesuffolk.org/index.cfm?page=landf.content&cmid=352
Spirituality in Older Years

A group of people who care about supporting older people’s spirituality met in March, with lots of laughter! At the same time we recognised that this phase of life / spiritual life can be tough going.

We shared experiences covering the whole age-range following retirement to deteriorating health, decreasing abilities and facing death. The approaches included activities together, being a carer, working in care homes and hospices, working with other agencies, spiritual direction, and theological reflection.

If you want like to benefit from this experience, or can offer experience of your own to encourage others, please contact Anne Spalding (anne.spalding@cofesuffolk.org) or 01394 610065.

Opportunities for Reflection and Prayer

Some opportunities in Suffolk are below. Other possibilities can be found via the Spirituality pages of the Diocesan website: http://www.cofesuffolk.org/index.cfm?page=landf.content&cmid=354

**Otley Hall** Retreat Days including ‘Exploring Spiritual Direction’

Otley Hall, Hall Lane, Otley, Suffolk IP6 9PA Tel: 01473 890264.

**Thursday 6 November, 10am – 4pm ‘Exploring Spiritual Direction’** with Anne Spalding and Anthony Lury.

Full current programme at http://www.otleyhall.co.uk/#/retreat-days/4568004990

******

**Quiet Waters** Singing and writing ‘Taizé’ chants

**Friday 13th to Sunday 15th June**

Flixton Road, Bungay, Suffolk NR35 1PD. Tel: 01986 893201

More information in the newsletter at http://www.quietwaters.org.uk/index.html

******

**Community of All Hallows Convent**

Belsey Bridge Road, Ditchingham, Bungay, Suffolk NR35 2DT Tel: 01986 892749


******

**Clare Priory**

Ashen Road, Clare, Suffolk CO10 8NX Tel: 01787 277326.