Welcome to the fourth e-newsletter on prayer and spirituality in Suffolk. This time we are exploring rhythms or rules of life to help us draw close to God day by day.

Most of us have patterns to our lives, shaped by family, friends, work, animals, health, church and so on. Life goes well if the overall mixture of these things brings life to ourselves and those whose lives we touch. By the same token, life goes downhill when the overall mixture saps us of all our energy.

By reflecting, and perhaps talking it over with someone we trust, we can identify what gives us energy, brings us life and brings us closer to Jesus who came to bring us life (see John 10.10). We can then shape a rhythm to our lives now that builds on our life-giving encounters.

The important thing is that these are rhythms of LIFE, not of duty or conformity for its own sake. I think of them like a framework to support my flowers or my runner beans so that they can get the sun and air and pollinating insects they need, and are helped to flourish to their best. For this reason, a rhythm of life needs to be realistic and do-able, not what might be done in ideal circumstances or by a different kind of person!

In this issue someone shares her experience of developing a rule of life for herself (page 2) and three others share their experiences of working with a shared rhythm of life (pages 3, 5 and 6). Rules sound like straight lines but, for one, a rhythm has been found in the dance of life (page 4). Various events in the diocese and beyond are on 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.
My Own Rule of Life

Tracy Watson-Brown has been developing a rule of life to fit herself and her circumstances:

The concept of a spiritual rule for life was introduced to me during the process of spiritual direction. My first problem was to get over two words – direction and rule!

The first, direction,* has been of great value with my busy life pressing in on all sides – wondering with a listening friend where does God fit in all this? Is there a pattern emerging?

A rule of life, for me, has provided a valuable tool here. The phrase is an ancient one, perhaps best understood as observing and committing to patterns of life that help the journey towards and with God. It is about guidelines and framework rather than hard and fast dos and don’ts. Writing these down is helpful as a reminder, and also as a reality check – we might feel that we are failing as a pilgrim if we fail to have a good solid hour of spoken prayer twice a day – but is this realistic where we find ourselves in life? Does it fit in with the person God made us to be? By writing things down, and succeeding or failing at them, I have been able to discover the sort of framework for Christian living which is both nourishing and fitting. Codifying it has helped me remember.

I enjoy scrapbooking, so have a note book which I store my rule-based thoughts. I think it is important that this is a working document – an encouragement and a guide, not a prison or a nappy! My book is currently in seven sections – church, family, lifestyle, work, service, prayer and study, and I decorate it with stickers and cuttings that I find inspiring, encouraging, or simply beautiful. This means it is a book I look forward to working with. I edit it often, but make a habit of really thinking about it a couple of times a year, adapting it to current reality, adding new things, taking out things which have proved unhelpful. For example, a recent addition has been the resources available for devotions in the form of podcasts from Scripture Union, and Pray As You Go. I have learned that I find it much easier to focus on spoken rather than written devotional material, which I tend to hurry. Listening material provides space along the way to slow the whole thing down, which is very good for me.

* See Growing Roots 3 for more on Spiritual Direction
Sharing a Rhythm of Prayer

Hannah Deaves describes how a group of people have been developing a rhythm of prayer that is do-able and helpful in their lives:

*Morph Community is a small new monastic community. We wanted to develop a rhythm to our prayer and worship which could sustain our very busy lives. At first we used liturgy from the Northumbria Community Daily Prayer book. However, many of us found it difficult to find even one time in the day when we could stop for long enough to pray, let alone find times throughout the day, and yet this is still what we felt we needed to do.

This inspired the idea for ‘on-the-go’ cards – small cards you can carry with you which have a short prayer on them. We aim to say the liturgy in full once a day including a time for meditation, and for the other two times of the day we use the ‘on-the-go’ versions. In reality, we might not even manage to spend a long time in prayer every day, but we have found that using the ‘on-the-go’ cards enables us to ‘check in’ with God throughout the day. This setting aside of time, even if it is twenty seconds, can have a huge impact on our whole day. It helps us to be more aware of God in our everyday activities, more mindful of his presence and more open to his promptings.

We become more aware of the meditative moments which can occur at any time in our day not just when we set aside time to meditate.

For more information or to contact me please look at our website [www.morphcommunity.org.uk](http://www.morphcommunity.org.uk). Other websites we find helpful to support our rule of life and meditation are:

- [www.sacredspace.ie](http://www.sacredspace.ie)
- [www.northumbriacommunity.org](http://www.northumbriacommunity.org)
- [www.pray-as-you-go.org](http://www.pray-as-you-go.org)
Recognising a Rhythm in Life

For Michael Thompson discovering a rhythm in life is like dancing:

*I learned the waltz from a Teach Yourself book. It had diagrams and foot positions. What could be simpler? I shuffled along, one, two, three and one, two, three, as I counted to three and begun again. It wasn’t long before I was sailing around the kitchen in the arms of an imaginary partner; one, two, three; and one, two, three; and one, two, three; and one, two, three. However, it became apparent that “and” had no place on a dance floor. We are called to the dance, to the dance of the Trinity. Through Jesus, the Beloved, we are drawn to be part of the dynamic and ever-changing co-indwelling and mutual interpenetration, community of being that is the Godhead. Inherently yet identifiably distinct “Three-in-One and One-in-Three” calls us to the dance of mutual and worshipful love.*

*Books on spirituality, prayer and meditation abound. Many reflect personality type and can help in many ways. These are all written by those caught up by the dance and can give us novel perspectives and ways of perceiving God, who is ultimately unknowable. The writer of the Cloud of Unknowing suggests the closer to God we become, the less we may know. It’s like being lost in a cloud or being approached by a blinding light. At best these works are choreography, to be brought to life by your dance: your dance, not theirs.*

*With great or little knowledge, but with a faith in Jesus, the Beloved, we are called to experience his wonder and love. St Francis would see God in the natural environment through its beauty and its gifts. It may be that we see or feel or experience in one way or another something of God in our daily lives, in the humdrum, yet God’s created order for us. It can be in our prayer or a walk or a lover’s kiss that opens a door of illumination. This is what a Spiritual Journal is for: to keep regular account and record those things that have occurred and just as important things which have not. It is our itinerary, markers where we’ve been and pointers to where we may go. It is our BOOK, our log of God’s love for us. And when we look back and reread, we may see the journey travelled and begin to see the steps of love to which we have been gathered, unique to you and the Beloved. We see the rhythm and are reminded of the heady swirl of the dance of love, as our steps are made one with his to a greater rhythm – no, harmonic of the whole.*
My Rule and Our Rule

James Longe has recognised his rhythm of life as in tune with Anglican Franciscans of the Third Order, Society of St Francis (http://tssf.org.uk). Here he describes his experience of developing a personal rule of life for himself as he begins his commitment in the Third Order:

As a novice in the Third Order of the Society of St Francis I have a rule of life. It provides a framework for a structured life centred on my Christian journey as a tertiary (a Third Order Franciscan). I find this structure helps me focus on a more Christ-like way of living.

The Third Order personal rule of life is drawn up around nine headings, namely the Eucharist; penitence; personal prayer; self-denial; retreat; study; simplicity; place in society / work / family, and obedience (see http://tssf.org.uk/about/rule/). Thinking about how these aspects are (or need to be) part of my own life, I have decided to group them under three broader headings. These are devotional and personal life, lifestyle, and community (as a priest ‘community’ includes my ministry).

The process of drawing up my own rule involves an evaluation of what I do day by day and to what extent it shapes my calling as a Christian following the example of St Francis. I did this evaluation with the assistance of my Novice Guardian and it could have been talked through with a spiritual director as well. I will need to review it periodically to check that the aims of the personal rule of life are being lived up to. Any changes that need to be made can then be done.

I know not everybody is called to a Franciscan style of living; however my experience is that a rule of life does give a structure for a way of living reflecting a Christian way of life.

For more information about the Third Order, Society of St Francis contact novguard@tssf.org.uk and you will be put in touch with someone local.
A Rule for Seeing God in the Whole of Life

Chris Ramsey finds the Cursillo rule of life a help:

Cursillo is a movement of the church concerned with spiritual renewal motivating deeper understanding which leads to lived-out Christian action. At its core lies a rule of life which marks these areas out as Piety, Study and Action.

Now, it might surprise you, but when I hear talk of rules of life I generally panic, as frankly I’m rubbish at keeping them and eventually just end up doing lots of spiritual self-recrimination – which is generally not helpful. In this Cursillo rule I’ve found a way of thinking which has helped me see the whole of my life as accountable to God.

The formulation of the Cursillo rule asks simple questions in the three areas of piety, study and action – primarily concerned with helping one see God in the ordinary as well as in the “set apart” and “devotional” times.

So as well as asking how have I sought God in prayer, it asks how I have seen God at work in my everyday conversation and interactions; not just what have I done to gain a greater appreciation of scripture, but also how have I sought to better appreciate my community or environment. And finally it asks these questions with a view to motivating witnessing action – not just direct evangelism – but how have I sought to transform my environment by living the Gospel. From such questions I have been able to develop a rule which is holistic and is concerned with the whole of my life, recognising that my interests, hobbies and relationships outside of a traditional faith setting are of as much worth (and as much used by God) as anything else.

While appreciating that much of this is held in common with many systems of “rule of life”, the Cursillo way of doing things and the ongoing support of the Cursillo community has helped me to learn and live this in a more real way than I’ve otherwise managed.

Chris is Diocesan Spiritual Director for Cursillo and he adds: This rule of life is just one aspect of the Cursillo movement. If you’re interested in finding out more then please do get in touch (01787 376293, revchrisramsey@googlemail.com)

For more about Cursillo, see www.anglicancursillo.co.uk

For Cursillo in Suffolk, see http://www.cofesuffolk.org/index.cfm?page=landf.content&cmid=349
Events

Making the Most of Mark: Preparing for a Year with Mark’s Gospel

This is a day for anyone who wants to explore the message of Mark for the lectionary year 2014 – 2015.

It includes presentations on reading and praying with the Gospel, with practical workshops on Mark and art, storytelling, discipleship, mission and teaching.

September 16th 2014 at the Cathedral
September 27th 2014 at St Michael’s Framlingham
from 9.30am – 3.30pm

Cost £8
Bring your own lunch – refreshments provided

For more information contact Lesley Steed at the MET office on 01473 298510 or Lesley.steed@cofesuffolk.org

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All Inclusive? The church and disabled people

With Rev Professor John Swinton
(Director of the Centre for Spirituality, Health and Disability, University of Aberdeen)

Saturday 11 October 2014, 9.30 for 10.00 am – 3.30 pm
at All Saints Church, Park Road, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 3QW

Cost: £20, concessions £10.
Bring packed lunch.

For more information and to book:
http://www.spectrumchristianstudies.com/all-inclusive.htm
or tel: 07749265571

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Simeon Centre: A day of preparation for Advent

Fear & Trust
With Adrian Chatfield & Helen Randall

Saturday 22 November 2014
10am – 4pm at Ridley Hall, Cambridge CB3 9HG

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

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