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

Most of us pray in various ways and this is good. But maybe we sense there is something more just out of our reach. Or maybe our life experiences make our prayer seem inadequate for ourselves and others. So this time we are looking at different ways people are going deeper in prayer and spirituality, as individuals and together.

The main thing about these experiences is that people have decided to do something to go deeper in prayer. What we do may be as simple as ‘keep[ing] your eyes open’ (page 2) but everything requires some time and attention. Other than that, these experiences are very different. For some, words are important (pages 3 and 4), for others the atmosphere to explore (page 2) and receive (page 5) is significant. Someone else considers the value God places on people who are oppressed, poor or excluded (page 6).

As these experiences show, going deeper in prayer is often encouraging and rewarding but not always. A future issue of Growing Roots will return to challenges and difficulties in life and prayer.

There are opportunities to encourage our growing in prayer locally, in places across Suffolk, and beyond. Some possible opportunities are highlighted on page 7. In particular, I encourage you to put Saturday 18 July 2015 in your diary which will be a day for Exploring Prayer at St Edmundsbury Cathedral.

As before, 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.
Going Deeper

Growing Spirituality with Children and Adults

Helen Woodroffe learns so much while making opportunities for children to develop their spiritual potential:

‘That’s God for you. He’s everywhere. You just have to keep your eyes open.’

Well, that told me! This is what a five year old child said to me during a chat at a recent Family Activity Day we were running at the Discovery Centre, whilst he was showing me how to make a wristband from loom bands. This is typical of what children can know and sense – they are spiritual in a way we perhaps have forgotten as adults.

Spirituality is the essence of what it is to be human. It is something we all feel and experience. It is at the heart of feelings, emotions and relationships. It is at the root of love, empathy and compassion. Through these we come to understand ourselves and others, identify and engage with our communities and gain insight into our world. Our spirituality supports the growth of imagination and creativity and drives our quest for skills and learning and I believe is innate in us all, whatever age we are.

If spiritual awareness is innate, it must be common to all human beings, so there must be ways of expressing it. Most researchers have assumed that spirituality will be expressed in religious language but in our more secular society, this language is not familiar so we need to find ways of uncovering spirituality using something other than religious language.

The most recent research suggests that children’s spiritual potential is best evoked in intimate, safe, sacred spaces and attended by penetrating, freely-chosen creative thought and play, silence or stillness, moods of deep joy, wonder and fascination with mystery. Church is where relationship is paramount – children are an essential part of this and have a key role to play. In church and at school, a secure and trustworthy environment needs to be created in which the process of learning and relationship can grow.
Finding the Words

For some of us, the words of prayers are important but the prayers we know do not always fit a particular occasion. One approach is to write our own.

Graham Hedger did just that. He wanted to respond prayerfully to Bible readings throughout the year so he has written prayers in response to set Sunday readings. **

This is Graham’s prayer for Advent 2:

Almighty God,
who calls your people to make known
your glory in the world around us.
Grant to us wisdom to use
our words and actions in such a way
that people may see and
be turned towards your truth.
This we ask in the name of Jesus,
the anointed one. Amen.

** Graham’s booklet of Prayers for the Christian Year is available from him:
graham.hedger@cofesuffolk.org
Remembered Words

Dean Frances has found the importance of familiar words in prayer for herself and with others:

When I was a nurse in the East End of London, I remember once looking after Mary, who had no family and had lost all sense of herself through some form of dementia. It was my duty to give her a bedbath, and to spend some time with her. Which was difficult, as she didn’t know you from one time to the next. With some sense of desperation, one morning I started to hum Crimond – The Lord’s my Shepherd. And to my utter surprise she joined in, with the clearest, most beautiful voice, singing word perfect all the way through. Somehow, I’d triggered a deep memory that unlocked the door to a deep sense of peace. For she smiled, she relaxed.

I took from that encounter, so long ago, just how important it is for our spiritual life to have words – and tunes, too – deep inside us. Learned off by heart, we can draw on prayers or hymns that put us in touch with something profound and lovely, something that reminds us of who are, and that we are loved at the deepest part of ourselves.

When I was little I was encouraged to learn the collects each Sunday off by heart. Some of them stuck, along with other familiar prayers and blessings from our worship. Every so often, I find myself, in times of stress, or in times of joy, using the words to pray, feeling that I am part of a long tradition that has enjoyed those good, strong prayers through the ages. Such prayers shape me. They draw me a little nearer to God.

I’d recommend it, alongside the other ways we pray. Committing some prayer to memory. It will be with you, then, until you need it. It will recall you to yourself, and to God in Christ, who will dwell within you richly as the Word of life.
A Time to Receive

Fressingfield has had a long-standing healing service which has been refreshed and inspired as the monthly Sacred Space service. Rosemary Willis shares their experience:

*Our Sacred Space service is a gathering for those who seek to set aside the busy-ness of life and enter into a time of worship, meditation and quiet reflection in the presence of God. The service has a flexible shape and is led by lay and clergy.*

Jesus said, ‘Come to me all who are heavy laden and I will refresh you’. This service is a response to his invitation.

*Importantly Sacred Space is undergirded by prayer and study on the healing and holistic ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we believe that prayer opens the way for the ministry of the Holy Spirit to enter into our lives in power. Faith is putting into practice the teaching and promises of Jesus.*

*An atmosphere of praise is created in a time of contemplative worship with readings chosen for the evening to enable an expression of our love for God. As we reflect on God’s love and compassion for us in the ministry of our Lord and Saviour, we become aware of his presence with us in his living and risen power.*

*Written prayer requests, and lighted candles are brought to the Holy Table. An invitation is given for prayer with the laying on of hands, other prayer ministry, and an opportunity to lie and soak up God’s presence. It is our experience that God’s love and power are encountered and that these prayer ministries are welcomed.*

*On occasion we have a guest speaker who shares their experience, understanding and insights of God’s grace and holistic healing, or redemptive reconciliation of past events.*

*We also get feedback from people who attend and have experienced answered prayer and renewal. I personally value Sacred Space because within it I sense and experience the empowering presence of God’s grace, healing and direction.*
Grappling with How to Live

Julie Mansfield is challenged by the God of the Bible’s concern with how we treat people who are vulnerable and poor:

I fully appreciate that my understanding about God of the Bible – that he came into being as the personification of the revolutionary worldview of the marginalised Hebrew people (later taken up by Jesus) just as all of the other communities of the ancient Near East had gods representing their conflicting but uniformly conservative worldviews – is perhaps more radical than most.

But, whatever your own understanding I’m sure it’s not controversial to suggest that the Bible’s main concern is with how we treat the poor, the oppressed, the vulnerable and the excluded. More than that, God of the Bible is clear that it is of no consequence if a person is the author of his / her own misfortune. S/he matters. Hence the murderer Cain, the first marginal, is given a protecting mark and Moses becomes a great leader despite his murderous past. Jesus follows this by saying that the tax collectors and the prostitutes get into the kingdom before the rest of us and and calls folk like me hypocrites for pretending we are interested in God’s kingdom when patently we are not!

Given my stark thinking, I find myself unable to spend overly long on contemplating practices, spiritual exercises or quiet retreats especially if they involve picturesque surroundings, well-rehearsed music or craft activities. But I absolutely do pray, often in shame but sometimes in confidence and hope. Prayer, for me, is attempting (ha!) to align myself with God’s impossible demands for my comfortable life; a time of ideological introspection.
Living Faith in Suffolk

Look out for Living Faith in Suffolk – a new Diocesan resource for groups.

Living Faith in Suffolk’s courses last from four to six weeks, and explore the foundations of faith in today’s world. They are not intended to be the last word on Christianity. For some people they will mark a beginning, for others a new direction in a pilgrimage of discovery and growth.

Living Prayer 1 will be among the first courses ready for piloting in Advent 2014.

Spirituality in Older Years

A group of people who care about supporting older people’s spirituality has met again to share experiences and knowledge. We noticed how important the little things are – little things that older people can still do for others, and little things any of us can do to recognise the humanity and spirituality of older people.

Marian Carter (one of this group) has a new book coming out:

Dying to Live: A Theological and Practical Workbook on Death, Dying and Bereavement (SCM Press, 2014)

For more information see dyingtolive.org.uk

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

Reminders

Spiritual Direction: we can be supported in going deeper by people who walk with us, as explored in Growing Roots 3, http://www.cofesuffolk.org/index.cfm?page=landf.content&cmid=299

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

Date for your diary

Exploring Prayer at St Edmundsbury Cathedral on 18 July 2015

A day to grow more confident in prayer and to explore prayer further

Details to follow