Welcome to the sixth e-newsletter on prayer and spirituality in Suffolk. In this issue we are exploring **retreat times** when we take time out for God as individuals or as part of a group.

Much of our praying is done in the midst of everyday life. We may pray as we go along and we may also have times set aside for prayer on our own or with others. All this is fitted in our daily routines. But, in the same way that a holiday can refresh us for day-to-day lives, times out for God can encourage and support our prayer in daily life. These times are often called retreats or quiet days.

Retreats and quiet days come in all shapes and sizes! We may make our own retreat, using the time and space in whatever way helps us draw closer to God: someone shares her experience of this on page 6. Some advertised retreat times help us explore particular ways of praying (see page 3). Many provide some input or guidance for prayer and then have times for us to walk, reflect and / or be creative (see pages 2 and 5). Some retreats are silent throughout but others have time to share or to chat. More information and ideas can be found via the webpage links and telephone numbers given on each page.

For a group, whether at home or away, one new way of exploring prayer is using Living Prayer 1 in the Living Faith in Suffolk series (see page 7). Also, have you got the Exploring Prayer day at the Cathedral in your diary (page 7)? Look out for the flyer in the spring.

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.
Retreating Together!

Quiet Waters in Bungay run weekend retreats and they offer space for individuals or groups to have time with God, with or without input from resident staff. Trefor Cook, as part of a small home group attached to the Baptist Church in Bury St Edmunds, went to try it:

The group suggested that it might be good to go away for a day retreat together. This is something we haven’t done before, and did not know what to expect. We came on the 31st May 2014 and asked Andrew if he would give some input into our day on how to listen to God. This was very helpful in giving focus to our thoughts.

We were given a warm welcome and arrived in time for morning prayers in the chapel. The rhythm of prayer is very significant in Quiet Waters, and we found it very meaningful and special in the time we spent there and felt a closeness to God, which seemed quite tangible.

During the day we were able to use the rooms available to us for quiet reflection, reading and prayer. The garden and grounds provided space to sit, enjoy and contemplate. A time of getting together over lunch and coffee to feedback on the day was very positive from everyone.

We had a wonderful day. We were all taken aback by the peace and the atmosphere of the whole house; it felt like God had embraced us. We each received something special from the Lord that day.

Our second visit was on September 27th in which we were given some thoughts by Andrew on the Lord’s Prayer. This was another special day we spent together, with God.

We found the house and staff very helpful to spending time with each other and with our Lord.

http://www.quietwaters.org.uk/
01986 893201
Retreat in Everyday Life

Clare Priory (in Clare) has run very popular ‘Be Still’ retreats for some years and in 2014 offered a retreat in everyday life. Ali Foreman signed up for it:

I decided to go on the Clare Priory Retreat in everyday life because at the time I was working full time but was keen to mark Lent in a different way last year.

I had heard from various people about silent prayer and the benefits of it and was curious to try it out. This was my opportunity, without taking any time off from work and whilst only committing to do it for a month.

The Retreat started on the first Saturday in Lent at Clare and I then committed to having a half hour a day of silent prayer for four weeks at home. We then all met up again the next Saturday at Clare to conclude the Retreat.

On the first Saturday we were all paired up with a mentor – someone who had several years of experience. My mentor phoned me up once a week, at a pre-arranged time to just check all was going well and to answer any questions I had. Whilst I didn't have many questions, it was really a great encouragement and incentive to continue, knowing that my mentor would be contacting me each week.

Since going on the Retreat, I have continued to have a half hour a day of silent prayer (I was warned that once people try silent prayer, a lot of them won't want to go back to life without silent prayer!). I can definitely say that going on this Retreat was the best thing I did last year to get closer to God. I would thoroughly recommend it to anyone.

http://www.clarepriory.org.uk/ 01787 277326
For me, Anne Spalding, looking and seeing can help me understand and respond to God. Here is one example of something from my surroundings that helped me reflect on my journey with God while on retreat at The Retreat House, Pleshey, near Chelmsford (http://www.retreathousepleshey.com/ 01245 237251).
Our Retreat Days at Otley Hall

Paddy Bechely and her friend Rosemary Stephens go regularly to Otley Hall’s Retreat Days:

Truly, the special days of the year for Rosemary and I are the Quiet Days we spend at Otley Hall. Happiness begins as we drive through the Suffolk lanes, then we turn through the familiar gateway, to be greeted first, perhaps, by the little cat or the peacock. Karen welcomes us with coffee and biscuits, we meet Catherine again, and the day begins.

We have always found the talks thoughtful and helpful; inevitably some leaders or speakers make a deeper impression than others – it depends on personalities and circumstances, but the opportunity to listen, to think, to share (and many people may contribute) is so valuable. At the end of a Quiet Day we often feel that we have come to know our companions well, although we may have spoken little.

I love walking in the grounds, along the lovely paths between the trees and bushes, beside the moat or the lake. I like to watch the reflections, deep down, to stand inside a “tent” of willow branches and sometimes to draw and paint the trees or the clouds. Rosemary likes to climb the mound when she can, to stand under the sky, and many people walk the maze [labyrinth].

We are grateful to Catherine and her family for sharing their home with us in this way.

Rosemary says: A retreat day at Otley is, for me, a day in Heaven on earth. I know a peace there that I have never found anywhere else. As we have been to Otley so often we have learnt the leaders that we find the most helpful, and that we would like to meet again. But, like Paddy I find that much of the value of the day is in the place itself. I heartily recommend these days to anyone wanting the chance to talk with God in beautiful surroundings.

Otley Hall is owned by Ian and Catherine Beaumont. Karen Gwynne-Vince takes the bookings.

http://www.otleyhall.co.uk/#/retreat-days/4568004990
01473 890264
Making My Own Retreat

Cathy knows how she needs to spend her times of retreat and goes to All Hallows Convent in Ditchingham, Norfolk, to do that:

Driving under the distinctive archway instantly brings a warm feeling of homecoming.

Once settled in my cosy room I simply sit. Sit and absorb the tranquillity, the silence, the peace. This period of repose may last one day or longer, depending on my need to unwind. In this initial stage, even my thought processes are still, numb even.

Gradually I become more mentally and physically alive. I might take a short walk in the garden, take up my gentle knitting rhythm or simply relish the relaxation of body and mind.

My days then develop a pattern. Early rising for spiritual reading, a cup of tea, prayerful contemplation for a time, wash, dress and yoga practice. I might listen to some music or settle into the silence once more. I write a long letter. I avoid news bulletins or any unsettling intrusion other than my own haphazard thoughts, which now start to flow more lucidly as the retreat progresses.

I meditate and periodically go back to my books to clarify something. I often find that a theme develops; linking a piece of music with a passage from a book or a recurrent thought. I keep a journal of my retreat days for future reference.

Cooking meals becomes an anticipated pleasure rather than a chore.

As the end of the retreat draws near thoughts gradually return once more to the family and outside world but this is now underpinned with a strong sense of peace and renewed awareness that all is well. I have regained the inner strength to cope once more.

Some people go to All Hallows to unwind as Cathy does, in self-catering accommodation, whilst others prefer to spend a period each day talking with a Guide. The traditional Individually Guided Ignatian Retreat would involve seeing your Guide for about 45 minutes every day and then praying with the scripture that would be given to you. Usually the Individual Retreat would mean your main meals are prepared for you.

http://www.all-hallows.org/guesthouses.php
01986 892749
More on Retreats and Quiet Days …

Other places offering retreats and quiet days include:

- Wigwam Retreat Centre, near Diss: [http://www.wigwamretreats.co.uk/](http://www.wigwamretreats.co.uk/) 020 8491 0222

… and more can be found via the cofe suffolk website: [http://www.cofesuffolk.org/index.cfm?page=landf.content&cmid=354](http://www.cofesuffolk.org/index.cfm?page=landf.content&cmid=354)

For information about retreats and quiet days in other parts of the country, contact the Retreat Association: [http://www.retreats.org.uk/](http://www.retreats.org.uk/), 01494 569056.

The Retreat Association is holding a conference in 2015 with speakers including Dr Rowan Williams and Fr Christopher Jamison OSB: [http://www.retreats.org.uk/conference2015.html](http://www.retreats.org.uk/conference2015.html)

Other Information

Living Faith in Suffolk

- Have you discovered these resources to help you and your church become more confident in Christian faith?
- The first few include the first one on prayer, Living Prayer 1.
- Taster sessions are on offer in February and March.
- Check them out at [http://www.cofesuffolk.org/index.cfm?page=landf.content&cmid=722](http://www.cofesuffolk.org/index.cfm?page=landf.content&cmid=722)

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Exploring Prayer

Saturday 18 July at St Edmundsbury Cathedral, 10 am – 4 pm

- A day to grow more confident in prayer and to explore it further.
- A time more to pray not just to talk about praying!
- No experience necessary – and lots of experience welcome!
- Workshops led by people from their own experience.
- Prayer spaces in the Cathedral developed by children and young people for everyone to use.
- Midday and final prayers all together.
- More details soon.