Welcome to the ninth e-newsletter on prayer and spirituality in Suffolk, in which we are exploring prayer.

Some of us don’t quite know how to go about praying (other than the ‘Thank you’ or ‘God help me’ prayers). Others of us pray in whichever way we have learned from people around us but have never really found our feet. Still others of us have found a way of praying that suits us and we stick with it because we find that approach helps us to come into God’s presence. But sometimes life changes and that approach does not fit us now. Exploring prayer, then, can help us draw near to God, in ways unfamiliar and familiar, and to recognise that what suits you may not suit me, at least not now.

One opportunity to explore prayer is at the Exploring Prayer days at the Cathedral. The first one was held last July with about 100 people coming along from all over the diocese. The day includes workshops to try out particular ways of praying and the chance to explore prayer on one’s own following the instructions at the ‘prayer stations’ in the Cathedral itself. Many of the pictures in this issue come from the prayer stations, created by children and young people, or from the Abbey Gardens.

Most of the contributions in this issue are experiences from the first Exploring Prayer day. As you will read, some people had a chance to try out a way of praying that was unfamiliar to them (pages 2, 3 and 4), another (page 5) gained from being led in a prayerful approach with others. We did also pray together in words but the thankful words shared here (page 6) were put together from a different time of reflection.

The next Exploring Prayer day is on 2 July 2016 (this is the correct date). Also Jane Williams is coming to Suffolk on 2 March to help us explore Praying for Others. More details on these and another event 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.
**Exploring Prayer**

**The Jesus Prayer**

Fiona Trott and Ruth Bull found stillness in God’s presence through use of the Jesus Prayer:

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,  
Have mercy on me a sinner”

Chris Andrews, who led our workshop, explained how each word has deep significance:

**Lord** - Our address to God  
**Jesus** - Recognition that He was human, Jesus of Nazareth  
**Christ** - ‘Christos’ meaning ‘anointed’ or ‘chosen’ one  
**Son of God** - Entering God’s presence  

**Mercy** - defined as ‘soothing’ and ‘comforting,’ and demonstrated by the extensive use of oil. Kyrie eleison has its origins from the Greek word ‘eleos’ meaning oil.

It is a simple prayer, which is easy to remember and can instil an intimacy with God. Many people in modern society lead very stressful and pressurised lives. The Jesus Prayer can be used anytime and anywhere, and in times of uncertainty when it is unclear what exactly to pray for.

The importance of silence and stillness in our relationship with God was highlighted. It was suggested that by breathing in during the first part of the prayer, and then gently breathing out for the second part, this would help to slow the pulse, calm down and create a more receptive and alert state of body, mind and heart for prayer.

Images of Christ, holding crosses and worry beads, as examples, can be used as aids to facilitate stillness and peace. These can provide the opportunity to relieve some of life’s tensions, give reassurance and maintain focus.

In the middle of a stressful period, the whole day’s workshop provided a welcomed, peaceful oasis and subsequently the Jesus Prayer has been used to focus on calm and a holding cross has provided solace. There were initial difficulties to accommodate the words within the breathing, but a rhythm has now been established and other familiar sentences have also been used: “Father in heaven, hallowed be your name”.

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*Image of worry beads and a cross advertisement.*
Praying through Movement

Mark Kichenside went with others to the Praying through Movement workshop led by Irene Leech and found it a really inspiring experience:

I must admit I went with a certain amount of trepidation, I was bit nervous and uncertain about what might be involved, but I need not have been.

Irene led us sensitively and prayerfully in a way that gave us a true vision of how we extend our personal expression in prayer through using our bodies in movement and dance. Many of us are used to the idea as to how our posture can aid or impair us as we seek to pray, but Irene reminded us of how many times we see posture and movement used in the bible to further express a person’s communication with God:

- Hear my cry… as I lift my hands towards your most holy place (Psalm 28.2)
- I lift my eyes to you whose throne is in heaven (Psalm 123.1).

She then invited us to seek to express some of those things in movement, seeking God, falling down before Him, searching, crying out for his mercy, expressing his Lordship and glory, in a way we could use to enhance our prayers. We also looked at the Collect for Purity (Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known…), Psalm 139, The Prayer of St. Francis (Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace…) and the Lord’s Prayer, and sought to express the desires, emotions, and responses with our actions to appropriate background music.

Sometimes words can seem inadequate in prayer, and movement and dance help us to identify them with the breadth of emotion in the psalms that is not possible through just reading them, particularly feelings of praise and lament. Overall I feel enriched by the whole experience, and my understanding of what it means to be in communion with God in my whole being has been greatly increased.

Why not try it yourself? Read a psalm or a prayer, close the door and put on a CD and begin to identify with the writer as you express the feeling and emotions in prayer through movement…

One song used was Lord hear my prayer: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RuPcxLjVxtg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RuPcxLjVxtg) [https://youtu.be/LKyU5Blxc0](https://youtu.be/LKyU5Blxc0)
Psalms of Protest

Bryan Parsons was challenged and encouraged by the workshop on Prayer and Protest:

This session led by Kathleen ben Rabha developed the theme that there are times when we all need to express the downside of life, when our worlds go pear-shaped. Maybe its illness, loss of a loved one or some personal failing. The bottom falls out leaving anguish, despair or loneliness. Christians aren't immune from this. However, the Psalms of Protest show us that God doesn't ask that we pretend things are other than they are; but rather that we should be completely open to Him. We can uncompromisingly give full vent to our inner shouts of protest and by doing so God shares intimately in our darkest moments. We are not alone.

It was apparent from the group that we all have our issues with God whether it be on the individual level of “Why me?” through to world ones of refugees and the like. Most importantly we needed to be able to express our outrage and anger with God without feelings of guilt.

The session has left me with a deeper appreciation of those Psalms which perhaps I have wanted to skim over and with a gratitude to those Psalmists who had such an honest ability to let fly with what they were really thinking and feeling. Also it is very apparent that the feelings and emotions of the Old Testament still hold sway today; but perhaps we have lost to some degree that immediacy of God being ever present through every aspect of our lives. Maybe by deeply engaging with the Psalms of Protest it can help us to reconnect more fully with God.
A Prayer Walk

Jane Hall found peace in sharing a prayer walk with others:

Along with about 20 others I had the privilege of enjoying a led prayer walk in the Abbey Gardens on a beautiful July morning as part of the Exploring Prayer day. I always enjoy walking but slowing down, being consciously aware of the beauty around me and keeping silence gave our time together a greater depth and a sense of God’s presence in all that we experience. We were led in the walk and quietness to use all our senses in prayer, thanksgiving and praise by looking, listening, hearing, touching, seeing, smelling and tasting.

We stopped three times to engage our senses in the present moment and our corporate stillness. Firstly by the sundial to relish the warmth of the sun, joy of the flowers and strength of God’s love. We went on to the water garden and acknowledged the power of water and Christ’s life giving promise of refreshment in him. The herb garden engaged our senses of smell and taste and, for me there was a reminder of the Spirit’s healing strength if we give God space in our busy lives.

I have done a number of prayer walks before but usually in peaceful countryside so being in the centre of a town was rather different; the Gardens were full of people and Saturday morning busyness and yet I found deep peace within them and myself.
What joy!
Andrea Skevington treasures words in prayer and life. In September she joined a Poetry and Reflection morning and someone else brought ripe figs from her garden. Andrea was so encouraged by the place and the ‘lovely’ people reflecting together on life and God that she wrote her own poem in response:

Fig

The fig is heavy in my cupped hand,
warm, still, from the sun,
purple and green.
I walk slowly, for the skin
is thin, ready to burst open.
I feel the juice, the seeds,
move inside, sway with me
as I walk
from that room.
There was cake,
and bunting,
and people,
and we read together – Keats’
“Ode to Autumn”,
while the hawberries glowed
from one window,
while the brown stubblefield sloped
through the other.
How rich, how full
this life.
An unexpected gift,
fragile in my hand.

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Events

Exploring Prayer 2016
Saturday 2 July 2016
10am – 4pm at St Edmundsbury Cathedral
- Workshops to try out particular ways of praying
- Prayer stations and space in the Cathedral to pray on one’s own
- Labyrinth to walk and reflect
- Midday and final prayers together
- Full details and booking from April onwards

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Jane Williams: Praying for Others
Wednesday 2 March 2016
At All Saints Church, Park Road, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3QW

Jane Williams is Assistant Dean at St Mellitus College (see http://www.stmellitus.org/academic-staff). A previous day she led on this topic was much appreciated.

There will be two sessions: 2.00 – 5.00pm, repeated 7.00 – 9.00pm (i.e. book for one session or the other, not both).

The cost is £5, payable in advance and non-refundable.

To book, contact Caroline Redman, The Cottage, Great Livermere IP31 1JG or caroline@theredmans.co.uk. Please either email and make an electronic payment to St Edmundsbury & Ipswich Diocesan Board of Finance Sort code 16-22-17 Acc No 12190090 or send a cheque made payable to “St Edmundsbury & Ipswich DBF” together with your details.

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The Gift of Christ: A day of preparation for Advent

The Simeon Centre
Saturday 5 December 2015
10am – 4pm at Ridley Hall, Cambridge CB3 9HG
Registration Fee: £20
Please bring a packed lunch; drinks will be provided.

Book your place at: www.simeoncentre.co.uk or call 01223 746590