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BATH & WELLS

Changing Lives, Changing Churches for Changing Communities

# Leading a Quiet Day

## Leading a Quiet Day: Some thoughts and practical suggestions

*As the deer longs for running streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. (Psalm 42 v1)*

Quiet days are about making space for oneself and God. God works in the spaces, in the silences of our lives and the silences within. So it is important to have space and silence in a quiet day – a quiet day is not a teaching day.

### Some Purposes of a Quiet Day

- It is a day to enable God to meet with people in the way God wants to meet with them – this can take time. There is a danger of stifling a quiet day with too many words
- It is a day that, ideally, will enable people to leave the 'baggage' behind, and hopefully move into a new place within
- It is a day of spiritual refreshment
- It is a day when we can allow our longings and our fears to surface and own them before God
- It will engage, if possible, our intellects, senses and imaginations

People come on a quiet day for a variety of reasons: it may be to read, to reflect, to walk, to write or to sketch, or sleep. It may be that they come because of a simple 'inner nudge', not knowing quite why they have come or what to expect. So primarily a quiet day is:

a space for grace

### Preparing to lead a Quiet Day, Aspects to Consider

- Who is the day for?
- Choice of location
- Hospitality/type of catering to be offered
- Choice of a focus from scripture/another theme
- Choice of images/symbols/words/activities
- You will need to work out a structure for the day, how to make space for God within the day's theme and how to indicate when silence is to be held
- To note: three hours of quiet is better than six hours of people coming and going

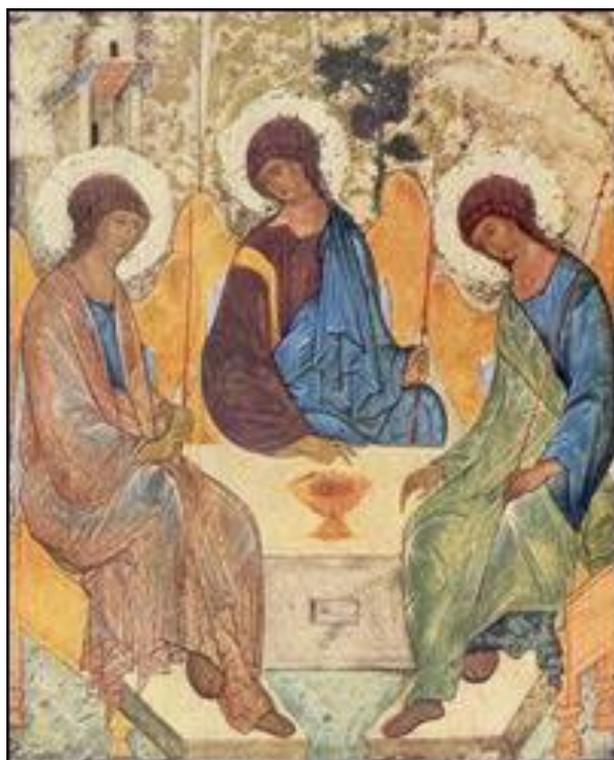
## Participants

This may well determine the day's style and content e.g. a quiet day for the regular churchgoers will be different from one for clergy or for non churchgoers. Who the day is for may determine the location, as well as the choice of theme.

## Location and Hospitality:

In terms of comfort, churches are not generally good places - but they can be good in terms of focus, and in enabling the day's theme to unfold. However, it is important to be aware of the discomfort of hard pews and of the difficulties of people having to sit in rows! Another setting might offer different rooms and a feel of 'space' - where people will not feel crowded and can spread out, go for a walk, or sit and sketch undisturbed – and that is always good.

Hospitality is key to the mood of a quiet day: an awareness of the participants and their needs. They may have travelled quite a distance, and been looking forward to the day for some time, so it is important for people to feel cared for (e.g. coffee/tea before the start of the quiet day and home made cakes later on always go down well). Allow time for some gentle chat before the start. It is best if the person leading the quiet day does not do the catering him/herself; try to find someone who can do this for you. If the quiet time lasts all day, consider providing a simple lunch of soup, a roll and fruit rather than leaving people to bring their own sandwiches. It all adds to the feeling of being cared for.



## Choosing a Theme

This may be influenced by the setting, the people who are attending or by the quiet day's timing within the liturgical year.

Some examples of themes are: creation, waiting, hope, harvest, new life, incarnation, prayer, vocation, change, preparing for/making a decision, renewal of baptism vows, pilgrimage (and labyrinth), journey (e.g. from darkness to light). Or there might be a spirituality theme e.g. Celtic or Benedictine, or a specific spiritual writer e.g. Thomas Merton, Julian of Norwich, or a poet such as R.S Thomas.

One or two paintings or icons can provide a theme, and many people find that God speaks to them through a visual image in a way that is profound (as humans, we learn to function firstly through images, not words). A very accessible icon is Rublev's *The Hospitality of Abraham* (also known as the *Icon of the Trinity*), and there are some good written reflections on this icon.

Biblical passages are also a fruitful source of themes e.g. Moses and the burning bush, Elijah at Mt. Horeb, Jesus at the well with the Samaritan woman, or any of the Christmas and Passion gospel narratives. Such passages lend themselves to *lectio divina* (details on link) or can be *prayed imaginatively* (details also on link).

The setting for the quiet day can itself provide the theme e.g. if the location is by running water, why not use some of Psalm 42 'As the deer longs (or yearns) for running streams, so my soul longs for you, O God'?

The theme can be quite simple (especially if it is for non churchgoers, or if people are coming only for half a day, or an evening) e.g. slowing down, so as to become present to the present moment, and spending time noticing/drawing an aspect of creation. The theme then is all about giving time and space for God.



## Images/Symbols/Words/Activities

These can be chosen to fit the theme and/or the location. It is good to remember that we are embodied beings, so the use of the body and the senses can facilitate not only engagement with the chosen theme but also enable people to enter the silence more easily and more deeply. Having some pictures/images just to colour can help still the mind and keep the hands occupied. Leading people through a simple stilling exercise can help people to slow down and leave the 'baggage' behind. Candles provide a good stilling focus, as well as acting as a sign of prayer. Consider too the use of incense pebbles and water. A visual focus at Pentecost, for example, might include candles and flame coloured fabric; for the theme of baptism, candles and water.

Make use of the senses and consider having a *sensory walk* (details on link). This kind of prayer walk is a very good way of settling into the day and almost invariably 'speaks' to people and deepens their awareness.

Music: The use of music can be pivotal in setting the mood – music can be a distraction or a way into stillness. Be discriminating about music that has lyrics or a dominant melody, as either of these can be distracting.



## **Plan and Structure of the Day - a typical day might be as follows**

- 10.00am arrival and coffee
- 10.30am start, with input
- Then silence till lunchtime, or just before lunch, when there can be a Eucharist, or a further brief 'thought'
- Lunch 12.30pm – 1.30pm or 1.00pm -2.00pm
- Then input, followed by silence till 3.00pm or 3.30pm
- Close with a Eucharist or short liturgy of the Word
- 3.30pm tea and departures

## **Why not try a morning or afternoon?**

- A day may be too long for some people, especially if they are new to this kind of experience: a morning can be very good, with lunch at, say, 1.00pm and then a brief opportunity to share, before departure. This shorter time is proving helpful for people who have busy lives. Or if you plan an afternoon, end with tea and cakes
- A morning/afternoon with a more 'general' theme can also attract those who are not necessarily 'church people'
- A morning/afternoon is also a good way to dip one's feet into leading a quiet time

## Further Help

- Have several copies of the programme scattered around the venue, or give each person a small programme of their own, so that everyone is clear about the day's structure
- Design the day's ending so that it brings everyone together as the day's focus reaches its conclusion (a short liturgy is good for this). This gives a sense of completeness, and people can leave feeling they have met with God, and that God has moved them into a different place
- If you are new to leading quiet days, try to do it first with someone who has more experience

**Remember** it is better to have quality than quantity. A short time of quiet with a well chosen theme will be much more helpful than a longer time spoilt by an inappropriate one.

**APPENDIX 1: Imaginative Prayer handout**

**APPENDIX 2: A sensory walk**

**APPENDIX 3: Prayer with Scripture**

## **APPENDIX 1: Imaginative Prayer**

Using a Gospel story, read the text once through slowly so that you are familiar with the events described. Then put the text to one side.

Next imagine the scene is happening NOW.

Enter into the story:

- Where are you in the scene?  
Who else is present?  
What are they saying?  
What are they doing?

Use all of your senses to enter into the story as fully as possible. Take time to engage with the people in the story, if that feels right.

Talk to Jesus, to the Father, to the Holy Spirit openly and honestly from your heart. Speak as if to a friend, sometimes talking, sometimes listening, sometimes being together in silence.

Don't worry if you get distracted; just gently bring yourself back to the scene. See distractions as leaves on a stream, notice them ... and let them float by.

## **APPENDIX 2: A sensory walk**

This simple prayer and stilling exercise is a good way to help you settle into a time of prayer or into a quiet day.

First, take some time to still yourself, centre within and let go of distractions. As you breathe out, breathe out your concerns, anxieties and burdens and gradually come to an awareness of the present moment and allow yourself to rest within that.

When you feel ready, gently start your sensory walk. The idea is to use your senses, to help keep you in the present. We have five senses: sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. Rather than jump around from one sense to another, decide which senses you are going to use; as well as sight (you do need to see where you are going), you might, for example, use touch and smell.

When you finish your walk, make a note of any insights, discoveries, reflections that you want to keep. There may be an item or two you want to bring back from your walk -as a reminder of their significance.

## **APPENDIX 3: Prayer with Scripture**

Use the Bible passage which your Director has suggested.

Read the passage over slowly several times without trying to analyse or moralise.

...notice how you're feeling and anything you desire from God.

...stay with any word, phrase or image that attracts your attention...

Notice what God is saying...

- where is God nudging you?
- how does that make you feel?