March 2017

Challenges of Spirituality:
Revd Dr Peter Hayler writes:

Opinion surveys by sociologists of religion suggest that many people identify as being 'spiritual', while the number who identify as 'religious' continues to decline. Correspondingly the concept of 'spirituality' is increasingly popular, but notoriously difficult to pin down. In Christianity, the use of the word 'spirituality' often has to do with choice of styles in relation to prayer, praise, worship, pilgrimage and the search for God. Examples of this might include Benedictine (Daily Office and Lectio Divina), Ignatian (the Spiritual Exercises or Examen), or even 'Happy-clappy'.

In its wider, more global use, the term 'spirituality' might also be used to describe practices or therapies that reach beyond the realm of prayer, praise and worship. An example of this might be Yoga; originally a Hindu tradition, but enjoyed by non-Hindus the world over as a form of exercise, mostly presented with an optional possibility of a 'spiritual' dimension. Another popular example is Mindfulness, which has its roots in Buddhist meditation but is also practised as a clinical therapy, completely stripped of any of its dharmic content.

To what extent might participation in such therapies be a search for meaning, and to what extent might the search for such meaning be considered as 'spiritual'?

Perhaps the idea of the search for meaning is a clue to what we really mean by 'spirituality'. If we search for meaning, and find it, and are shaped by it, then we have been on a spiritual quest. For some, this quest may be transient, while for others it is a life-long, even life-shaping, life-consuming activity. Now we begin to see that our actions are also part of our spirituality. It's not just about what we feel (with our hearts) or what we believe (with our heads), but about the actions we take (with the rest of our body) as an expression of our values and beliefs. After all, very few of us do nothing about the things in which we believe… except, of course, the proverbial man who built his house upon the sand (Matthew 7:24-27).

As I come towards the end of my time at Great St Mary's and look back on what has sustained my work as Chaplain to University Staff, and what I have achieved, I find myself wondering how would I describe my own spirituality. From the starting place of Morning Prayer, each day, I have sought to make a contribution to staff wellbeing across the non-college parts of the University. In particular I have worked to mitigate sources of isolation amongst postdoctoral spouses and toddlers; I have sought to work inclusively, mindful of the

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diversity of nationality, culture, ethnicity and religion. I have sought to do this by making the best of the strange set of resources that I had at my disposal: a city-centre church, a pulpit, an office, a cottage on the West Cambridge site, and a complex circle of University colleagues, all working hard in their own secular discipline or profession. So, perhaps I could say that I have developed a world-facing spirituality of stewardship and hospitality, for the common good… perhaps this is the essence of chaplaincy spirituality.

How would you describe your spirituality?

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Pauline Davison writes:

Prayer is the default mode of the Christian, whether in formal services, in quiet times that we purposefully set aside, or in the brief, but heartfelt, utterances when all we can say or think is ‘Oh God!’ We pray every time we ask for help, understanding, or strength, or when our hearts ache for another’s pain. In prayer we say who we are – not who we should be, nor who we wish we were, but just who we are.

Prayer is the way we communicate with God and there are many ways in which we can deepen and strengthen that relationship. One of them is the ancient ministry of spiritual counsel, sometimes called ‘spiritual direction’ though I prefer the term ‘spiritual accompaniment’. Spiritual accompaniment means journeying in faith with a companion, identifying and reflecting on God’s presence in one’s life, and exploring new ways of encountering Him in prayer and in life. It is a relationship in which, paradoxically, the main task of the ‘director’ is not to direct but to listen and give attention without judgement, and so provide a sacred space, safe and confidential. The director may help the ‘directee’ to express their ideas and feelings, may offer observations or suggestions, but always walks alongside, going at the other’s pace. Spiritual Direction is not counselling, though it does share some of its aspects, particularly its confidentiality and attentiveness. People usually seek counselling when they have difficulties of various kinds, but that is not the reason for Spiritual Direction. Its focus is always on the relationship with God, with finding Him in prayer and in life, and it always amazes me how the loving and constant attention of another person can release so much, be it hurts and fears, love and inspiration, understanding and insight.

People usually meet for Spiritual Direction every 2 or 3 months for about an hour. They will have been introduced via the Spirituality Advisory Group and will have had a first meeting where they decide that they can work together. Then it is up to them to create a relationship, a journey in faith together.

George Herbert’s wonderful poem Prayer, with its long list of definitions, ‘Prayer the Church’s banquet’, ‘The Christian plummet sounding heav’n and earth’, ‘Exalted Manna, gladness of the best’, ends with the simple words, ‘something understood’ and that is what both participants in spiritual direction want to achieve.

Spiritual Directors who are registered with the Ely diocese will have undergone training, will continue to learn and undertake supervision for their work, and receive direction themselves.

If you are interested in seeking a Director you can contact Revd Pam Thorn: pamandt@btinternet.com 01223 864262 or Mrs Irena Milloy: irena@themilloys.co.uk 01223 237902.
Centering Prayer

Donna Hayler writes:

Centering Prayer is based on the wisdom saying of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: “When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.” (Matthew 6 v 6)

Father Thomas Keating was a founding member, and the spiritual guide of Contemplative Outreach, LTD. He describes Centering Prayer as a method of silent prayer that prepares us to receive the gift of contemplative prayer, prayer in which we experience God’s presence within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than consciousness itself. This method of prayer is both a relationship with God and a discipline to foster that relationship. Keating goes on to say that Centering Prayer is not meant to replace other kinds of prayer. Rather, it adds depth of meaning to all prayer and facilitates the movement from more active modes of prayer - verbal, mental or affective prayer - into a receptive prayer of resting in God. Centering Prayer emphasises prayer as a personal relationship with God and, as a movement beyond conversation with Christ, to communion with Him. It is a practice that can be done both in personal prayer and within a supportive group setting.

Centering Prayer Guidelines

1. Find a quiet place and position yourself comfortably.

2. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God’s presence and action within. Examples might be: Lord, Saviour, Father, Abba, Peace, Grace, Love…

3. Sitting comfortably with eyes closed, silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol. Then let it go.

4. When you become aware that you are engaged with your thoughts (these might include body sensations, feelings, images and reflections), return ever-so-gently to the sacred word as a way of letting the thoughts go and refocusing.

5. At the end of the prayer time (which is usually 20 minutes) remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

Centering Prayer can be used both within personal prayers but also within a small study group setting where members can be supported and encouraged in individual practice. Centering Prayer is not a technique but a way of cultivating a deeper relationship with God.

Resources: Book: Open Mind, Open Heart by Thomas Keating; www.contemplativeoutreach.org; www.centeringprayer.org.uk
On Meditation

Submitted by Anne Lindley:


“To learn to meditate the first thing you have to try to understand – and this is the principal challenge to all of us – the first thing is to understand how simple it is. We live in a society that is highly complex. All of us have to deal with a variety of challenges in our life, all of them quite complex. It is very difficult for us to believe in anything that is very simple, very straightforward, very clear. It is very difficult for us to believe that such a teaching could be important and could be effective.

We speak to you as Benedictine monks and our message to you is that we are the inheritance, you and I, in this time, of a long and rich spiritual tradition and it is a tradition that has been passed on and has survived for hundreds of years, despite many attacks on it, despite many misunderstandings of it and despite simple neglect. Because we have been brought up in our society in a largely intellectual climate and tradition we tend to think that once something has been written down it has power to survive on its own.

But what I think we have to understand is this: a tradition does not and cannot survive either merely by being talked about or by being written down. A tradition survives and grows only because men and women can be found who will enter into the experience of the tradition.

In other words, we not only inherit a tradition but we have to re-create the tradition in every generation and we re-create by discovering it from our own experience and at that moment of discovery, the tradition lives. It is a living tradition and living, it possesses power. It becomes a living flame that has the power to enlighten, to guide and to warm.”

From ‘The Door to Silence’ http://wccm.org/content/john-main-collected-talks-door-silence

Note: This is one of the ways of silent prayer. It is a mantric practice and the suggested word ‘Maranatha’, meaning ‘Come Lord Jesus’ is used.

Great St Mary’s Quiet Day 2017

The lovely, historic Clare Priory will once again be the venue for a Quiet Day in the Autumn. Situated on the banks of the river Stour there are peaceful walks along the river or in the quiet gardens. There will be group guidance, lunch, coffees and tea provided. More information will be provided nearer the time.
Lament for a Best Man
Roger Hall writes:

Last year, Jo and I celebrated our Golden Wedding. Understandably, my Best Man of fifty years before, now in his eighties, felt himself unable to travel from Hampshire to join our celebrations. When his Christmas card did not arrive in early December, and our emails and telephone calls were unanswered, our concerns were raised, and we later learned that he had died shortly after Christmas.

Gordon and I met as members of Cambridge Young Conservatives sometime in 1964. At the same time, the vicar of GSM, Hugh Montefiore, decided that the church needed an organisation for young people, town and gown alike, between the ages of 18 and 35. Diane, the daughter of one of Church Wardens and Claude Mascall, recruited a small group of YCs, including Gordon and me to join the organisation known as Back Benchers. The ethos of both groups, a combination of debate and socialising, was not dissimilar, apart from religion replacing politics.

Gordon and I became close friends, meeting girlfriends from both organisations, with Gordon’s pale blue Triumph Herald an attractive asset. We would go on ‘mini pub crawls, visiting half a dozen or so pubs, having half a bitter or shandy in each, talking incessantly. On 5th October the following year, GSM held its Harvest Supper and dance in the Guildhall and the Back Benchers were there in force. That is where Jo and I had the ‘last waltz’ and afterwards I walked her home. Gordon had the last waltz with Betty Orange and drove her home in the opposite direction in his Triumph Herald. Had Gordon been the marrying-kind, I am sure Betty have would have accepted him as Jo accepted my proposal six weeks later.

He was undoubtedly self-centred; one Christmas card featured a photograph on the front captioned ‘my house, my car, cat and me’ and inside merely ‘from Gordon’. There was another impediment which prevented him taking this step of which he was acutely sensitive. Having a club foot as a result of polio, his lower left leg was that of a four-year-old. But he was a superb raconteur, able to speak entertainingly (like many Welshmen) on any subject in any company. Being an instruments’ engineer, his conversation was almost entirely empirical, religion and politics having no value beyond his social orbit. He was a gifted musician, freely taking his Yamaha keyboard around old peoples’ homes and playing his ukulele as a member of a musical group.

The last time we saw Gordon was in the spring of 2015. Then he seemed to have changed little since he had been my Best Man fifty years before. He had befriended an elderly lady with whom he went on long walks with her dog and she helped him with his garden. Ill and dying with cancer, he asked her to marry him. She consented, and the hospital arranged a taxi to take them to the registry office to exchange their vows. He died, therefore, a married man, fondly remembered by all who knew him.
St. Frumentius College, Gambella – St. Peter-tide collection

Margaret Johnston writes:
At St. Peter-tide your generous support raised £1,163 towards the new College in Gambella. We have received a letter expressing much appreciation for this support at this time of increasing needs in Ethiopia with the escalating violence in nearby South Sudan. Currently the situation in Gambella is extremely difficult and conditions are arduous.

The Anglican Church in Ethiopia writes:

“Your generosity (together with others) has contributed to the cost of the establishment and equipping of St. Frumentius College and training of priests, support for refugees fleeing the civil war just over the border in South Sudan, the library, and the very successful Mothers’ Union project to educate the women of the region in healthcare, hygiene, sterilisation of water, food preparation and many aspects of family care which has led to a remarkable reduction in infant mortality."

Cambridge City of Sanctuary

Tuesday, 28th February 19:30-21:00
Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal, original founder of the City of Sanctuary initiative in Sheffield is visiting Cambridge to speak on the theme of Home.
All are most welcome to attend.
Newnham College (Sidgwick Avenue) in the Jane Harrison Room.
The Book of Common Prayer

It is said that for many, the Book of Common Prayer is, at best, part of our heritage with little immediate connection to today, which means the Church risks losing one of the foundations of Anglican spirituality. The BCP is concerned with our spiritual formation, offering prayers for critical moments in our lives – from the safe delivery of a baby to preparation for death – and providing guidance on the giving of alms and care of the poor. Cranmer and his heirs grasped that spirituality is not simply about prayer. Rather, Christian spirituality is about living lives orientated towards God, not as an escape from the world, but in order that we may live more fully and authentically in the world. It is in this sense that the Prayer Book is concerned with our spiritual formation, and with giving it form and substance. What then, are the hallmarks of Prayer Book spirituality? Three themes stand out: exploration, transformation and reconciliation.

EXPLORATION. The BCP places great stress on exploring the meaning of our worship and our faith. Take the opening sections of morning and evening prayer: ‘Dearly beloved, the scripture moveth us in sundry places to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness’ the introduction setting out why we are invited to confess our sins. It then invites us to set forth God’s praise, hear God’s holy word and to pray for the needs of body and soul. This emphasis on instruction and explanation underlines that Anglican spirituality is built on exploring and handing on the faith.

TRANSFORMATION. The BCP has often been criticised for placing too much emphasis on confession – how many sins can one person commit between morning and evening prayer? But it is concerned with what the monastic tradition calls ‘conversion of life’ – a constant turning to God, our interior transformation as we deepen our relationship with God and then live that out in bringing transformation to the world. The pattern of daily confession and self-examination is one of the spiritual tools for interior transformation and renewal.

RECONCILIATION. The BCP is a stranger to our emphasis on individualism and the spirituality of ‘me’. Consequently, the spirituality is concerned with the right ordering of church and society, promoting unity, and the ‘common good’. Hence the prayers for rain and for good harvests – they are a recognition of our mutual dependence on each other and the world; hence the emphasis on prayer for the Queen and parliament: good governance and the maintenance of justice matter; hence the calls for the relief of the poor: we have duties to each other. Such prayers and directions give expression to the injunction of Jesus to set our minds on God’s kingdom and justice. They remind us that we are called to be not just the Church of England, but a church for England. The spirituality of the Book of Common Prayer commits us to working for reconciliation and the good of all.

This item is based on an article in The Prayer Book Today, the magazine of the Prayer Book Society. Canon Dr Andrew Braddock is author of The Role of the Book of Common Prayer in the Formation of Modern Anglican Church Identity (2010), Edwin Mellen Press - See more at: http://churchsociety.org/blog/entry/ministry_monday_the_bcp_spirituality_for_life_not_just_for_church

Image: A 1760 printing of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer
**DIARY MARCH 2017**

**GREAT ST MARYS AND MICHAELHOUSE**

**SERVICES IN MARCH**

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**FREE LUNCHTIME RECITAL AT GSM**

**Tuesday 7 March** Sunny Li—violin

**At Michaelhouse**

**Wednesday 8 March, 1 pm**

Women In Cambridge—A talk with Nancy Gregory to celebrate International Women’s Day.

Women have faced a long struggle in Cambridge to win the same rights to a higher education as men.

Has real equality yet been achieved or not? This 45-minute presentation covers the significant years of changing attitudes in the 19th and 20th centuries. This is a free event with a retiring collection for Newnham College.

**LENT @GSM**

**MONDAY LUNCHTIME TALKS:**

**THE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH TO COME**

1 pm at Michaelhouse, with soup served from 12.30pm. The talks look at how society and religious faith are changing, and discuss how the Church is responding. The first talk, on Monday 6 March will be given by Duncan Dormor, Dean of St John’s, and is entitled Changing Society, Changing Faith. (Mondays throughout Lent)

**SPIRITUAL M.O.T. CHECK**

On Tuesdays during Lent, stop by Michaelhouse Chancel between 12.30 and 1.30pm for a 10-minute Spiritual M.O.T. check - a quick check-up about prayer, faith, reconciliation, and spiritual maintenance, with Rev’d Devin.

Visit our website at: www.gsm.cam.ac.uk  Newsletter Editor: Sarah de Mas sarahdemas48@gmail.com; 01223 561 131

The Editor reserves the right to edit submissions; if revisions required are major, they’ll be run by the author prior to publication.