

A Year of Rural Worship: God in Farm, Field and Village

12th October 2019

Spirituality 2 – Sue Lockwood

The group had wide ranging discussions which are summarised below:

Dawn Service on Easter morning: Gather outside and watch the sun rise. Included a bible reading, prayer and silence. Great deal of bird song. Very successful with many people attending who don't go to the church. Afterwards many of these people followed others into the church and joined in the traditional church service. Promoted around the village with posters. In future will promote through the school as well. Discussions about how the **outside environment and nature can really lift the spirit**. Others talked about holding outside services where other are around and can be encouraged to join in, for example dog walkers near a reservoir.

An example of work with a school in the outdoors at Easter was shared. White clothes represented Jesus and were laid in a tomb. Stones were given to all the children and they were encouraged to think of them as representing 'things wrong in the world' that Jesus took with him. Later they went to the 'tomb' and the clothes and stones were gone. The children were taken by the drama and the active representation in which they were involved.

Outdoor Church – a step on from messy church: In this example messy church happens once a month and doesn't have enough volunteers to increase its frequency. Instead the church started seasonal outdoor church sessions which are held in the community millennium wood. **Families walk through in groups, share a picnic, have a fire and tell bible stories on the move**. An example of the lost son was shared and how the group were able to look out over the surrounding countryside and imagine a father looking out. A further example of building shelters was shared which then was drawn together to consider how God provides shelter. This is advertised through posters and facebook and happens whatever the weather! This has reached new families. Discussions were had as to how to slow down the charge through the woods and get families to ponder and focus (awe and wonder). Ideas included taking photographs, using a cardboard picture frames to hone in particular aspects of nature and of mirrors to encourage people to see the tree canopy and sky. Parents remain responsible for their children and their safety.

Gardening Club/children's church held on an allotment: This was in an outdoor setting with log circle and children gathered, and involved a bible story, prayer and growing things together. There was a **real sense of shared ownership** of the allotment and children **really connected with nature** through their planting and care of the allotment. Creation linked well and on one occasion, children made little bug hotels for their 'brother and sister' insects. A **strong sense of togetherness** was obvious.

Discussion was held about how it is important to come **out of the church building and meet with people in the community**. It was suggested that it can be useful to **look at what non-church organisations are doing that are popular and see whether this can be used and adapted**.

Pilgrimages: Discussion about the Boniface route that takes in churches and significant features of the land. People have been really inspired by this. There is a **British Pilgrimage Trust website** (<https://britishpilgrimage.org>) which is worth a visit. They are a growing group set to 'revitalise the tradition of pilgrimage in Britain'. They take suggestions for 'pilgrimages / walks'. Also shared was the idea of earth pilgrimages which can be prayerful and silent and work with the contrasts within the landscape

(and perhaps art works). The power of walking through an enclosed wood contrasting with the dramatic dropping away of the land and view across the landscape was shared.

Using bodies in prayer: On Remembrance day those gathered were able to turn towards Plymouth to pray for those who had lost their lives in conflict, or were currently experiencing conflict; turn towards London to pray for those in Leadership positions and the decisions they make; turn to Hay Tor to pray for the challenges we face; and to the school to pray for wisdom about what the school and community can do to bring peace to the world. The spiritual power of prayer both inside and outside was noted.

Prayer meetings: a regular prayer group has started praying outside of their homes and are travelling around churches, particularly during the week, to make prayer visible to others.

Open the book teams in schools: Bible stories in an accessible and interactive way with a good cross over of the generations.

Church schools ways of working with spirituality: Discussion about how spirituality is difficult to explain and define and how many church schools use the concept of 'windows, mirrors and doors' to help children and staff to develop spirituality and to intentionally plan for opportunities.

- **Windows** (Encounter): Opportunities to look out on the world to gaze and wonder: The wow and awe moments, the things we find amazing and bring us up short.
- **Mirrors** (Reflection): Giving opportunities for children to reflect, to look inward to consider some of the big questions of life: To explore their own insights and those of others. Reflection - learning from.
- **Doors** (transformation): Giving opportunities for children to respond, to do something, to go through the door of a creative expression of their own thoughts and convictions. The learning to live by putting into action what they believe.



Buildings can be spiritual. Spirituality is often relational

Music: Youth band. Taize services with short times of silence. Meditative quality associated with chanting and repetition.

Silence: periods of silence can be extremely spiritual but need to build up to this. Start with short periods. Let people know what is coming and for how long as otherwise can become uncomfortable. Silence in a world that is full of distractions isn't always easy!

Service and social action: discussion about how service towards others can be a spiritual experience and how many of younger generations have been active with climate change protests. Many people are motivated by social action and it can be a force for good.

Spirituality doesn't need to be linked to religion. Religion is not what you should / should not be doing. We could all be looking, listening and appreciating more.