

DCRF Rural Worship Workshop 12 Oct 2019

Notes from the Spirituality 1 subgroup

Present: Janet Bell, Sandra Collier, Ruth Frampton (facilitator), Lionel Holmes, Stephen Skinner, Sam Wernham

SC, now in Crediton but with 33 years' experience living in Hatherleigh, spoke of a prayer walk in Hatherleigh as part of TKC. Posters were put up three months in advance around the town and in shops etc advertising the place and time of meeting; the event was publicised in services for the same period. It was very well supported by church members and non-church members with some visitors/holidaymakers joining in. The route lasted about an hour and was decided "on the hoof" by the people walking and stopped for prayer at the church, the school, the surgery etc.

SS spoke about his community of 13 churches on the Jurassic coast in SW Dorset. They made a pilgrimage trail going around the churches - a "Local churches pilgrimage". Its success has depended on high quality publicity well in advance - 3 months again (and SC also emphasised the importance of widespread publicity):

- A4 posters around the towns and in the parish magazines and in pew sheets, and on social media
- good quality leaflets well printed on quality paper - a separate leaflet for each church - placed in TICs, shops, pubs.
- badges - one for each church - and then, for those who can photo themselves wearing a badge from every church, a "gold star badge" for the complete pilgrimage.
- The churches offered hospitality - a welcome rack with leaflets and facilities for making cold drinks - mugs/water/cordial

SS said that they had been able to apply for a small amount of local funding from Salisbury diocese. RF mentioned that small sums of up to £500 could be applied for in Exeter diocese - she thought from the Mission & Ministry team.

SW pointed out the importance of working proactively with others in the wider community to organise special events. SC mentioned a priest in Sandford - Paul Fillary?sp? - who organised wassailing around the farms. Stoke Gabriel also celebrates wassailing and RF has been making enquiries about some of her churches.

SW talked about a service she had organised for 30 Nov Remembrance Day for Lost Species. There were 4 prayer stations, one for each element: earth, air (eg birds/pollinators), water and fire. Fire was for humanity, for our pledges and resolutions.

SS spoke about an interfaith event in Salisbury diocese which involved foraging for food and then creating a banquet with what was gathered.

Festivals = Food and Fun

SW emphasised the importance of storytelling. She talked about River Dart Wild Church and recommended the website for more information. Social media is important and involvement with wider community is gained by creating a Facebook Community rather than just a Facebook Page. There is less control over a Community because anyone can post, but it is well worth taking the risk.

JB talked about the Buckfast Abbey pilgrimage for their millennium for which Sidmouth church had offered the use of their church building and hall as overnight accommodation for the pilgrims - the local community benefited from their presence: using the leisure centre shower facilities and buying their food and drink locally.

Midweek coffee was discussed and is fairly widespread. SC recommended small "prayer flyers" which can be left on tables to be taken away by people who would not otherwise come into contact with prayer in church.

SW explored the lack of space for unchurched, but spiritual, people to ask and learn. They are looking for depth in spiritual issues and need a place to dig deeply. She described "Wild Monastics", a midweek contemplative meditation study group which comprises study, silence and reflection. The books studied vary greatly but make no concessions: the Desert Mothers and Fathers, the Philokalia - theological originals. The sessions create space where people feel free to speak - the venue alternates between church and home.

SS described attending Buddhist Sangha meetings which follow the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh. The meetings (similar in structure to Wild Monastics) last 2 hours: silence/meditation, walking meditation, reading from a book a paragraph at a time, then Dharma (deep sharing). SS particularly likes sharing "Namaste" which signifies deep respect for the other.

JB commented that often people don't feel safe enough to share.

Other topics touched on in passing:

- Sea Sunday
- Beach Church (a Forest Church equivalent)
- Labyrinths (JB mentioned that they set one up in a hall in Axminster)
- Prayer walks various: in spring - bluebell walks or daffodil walks; in autumn - acorn walks or conker walks. The possibilities are almost infinite!

What stood out for me in the discussion:

- Our rural context gives us a wealth of different opportunities for "being church" (or "expressing spirituality") in new and different ways outside the church buildings - whether you call these "Fresh Expressions" or merely "special outreach events"
- The importance of good quality, well-timed publicity for events
- The huge opportunity there is for us to create safe space for people to ask, search and learn - and this might be the most important of all! But it depends on all the nitty gritty of DBS checks and safeguarding etc - all the tiresome admin - being done securely to ensure everyone's safety. If we are to create "safe space" on walks, in labyrinths, on pilgrimages, in silent meditation - wherever, whatever - we must ensure that we are providing *safe* space.