

## Reflections and Suggestions for Spirituality Events

Sam Wernham 2019

<https://www.riverdartwildchurch.com/>

Below are some reflections from my last 15+ years working professionally as a contemplative pioneer minister and overleaf are some basic suggestions for some 'spirituality events' to try. For more details, stories and pictures, please see my River Dart Wild Church website above. Why not share your own experiments and experience with our facebook community: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/791580240900640/>

### Before you begin

If you are thinking to offer spirituality events as a form of mission and especially if you are hoping to reach a wide range of different people, you might like to begin with a long, loving look at your own relationship to spirituality and to difference. Most of us are more effective and inspiring when we share what we know and love, so it is worth taking the time to deepen your own understanding and experience of Christian spirituality before you begin to bring it to others. This may seem obvious but why not begin by practising, growing and deepening your own form of spirituality, whether this be regular still and silent contemplation, prayer walking, retreat days, sacred art, poetry and music or longer pilgrimages and retreats etc. I also recommend that you get to know more about the many wonderful figures and forms of Christian spiritual tradition from the early Church to contemporary times – read widely, take a course (suggestions below) and share and reflect on the journey with a companion or two...

I suggest you also include different forms of spirituality in this process, especially if you are hoping to welcome difference within your events. Get to know what kind of spirituality events are already happening in your area. Are there, for example, yoga classes, meditation or mindfulness groups, nature based or different faith festival celebrations, shamanic dance and drumming, forest bathing and other forms of nature connection, sacred chant, sacred activism or meetings based around secular ethics etc? If anything makes you feel particularly uncomfortable, then give it a go! Cultivate an open heart and mind. All these experiences give you an opportunity to listen to others – to how they express their deeper values and spirituality, and to listen to yourself – especially, perhaps, your own fears and judgements. Notice what it feels like to meet unfamiliar language, to feel different or out of place and what helps and hinders you in making connections. (Bearing in mind how very unfamiliar Christianity is for many people now). This is all helpful information and you may make some great contacts along the way!

By taking time for the above, you can build a small core of spiritual companions and the beginnings of a wider network, which are both essential if you want to start offering spirituality events. With what you have learned, your core group can now start planning some great events together and hold them within your own ongoing learning, contemplation and reflective practice. Just keep remembering to BE STILL with God and with each other, before you get busy!

Some book & course suggestions:

Journey to the Heart. Christian Contemplation Through the Ages - Edited by Kim Nataraja

Christian Spirituality – Alister McGrath

Into the Silent Land – Martin Laird

The Mystic Heart – Wayne Teasdale

The Way of a Pilgrim – translated by Helen Bacovcin

...anything by Richard Rohr, Cynthia Bourgeault, Philip Newell, Thomas Keating, Laurence Freeman

Resources and courses suggestions:

The Julian Meetings: <https://thejulianmeetings.wildapricot.org/>

Sarum College: <https://www.sarum.ac.uk/>

Exeter Diocese – Exploring Christian Spirituality: <https://exeter.anglican.org/christian-faith/spiritual-growth/exploring-christian-spirituality/>

## Ideas for Spirituality Events

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Start a silent meditation group (offer a warm welcome, a long silence and a short time of sharing...)

Offer a spiritual book group (and anything deeply thought provoking, moving, honest, beautiful, mythic etc can be 'spiritual'. If choosing something overtly Christian, don't be afraid to pick something ancient or medieval and mystical. Take it in turns to offer a warm welcome, a short silence and invite reflections on the reading)

Guide a silent walk (get to know your route well first and perhaps work with a natural theme, but let God meet people through the land rather than imposing Bible texts, offer your gathering some guidance on moving into silence and embodied presence at the beginning, walk in silence ideally for at least 30-60 minutes, share tea and reflections and then perhaps conversation on the way back.)

You don't have to just walk... how about contemplative canoeing, climbing or camping?

Explore sacred chant (you don't have to be a great singer to share simple chants in a devotional way, leading into a quiet time and then shared reflection.)

Get inspired by sacred art or history (take a small group to visit a beautiful church or icons in a museum, take time to gaze quietly, perhaps to write or draw in response and then gather to reflect together afterwards – you don't need to be an expert, but do your homework so you have some interesting details to add to the pot!)

Be creative (offer a group quiet space & materials for drawing and writing around a spiritual/ nature connection theme, which can include time outside. Again, a long space for quiet creativity and a shorter time and open invitation for 'show & tell'.)

Gather for a seasonal celebration (it doesn't have to be liturgy but can be more of an installation with beautiful, seasonal and natural prayer stations (inside and/or outside) for contemplation and lighting a candle. Or if you want a service, why not keep it simple (no service sheets or formal prayers) and spacious. Let the language and music be open and inclusive and invite participation.

Work with storytelling and poetry in a reflective way within a group, retreat or event.

Offer a retreat day including any elements above – keep it spacious, slow and quiet.

Link up with eco and sacred activism, charity initiatives or national nature events, all of which can also be approached in contemplative and creative ways, eg Extinction Rebellion, Remembrance for Lost Species, The Wildlife Trust's '30 Days Wild', the National Trust's '50 things to do before you're 11and 3/4' and citizen science initiatives such as the Big Butterfly Count etc.

Collaborate with others... work with your local foragers, poets, storytellers, artists, historians, singers, activists, musicians and more in creative, contemplative and reflective ways.

How you hold yourself and others within sacred space makes more impact than the content of what you do. The more depth and breadth, thoughtfulness and authenticity you can bring to how you articulate your Christian spirituality, the deeper you can rest into silence, into stillness, into simply being and meeting God and others with an open mind and an undefended heart, the more any occasion can become a 'spirituality event'.

Wild blessings!  
Sam

