

## Ways to Pray

In what ways might we pray? In each of the next 12 months, **reflect** will offer an article on a range of ways of praying, with the emphasis very much on 'how to'. Each article will be by a different person, who will be writing very much from personal experience.

Methodist Spirituality is coming back on to the agenda – there is to be a connexional consultation in late October. It has always been there, and **reflect**, Methodists Supporting Spirituality and Retreats, arose out of an earlier Commission on Spirituality which reported to Conference in 1974. The Commission had 24 members, lay and ordained; it was chaired by Rev. Gordon Wakefield and its secretary was Rev. John Taylor.

Might all Methodists adopt a Rule of Life – a daily pattern of prayer and discipline – more typically associated with monastic practice or religious orders, but also evident in latter day communities such as the Iona Community and in our own Diaconal Order? This was one topic the Commission considered. It also encouraged the Connexion to promote church retreats, quiet days and church family weekends, for fellowship, study and spiritual enrichment.

“I am not religious but I am spiritual”, is a phrase often heard. Equally, and a bit naughtily perhaps, the phenomenon of “I am religious but not spiritual” might be the case?! Spirituality has become a vogue word and ‘mindfulness’ is everywhere. There is a danger that the church’s best clothes are being stolen! One aim of this new exploration and of the articles we will be offering is to help church folk reclaim and rediscover their heritage of spirituality, retreats and many diverse ways of praying.

Retreats have long been a part of life in both the Anglican and Roman Catholic traditions. The Commission report introduced Methodists to the practice of taking time away for quiet reflection in which to deepen our relationship with God. In turn this helps to make us become more aware of God’s presence and activity in our lives. In 1979 the Methodist Retreat Group was set up and built on this by organising retreats and publishing helpful material. Rev. Mary Holliday, one of the group’s founders, wrote “What is a Retreat?” and it proved a classic. The Group adopted the scallop shell as its logo, being the then symbol of Methodism, taken from the Wesley Coat of Arms, but also an ancient symbol of pilgrimage. The words of Sir Walter Raleigh were taken as a motto: “give me my scallop shell of quiet”.

One possible consequence was a feeling that not everyone can get away on a retreat. So another group, ‘Spirituality and Methodism’, came into being to help explore other ways of promoting spirituality in addition to, or in lieu of, retreats. Various forms of ‘retreat in daily life’, were promoted, including quiet days, weeks of guided prayer, and open door retreats. There was also a growth in the ministry of spiritual direction, outside of the world of ‘guided retreats’. Methodists found themselves doing the whole Spiritual Exercises in St. Ignatius of

Loyola, both on retreat *but also in daily life – and finding their lives transformed and changed in direction!*

So in 2003 there emerged the 'Methodist retreat and spirituality network', bringing these two strands together. In 2011 the name was changed again to '**reflect, Methodists Supporting Spirituality and Retreats**'. We are supporting what is already there – people's spirituality and hunger for God – and offering ever increasing means of enabling folk to deepen their relationship with God and to become more aware of God's presence and activity at the core of their being. Increasingly – though this was always the case from the outset – we are seeking to work ecumenically, especially with and through the National Retreat Association, of which the Methodist Retreat Group was a former member, and on whose board of trustees we are represented.

So nowadays we can draw from the whole church's spiritual heritage and find ways of adapting it to our present times. Also we can seek to rediscover the modern day Methodist contribution to offer to our sisters and brothers in other denominations. Gordon Wakefield wrote a classic book on 'Methodist spirituality'.

One potential shock, to warn you of in advance of this series of articles, is that many will focus on ways of being silent – not traditionally what we may be best known for. But arguably our activism may be better informed and shaped if it is increasingly based on time taken out, and on discernment often done in silence, whether individually or in a group. Not only do we have 'means of making you talk' but we may invite you to 'means of becoming silent'. My organ teacher tells me that the more noise I want to make on the organ, the more silences I must have between the notes! Otherwise my playing is simply din, and not music.

**Reflect** is open to anyone connected with Methodism with an interest in and a passion for sharing and developing spiritual practices within our denomination. We produce a twice-yearly newsletter and run some retreats ourselves. We can link you to the Retreat Association and its many publications and contacts. More information can be found at <http://www.reflectretreats.co.uk> and <http://www.retreats.org.uk>.

Happy praying and may your retreating enable you to advance the better!

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