

## What next?

### Visit St Columba's House, Woking

The leaders of our lent course came from St Columba's House, Woking. St Columba's House offers an annual programme of quiet days and retreats. Their web address is [www.stcolumbahouse.org.uk](http://www.stcolumbahouse.org.uk)

### Find a spiritual companion

The Winchester Diocese has a network of spiritual directors / soul friends / spiritual companions, who are available to accompany us on our journey of faith. If you would like to discuss the possibility of working with a director then please contact Rev Julia Mourant on 01962 737316 or email [julia.mourant@winchester.anglican.org](mailto:julia.mourant@winchester.anglican.org)

### Go on a retreat

A retreat is a chance to step aside from life for a while, to rest and just 'be' in a welcoming, peaceful place. They vary in length from something like 2 days to 7 days. You can choose a themed retreat or simply spend some time alone. A great place to start exploring the possibilities is

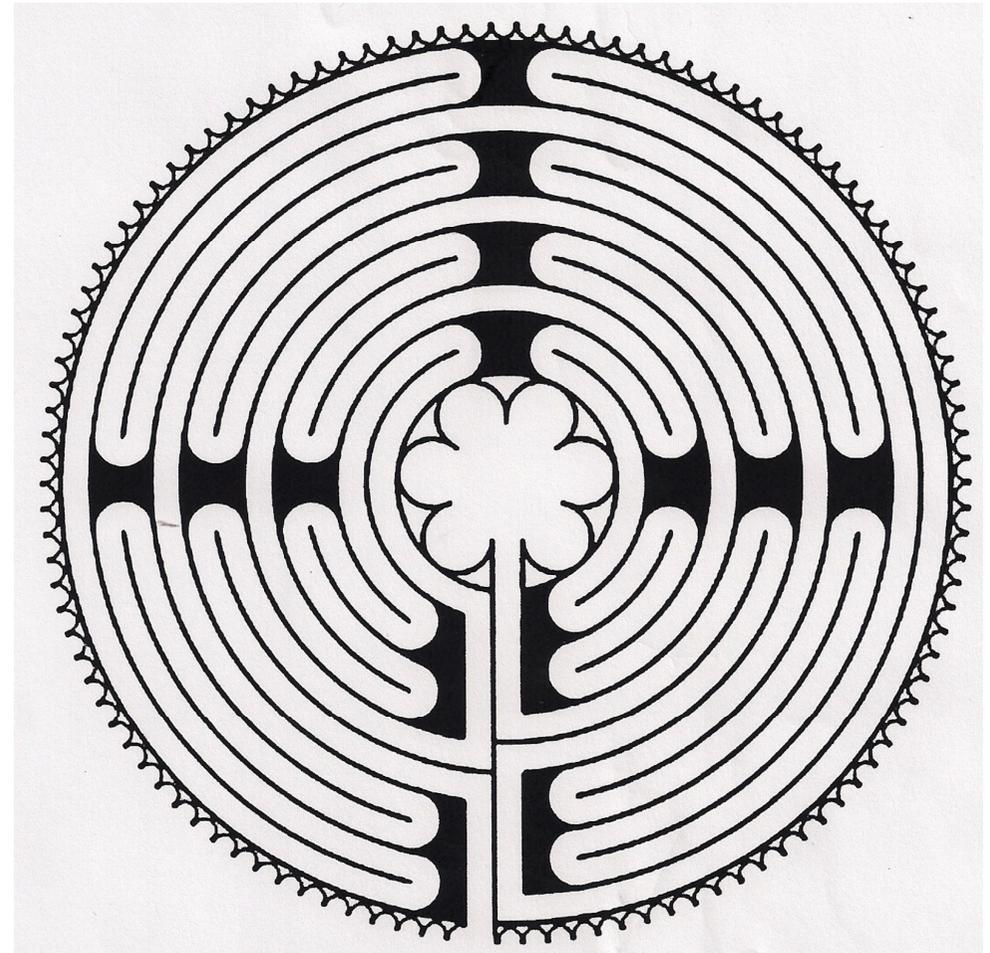
[www.retreats.org.uk](http://www.retreats.org.uk)

### Visit Ffald y Brenin

People from both St Marys and St Barnabas have visited Ffald y Brenin a retreat centre near Fishguard. It is a long way to travel but once you are there it is a spectacular setting. In the hills close to the Pembrokeshire coast. When we are there we join others for morning, midday and evening prayer and read books and walk the coastal path. I recommend it!

[www.fffald-y-brenin.org](http://www.fffald-y-brenin.org)

## Exploring Prayer and Spirituality



*Linda Scrivener, Pam Thorogood  
and Teresa Brooks*

*St Columba's House, Woking*

## **Introduction**—a daily rhythm of prayer

While at Ffald y Brenin, a Christian retreat centre, I was struck by this verse, Jesus said...

*Walk with me and work with me— watch how I do it.  
Learn the unforced rhythms of grace  
Matthew 11.29 MSG*

And as a result I would like to encourage all of us to find a daily rhythm of prayer which fits us and our lifestyle. What I do is ...

### **Morning—start the day with God**

At the beginning of each day I read the bible. I pray for those who have asked for prayer and I pray for the day.

### **Lunchtime—The Lords prayer**

I try to stop and pray the Lords Prayer. I pray Your kingdom come, Your will be done. (see [www.24-7prayer.com/content/789](http://www.24-7prayer.com/content/789))

### **Evening—seeing God in the day**

At the end of the day I review the day with God—using the Daily Examen on page 6 of this booklet.

I am immensely grateful to Linda, Theresa and Pam for their time in preparing and presenting our lent course for us.

It is now up to us to put into the practice what we have learnt.  
It is up to us to learn *the unforced rhythms of grace*.

## **Rule of life**

A Rule of Life needs to be personal to you—pray as you can, not as you can't.

Things that you could include in your “rule”.

**Worship**—you may decide to go to church once a week, whenever possible, or to attend communion once a month. Is there a lunchtime service near where you work?

**Prayer**—you may decide to put time apart every day—be realistic with the amount of time.

**Ministry**—ministry suggests that you are working for God, not an institution. This could be a regular commitment to visit an elderly person, to take a turn on the coffee rota—something in the world.

**Giving**—we need to respond to God's generosity. A difficult one this, but a small regular gift is a very good discipline.

**Christian Growth**— “To live is to change, and to become perfect is to change often” Cardinal Newman. We need to commit ourselves to growing and changing. This could be reading two or three Christian books a year, or regular bible reading. It could be having a spiritual friend—this gives you a safe place to explore your faith, perhaps to explore how or where God is calling you.

**Retreats and Quiet days**—Might seem like a luxury, but time apart is an essential part of many peoples journey.

**Other suggestions**— keeping a spiritual diary, taking physical exercise, all part of becoming a whole and fully functioning person.

A “Rule of life” should be hard enough to stretch you, but not so hard that it discourages you. Write it down. Review it every year. Don't even try if it feels like a set of regulations.

# Daily Examen

A great way to pray is to look for God's presence in your life. More than 400 years ago St. Ignatius of Loyola encouraged prayer-filled mindfulness by proposing what has been called the Daily Examen. The Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and to discern his direction for us. Try this ...

**1. Become aware of God's presence.** Look back on the events of the day in the company of the Holy Spirit. Ask God to bring clarity and understanding.

**2. Review the day with gratitude.** Gratitude is the foundation of our relationship with God. Walk through your day in the presence of God and note its joys and delights. Focus on the day's gifts. Look at the work you did, the people you interacted with. What did you receive from these people? What did you give them? Pay attention to small things—the food you ate, the sights you saw, and other seemingly small pleasures. God is in the details.

**3. Pay attention to your emotions.** One of St. Ignatius's great insights was that we detect the presence of the Spirit of God in the movements of our emotions. Reflect on the feelings you experienced during the day. Boredom? Elation? Resentment? Compassion? Anger? Confidence? What is God saying through these feelings?

God will most likely show you some ways that you fell short. Make note of these sins and faults. But look deeply for other implications. Does a feeling of frustration perhaps mean that God wants you consider a new direction in some area of your work? Are you concerned about a friend? Perhaps you should reach out to her in some way.

**4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.** Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is particularly important. It may involve a feeling—positive or negative. It may be a significant encounter with another person or a vivid moment of pleasure or peace. Or it may be something that seems rather insignificant. Look at it. Pray about it. Allow the prayer to arise spontaneously from your heart—whether intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude.

**5. Look toward tomorrow.** Ask God to give you light for tomorrow's challenges. Pay attention to the feelings that surface as you survey what's coming up. Are you doubtful? Cheerful? Apprehensive? Full of delighted anticipation? Allow these feelings to turn into prayer. Seek God's guidance. Ask him for help and understanding. Pray for hope.

St. Ignatius encouraged people to talk to Jesus like a friend. End the Daily Examen with a conversation with Jesus. Ask forgiveness for your sins. Ask for his protection and help. Ask for his wisdom about the questions you have and the problems you face. Do all this in the spirit of gratitude. Your life is a gift, and it is adorned with gifts from God.

# Listening to God's word (Lectio Divina)

**Be aware** that God fills you and soaks you with his presence. He loves you just as you are, is always conscious of you, always with you

**Choose** a passage from Scripture—not too long. (a gospel event, a psalm)

**Believe** that these words are God's words, and meant for you, here and now.

**Read it slowly**—perhaps one verse at a time; **read it aloud**, or whisper in a rhythm with your breathing. **Repeat** words or phrases whenever you feel like it.

**Linger** whenever you feel drawn or moved, if a word or phrase touches you, (You feel God's love, a sense of peace, happy, confused or disturbed by what the words are saying to you)

**This is God speaking directly to you in the words of Scripture.**

Don't hurry to move on. **Savour** these words; repeat them over and over again. **Relish** them, let them sink in and become part of you.

**Respond** after dwelling on each phrase that's moved you, may be you want to thank God, praise him, share your sadness, your confusion, and ask for his help or forgiveness.

Let prayer arise out of you—often it will be wordless—**Joy, Gratitude, wonder, tears**—

Whatever is going on within you as you receive His word can be gathered up and directed towards him.

**Talk** with the Lord about what you have heard any thoughts, feelings, doubts and concerns that have arisen during the prayer time. Be honest, carry on a conversation, as one friend to another.

**Don't be anxious—relax**—God will speak to you in his own way. Don't try to figure things out on your own, Look for lessons, solutions, and implications. Let God's Spirit pray in you.

# Imaginative Prayer

In its most common form, you take a passage from scripture, usually one of the gospels, and immerse yourself in it imaginatively using all the senses. You feel the heat of the day, smell the livestock and clouds of dust on the road, listen to Jesus' words, watch his actions. It's a way to engage the gospel personally, with all of our faculties.

How do we start? First we get settled in a comfortable chair and in a quiet place where we won't be distracted. Our first gesture might be to open our hands on our lap, and to ask God to open our hearts and imaginations.

Then pick a story out of scripture. Read through it once slowly and put it down. Now we begin to imagine the scene as if we are standing right there. What is around me? Who else is there? What do I hear in the scene? If I am in a house, what noises are in the house or in the street outside? What are the smells I can pick up?

Now we begin to imagine the scene we read about. Who is in it? What conversation takes place? What is the mood – tense? joyful? confused? angry?

Feel free to paint this picture in any way your imagination takes you. If we worry about historical accuracy, it can be a distraction that takes us away from prayer. This isn't scripture – this is letting God take our imaginations and reveal to us something of the intimate life of Jesus or others. If, in our prayer, Mary pulls the toddler Jesus onto her lap to tie his shoes or zip his coat, we can let it happen that way. We don't want to fret about the historically accurate kinds of food served at a dinner or what kind of carpenter tools Joseph might have really had in his workshop. Here is an experience of prayer that lets our imaginations free themselves from anything that limits them. This is God revealing himself to us.

It helps if we imagine Jesus and his disciples as the real people they were who walked the earth. St. Ignatius imagined that the first person Jesus appeared to after the Resurrection was his mother and he encourages us to picture Jesus appearing at home to Mary, watching the joy and emotion in the scene.

# How do I know it is God? (Discernment)

The process of sifting our experience to get a glimpse of God is known as "discernment".

The first principle is the belief that personal relationship with God is possible, and that God acts in the world and in our lives. God is a God of life, love and of hope. The inner experiences which come from God or speak of God are likely to reflect this life, love and hope rather than guilt, fear and rejection etc.

So when we look back over the day, our week, our life. We are particularly looking for moments of life, light or energy and these may be moments that speak to you of the God who communicates, who desires you to be "fully alive and fully human". Ask yourself the following questions

**Does it increase my desire to know God and respond to God?**

**Does it help me to be more accepting of myself and others?**

**Does it increase my desire to be generous or helpful?**

**Does it help me to become more open to life, to other people, to God?**

If the answer is yes to any of these questions, then it is possible to have more confidence that the experience is likely to be moving you in God's direction and may indeed be from God. Such experiences help us to grow and mature, to become more human.

There are experiences in life, which cause quite different reactions—fear, anxiety, resentment, shame, destructive anger. These sort of thoughts and feelings tend to close us down, they tend to turn us in on ourselves, rather than outward towards other people and God.

Movements which come from God tend to

**Help us to become more open, loving and hopeful**

**Tend to feel as if they "fit", they encourage and affirm**

**Draw us towards God and an openness to life**

**Elicit a response of gratitude in us**

As we reflect on these movements, be grateful for them, relish them and talk to God about them.

Although we cannot be definite about what God is doing in our lives, we can be confident that it will tend to be helping us to "choose life".