

TREK

Spiritual Development Programme For Staff in Anglican Schools

Part Two

Growth

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Welcome to Trek

TREK has been created to help those working in Anglican Schools explore their spirituality.

Spirituality is an important part of human wellbeing. It is a key part of the human search for meaning that all people participate in. This search helps us to live happy and fuller lives. Spirituality is recognised in the Bible as a fundamental aspect of human life that connects us with God, with each other and with the world. It is also an important part of education. Young people are at a formative stage of life. Schools have an important role to play in the development of their spirituality. Spiritual development is increasingly seen as an important part of education including here in Australia. The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* states:

“Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation’s ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion.”

Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008)

TREK is open to all people. It is firmly embedded in the Christian faith and is shaped by it. It focuses on the development of personal spirituality within a community and encourages participants to practice spiritually constructive action in the school.

The program is sensitive to the various spiritual starting places of school staff including the deeply spiritual, the curious but cautious seeker, the agnostic, the committed Anglican and those of other denominations and traditions.

There are four parts to the program each with a different theme: journey, growth, community and habit. Each part has five sessions. TREK is designed with a group journey in mind and can be completed over the course of a year meeting together every two weeks during term time or by meeting more regularly.

We hope you enjoy the journey.

Welcome to Part 2 of Trek

- The theme for Part 2 is growth.
- For each of the group meetings, you prepare a “challenge” that requires you to think about the theme in a particular way. During the challenge, you choose an artefact to bring to the next meeting.

The challenge prior to meeting one.

Challenge

- Practice Walking Meditation over the holidays. Aim for once a day for 10 minutes.
- Choose a prayer to accompany your walk.

Or

- Practice Morning or Evening Prayer as a new spiritual discipline. You will need An Australian Prayer Book.

Choose a reading from the material from next week and gather your ideas

- Read the passage with the focus question in mind.
- Complete the questions below the reading.

Journal

- Reflect on the term’s experience.
- How would you characterise your time with the Spiritual Development group?
- What will you take with you from the challenges you have completed?

Collect an Artefact for next session

- This may be a written reflection on your experience of saying Morning and or Evening Prayer, or photos from your walking mediation
- Or something you find on your holiday which symbolises your experience in the Spiritual Development Group.

Choose a reading from the material for next week (Term 2: Week One) and gather your ideas

- Read the passage with the focus question in mind.
- Complete the questions below the reading.



Growth Week 1

Order of activities for the meeting

1. Gathering activity
2. Discuss your artefacts
3. Discuss what you learn from the Readings
4. Conclusion
5. Actions for Next Meeting

Gathering activity

Activity

If you have a garden bed available
you will need:

Gardening gloves 1 pair each

Gardening fork – 1 each

If you wish to pot your own plants
you will need:

Gardening gloves 1 pair each

Gardening fork – 1 each

Small pots

Potting mix

seedlings



- Look around the school to find a garden bed that could use some tender, loving care.
- Grab your gardening gloves and a gardening fork and see what you can achieve together for the first 20 minutes of your group.
- If you would prefer to create your own gardens to tend during this term, bring along a pot each and some potting mix and plant some seedlings.
- These pots could be a focus for your reflection during the term.
- During the activity, discuss what a gardener needs to create a suitable climate for growth.

Discussion

- Spiritual growth is a dynamic process. Just as a gardener can prepare the soil, maintain the ground and add water and fertilizer, actual growth is not up to the gardener.
- Consider the skills that make a good gardener - patience, observation, memory, commitment, passion, understanding of the seasons.
- Consider the habits of a good gardener- consistent effort, routine weeding and watering, pruning when necessary.

Discuss the artefacts

Remember the challenge you completed prior to meeting-

- Practice Walking Meditation over the holidays. Aim for once a day for 10 minutes.
 - Choose a prayer to accompany your walk.
- Or
- Practice Morning or Evening Prayer as a new spiritual discipline. You will need An *Australian Prayer Book*.

Artefact:

- This may be a written reflection on your experience of saying Morning and or Evening Prayer, or photos from your walking meditation.
- Or something you find on your holiday which symbolises your experience in the Spiritual Development Group.

The group shares stories from the challenge -

- Each participant has the opportunity to show their artefact and tell their story.
- While someone is speaking, their artefact is the “talking stick” ...this allows the speaker uninterrupted time to tell their story.
- Agree beforehand how much time each person has and allow time for comments and questions at the end.
- Ensure that each participant has a chance to share.



Readings and discussion

As part of your preparation for today's session, you will have read and considered one or more of the following stimulus materials.

Contribute to a group discussion on the ideas.

Identify the reading you chose and discuss the insights you gained.

Reading 1

This psalm begins with a reflection/wondering about the nature of the ever-present God, the God who is so intimate that there is nowhere and no way of being away from God.

Psalm 139:

- 13 For it was you who formed my inward parts;
You knit me together in my mother's womb.
- 14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.
- 15 My frame was not hidden from you,
When I was being made in secret,
Intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
- 16 Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written all the days that were formed for me,
When none of them as yet existed.

1. What is your reaction to this psalm? Do you feel it relates particularly to you, or do you read it as being particular to the psalmist?

2. Imagine you wrote this psalm. How do you move into the world after feeling so close to the Creator?

3. If you could ask God one question about your own creation, what would it be?

Reading 2

Martin Laird, *Into the Silent Land*, Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, London 2006, pp 3-4.

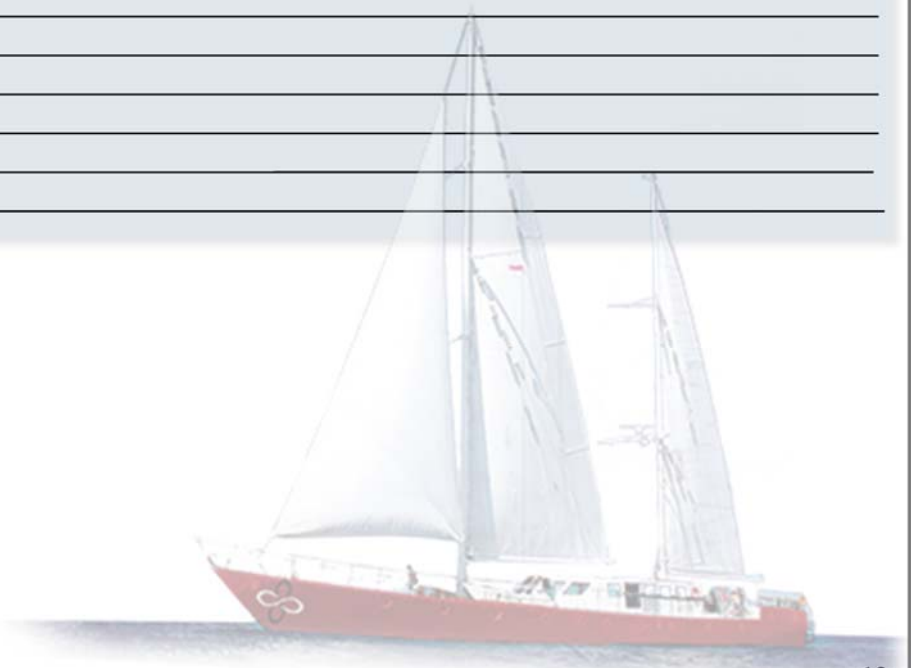
A gardener practices certain gardening skills that facilitate growth that is beyond the gardener's direct control. In a similar way, a sailor cannot produce the necessary wind that moves the boat. A sailor practices sailing skills that harness the gift of wind that brings the sailor home, but there is nothing the sailor can do to make the wind blow. And so it is with contemplative practice, not a technique, but a skill. The skill required is interior silence.

There are two contemplative practices of fundamental importance in the Christian tradition: the practice of stillness (also called meditation, still prayer, contemplative prayer, etc.) and the practice of watchfulness or awareness.

1. Tease out the two metaphors at work in this passage. How do they illustrate the work of the Holy Spirit?

2. Describe two insights about the nature of spiritual discipline.

3. Laird states that there are two contemplative practices necessary for the spiritual life – stillness and watchfulness. What is your response to this simple statement?



Reading 3

Tales of a suburban gardener coffee connoisseur.

My mother was an awesome gardener. She ignored any planning direction on a new pot plant and merrily crowded seedlings that required a “ruler measurement of 40cm between each thumbhole”; placed “partial sun” newbies in the shade and watered everything routinely, cacti included.

Things just grew. She was known for it. Visit for a cuppa and you’d go away with a cutting of something lush in a recycled pot. Invite her over for dinner and she’d have a cotton wool ball soaked in water, keeping a posy of dainty pansies fresh - a piece of tinfoil wrapped around the lot.

I did not inherit this gift. The side garden has been taken over by the nasturtiums. The back yard resembles a cattle yard after a drought – what the neighbour’s Poinciana doesn’t shade, the trampoline does. Then there’s a garden bed out the front. It has given me grief for 20 years. We moved in to the newly planted bed of grevilleas. Those lasted until our toddler turned out to be allergic to them. Lavender was next – a whim of the man of the house. Ten different types to be precise. It happened that they all needed different soil ph, and varying amounts of water. Ferns suffered from too much sun. Daisies suffered from too much shade. The dry spell came along with water restrictions and we just gave up.

Now that sprinklers are a part of suburban life once more, we gave it one more afternoon of work, vowing to brick the lot if it didn’t work this time. Lo and behold, eight flamboyant hibiscus plants are flourishing in what appears to be their ideal conditions – morning shade, afternoon sun and a brick wall behind them to keep them warm with radiant heat at night. They bloom constantly and appear not to notice the sporadic nature of the watering regime at our place. Growing between them is an abundant oregano groundcover that shouldn’t, parsley that survived transplanting and mint that has yet to overtake the rest. RESULT!

Some living things will flourish under only the most precise conditions. Others will thrive despite our misunderstanding of their real needs. Most will survive if given half a chance.

1. How would you categorise your spiritual growth in gardening terms?

2. Most plants need water, sun, some shade and food. What are your basic needs for spiritual growth?

3. Plants struggle to maintain lush growth when bugs attack, or when resources are limited. What stops you from flourishing spiritually?

Conclusion

You may have touched on these points through your discussion. Conclude your time together by revising the idea that Spiritual Development involves periods of sameness and routine.

Spiritual development is growth through seasons.

It is a living, dynamic process and involves periods of obvious growth and times of apparent dormancy

Once thriving though, the spiritual life of an individual and community produces fruit that sustains

A wise and patient gardener trusts to the rhythm of the seasons, remembering that while abundance is an obvious goal, work is done in the colder seasons, under the earth and away from our sight.



Before the next meeting:

Challenge

- Care for a garden each day for a week. If you already have a garden where you regularly spend time, use this week to notice its growth more intently.
- Record what you do in the garden this week.
- If you don't have a garden of your own, you might adopt a patch in the park, or plant a small window box, or offer to weed a neighbour's garden patch.
- Even if it is just watering every couple of days, do it mindfully and enjoy being outside and quiet within the growing world.
- Take pictures of the changes each day. Record your time in a journal.

Journal

- What gardens have you experienced in the past?
- Describe a garden/natural space that is important to you.
- Include images if possible

Collect an Artefact for next session

- This might include cuttings from the garden, or images of fruit, flowers, insects and leaves. Be creative.

Choose a reading from the material from next week and gather your ideas

- Read the passage with the focus question in mind.
- Complete the questions below the reading.



Growth Week 2

Seasons – Dormant not Dead

Order of activities for the meeting

1. Gathering activity
2. Discuss your artefacts
3. Discuss what you learn from the Readings
4. Conclusion
5. Actions for Next Meeting

Gathering activity

You will need:

the garden or pots from the last session

Coloured card

scissors

pens

sticks from the garden or popsicle sticks

sticky tape

Activity

- Observe last week's garden or pots and consider how much has happened in the intervening days.
 - Imagine the work going on under the soil, out of our sight.
- Breathe deeply and imagine the same life force at work in you and those you love.
 - Consider how you want to grow in all areas of your life.
- Come up with some "plantitudes" – lessons we can learn from plants!

Some Plantitudes we prepared earlier

Sometimes to grow straight, you need support

When you've out-grown your space, don't be afraid to re-pot.

Pruning is a must, or you're in for a bad leaf day.

Re-potting lets your roots grow.

Use the cardboard, scissors, sticks and tape to post your "plantitudes" in the soil for others to see and ponder over.

Discussion

- Share your observations of the growth (or otherwise!) of the plants.
- Discuss your expectations for the plot/pots.
- Consider how you will be able to tell when these expectations are fulfilled.

Discuss the artefacts

Remember the challenge you completed prior to meeting-

Challenge

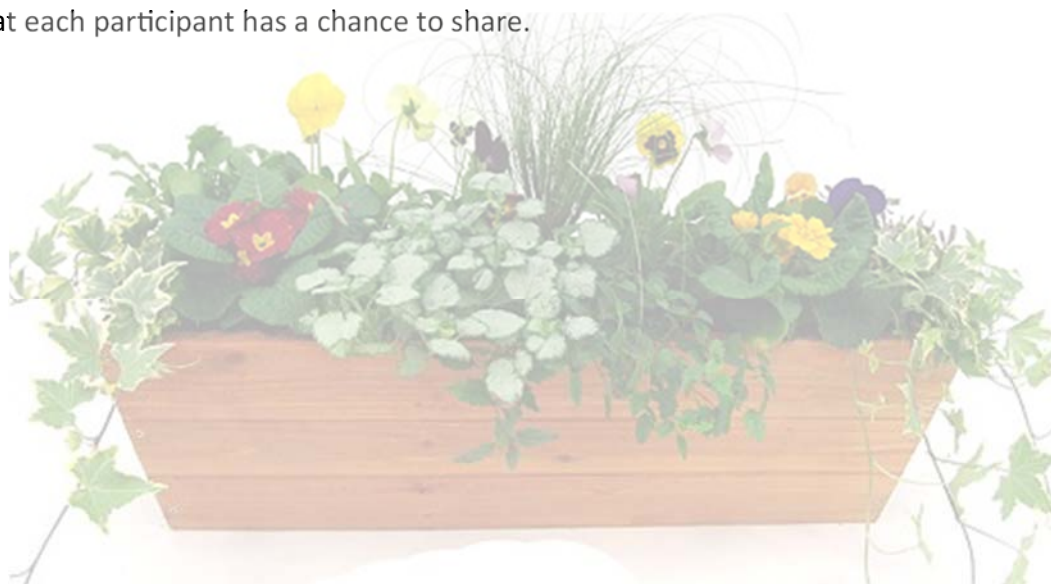
- Care for a garden each day for a week. If you already have a garden where you regularly spend time, use this week to notice its growth more intently.
- Record what you do in the garden this week.
- If you don't have a garden of your own, you might adopt a patch in the park, or plant a small window box, or offer to weed a neighbour's garden patch.
- Even if it is just watering every couple of days, do it mindfully and enjoy being outside and quiet within the growing world.
- Take pictures of the changes each day. Record your time in a journal.

Artefact

- This might include cuttings from the garden, or images of fruit, flowers, insects and leaves. Be creative.

The group shares stories from the challenge-

- Each participant has the opportunity to show their artefact and tell their story.
- While someone is speaking, their artefact is the "talking stick"...this allows the speaker uninterrupted time to tell their story.
- Agree beforehand how much time each person has and allow time for comments and questions at the end.
- Ensure that each participant has a chance to share.



Readings and discussion

As part of your preparation for today's session, you will have read and considered one or more of the following stimulus materials.

Contribute to a group discussion on the ideas.

Identify the reading you chose and discuss the insights you gained.

Reading 1

Paula Gooder, in her book Ordinary Time, reflects on the nature and importance of the weeks in the Church calendar that fall between the celebrations of Pentecost and Advent. You don't need to know what these weeks mean to an Anglican Christian, or have participated in a parish during these "not a celebration" weeks to appreciate Paula Gooder's thoughts about the importance of the ordinary.

Paula Gooder, Ordinary Time, Canterbury Press, London, 2012, pp. 8-9

A commitment to Ordinary Time, then is a commitment to time itself, to the marking off of days and weeks, not so that we can wish them away but so that we can savour them. Ordinary Time challenges us to become 'measured people', people who commit themselves to a greater spaciousness of living and to a less frenetic mode of being. It invites us to be more generous to ourselves and to re-interrogate the rhythms of our life to ensure that our ordinary lives contain enough space within them for us to flourish.

As we mark week after week, we are challenged to celebrate the good times and grieve for the bad, to recall our joys and confess our failings. This rhythmic passing of time is one which the monastic tradition understands profoundly. The monastic life of regular prayer and worship...draws people deeply into ordinariness through the passing of time in a particular place and it is in that ordinariness that they encounter God.

Many people today are beginning to rediscover the value of monastic living...the challenge for each one of us is to find a rhythm that works with our personality, our home life and our working pattern.

One of the complexities of this is that , when you have found the rhythm that works for you and you have done it for long enough, then the rhythm carries you. I have often heard the people who say Morning and Evening prayer regularly, reflect on the fact that no matter how bad your day is, how unprepared for worship you are, how distracted you are...the service carries you along...like steering in the current of a river. Once there the rhythm does the rest, pulling you closer and deeper into the presence of God. The problem is getting into the rhythm in the first place. It takes discipline, practice and sometimes pure grim determination to get over the hump of boredom, distraction and busyness into the rhythm beyond.

- 1. Paula Gooder describes the usefulness of ordinary time. How do you respond to her idea that the ordinary time is to be savoured and valued?**

2. Describe two insights you gained from this passage.

3. Identify one question you have about the nature of the ordinary, unremarkable times in our lives.

Reading 2

Henri Nouwen, *Out of Solitude*, Ave Maria Press, Indiana, 1974, pp55-56

The mother of expectation is patience...A few years ago I met an old professor at the University of Notre Dame. Looking back on his long life of teaching, he said with a funny twinkle in his eyes: "I have always been complaining that my work was constantly interrupted, until I slowly discovered that my interruptions were my work."

That is the great conversion in our life: to recognize and believe that the many unexpected events are not just disturbing interruptions of our projects, but the way in which God molds our hearts and prepares us for his return. Our great temptations are boredom and bitterness. When our good plans are interrupted by poor weather, our well-organized careers by illness or bad luck, our peace of mind by inner turmoil, our hope for peace by a new war, our desire for a stable government by a constant changing of the guards, and our desire for immortality by real death, we are tempted to give in to a paralysing boredom or to strike back in destructive bitterness. But when we believe that patience can make our expectations grow, then fate can be converted into a vocation, wounds into a call for deeper understanding, and sadness into a birthplace of joy.

1. Describe the major "interruptions" that constitute your life.

2. Identify a time when your plans were derailed by life and describe the outcome.

3. What questions would you like to ask Henri Nouwen about this?

Reading 3 - Romans 8: 24 – 28

- 24. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?
- 25. But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.
- 26. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.
- 27. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.
- 28. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

1. In what ways does this passage speak to you of the different types of work needed to grow in faith and spirituality?

2. Describe the role that hope plays in your life at the moment.

3. If you could ask the author one thing about this passage, what would it be?

Reading 4

M. Robert Mulholland Jnr., Invitation to a Journey: A Road map for Spiritual Formation, InterVarsity Press, Illinois, pp 21-23.

What we don't realize is that often a period of apparent spiritual stagnation, a time in which we don't feel as if we are going anywhere, a phase of life in which our relationship with God seems weak or non-existent, the time of dryness, of darkness – what the mothers and fathers of the church speak of as the desert experience – is filled with nurturing down below the surface that we never see...This hidden work of God is nurturing that prepares us for what appears to be a quantum leap forward. What we see as the quantum leap may actually be only the smallest part of what has been going on in a long, steady process of grace, working far beyond our knowing and understanding, to bring us to that point where we are ready for God to move us into a new level of spiritual awareness and a new depth of wholeness in relationship with God in Christ...the idea of spiritual growth as a continuous process rubs harshly against the deeply ingrained instant-gratification mode of our culture. Perhaps one of our first spiritual struggles for genuine growth toward wholeness will be against this strongly entrenched approach to life. There is much in our culture that infiltrates our attitudes unconsciously and makes us expect spiritual formation to happen instantaneously rather than through the steady progress of a process.

1. Identify a time when you felt the “desert experience”.

2. Describe the growth that resulted from that time. Is it easy to identify the changes, or do you still have questions?

3. How do you respond to the statement that our culture expects instant gratification?

Conclusion

You may have touched on these points through your discussion. Conclude your time together by revising the idea that Spiritual Development involves periods of apparent dormancy.

Spiritual Development involves periods of apparent dormancy, when we are like a garden in winter

When we feel like nothing is happening, God may be working in our deepest heart

In a cold, long winter there will be few signs of life

It is easy to give up and move onto something else. Yet spring brings renewal and a chance at another cycle of life and growth

Often when we perceive nothing happening on the surface, there is deep nurturing and sustaining going on down below

Growth Week 3

Order of activities for the meeting

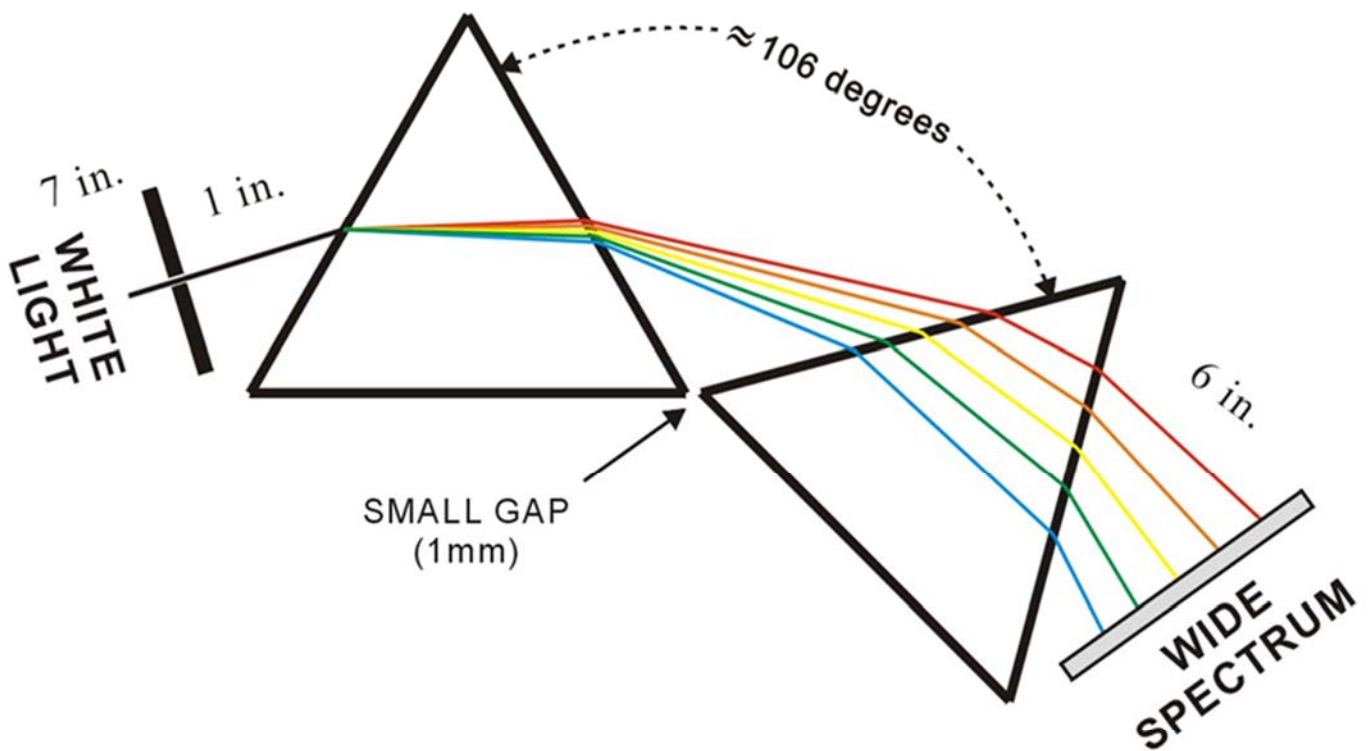
1. Gathering activity
2. Discuss your artefacts
3. Discuss what you learn from the Readings
 4. Conclusion
5. Actions for Next Meeting

Gathering activity

You will need:

- A selection of prisms
- Light source

Play with a collection of prisms. See how the light changes, and can be thrown around the room.



Discussion

- Notice how one element can bring out details in another, can act on another to show it as it really is, to transform it and reveal it. To our eyes, light looks transformed when it is refracted using a prism. It is broken into its constituent spectral colours. Christian spirituality seeks to move a person closer to God, to awaken in them an awareness of the God-ness of which they are a part. To allow the person to glow in all their God-given colours.
- While many of us long for transformation in some areas of our lives – freedom from habit, freedom to express ourselves effectively, courage in particular circumstances, most of us want to remain essentially ourselves.
- Spiritual development practices like silence, stillness, prayer and mindfulness seek to prepare the ground for growth. God's transformation of us is surprising and renewing, but we are essentially always our own selves.



Discuss the artefacts

Remember the challenge you completed prior to meeting-

Challenge

- Reflect on your experience of growth.
- Create an artistic expression of the mystery of growth – from seed to plant, from young to old, from innocent to wise...pick your interpretation.
- This is not for a competition or marks! It is not to be judged in any way and can be as intricate or broad as you make it. You are offering your impressions as explanation.
- Use any medium you like, from colouring pens, graphite pencils and paper, film, sketching, painting.

Artefact

- Bring along your artwork if you wish to share it.
- Otherwise, keep your eyes out for another interpretation/representation of the mystery of growth, the forces which move out of our control or sight. This may take the form of a poem, a picture, photograph, or a reflection from your journal.

The group shares stories from the challenge -

- Each participant has the opportunity to show their artefact and tell their story.
- While someone is speaking, their artefact is the “talking stick” ...this allows the speaker uninterrupted time to tell their story.
- Agree beforehand how much time each person has and allow time for comments and questions at the end.
- Ensure that each participant has a chance to share.

Readings and discussion

As part of your preparation for today’s session, you will have read and considered one or more of the following stimulus materials.

Contribute to a group discussion on the ideas.

Identify the reading you chose and discuss the insights you gained.

Reading 1

In this passage, Laird talks about transformation as a change of consciousness, as something that we can learn. Rather than being a random, lightning bolt action given from outside us, he speaks of transformation as a way of experiencing God, others and ourselves.

Martin Laird, *Into the Silent Land: The Practice of Contemplation*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2006, p17.

Some who are tediously metaphysical might worry that all this talk of union with God blurs the distinction between Creator and creation. Far from blurring this distinction, it sets it in sharper focus. John’s Gospel says we are the branches and Christ is the vine. (John 15:5). The branches are not separate from the vine but one with it. If the branch is cut off, you won’t have a branch, for it soon shrivels away. A branch is a branch insofar as it is one with the vine. From the branch’s perspective it is all vine. Speaking of this transformation of consciousness that marks the moving into awareness of our grounding union with God, Meister Eckhart says, “All things become pure God to you, for in all things you see nothing but God.” John of the Cross speaks along similar lines. “It seems to (the soul) that the entire universe is a sea of love in which it is engulfed, for, conscious of the living point or centre of love within itself, it is unable to catch sight of the boundaries of this love.” When life is lived from “the centre” as John of the Cross terms it, all of life seems shot through with God.

We might liken the depths of the human to the sponge in the ocean. The sponge looks without and sees ocean; it looks within and sees ocean. The sponge is immersed in what at the same time flows through it. The sponge would not be a sponge were this not the case...the more we realize we are one with God the more we become ourselves, just as we are, just as we were created to be.

1. How do you react to the idea that we are in and of God, that we must realise that we are one with God to become fully ourselves?

2. Describe one area of your life that would be transformed if you could maintain a view like the one described above.

3. Identify one question you have about the nature of spiritual growth and development as described by Laird .

Reading 2

John 15: 5-9

1. I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower,
2. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.
3. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.
4. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.
5. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.
6. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers: such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.
7. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.
8. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.
9. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

1. Explore the metaphor of the vine and branches. Is a branch any less a part of the vine than, say, the fruit?

2. What are two insights you note, about the nature of our relationship with God as expressed in this passage from St John's Gospel?

3. What questions do you have about this passage? Who would you like to ask?

Reading 3

Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith*, Harper San Francisco, 1998, pp49-50.

Put simply, the contemplative life is the steady gaze of the soul upon the God who loves us. It is "an intimate sharing between friends" to use the words of Teresa of Avila*. ...some of the contemplative life's most fundamental characteristics...

Love – through time and experience we sense a delicate but deepening love for God that feels more like a gift than an achievement...

Peace – At the same time, in slips a peace that cannot be analysed or dissected – "a peace that passes understanding, as Paul puts it (Phil. 4:7). This quiet rest, this firmness of life orientation, is not due to the absence of conflict or worry. In fact, it is not an absence at all, but rather a Presence. This peace is interrupted often by a multitude of distractions, especially in the beginning...

Wisdom - ...no sterile intellectualism or impersonal awareness, this is a knowing and inflowing of God...we know as we are known...

Transformation – Through it all, God gradually and slowly "captures" the inner faculties: first the heart and the will, then the mind, the imagination, and the passions. The result is the transformation of the entire personality into the likeness of Christ.

****The Life: The Collected Works of St Teresa*, vol. 1, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1976, p 67.**

1. Identify three ideas that resonate with you about your own spiritual journey.

2. Identify areas of your life that have been transformed in this way.

3. Frame a question to ask the others in your group, about the nature of spiritual growth as described by Foster.



Conclusion

You may have touched on these points through your discussion. Conclude your time together by revising the idea that Spiritual Development has times where rapid growth leads to transformation, with the emphasis on revealing truth and our essential character.

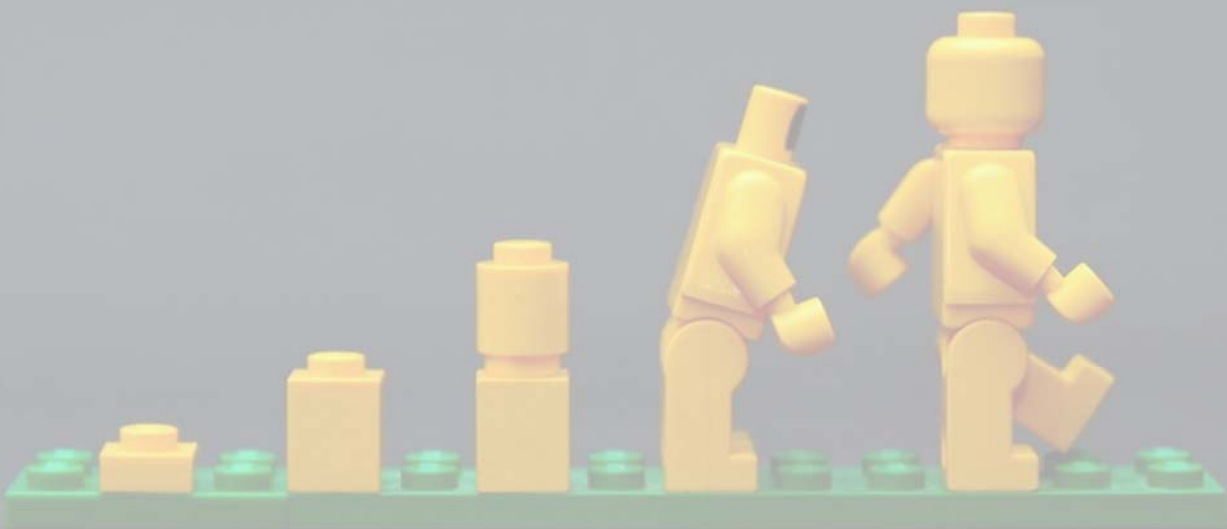
Spiritual
Development
involves a
process of
transformation

Our modern context relishes in the idea that things can transform from one thing to another

Transformers, transfiguration, miracle cures, magic, CGI all contribute to an agreed understanding that transformation takes one thing and makes it into another

In nature however, and in Christian Spirituality, transformation is more about a creature becoming its true, adult self - The thing it was always meant to be

When we crave transformation in the Christian life, we become who we are designed to be



Growth Week 4

Order of activities for the meeting

1. Gathering activity
2. Discuss your artefacts
3. Discuss what you learn from the Readings
4. Conclusion
5. Actions for Next Meeting

Gathering activity

You will need:

Glasses for the “abundance audit” (optional)

Paper

Pens

- Take a walk around the school together and make an inventory of all that it has in abundance.
- If you want to draw some attention to the process, consider wearing novelty glasses. When people ask you what you are doing, you can mention the “abundance audit”.
 - Make notes, or take photos of the resources.
- Discuss how your school’s abundance could be of service to others, the students, staff or community.

Discussion

- Look around and be surprised by just how much life has for you.
 - Jesus wants us to have life and have it to the full.
- This notion of abundance and extravagance is one we often struggle with, thinking that we must work at deserving life’s wonderful gifts.
- What is worth having? Less is so often more...less clutter, less busy-ness, more space to participate in the things that bring true contentment and joy.



Discuss the artefacts

Remember the challenge you completed prior to meeting-

- Set aside 20 minutes for a walk around your home and neighbourhood.
- Create an awareness of the abundance in your life.
- Make a list of the things/people/time/events/experiences you have in abundance.
- Identify any of these which may contribute to the wellbeing of your spirit

Artefact:

- This may take the form of a photograph of your abundant resource, or an artistic interpretation.
- Perhaps even a flower picked from your garden on the way out the door this morning.

The group shares stories from the challenge -

- Each participant has the opportunity to show their artefact and tell their story.
- While someone is speaking, their artefact is the “talking stick”...this allows the speaker uninterrupted time to tell their story.
- Agree beforehand how much time each person has and allow time for comments and questions at the end.
- Ensure that each participant has a chance to share.

Readings and discussion

As part of your preparation for today's session, you will have read and considered one or more of the following stimulus materials.

Contribute to a group discussion on the ideas.

Identify the reading you chose and discuss the insights you gained.

Reading 1

Joan Mueller, *Living a Spirituality of Action: A Woman's Perspective*, St Anthony Messenger Press, Ohio, 2008, pp 49-50.

The greatest gift from God, of course, is the gift of Jesus Christ himself. God became human, so that we could become divine, early Christian writers tell us. In becoming human, God took our nature and lived among us. A literal translation of John 1:14 reads, “and the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us.” In modern English, we might say: “And the word became flesh and moved into our neighbourhood!” God became human and lived as we do.

What happens if we offer our hearts to God? The Gospel of Luke gives us a perfect example. Jesus is on the cross with his enemies below taunting him. What does he do? Curse everyone out? Rant and rave? No. Luke says he looked at everyone and then peacefully asked his Father to forgive them all. He then breathed his last breath into his Father's hands and died. One wonders, is that all there is? Is this what it means to be a friend of God?

But no. Luke has a second book, the Acts of the Apostles. This book opens with the disciples huddled together, fearfully crouched in the upper Room praying. Suddenly the Spirit of Jesus bursts upon them in tongues of fire. This is what the Father does with the last breath of Jesus...moves the disciples to preach and teach in Jesus' name. A church, a religion is born. Jesus did a lot in his lifetime, but could never have dreamed of accomplishing this! Jesus simply did his best. God took the gift and amplified it one hundredfold.

We do not need to worry about giving God what we have. We do not need to be concerned that God is miserly. We do not need to wonder if our sacrifice will be greater than our reward. We do not need to worry that God will cheat us. God is a good business partner. A deal with God has guaranteed returns.

1. Identify three points that stand out for you from Pastor Grimbol's writing.

2. In what ways would you like to apply this understanding to your life right now?

3. In what ways have your spiritual journey informed your "calling", as Grimbol describes it?

Reading 2

M. Robert Mulholland Jr., Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation, InterVarsity Press, Illinois, 1993. P 49.

Thank you, O God, for meeting me here in ways far beyond my knowing. I thank you for working in me in ways far deeper than my awareness I thank you for your love. It enfolds me even when I am most resistant to your presence. I thank you for your grace. It offers yourself to me even when my back is turned. I thank you, as I come into your presence...for the infinite variety of your creative power in my life. I thank you for the infinite diversity that you have crafted into me. It makes me a unique person. As I think upon this, I pray that you will enable me to be truly thankful for the creation gifts you have given me. Enable me to offer myself to you for the work you want to do in me and through me, in my life in the world.

1. In what ways does this prayer resonate with your own life?

2. What parts of this prayer would you consider taking with you for another day?

3. Imagine that God responded in person to this prayer. What might be the content of that response?

Conclusion

You may have touched on these points through your discussion. Conclude your time together by revising the idea that God has an abundance of grace ready for those willing to recognise it.

Life with an eye on
Spiritual develop-
ment trains us to
recognise the
richness of God's
work in our lives

Seasons of scarcity and struggle will eventually give way to seasons of
fertility and abundance

Life with a focus on the God-ness in all things will train our eyes to look
for signs of life, be they obvious and bountiful, or small and still

Before the next meeting:

Challenge

- What is your body telling you?
- Listen to and create awareness of your body this week.
- Record the amount of sleep you get each night.

Date	Hours of	How do you feel about sleep today?	Reasons for great sleep, or poor sleep

Journal

- What are the niggling messages your body has for you?
- Jot down your concerns about your health, and take steps toward addressing them.
- This may be as small as an overdue dental check up, or more concerning.
- You don't have to share these in the group, but it is useful to address issues of physical well-being in order to make the most of your interior life.

Collect an Artefact for next session

- Identify the events/people/experiences that feed your spirit. Make a connection with one of those people this week and record the meeting/phone call/text/Facebook/tweet in some way. Bring this along to share and tell the story of your friendship.

Choose a reading from the material from next week and gather your ideas

- Read the passage with the focus question in mind.
- Complete the questions below the reading.

Growth Week 5

Order of activities for the meeting

1. Gathering activity
2. Discuss your artefacts
3. Discuss what you learn from the Readings
4. Conclusion
5. Actions for Next Meeting

Gathering activity

You will need

Paper

Pens

Copies of how to draw a labyrinth from term 1, week 1.

Or

Labyrinth set up in the grounds

- As this is the final meeting for Semester One of your Spiritual Development Community, celebrate the journey travelled together by revisiting the Labyrinth.
- Build a labyrinth before the meeting on the oval, or in a garden using biodegradable materials, or use paper and pens to draw one each.
- As you walk, or draw, contemplate the nature of cycles in your life...work and holiday, energy and rest, plenty and emptiness, wholeness and fracture, illness and healing.



Discussion

- Wisdom allows us to apply patience or action as necessary according to the season.
- When a seed falls in fertile soil it becomes a part of the cycle of the seasons, growing in the spring, fruiting in the summer, shedding dead wood/leaves in the autumn and lying dormant in the winter. One who has seen this pattern repeatedly will be patient and serene, knowing that the seasons each have a purpose and that all the phases are completed at the right time. We work hard and it is vital that we recognise that rest and slowness are required. It seems that in a teacher's year there are two speeds, full-on and holidays. Given that most "Holidays" can mean full-on family responsibilities along with preparation for next term, we need to listen to our internal signals and take deliberate care of ourselves.
- Growth in the natural world involves periods of rest. Growth in our spiritual lives sometimes depends on rest, care and nourishment of our bodies.
- Intentional spiritual development and engagement in liturgy can provide access to these rhythms in life and remind us to pause and take care of ourselves.

Discuss the artefacts

Remember the challenge you completed prior to meeting-

Challenge

- What is your body telling you?
- Listen to and create awareness of your body this week.
- Record the amount of sleep you get each night.

Date	Hours of sleep	How do you feel about sleep today?	Reasons for great sleep, or poor sleep

Artefact:

Identify the events/people/experiences that feed your spirit. Make a connection with one of those people this week and record the meeting/phone call/text/facebook/tweet in some way. Bring this along to share and tell the story of your friendship.

The group shares stories from the challenge-

- Each participant has the opportunity to show their artefact and tell their story.
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Readings and discussion

As part of your preparation for today's session, you will have read and considered one or more of the following stimulus materials.

Contribute to a group discussion on the ideas.

Identify the reading you chose and discuss the insights you gained.

Reading 1

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*, InterVarsityPress, Illinois, 2005, pp71-72

God inhabits our bodies, delighting in every inch of us. Every eccentricity and peculiarity is received. Every longing and self-destructive habit is known. God knows us through and through and still wants to make home inside of us. The fact that the Holy Spirit wants to abide in us is one way we know how infinitely precious and beloved we are. We are God's own prized possessions. Prized possessions are something you take care of...Spirituality doesn't happen somewhere in your head, outside the concreteness of your own body life. The spiritual life shows up in bodies that love God and our neighbour as ourselves.

When we pay attention to our bodies, they tell us the truth about ourselves. By listening to them we can detect lethargy, escape strategies, energy levels, dependence on caffeine, addiction to food, compulsions to work, signs of burnout and so on. These messages are meant to be taken seriously. Self-care need not be a selfish act. Exercise, rest and nourishing food aren't meant to be luxuries but the staples of good self-care. Regular checkups, eating healthy food, spending time with friends: these habits honour the way God made us...

As we practice self-care we intentionally receive ourselves as God's own beloved. Receiving this love into our bodies births the ability to give love and forgiveness to ourselves and others.

1. Identify three ways that a rest for your body and mind would benefit your spirit.

2. Ahlberg proposes that taking good care of our bodies will allow our spirit to flourish. How does this idea gel with the messages about body you received growing up?

3. What is one idea you'll take from this passage and adapt to your own life and spiritual growth?

Reading 2

Patrick Oliver, *Getting Out of the Way: the Essence of Spirituality Put Simply*, P. Oliver, Brisbane, 2002, p113.

While much of the Journey involves searching for God, there comes a time when we need to turn off the motors. This seems to be quite contrary to what we are "supposed" to do. Yet it can take more faith to refrain from the frantic searching for God, and remain in a quiet space so we can let ourselves be found.

I once had the experience of swimming in the Dead Sea. It was exceedingly difficult to permit myself to float because my neural pathways kept telling my muscles to do things which in the Dead Sea are counter-productive. It is the same in the arid times: through moving from the "Me" question of "what am I doing about producing more God-feelings:" to the "I" question of "how can I stop striving and let God reveal Godself anew?" we learn to spiritually float.

1. In what ways have you striven to produce "more God-feelings" in the past?

2. What is your initial reaction to the message that sometimes it is more fruitful to "stop striving and let God reveal Godself anew"?

3. How has this played out in your life in the past?

Reading 3

Matthew 6: 25-30 (NRSV)

25. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?
26. Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?
27. And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?
28. And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin,
29. Yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.
30. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown in to the oven, will he not much more clothe you...?

1. What ideas about your own life and work do you take from this reading?

2. Create a slogan about the nature of acceptance and trust, based on this passage.

3. Frame a question from something that puzzles you about the nature of our world, as expressed in this reading

Conclusion

You may have touched on these points through your discussion. Conclude your time together by revising the idea that healthy Spiritual Development, like healthy physical development, requires periods of rest.

Growth occurs in stages and through seasons, requiring periods of rest and rejuvenation to really flourish

We have got the message: we are worth it

Time off, time away, time for silence, meditation, prayer and recovery are necessary parts of our physical existence. God sanctions it, even more so, God requires it.



