

*‘For where two or three
gather in my name,
there am I with them.’*



Matthew 18: 20

Preparing for the Meeting

Access to Materials: It would be good if before the meeting you can make sure everyone has access to the online form of the retreat and make copies of the first week's sheets for those who don't have access.

Finance: It would also be good to make sure they know if there are any financial costs involved.

Timing: If you could let people know how long you plan the meeting to be, then keep to time – people appreciate this.

Sharing Groups: Because each week we shall be sharing where each member of the group is, it is important that everyone can see each other. We strongly suggest that sharing groups be arranged in a circle. If you have more than 12 people, then you will need to divide the group into sharing groups of about 6-8 people. Each group should have one person in charge who understands what a sharing group is about and who can keep time, and where necessary intervene to ensure each person gets some time to share.

We give suggestions for each week's group meeting, but it is up to you to organise how you feel best. Feel free to move things around, omit or add things; you must feel comfortable with your meeting.

Meeting before Ash Wednesday

Begin with tea and biscuits while people gather and are welcomed.

1. Introductions – names, and what brought people to the group – what do they hope for?
2. How the Retreat works

It would be good to talk to the group on the following subjects:

- Time for prayer: Finding time for prayer – and a suitable length of time.
(We would suggest 15 min – 1 hour)
- Place for prayer. This will probably be in a place at home, but might be in a local church or outside. Some people like to light a candle or have some religious symbols in their place of prayer a picture or a cross. Some prefer very quiet background music. The golden rule is 'whatever helps you'.
- Accessing prayer material – Online, printed sheets.
- Journaling the prayer. Suggest that everyone gets an exercise book to make a short summary of each period of prayer.

This will help them remember what happened in each prayer time and allow them to see any patterns as they emerge during the retreat. Their journal is private. (You won't be taking them in for marking!) So they need to be honest. If a prayer was boring or didn't work, say that.

Suggest that they look at feelings and the emotional content of prayer as well as thoughts. "What inspired you?" "What brought joy, what brought consolation?" "What disturbed you?" "Where was the loving God in the prayer?"

- Group sharing of prayer. A chance to reflect on how the prayer went, be aware of what God is saying to you, become aware of how you feel.

Also the sharing gives the opportunity for people to support each other both in listening and showing compassion and understanding. (Only share what you are comfortable with, no competition.)

3. Stilling exercise.

You might like to set the scene with a centrepiece, maybe a candle and cloth of Lenten colours.

Lead the group in a relaxed and slow way through your favourite stilling exercises.

After the stilling exercise you may like to ask people to become aware of the presence of God and then ask God for what they desire.

Then you could read a suitable passage of scripture or listen to a piece of reflective music (particularly suitable for noisy venues).

You may like to finish the prayer with a formal prayer such as the Lord's Prayer.

4. Sharing – it might be good to model the sharing now. Asking how people felt during the stilling, did they find it easy to find something to pray for, did anything strike them about the passage or piece of music. What is their overall mood?

See how this goes, note who doesn't share, and who might share too much!

These groups seem to go best when everyone shares something and everybody allows time for others to share.

5. Looking Forward

- Make sure everyone is certain how to access the material for the coming week.
- Make sure the time and venue etc. of the next meeting is clear.
- It may be that people are encouraged to take turns in providing refreshments.
- Thank everyone for coming.

