

### For every meeting

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.

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

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

### Stilling and awareness exercises

1. Introductions – if there are people this week who didn't come to the last meeting then introductions would be necessary?
2. How the Retreat works (If you didn't do this last week)
  - Finding time for prayer -and suitable length of time.
  - Place for prayer. Some people like to light a candle or have some religious symbols in their place of prayer. Some like an incense stick. Some very quiet background music. Whatever helps.
  - Different ways of accessing prayer – Online, printed sheets.
  - Journaling the prayer. Looking at feelings and emotional content of prayer and well as thoughts. What inspired you?
  - Group sharing of prayer. (Only share what you are comfortable with, no competition.)

3. Stilling exercise – it might be worth trying all three of these – or any other that you wish. Whatever way of praying you choose it is good to begin with a period of stilling (quietening awareness, or centring). Here are three most common stilling exercises.

Most people find it helpful to sit with back straight and with both feet on the ground.

**Body Awareness:** going from toe to head become aware of each part of the body in turn for the space of three slow breaths: whether it is warm or cold, can you feel clothing, the movement of breathing, itching, pain or other sensations? Where there is tension let it go.

Sometimes tensing the muscles then relaxing them helps. Imagine the tension flowing down the body out through the feet to the earth.

**Listening to sounds:** Become aware of sounds inside and outside the room. Don't dwell on any particular sound but listen for as many different sounds as possible, particularly the subtle sounds.

**Slow Breathing:** Consciously take deep and slow breaths. You might imagine yourself breathing in the Spirit of God and breathing out this same spirit to others or you might breathe out all that you want to be rid of e.g. jealousy, fear, bitterness.

4. Sharing – if people have already spent some time in prayer this week, then ask them to look back over their prayer times this week and share what they are comfortable with. How did they find praying the Scripture or the other meditation? Did time seem to drag, or did it go quickly. Did anything surprise them? Did any of the Scripture passages or other meditations have any special meaning for them?

## Leader's Notes: Sharing

The purpose of sharing is twofold: for each participant to articulate how the prayer has gone and where God has been for them in the past week's prayer, and for the group to listen and understand how God is working through others in the group.

- These groups seem to go best when everyone shares something and everybody allows time for others to share.
- The first round of sharing should allow each person to speak without interruption. Only allow interruptions if a person can't be heard, or for clarification if they can't be understood.
- People should leave a moment of silence after sharing to take in what has been said rather than jumping in, which may give the impression that they couldn't wait for the last person to be finished.
- In the first round people should share their own material, not comment upon what others have said.
- If you have time for a second round, then people might want to share what listening to the others has brought up for them.
- Some people might need help to get the idea of sharing.

The idea is to share what went on for each person in their prayer. So encourage people to talk about their own prayer.

If people start talking about 'Everyone' e.g. 'Everyone finds this sort of prayer easy' or 'I'm sure we all love to say the Rosary' then a gentle encouragement to speak for themselves might be helpful.

- Note who doesn't share, and who might share too much! It may be good to work out how long you have for each person to share before you start and say "We have up to 10 minutes each". Which will then give you permission to stop anyone who is going a lot over their time. As leader you might have to thank someone for their sharing before they have finished if it looks like you might run short of time.

Flexibility is the key.

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.

Thank everyone for coming.

