

CONTEMPLATIVE FIRE

GATHERINGS – theology in practice!



CAIRNS FOR GATHERING PLANNING 2e

Rev'd Philip Roderick and Rev'd Susan Blagden

INTRODUCTION: Setting the context

Language and symbolism

“I believe that God as Trinity is calling us to be bold and to realise that the great challenge for the Church today is the fact that most people outside the Church can’t make head or tail of our language and symbols. There is also a lot of rage about the perceived shortcomings of religion. There is, even within the Church, a feeling that Christ’s Way of love has been hi-jacked by those more concerned with promoting their own brand of ‘truth’. For many people the inherited model of Church is seen either as bigoted and corrupt or as just boring and meaningless.

“Ever since I stepped out in faith from my parish to engage in this pioneering ministry, the first challenge has been to see and listen to people with gentle eyes and healing ears so that their woundedness can be acknowledged and addressed. It became clear that one of **Contemplative Fire’s** tasks in worship, whilst honouring the living tradition of Christian liturgy, is first to deconstruct language, symbol and sacrament and then imaginatively to reconstruct them. It would be too easy simply to jettison an outmoded vocabulary. Reconstructing the tradition of worship means finding accessible and resonant language and image. The tradition of faith needs both to be dynamic and to do justice to the ancient patterns and core ingredients of Christian belief and prayer.

“For instance we avoid words like ‘altar’, ‘confession’ and ‘absolution’ because we find that, for the post Christian and pre Christian seeker, such words have connotations that are unhelpful or simply confusing. Instead of altar we use ‘table of friendship’. Instead of confession we use ‘letting go’ and instead of absolution we use ‘setting free’. The design of our Gatherings emerges from the scriptural texts for the day and enables participants to engage in the core elements of liturgy in different imaginative ways and receive the forgiveness and empowering of God.

“Whether we meet in a barn, a farmhouse or in an Abbey, we always use a simple wooden table with a bottle of wine and a freshly baked loaf, broken reflectively. This simplicity still gives plenty of space for the mystery, reverence and spiritual replenishment which are part and parcel of the great tradition of Christian worship. In a way we are

returning to the integral dynamic and rich symbolism of the early Church.

Personal story: roots and shoots

“My grandfather was a Methodist minister and my own spiritual roots, pre and post conversion, lie both in Methodism and in Eastern Orthodoxy. The patterning of Contemplative Fire as a network church draws consciously and unconsciously no doubt on Wesley’s tradition of class meetings (small groups), and of the use of personal reflection and story telling; rendering the truth of Christ accessible through an experience of transforming love.

“When I was in my early twenties, I spent a year in an Orthodox hermitage and the worship there, connecting as it did with early Celtic Christian praise, was hugely influential on me. In a converted cowshed three monks used to sing theology in harmony! Their use of rich harmonics, body prayer and visual symbolism in the worship of God allowed the Scriptures and the Christian message to resonate in me at a deeper level. The Orthodox believe that in worship heaven dips down and embraces the worshipping community and so heaven and earth intermingle. That has been my inspiration for worship.

Opportunities for learning:

So **Contemplative Fire** is drawing from the Protestant and Anglican tradition of scripture, tradition and reason, within an open Catholic tradition; it seeks to be both deeply Christ – centred and holding the creative tension of the opposites: withdrawal and involvement, stillness and service, resting and wrestling.

Incorporating the body as “temple of the Holy Spirit” and using movement and procession as expressions of prayer is proving to be effective in awakening different parts of the person to the inner meaning of liturgy and worship. Down the centuries the Church has used prayer posture to express the personal authentication of God’s involvement with our life and being. We are recovering that dimension of worship and I have been led to evolve some simple, yet often quite evocative movements to accompany the Lord’s Prayer and other key texts and spiritual aspirations.

“When we draw together in a ‘Gathering’ to worship, be it in an abbey or a barn, a home or a factory, we see sacred space as “psychoactive” and, in the light of the particular liturgical season and/or service theme, will play creatively with the placing of chairs and other furniture. Wherever we meet, we will hope to draw inspiration from all elements of that space. I think fixed pews are anathema to imaginative worship! A freedom flows from the creative use of location which seems congenial to the moving of God’s Spirit. We find that if worshippers are enabled to enjoy and sense the significance of the liturgical spaces, this sense of fluidity allows people to engage afresh with the truth. Many of our services are held entirely by candlelight. Especially on darker evenings, this has the effect of slowing things down to match God’s rhythm and opening things up to discern God’s meaning.

The Metaphor

Contemplative Fire is called in worship, ministry and outreach to embody the paradox contained in the two words of the foundational metaphor. Jesus calls us to Sabbath rest, to abide in the love and in the presence of God. God calls us to be awakened by the flame of the Spirit so that we may use our creative imagination in the service of God. We tend not to use service sheets or prayer books and each Gathering is planned by a small team of two or more people with skills and insights in worship leading. The design process begins with the Lectionary readings and the small group seeks to allow the Spirit to speak in and through the scripture and the season of the Church’s year. The unfolding of the theme, the clothing of the structure of the liturgy, the nature of the music and chants, the choice of art work, dance or movement emerge from the Biblical texts.

“Undergirding both **Contemplative Fire** and The Quiet Garden Movement is an educational dynamic. In our worship and in our retreats, we hope to awaken people to the presence of God in the here and now. It has been shown that there are three ingredients in the best sort of learning – visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. In other words, we learn best when we are engaged in seeing, hearing and doing. God works in and through quiet reflection but also through the consecration of feelings, of activity, of playfulness and profundity. One Pentecost for instance, in our liturgy focussing upon Ezekiel’s story of the Valley of Dry

Bones and the life-giving quality of the Holy Spirit, we enjoyed live music, Taizé chants, songs we had created ourselves and a samba dance procession from one end of an Abbey to the other!

Philip D Roderick
June 2006

Cairns to Guide the Planning of a Contemplative Fire Gathering

- **Why Cairns?**

Cairns have traditionally been markers on a journey – piles of stones laid down in response to a holy, transcendent experience. In time they may become markers of a pilgrimage route for others. What follows here are Cairns for Gatherings – they mark what has been helpful in the journey so far; they may serve as guides through this new territory, and as such are offered as a way of helping to shape a Gathering. On occasion some of these cairns will be bypassed – either deliberately or non-intentionally as the leaders respond creatively to the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, local need, as well as times of festival, and local, national, or international need. However, it is important as a Fresh Expression of Church that we keep continuity with the ancient patternings whilst exploring new shapings. Indeed the ancient eucharists offered a number of variations in order and structure so there has been a fluidity from the early days!

- **Who are my partners in this?**

It takes confidence to be radical! Leaders need to model the radical dynamic of **Contemplative Fire** most especially in the deconstruction and reconstruction of language and symbol.

The partnership ideally needs to embody the profound with the playful, theological robustness with artistic creativity and be rooted in contemplative practice with a knowledge of the Christian mystical tradition whilst experiencing the passion and fire of this mystical journey as a profound agent of transformation ie be contemplative fire! Therefore the journey needs to touch the heart as well as be informed by the head!

Team: Do I have other theologically informed people as well as artists, readers, welcomers, musicians, people to set up and take

down, as well as technicians whose skills I can draw on as and when needed?

Time: Planning a Gathering usually flows from living with the material and letting the pattern emerge. Something rich and creative will be lost if the planning is reduced to a tick box. It is time consuming – likely to involve a group of four or five people two 2 hour planning sessions plus time for administration, planning of visuals and of music plus set up



and take down time on the day. However, entered into at depth the planning is a great source of sustenance. The creativity that emerges from the liturgical season as well as the Scriptural texts for the day will ensure a freshness to each Gathering whilst being attentive to the core patterns of worship.

- **The Gathering seeks to**

- ◆ be a place of warm welcome for each person who comes regardless of who they are, their beliefs or lack of them, or their spiritual practices
- ◆ gather people around the good news (gospel) of the day
- ◆ offer both reflective and applied engagement with the texts through exegesis, symbol and liturgy
- ◆ provide opportunity to deepen contemplative prayer through the use of silence, music, nature, provision of images that are evocative of the theme
- ◆ nurture community through some sharing – often verbal, often in silence, sometimes simply through sharing the bread and the wine together
- ◆ be invitational - offering space in which a transformational and sanctifying work can take place/begin ie expect change!
- ◆ Send people out to be agents of change in their own community

THE STARTING CAIRN First Planning Session

Bible readings

These are taken from the Revised Common Lectionary Principal Service/Holy Communion¹ (a resource used by many different denominations that provides daily portions of the Bible so that most of the Bible is read during a 3 year cycle.)

The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is used because of its inclusive language translation.

Quite often only certain extracts are used from the lectionary readings. These emerge from the discerning and sharing process that is the focus of this first session. The basis of this whole Gathering planning is trust that the Holy Spirit will guide the group to identify the key themes and texts for that particular Gathering. This necessitates a prayerful reading of the Scriptures and a capacity to respond to the stirrings in your own heart whilst also being attentive to the insights of others.

The readings are there to bring life, to help effect change, and therefore how they are handled is key to the effectiveness of the Gathering.

Process

The process is a variation on Lectio Divina (spiritual/holy reading). This may be described as grounding in God and in Scripture so as to enable the Holy Spirit to speak through the process and eventually the Gathering. It is a time that seeks to honour the 'Still Waters' component of the Contemplative Fire rhythm of life - where we can go deep in prayer and allow clarity to emerge from the stillness.

¹ <http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/lectionary> - this lists dates, clearly indicates liturgical year – A, B, or C, provides the full text from the NRSV which can be copied and pasted into word document and so provide readings for readers. You may need to adjust font size for public reading in dim light!

It is also available in booklet form from Church House Publishing, <http://www.chbookshop.co.uk>
Revised Common Lectionary – Advent 20xx to Advent 20xx

1. Read the passages set for the day out loud and really listen to them with the eyes of the heart.
2. Ask God's blessing on the process as we begin to rest in silence with the texts
3. 5 mins silence (see below for fuller explanation about how to use the silence)
4. Hear without discussion what has been received in the silence from each person and in no particular order.
5. Each member or a number of people may choose to take notes at this stage as a significant help in recalling the primary themes and practical suggestions for the next planning step.
6. Second silence of 5 mins
7. Share again their responses to particular verses. It is helpful to other members if the person speaking identifies the book, chapter, and verse to which they are referring.
8. Open discussion and aim to identify a key theme, and begin to shape the practicalities of the liturgy eg visuals, music, movement, arrangement of space, and which readings will be used.
9. Evening ends with a prayer.

In the silence some challenging questions can be received from and asked of the texts. Our task is to be aware of theological questions raised and of the experiential dynamic introduced by the text in the context of a Gathering. Let each member be aware what is stirring in the heart as this can be a key indicator of what might be life-changing.

Some questions that might be helpful are:

- Gospel - How is this good news?
- What do I find challenging?
- What do I find puzzling?
- What does this say about God/journey/prayer?
- What might have been the purpose of this originally?
- How does the Scripture inform or challenge today's situation?
- How is this relevant to the Christian contemplative tradition?
- Is there anything in the Christian contemplative tradition that might illuminate this further?

Example

John 10 – I am the Good Shepherd. This has not been good news for many who have been hurt by the church ... Two challenges readily arise from this:

1. The patriarchal experiences of church that some have been through, known in some circles as 'heavy shepherding'
2. "Listen" is a key verb in the text – so how might I listen and how might I know when I've heard ... Why should I listen?

Examples

The way that the reading/s are handled will vary from one Gathering to another. The decision as to what exactly should be read depends on the main theme that you as leaders have chosen to engage with on this occasion. Possibilities include:

- **Six bite size extracts** – read from different parts of the room with a 20/30 second pause in between each.
- **A dramatic enactment** – eg woman who challenged Jesus about giving food even to the dogs – whilst the reading was read, a woman moved nearer and nearer to the person reading Jesus's words – becoming increasingly bold – the space was used as much as the words to convey the truth of the reading.
- **Alternating voices.**
- **A 'hidden' voice**
- **Split into three** and read the unfolding story as the Gathering progresses.

Where will the journey go next?!

There may be little time left to shape the liturgy further on this first planning. Each text is different and will present different possibilities for the Gathering. Experience says that 'less is more'. Ruthlessness and graciousness may be needed in leaving out some apparently 'good ideas' in order to aid clarity and keep focused on the main theme.

CAIRN - SPACE

As, for example, in Mark's gospel with its powerful use of the topography of Jesus' ministry, **Contemplative Fire** celebrates space and place as psycho-active. In other words the spatial arrangement of furniture, of the table of friendship (altar), of visual elements, are seen to be psychologically and spiritually significant in service to the hidden leavening of the Holy Spirit. These are some of the things that need to be considered?



- ◆What space or spaces am I using? Pre-configured eg in a church or open space – such as in a barn or outside?
- ◆How does the space speak? How might it be used? (The answers will be different on each occasion.)
- ◆How many seats are needed? In how many areas? What configuration? Eg rows, random, facing the wall, facing the centre. Ideally, the seating needs not to resemble traditional pews in church! Encourage a different arrangement for each Gathering.
- ◆Where will the initial Gathering space be? Which other spaces are to be used?
- ◆Where will the visuals be placed?
- ◆What space does the visiting artist or performer eg dancer or musician - need – paying particular attention to flooring and lighting?
- ◆ Where will the table of friendship be placed?
- ◆ Where, when, and how are people going to move around?
- ◆ How much time will it take? If there are over 40 people movement will take considerably longer and therefore more thought will need to be given as to how this happens.

Ideally the space needs to be big enough to allow movement within each Gathering. In traditional church the space was configured to help people remember their spiritual journey. **Contemplative Fire** asks its Gathering planning teams to be aware of how available spaces might be used as aids to the interior journey. **Contemplative Fire** seeks to re-engage with this by embodying in each Gathering that we are a Pilgrim community – a



people on the move. This is a Fresh Expression of Church and as such has no desire to find a prescriptive pattern for each Gathering that will run the risk of losing its generative dynamic. Any movement within a Gathering is never merely a practical need to move from A to B but rather a helpful liturgical element that helps people to be more deeply in touch with the day's theme.



The gospel stories continually show Jesus using space in different ways – outdoors, in the synagogue, on the way to somewhere else: wherever he was, there was always something that could be enjoyed and be received as a bearer of insight – a teacher. **Contemplative Fire** seeks to honour and follow this mentor and model and be continually open to spatial possibilities that present themselves.

Examples

Ways in which **Contemplative Fire** has done this so far have been very varied! They include

- ◆ a procession through an Abbey led by a child
- ◆ a flag and ribbon waving dance
- ◆ in two's sharing along the way, or open space for people to explore and reach another part of the worship space in their own time maybe having looked at some visuals along the way
- ◆ a very slow mindful walk – concentrating on putting the heel down, rocking forward to the toes and moving on to the other foot in a deeply attentive manner
- ◆ exuberant dance!
- ◆ a procession around the outside of the venue preceded by an icon of the feast, held aloft

The possibilities are endless!

CAIRN - VISUALS

The starting point is to remind the group of the theme for the evening. What is the intended outcome?



The visuals are an essential component of the Gathering. They

1. make the space welcoming
2. provide visual focus
3. illustrate the theme
4. for people who learn best visually they can often be the most transformative element of the Gathering

Do the theme, readings and messages draw an immediate picture or give rise to a visual response?

Examples

A theme of God as Shepherd may lead us rather literally to a shepherd's crook and perhaps not much else - but what around you reminds you of a shepherd's crook even though it is not remotely connected? May be, for example, the unfurling fronds of a fern?

Other themes and readings may be easier.

For example, the parable of the rich man who invites his friends to a banquet and finds no one accepts, prompting him to invite the poor in off the street. This could be visually represented by a sumptuous table set with good things. As this is a parable about being invited to God's abundant table the predominant colours could be gold and white - the liturgical colours of celebration. There could be a lot of light in the form of candles and much fruit, including perhaps grapes and a loaf of bread to represent the giving of the Sacrament.

- ◆ What is the liturgical season and how do you want to represent it visually?

Getting stuck - when visuals do not come to mind!

Struggling too hard to think of visuals is often counter-productive. Keep the readings and messages in mind, re-read them and just let them “sit” without worrying about it. Walking around in a “soft focus” way may result in something connecting with you or you may be struck out of the blue when you aren’t even thinking about it (as in the case of seeing the unfurling ferns and immediately thinking “shepherd’s crook”!).

Less can be more

You don’t need a lot of different visuals or to feel you have to represent all the ideas that will be within the Scripture readings and the rest of the Gathering content. One idea presented boldly but simply (like the ferns) can be as powerful as something much more elaborate (like the laden table).

What to use?

It is good to involve as many of the senses as possible –

- ◆ consider draping or scrunching up fabric or ribbons in interesting textures and beautiful colours (especially colours relevant to the theme - perhaps a rich blue for an evening focussing on Mary for example).
- ◆ Use flowers - for their colour, their scent or especially because they convey an appropriate message - for instance clematis seed heads or flowers with bendy stems may suggest the Spirit blowing through us.
- ◆ Incense or scented candles, if people don’t have an allergy, are good too.
- ◆ Clustered candles in red, blue or green
- ◆ Muslin screens to divide up space in a variety of ways
- ◆ Water – for washing

Use things that are every day and already around the house or the garden - but consider using them in an unfamiliar way.

Basket of apples as a visual to accompany the text: You are the apple of my eye.

Photographs illustrating moments of light transfiguring landscapes and a stone illustrating the 'Eye of the Beholder' and an icon of Aidan Hart's 'The Transfiguration'.



Colours

Purple

Advent, Lent – times of preparation, letting go

Red

Saints days – red symbolising martyrdom –
shedding their blood. Also Pentecost –

representing Holy Spirit

Blue

Mary, mother of Jesus

Green

Trinity, Ordinary time – Sundays between

Pentecost and Advent

White

Christmas, Easter, Transfiguration, Baptism –
celebrations of light



CAIRN – PRAYER

There is a need to both model and teach about the many different expressions of Christian prayer.



Model prayer

- ◆ If we want people to be taken deep into the life of God in prayer then we need to let this flow from prayer both in preparation and on the day itself. It is helpful to pray at least with your co-leader and maybe others involved in the service. This prayer time gives opportunity for a time of stillness and deep listening whilst containing a few words seeking God's blessing on the Gathering.
- ◆ It is helpful practice that 15-30 mins before the 'official' start of any Gathering that those involved in leading the Gathering are settled in their places and able to be still. This gives clear signals to those arriving that this is a prayerful space and models the Still Water's element of **Contemplative Fire's** rhythm of life. In the winter months this sense of tranquillity is helped by candlelight and a quiet, intimate sense of space. In the lighter summer months it can be more difficult but no less important. Such prayer also helps those who are leading to be clear of inner noise, and therefore freer to respond to the moment as they lead others through this Gathering time.

Ideally each Gathering will model a number of different ways of praying – usually invited by the texts. Over several Gatherings it is worth just checking that a variety of prayer has been experienced.

Contemplative Prayer

- ◆ As part of most Gatherings we encourage an *extended period of quiet prayer* – between 5 - 15 mins. Guidance will need to be given

about its purpose so that it deepens prayer practice both for those who feel like novices as well as those who are used to practising meditation for more than 15 mins a day.

- ◆ The purpose of this type of prayer is to help people on the deep part of their journey – remembering **Contemplative Fire's** commitment to Travel Light and to Dwell Deep. This silence can in itself be a deeply transformative experience – the mystics talked of a 'sifting by silence'.
- ◆ Alternatively, two or three shorter periods of silence can be woven into the Gathering.
- ◆ However long the time given to meditation it may be helpful to offer, as an option, a visual focus or a question, that will help people deepen the intimacy of their prayer life.

Imaginative Prayer/Guided meditation

This has its origin in St Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises. It is usually a lengthy prayer experience of about an hour. However, it is possible to condense this in a corporate setting and take people in short steps through the Scriptural reading (usually as an imaginative experience of a gospel story) and then interject some pertinent questions. It can be a lovely way of helping people to engage directly with the story. There needs to be reflective space in between the questions so that people are helped to a point of imaginative interaction and will then generally find this to be a transformative and illuminating experience.

Intercessory prayer

Contemplative Fire is committed to a rhythm of life that embodies prayer, study, and action. This action part also needs to be remembered in our prayers.

This can be done in a number of ways:

- People may light a candle and place it in a particular place – offering it as a sign of light shining in the darkness.
- People may be invited to speak out very briefly a name, a situation, a world need and these can be gathered together again arising out of the theme/application of the theme for the Gathering.
- Occasionally people have written a request on paper provided and these requests have then been gathered in a basket and symbolically been offered up.
- CPO cards of the many different faces of Jesus
- Phaidon Art photographic postcards of different cultures

Any of these methods of intercessory prayer encourage community growth and are empowering for personal prayer – they are not dependent on the leader and can be used in any time and any place.

Body Prayer

Contemplative Fire is affirmative of the goodness of the body, remembering that John in his gospel wrote “the Word was made flesh” and that St Paul understood the human body to be the “temple of the Holy Spirit”. Particular body prayers have been developed that flow from the liturgical seasons of the year. These were developed by Rev’d Philip Roderick and Rev’d Lynn Trainor for the small group series, Way Beyond Religion. They may also be used to great effect during the appropriate season at a larger liturgical Gathering. (Please see appendix for details. Also DVD available – contact Contemplative Fire office for details.)

The Lord’s Prayer

Contemplative Fire makes regular use of the Lord’s Prayer body prayer. This usually takes 10 minutes to pray – including a quick run through to let people know it’s shape.

Learn the movements and pray the movements regularly as part of your own prayer practice and so leading others will come naturally. This will help others to pray it deeply too. (See DVD)

This way of praying uses simple movements to embody the prayer. The words are spoken by the leader and the movements are carried out in silence. It deepens attentiveness and models a different way of praying – that of mindfulness. It also invites participation in prayer that goes beyond words. Sometimes our bodies can be the best way of expressing our prayers. This is not meant to be prayer accompanied by physical movement. It is meant to be the whole of our being actually praying.

If you develop any body prayers of your own for group use then the actions need to express and authenticate the theme. The movements need to be simple and accessible bearing in mind a range of physical abilities. If the choreography is too complicated people will be distracted by the actions whereas the actions are meant to free people to go deeper in prayer.

When leading body prayer make sure you are visible and that the instructions are clear.

- Tell people what will happen.
- Then take them through it once.
- Then repeat to deepen the experience.

CAIRN – LETTING GO/BEING SET FREE

Each month the readings will offer different possibilities for what is traditionally called, Confession and Absolution, and in **Contemplative Fire**, is called, Letting go and Being Set Free.

This is usually done in a wordless way with some body movement and/or whilst listening to some appropriate music/singing a chant such as a Kyrie eleison, or Lord have mercy.

It can be helpful to have a simple movement to help a felt experience of what it is like to 'let go' and to experience something of 'being set free' which is an ongoing experience, not a one-off.

Thomas Keating, in 'Open Mind, Open Heart' says: *“Letting go” is not a simple term; it is quite subtle and has important nuances - depending on what you are intending to let go of. When a thought is not disturbing, it won't go away so easily, so you have to let it go in some other way. One way you can let it go is to sink into it and indentify with it, out of love for God. This may not be possible at first, but try it and see what happens. The principal discipline of contemplative prayer is letting go.*” (p 99)

CAIRN - GIVING AND RECEIVING

The Offertory

Very often in church the offertory means : they want my money! At its best it is an opportunity to give thankfully to continue supporting the ministry of the local church, as well as chance to offer the bread and wine to God.

Contemplative Fire also needs money! However, we seek to recover the element of thank offering. This underlies the Biblical principle of tithing – giving one tenth of one’s income away. Ideally the offertory needs to be framed as both an expression of and a response to God’s generous love. Those who are gathered need to be aware of **Contemplative Fire’s** financial needs and it is a challenge to weave these into the invitation as a necessary part of the community rhythm of life.

If people are giving then it is good practice to receive those gifts within the Gathering with thankfulness.

There are times when it is worth thinking of other things that may be offered along with money eg skills, creativity, administrative help, prayer energy.

Contemplative Fire is about giving as well as receiving. We want to model the generosity of God. Therefore sometimes we give those who come something appropriate to the theme to take away eg grape, chocolate coin, sprig of rosemary! The giving and receiving flow in and out of each other.

- Who will give and take?
- When?
- How?
- Where and how will it be received?

The Peace

One element of **Contemplative Fire’s** call is to be a healing community. Peace, the Biblical concept of shalom, means offering each other the hope and means of wholeness – where body, mind, and spirit are

integrated and at peace. This is a great gift of God in today's fragmented age. The contemplative expression of this means being deeply present to the gift that is being offered. We have discovered that on the whole, strange as it may seem, that this is best offered without words and in silence.

One of our most frequent ways of sharing the peace is by everyone standing in a circle and putting their right hand on the next person's left shoulder. The leader may say some words in an appropriate way to the evening's theme and context making us aware that it is God's shalom, God's gift of peace and wholeness that is being given and received. We are the channels. People are then given time to be aware of receiving the peace and then passing it on. The silence enables attentiveness to the gift that is both given and received. The touch that is given and received also affirms our bodies as being good and can be part, hopefully, of the healing.

However, It is worth being aware pastorally that just occasionally such touch may be too much to handle for a person who has been physically/sexually abused. If someone opts out you may need to think/act quickly and discreetly to bring them back into the group. This is where a co-leader is helpful or another pastorally able person who can assist if such a situation arises.

CAIRN - SHARING OF BREAD AND WINE

Invitation

Each person who is committed to travelling along this way of the risen Christ is welcome to receive bread and wine. Intinction (dipping) of the chunk of fresh bread has become the usual practise for the **Contemplative Fire** community. This underlines the simplicity, symbolism, and embodied quality of the primitive sacrament with use of a real loaf of bread and wine poured from a bottle. Hygiene demands the practice of intinction.

Table of Friendship

Everyone is invited to gather around this table of friendship (known in some churches as “the communion table”, in others it is known as “the altar”.)

Jesus said I have not called you servants but friends John 15 v15

Bread

- ◆ **Contemplative Fire** is committed to having a loaf of freshly made bread that can be broken into large chunks. It is good if some local people in the **Contemplative Fire** community can share this task and make the bread and bring it as part of their offering to the Gathering.
- ◆ The bread is placed in a basket on the table. If it is left in a clean cloth and unfolded at the start of the thanksgiving prayer it helps those present to see it is home-made and comes from the resident community. It may also be necessary to make provision for gluten free bread.

Wine

- ◆ We are a community gathered in this moment around the table of friendship but we are also a community that has a responsibility for compassionate action in our world. **Contemplative Fire** is committed to Fair Trade and the fairly traded wine is a small gesture of support for those in other countries who struggle to make ends meet. This is available

from most large supermarkets or in case of difficulty in the UK directly through the **Contemplative Fire** office.

- ◆ **Contemplative Fire** believes that God is an essentially generous God who loves and therefore loves to give and gives generously. It is for this reason that we invite people to take chunks of bread and dip them into the wine. The chalice is not pre-filled. It is good to use our auditory awareness and hear the generous pouring of wine at the appropriate point.
- ◆ If there are more than 50 people at a Gathering you probably want two chalices for the wine.
- ◆ If two are needed then decide who will administer the second one.

The fragrant bread and wine help us use more of our senses and affirm the gift that is our body.

Time is given to savour this gift – either in silence or with some appropriate music playing – and allowing people to be wherever they want to be in the space and make their own response to God's generous giving.

Practical Instructions:

Some brief word is necessary to invite people to share the bread and wine, the real presence of Christ, and to advise them of the practicalities

- To take the chunk of bread and dip it in the wine as symbol of God's generosity to them. (Despite this some will still take a miserly crumb of bread!)
- To cup their hand under the bread being careful not to let wine drip onto the floor.
- To invite them to come from the left or the right as seems fit. Not to come out in rows or a neat and orderly fashion!
- To find a space that is where they want to be and take time to savour the gift that they have been given.
- It may be wise to have gluten free wafers available in case of increasingly common gluten allergies.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

The Prayer of Thanksgiving is improvisational – either arising out of the Gathering there and then, or having been thought about in advance. Whatever the style of the person celebrating – it is helpful if it contains the following elements:

- Thankfulness to God as creator, Son, and Holy Spirit
- Weaves into the words the theme of the Gathering
- Has some sense of ‘telling the story’ of faith
- Seeks to make explicit the holiness (making whole) of this sharing together. Invites the Holy Spirit to make these offerings, and ourselves, holy.

Words of institution

The traditional words of institution are said – maybe by a second priest.

As the celebrant takes the loaf in their hands and raises it up, the assistant says:

‘Our Lord Jesus in the same night that he was betrayed took bread and gave you thanks. He broke it.’

(The bread is then deliberately and prayerfully broken into large chunks. This will take time but it is infinitely worth taking the time to break it and be aware of what it feels like. Try not to be distracted by the time it takes or by perhaps feeling like the centre of attention. Your action is what people are being drawn into.)When it is all broken the celebrant takes the basket with the broken bread and lifts it up whilst the assistant continues:

‘Jesus gave it to his disciples saying: Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’

The celebrant then pours the wine into the chalice and then lifts the chalice up as the assistant says:

In the same way after supper he took the cup and gave you thanks. He gave it to them, saying: Drink this all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.'

The invitation to receive may be given using these words:
Receive the Bread of the Presence and the Wine of the Kingdom



CAIRN – SENDING OUT

- ◆ This is an important time of transition as most people will have found the reflective space and sharing in the bread and wine to be quite a moving experience.
- ◆ The remembering of Christ with thankfulness that has taken place in the sharing of bread and wine, now touches the remembering of their daily lives, hopes and realities.
- ◆ It is good to send people out with a blessing – usually weaving in the theme of the Gathering.
- ◆ This can be a good opportunity to encourage people to share something in twos before they go – but don't do this every time!
- ◆ Just occasionally there may not be a particular end to the Gathering – allow people to go when they feel ready.
- ◆ Other times there may be a playful ending!
- ◆ A certain fluidity is needed at this point so that appropriate response can be made depending on the mood of the group.

CAIRN – COMMUNITY NEWS

- ◆ Otherwise known as notices. They are a challenge!
- ◆ People need to be informed about what is available but it needs to be framed within all that helps the contemplative/active life – **the rhythm of prayer, study, action**. They should be included in the Gathering at some point and this will be different on each occasion.
- ◆ Remember to draw people's attention to the literature available at the end on the display table and invite them to sign up for small groups, to come and experience more of this community and discover how being part of this emergent community of Christ at the Edge can help to deepen the contemplative/active life.



Thanks to Sharon Roberts for contributing much of the material under visuals

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Contemplative Fire Language

What language shall I use?

If a vibrant and imaginative response to the gospel/good news is the most fundamentally challenging part of the preparation, then the use of language is probably the next most challenging element! There is a need to be constantly aware of the impact of religious and theological language both on thinking and on behaviour. **Contemplative Fire** seeks to be radical in its use of language – deconstructing some traditional words and symbols and then reconstructing them for today's culture. Whenever the leader is speaking it is important to remember that the primary purpose of **Contemplative Fire** is to reach those who have been wounded by church, or who have thrown out Christianity because of how they have been treated, as well as those who have never considered Christianity because they did not see it as having a contemplative dimension.

**** These people do not need to hear churchy language.****

There are significant theological issues and questions involved in the language we use and it is worth taking time to be informed about these and able to articulate them to others. People will ask!

How might I address God?

1. **Contemplative Fire** works with a non-boundaried system – all are welcome to drink at this sweet water well, to warm themselves at the fire. Inclusive language is a necessity and we would encourage you to avoid putting a gender on to God. The more that people have explored mystical/contemplative prayer the less likely they are to be comfortable relating to a male/female God. Equally those whom **Contemplative Fire** is primarily seeking to reach who have rejected Christianity because of the way the church has treated them, or because of institutional language, live in a world where inclusivity is the norm.

2. When using nouns to describe God – Lord, King, creator, ruler, Father, Mother, etc – need to remember that nouns speak of a role which put the hearer in a particular relationship which may or may not be helpful. Nouns can be helpful but be careful to not always use the same nouns. **Contemplative Fire** is trinitarian and is happy to speak about God as creator, following the way of the risen Christ, and inviting the Holy Spirit to inspire and challenge our Gatherings!
3. Consider sometimes using adjectives that describe God's nature. Many of the mystics used metaphors and these can often be helpful eg Catherine of Siena referred to God amongst other ways, as sea and mirror. Teresa d'Avila spoke of God as a castle.
4. The Gathered community on this occasion may be representative of a variety of beliefs and practices, and bearing in mind **Contemplative Fire's** primary mission statement of reaching out to those who are unchurched, it is helpful to aim not to assume membership of a Christian community or adherence to particular credal statements. To say 'we' may on the face of it sound inclusive but it can be deeply alienating or even frightening to those who are present and are not yet feeling part of community and are even less sure of what they believe.

Linguistic non-negotiables for **Contemplative Fire:**

The deconstruction and reconstruction of language is very evident when describing elements of a Gathering. The traditional, liturgical words are rarely used and if they must be used (or inadvertently slip out!), then follow them with the explanation so that people are helped to understand.

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Gathering | - Gathering because it is a community being gathered together. The relational element is important. Traditional language would call it a service. |
| Letting go | - confession |

Being set free - absolution
Good news - gospel
Table of friendship - altar

It is worth taking a little time to weave these explanations into the Gathering in a natural and easy way.

Other churchy language to be attentive to:

If you have been used to leading church services it is easy at first to feel disabled by not using instructions that are familiar but it's worth getting beyond the discomfort and learning to be bold!

Some phrases that are best avoided:

"Let's open with prayer."

No! Business meetings are opened. **Contemplative Fire** wants to model worship and prayer as a way of life. Such a phrase also reduces prayer to words. **Contemplative Prayer** is a whole way of living life – the Gathering needs to model that continuity.

SO PRAY! No introduction needed!

Call to worship

What does worship mean? Again, no need to name. Get on and worship and let them be part of it.

APPENDIX 1

Practicalities to have been considered:

Artist

Music

Lighting

Sound

Chairs

Space

Cairns

Welcome

Community news

Theme set

Pilgrimage

Letting go/setting free

Scripture readings

Prayerful reflection on text(s)

Prayer/silence

Body prayer – Lord's Prayer

Sharing/offering peace

Offertory

Breaking bread/sharing wine

Sending out - Blessing

APPENDIX 2 – PRACTICAL DETAILS

Spreadsheet with running order

Copies for

- ◆ Leaders
- ◆ Lighting operator (If needed)
- ◆ Sound technician
- ◆ PA / CD operator_

Health and Safety

Remember health and safety in moving round building.

Be aware of some people's potential limitations:

- ◆ How will people negotiate steps if they are wheelchair bound? Is there an alternative? If not, how can they not feel excluded if people move somewhere else?
- ◆ If circle dance is used remember to find a way of including those who may not be able to do it.

Lighting:

- ◆ Ambient lighting is lovely and helpful in mood setting. However do be aware of safety issues – enough light to illuminate slopes and steps.
- ◆ Have potential places to trip been highlighted eg placing a chair over an awkward corner.

Fire

- ◆ Do you know, and some of your core team know, where your sand/fire exits/extinguishers are?

Candles:

- ◆ Avoid dripping wax onto surfaces, make sure candles are in flame proof holders and not in a draught, nor in a place where people may fall over/into them.

Cables:

- ◆ Have you got tape to make sure cables are securely taped down?

Lighting

- Pillar candles, plates, matches/tapers, fire blanket
- Small torches for those leading in case of darkness!

- Electric light operator – depending on where you are holding Gathering
- If Communion – are there candles on the table of friendship?

Music

- ◆ 30 mins before service
- ◆ Chants/singers – practised before hand – arrive early on the day
- ◆ Instrumental – need to arrive early and be checked for sound etc
- ◆ CD for Gathering. It can be helpful to cut all the music onto one CD with timings clearly worked out. This helps those playing the CDs to be more involved in the Gathering as hopefully they will be less distracted by practicalities of needing to find correct CD and correct track in time. Equally the use of an MP can be helpful.

Visuals

- ◆ What is needed?
- ◆ Who is bringing?
- ◆ How will they be displayed?

Artists

- ◆ Need to arrive early.
- ◆ For spoken pieces – need to check microphone and audibility
- ◆ For visual pieces – need to think about lighting, stands
- ◆ Usually invite artist to speak about their work and how it fits into the Gathering theme for somewhere between 5 and 8 minutes.

Welcomers

- ◆ Need two people who can welcome people into the space and the community. **Contemplative Fire** is a welcoming community. Christ welcomed all who came. Welcomers need to be warm and welcoming people, able to gently direct people to the Gathering space, may be have a brief word

about the contemplative prayer before the service, and put people at ease. Welcomers need to be alert to physical needs – such as mobility, directions to toilets, how long the Gathering might last, as well as being alert to pastoral/spiritual needs and able to offer reassurance or refer on as needed.

Readers

- ◆ However experienced they need to arrive early to have a practice run through with this reading, in this style, in this building, with microphone if used.
- ◆ Have copies of the readings from the NRSV.
- ◆ Be sure they know where they are reading from in the building and at what point in the Gathering.
 - How will they be heard? Is a PA system required?
 - Make sure readers have copies of the readings at least a week before so that they can be prayerfully with it for a few days before the Gathering.
 - If it is a large liturgical space is there a 'T' loop for those with hearing aids? If not, be even more aware of clearly enunciating words and making sure your face is in the best possible light so that lip reading might be possible. If there is a trained signer available then do use them as their movements can also enrich the experience.
 - Microphones - if using, who is able to switch on/off and do they know when? Do you need tape for securing leads across walkways.

Offertory

- ◆ Two or three baskets to take offertory in
- ◆ People to gather the offertory (usually 2 or 3). Do they know when, how, and where to place the baskets at the end?

Community News

- ◆ Need a table with all the **Contemplative Fire** event leaflets clearly displayed.
- ◆ Gift aid envelopes also need to be available on the table

APPENDIX 3

Lord's Prayer Body Prayer

To lead the Lord's Prayer – invite people to stand, feet slightly apart and hands in the traditional prayer position – palms together, fingers pointing upwards – making sure they have room to stretch out their arms without hitting anyone else!

Explain that you will speak the words on their behalf. Quickly take them through the movements and then for the second time, slow it down, and pray it for real!

If you get the timing right the whole thing should take about 10 mins, including the instructional run through. To learn this thoroughly please see: [Sacred Posture DVD](#) - available from the Contemplative Fire website Store

Starting with traditional prayer position of palm of hands together in the middle of the body, a slow moving up and then circling out from top to bottom – once on each of the three phrases::

Our Father
Who art in heaven
Hallowed be thy name

Then from the same prayer position, move down to the bottom of the circle, and move out from top to bottom – once on each of the three phases

Thy kingdom come
Thy will be done
On earth ... as it is in heaven

(helpful to pause so that the earth is felt at the bottom of the circle and the reaching towards heaven at the top of the circle)

Hands return to prayer position.

Give us this day our daily bread –

Hands move upwards and open a little to create a chalice shape. Helpful to pause at this point and ask people to quietly name what it is they most need for sustenance today. It is a form of petition.

Forgive us our trespasses

Hands move down and outwards to the horizontal – reminiscent of the position of crucifixion

As we forgive those who trespass against us

We move our hands back in and fold arms over chest – symbol of gathering those who have maybe hurt us back into our hearts

Lead us not into temptation

Elbows gradually move up

But deliver us from evil

and arms open out

Pause and then descend in the circle, finishing with hands back in the prayer position as the last lines are said:

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
For ever and ever. Amen.

APPENDIX 4

Excel spreadsheet – Gathering template

For artist – to make as sure as one can be – plan a and plan b

Logistics manager MC – planned ahead

Icebreaker at start sometimes to help build community – in two's say hi

Conceptual – spatial think through the detail

Logistics person in to ask tricky situations at final planning

Can be helpful to colour code different people's contributions eg

- Music always in yellow
- Priest in grey
- Assistant in pale blue

Words of Institution

**On the night before he died
he had supper with his friends and,
taking bread, he praised you.
He broke the bread.**

**He gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.**

**When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you; this is my blood of the new
covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the
forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of
me.**