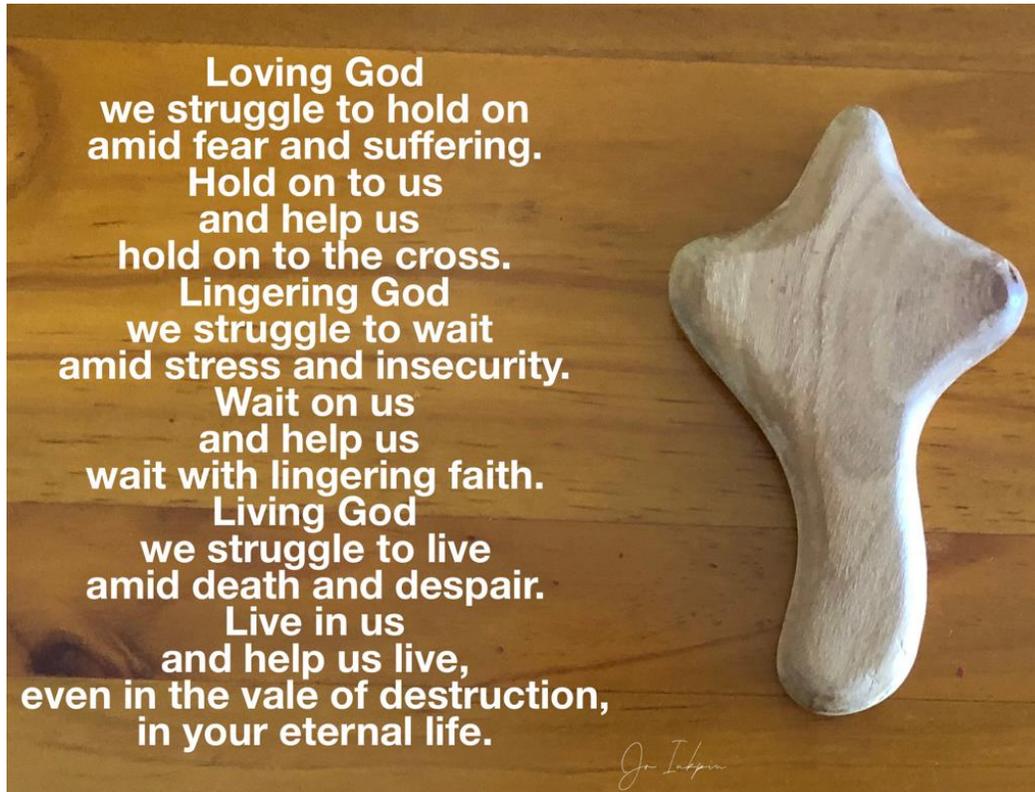




# NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2020 EDITION 98



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## PLEASE NOTE

We will be looking for a new Honorary Treasurer in June 2021 as Chris Dowlen will be stepping down after 6 years of managing the SPIDIR accounts extremely efficiently. Anyone interested please contact our Chair, Biddy Taylor.

Dear Friends,

In my last letter I very optimistically suggested that we were beginning to see a slow down in the spread of the Corona virus and that we would be returning to a more normal way of life quite soon. We were beginning, although tentatively, to see people indoors if they felt comfortable doing that.



However, we are now well into the second wave of the virus which has returned with a vengeance and are having to go into a national lockdown until December. That means that we are no longer able to see directees face-to-face which is a great shame. Although many directors have managed to keep contact with their directees via various electronic devices and telephone, these are no real substitute for meeting in person. However, we can only do what we can within the Government guidelines. Many people have felt very lonely and isolated and contact with their director has been invaluable. This reminds us what a vital ministry we are engaged in.

I was hoping that the Autumn Refresher Day with Rev Trevor Mapstone would go ahead, but unfortunately we had to cancel it. Trevor has kindly rescheduled his talk on Evangelical Spirituality and Spiritual Direction for March 2022. Details are on the website and will appear in the newsletter nearer the time. However, we were fortunate to get Chris Chapman to lead a day via Zoom for us in October. This was a day of two parts with a morning and afternoon session, and was entitled 'The Long Path to Renewal'. It was a most inspiring day, and Pat Brown has written a detailed report for the newsletter on pages 5,6 and 7.

Supervision groups now meet on line, and meetings of the group facilitators occur several times a year. These are a good opportunity for group leaders to share their experiences and to feedback comments and suggestions to Rosemary Shaw, who is the Supervision Co-ordinator.

Plans for the next Training Course are going ahead well, and five students have been accepted already, and further interviews will be held in November until June next year. Ruth Lampard has sadly had to step down as one of the trainers due to ill health, but Jacky Sutcliffe has joined John Philpott-Howard, Rosemary Shaw and May Nicol on the training team. Our thanks to Ruth for her dedicated commitment to the training course, and wish her all the best for the future.

We have now resumed accepting applications for Spiritual Direction from the website, and hold virtual Referral meetings, as well as Main Committee meetings on Zoom. These seem to work well, and we are all getting very adept at this latest technology. Our Referral Secretary, Chris Serbutt has been very unwell for some time, but is now back home and making good progress. We pray for his continuing recovery.

The Spring Refresher Day is due to go ahead on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2021 with Rev Andrew Woodhead leading the day for us. His topic is spiritual care for those at the end of life. If this event has to be cancelled, Andrew has expressed willingness to hold it via Zoom. We will of course let people know in good time about any changes to the published plans.

John Woodhouse will be running further on-going training in the new year following on from the excellent three days he, Nim Njuguna and Chris Chapman organised in 2019. If you have any suggestions for topics you would like to see covered, please contact John on: [woodhousesopten@btinternet.com](mailto:woodhousesopten@btinternet.com)

We face an uncertain time ahead and the possibility of not being able to see families and friends over Christmas is hard to contemplate. However, I do wish you a very happy and holy Christmas wherever you plan to celebrate it and may we all keep safe and well until we meet again.

With warm wishes and God's blessing on us all.

Biddy

## The Long Path to Renewal

### Exploring the place of spiritual direction in our common life

On Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2020, the SPIDIR Refresher Day led by Chris Chapman took place via Zoom. Zoom is well known as the go-to tool for Video conferencing, whose use the COVID era has extended from the business world to a wide range of events. It was a new venture for SPIDIR, with about 33 participants.

The delivery format was through Chris talk, sprinkled with many challenging, thought-provoking question and illustrated with beautiful pictures and relevant texts.

The day was presented in four sessions, sandwiched with small group discussion in breakout rooms. There were also times of reflection and prayer.

The day was split in two halves with a decent interval to move away from the technology and stretch.

#### Dialogue and discernment in a time of change

Through images and questions, Chris enabled the group of participants to consider where they found themselves at this point in time. He referred to the symbol of the autumn season with the ensuing approach of winter, the uncertainty of the COVID-19 era, and to any personal contexts.

Chris reminded us that the task of spiritual direction is to help people to go deeper into God, to discover themselves and to live creatively through listening to life and reflecting on responses to the events of life.

*Chris works on an independent basis as a Spiritual Director, Retreat Leader and Teacher. He trained as a Spiritual Director in the late 1980's at St. Beuno's Jesuit Spiritual Exercises Centre and Heythrop College, London. He is an associate tutor for St Augustine's College of Theology and a guest director for individually guided retreats at St. Beuno's. He was the former Spirituality Adviser in the Anglican Diocese of Southwark for 25 years and is author of several books.*

He led an Examen meditation, to reflect on how we were feeling physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and the relevance of this.

**Society and its bearing on spiritual direction:** Chris likened the spiritual journey - the seasons of the spirit - as similar to the passing of the seasons of nature. He reminded us that spiritual directors were also experiencing the impact and effect of the Lockdown and current events, bringing the validity of their experience to their work, as they come alongside those making choices about their future direction. He raised these questions:

- What opportunities for developing the spiritual experience have emerged?*
- What is the sense of God's invitation to spiritual directors at this time?*
- What is it possible for spiritual directors to do that might make a difference?*

**Vulnerability:** Valuable time was spent examining the notion of vulnerability, particularly relevance given to the increasing level of fear and anxiety, touching both directors and directees. He reminded us of the value and importance of our supervision groups and the contact we have with our own spiritual directors.

**What does spiritual direction offer?** Chris shared six images of possible approaches, which were then discussed in the small groups.

Everyone seemed to find this a helpful exercise and prompted opening up a more creative way of looking at direction. The new title of **spiritual gardener** was offered.

**Summary conclusion:** One person commented on how Zoom had enriched her day, such as, being able to self-mute or close off the screen when there was need for privacy. She also felt the dialogue was of a better quality. Others commented that there were no distractions, enabling better listening.

The day was fully relevant to the participants, as spiritual directors, as human beings and as directees themselves.

The multiple perspective was enriching and deepened the learning experience. It was a refreshing and stimulating day, peppered with many questions for further reflection. Referencing the context to the current COVID-19 era, was particularly helpful.

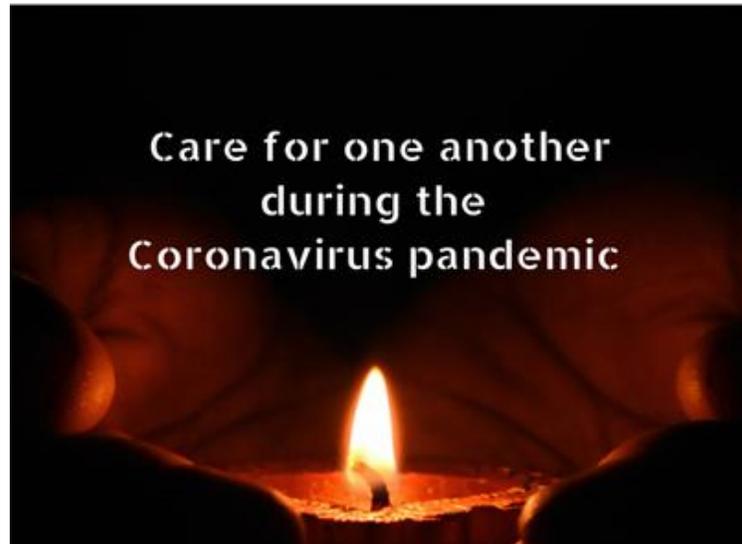
Biddy Taylor thanked Chris for his rich contribution to the day and John Philpott-Howard for managing the registration and Zoom process.

Reference was made to the following:

Laudato Si' (On care for our common home)

Amos 5: 21-24 and Matthew 16: 1-4

**Sent in by Pat Brown**



## **SPIRITUAL DIRECTION - FROM THE CLOSET TO THE MARKET PLACE**

By Nim Njuguna

The priest and the Levite did not stop to help out of fear, thinking, *"If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?"* whereas the Samaritan considered, *"If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?"*

Martin Luther King Jr.

The forced lockdown due to the pandemic has brought an abrupt halt to our collective lives at a time of social and political tensions in some parts of the world. The pandemic global reach affects everyone regardless of nationality or status. However, though in the same pandemic storm, survival depends on social hierarchical factors of 'the haves', 'the have-nots' and 'the have lots' all on the same journey in different 'sea - worthy vessels'.

In Minneapolis, the brutal killing in public of George Floyd was a key moment that brought communities in the streets to demand a halt to their daily experience of oppression. The civil disturbances and the political unrest that followed, were a catalyst for the Black Lives Matter protests around the world demanding an end to the polarised racist policies informed by a dualistic mindset when it comes to dispensing justice.

In London, Patrick Hutchison, a Black Lives Matter protester dubbed a good Samaritan by the media, is pictured carrying a semi-conscious Bryn Male, a white counter protester to safety.

This was a powerful statement of compassion being more than just feeling sorry for a victim and walking by muttering canned memorised responses. Compassion in action has potential to dissolve fear.

In Rome, Pope Francis in his encyclical 'Fratelli Tutti', fraternity and social friendship said, 'the Good Samaritan isn't just a parable, it's a way of life'. How then do we cultivate the courage needed to dispense with our social limiting standard script inherited from our tribal past?

Asking ourselves searching questions like, “*to whom am I a neighbour?*” shifts the focus away from the self and self-interests to understand and meet the needs of others. This cannot be done while closing borders and building walls of separation.

*‘Living a day in my wife’s shoes taught me about race bias’*- Prince Harry.

Dallas Willard, my favourite theologian, defines a disciple as *‘someone who follows Jesus in order to become like Jesus, to do what Jesus does.’*

A spiritual direction approach in the manner of Jesus is not a programme but a transformational life that draws its life from Christ the same way a branch draws its life from the main stem. As a spiritual director, this is an effective way of being able to hold a non-judgemental space for the ‘other’ free from cultural and social theological constraints.

As spiritual directors, we cannot continue using some of our dysfunctional historical monocultural modes of religiosity devoid of intercultural contexts. A socially domesticated theology is one that is lukewarm towards participatory ongoing self-examination about cultural diversity and only capable of compassion by proxy not action.

John O’Donohue says: *We have a duty to speak out for those who have no voice or are not being listened to. We should at least begin to have some conversations with these members of our human family. It would open our eyes. When our compassion awakens, our responsibility becomes active and creative. When we succumb to indifference, we blaspheme against the gifts that we could never earn, that have been so generously given to us. The duty of privilege is absolute integrity* (O’Donohue, 2011: 375)

Christianity is an incarnational faith and separating action from contemplation in spiritual direction is disingenuous. Only a spirituality energised by the power of love with strong social practical quest for the common good will suffice.

Severing contemplative practices from engagement in social action for justice, seeing it as an afterthought to true spirituality, is wrong and needs further reflection. I would argue that social justice and the Kingdom of God go hand in hand and anything less, remains an unhealthy individualistic form of private spiritual consumerism conditioned by existing power structures.

Spiritual, mental and emotional maturity takes place over a lifetime with each person travelling their unique road towards transformation. However, I believe spiritual directors should also be found in the market place confronting demeaning ethical frameworks that tarnish people made in the image of God.

Travelling to Jericho from Jerusalem, a Jewish man was robbed and left by the road side and unless help came soon, he was a dead man. This well-known parable of the Good Samaritan, (Luke 10:25-37) tells us that the priest and the Levite ‘who passed by’ for fear of defilement were heavily influenced and prejudiced by internalised and absorbed particular ways of being religious. Their socialisation, religious outlook, peer pressure and community dictated their behaviour towards the victim. The Samaritan on the other hand, without social rank consideration and his brand of religious obligations to dictate his actions, came to the aid of the victim.

Jesus used this parable to challenge us to cross the perceived social boundaries between ‘them’ and ‘us’, reminding us that discipleship is seen in how we live and by the things we say we believe about him. In the context of Jesus’ life and teaching, love is a radical commitment that does not avoid deliberative public engagement for living as if the Kingdom has come.

The Levite and the Priest held to a tunnel visioned spirituality, incapable of overflowing into diverse cultural boundaries for social mutual engagement which can be self-centred and self-serving. When we get out of this lockdown, the emerging new social frontiers will bring myriad challenges that cannot be solved with old mindsets.

What is needed is a new spiritual mindset capable of anticipating and understanding competing images of the future and unveiling hidden social pitfalls.

*Pat Brown in her report on October's Spirituality Day made mention of the fact that one response to Chris Chapman's request for a new creative way of looking at spiritual direction was the offer of a new title of spiritual gardener. Coincidentally, we find echoes of this in Richard Tyler's poem and piece on his experience during the continuing COVID-19 pandemic.*

## Digging

There is something mindless about digging  
But which satisfies.  
Each clod it signifies  
A wrong last week, a minor triumph  
Turned in earth.

They stand behind the wire fence  
All waiting for a worm  
The Sussex Cross, the cockerel  
Does that thought make you squirm?

And as I dig I like to think  
Of all those who by toil  
Have sown and grown, fed families  
By working on this soil.

There is something timeless about digging  
But which crucifies.  
Each pain elucidates  
That life is short, a passing moment  
Grown in time.

**Richard Tyler**



## DIGGING

I have in the Covid -19 crisis been answering a weekly survey. The one question which I have had to stop and think about is whether I have felt restless and unable to sit still.

I am a naturally restless person. "Be still and know that I am God" does not suit me.

I had a highly pressurised job and found relaxation and space for reflection in the chopping of wood and digging of earth. We now live in the converted cowsheds of an old Welsh Farm. Having built a flower garden in the farmyard I opened up a vegetable garden in a corner of the main hay meadow. This produced a goodly amount of food in the lock down and I have now started real improvement of the soil which involves double digging.

A trench is dug across the garden, the subsoil is broken up, manured and the soil for the next trench is thrown on the previous one and so on. The large amount of stone produced is put on one side to assist drystone walling.

This really hard work takes very little brainwork to achieve which gives me space to reflect on all those problems which come to mind. Solutions are often found, aided much by the sheer beauty of the surroundings in which I am working. For me there is something deeply spiritual about what I am doing with great parallels with the work which I have carried out over years as a lawyer, spiritual director and mediator.

I have left instructions with my will that I wish my old walking, then gardening, boots placed on my coffin when it is carried into church on the basis that they have brought me closer to God than anything else.

**Richard Tyler (SPIDIR Course K 92/93)**

## ELFJES – Chris Dowlen

Our Church decided that they were going to put together a challenge in the run up to having an International Day on 31st May, Pentecost Sunday. This would, under normal circumstances, have been an international service, celebrating the different nationalities in the Church. But in the current climate whatever happens will have to be done as an on-line arrangement.

The challenge covered the 21 days, with a separate task to be completed on each day. One task was to create something inspired by Psalm 1. This could be anything – that was all that was written into the challenge. So it might be a picture, a still life, a model, a song – anything at all.

My mind went back to a time when I was doing a short course on creative thinking at Surrey University, many years ago. We were introduced to a concept known as an elfje. Our tutor was Dutch, which might help to explain the title. You could call them elevenies, in English, if you prefer.

An elfje is a mini-poem with but eleven words, set into five lines. Each line has a particular purpose.

Line 1 has a single word, which is the subject of the mini-poem – a thought, object, colour, smell – or anything at all.

Line 2 has two words. What does this subject do?

Line 3 has three words. Where or how is it?

Line 4 has four words. What do you mean?

Line 5 has the last, single word. What is the outcome?

Could I write an elfje inspired by Psalm 1?

The single elfje got expanded into several elfjes as I continued to think through the psalm.

Then I thought I could add a picture for each one. (*Some pictures are from other sources*)

The result is not necessarily meant to be excellent poetry – more a piece of fun that investigated this psalm. I'm sure it could be done with any psalm or many completely different things.

Try it, perhaps with a different psalm.

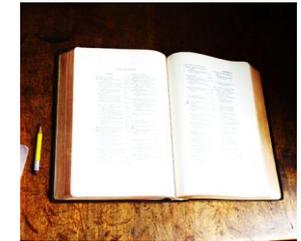
Here are my elfjes on Psalm 1.



Blessing  
Follows one  
Walking against wickedness  
Not in mockers' company  
**Goodness**



Tree  
It grows  
Beside water streams  
Like the Godly person  
**Blessed**



Delight  
Makes glad  
Thinking about scripture  
Biblical meditation produces fruit  
**Prosperity**



Godliness  
Permeates space  
All around them  
Delighting in God's word  
**Infectious**



Wind  
Blows chaff  
Like God's Spirit  
Clears wickedness well away  
**Holiness**



God  
Watches righteous  
Makes ways clear  
He protects: he guides  
**Fellowship**

## Threshold

I emerge from the mind's  
cave into the worse darkness  
outside, where things pass and  
the Lord is in none of them.

I have heard the still, small voice  
and it was that of the bacteria  
demolishing my cosmos. I  
have lingered too long on

this threshold, but where can I go?  
To look back is to lose the soul  
I was leading upwards towards  
the light. To look forward? Ah,

what balance is needed at  
the edges of such an abyss.  
I am alone on the surface  
of a turning planet. What

to do but, like Michelangelo's  
Adam, put my hand  
out into unknown space,  
hoping for the reciprocating touch?

**RS Thomas**

Sent in by Sally Lowe



## ANNUAL CONFERENCE - 28<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2021



**GUEST SPEAKER LIZ WATSON**

### **'Silence and Self-knowledge: Wisdom from the Desert'**

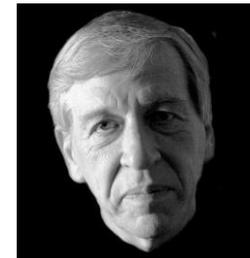
"Why have our Christian friends through the centuries seen silence and self-knowledge as indispensable elements in spiritual growth? Is it true today? We will look for insight and inspiration in the lives and wisdom of the Desert Fathers and Mothers of 4th century Egypt."

**SPIDIR RETREAT 20<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2021**

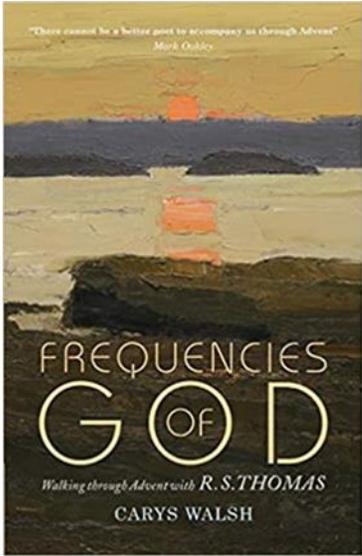
Venue: St Michael's Convent, Gerrard's Cross

**'LATE MUSINGS. Observations on aspects of life and faith'**

**Led by: BARRY PREECE**



Barry is a retired Anglican priest living near Folkestone in Kent. He is a former Spirituality Adviser to the Diocese of Guildford and the Current Chair of the Association for Promoting Retreats and the Retreat Association. He has been a spiritual director and leader of retreats for over thirty years.



**Frequencies of God:  
Walking through Advent  
with R S Thomas Paperback**  
by [Carys Walsh](#) (Author)

With the season of Advent, the coming of Christ is imminent, and following the contours of the season leads through a rich time of preparation for God-with-us in the Incarnation.

R. S. Thomas, a poet of waiting and anticipation, can be a profound guide for this season. His spiritual and poetic trajectory of discovering the presence of God - divine 'frequencies' – even in apparent absence, can help lead us into an Advent landscape of surrender, open-hearted discovery, epiphany and encounter.

This collection of 28 reflections on Thomas's poetry travels through the season, and follows one of the traditional patterns of themes explored in each Sunday of Advent: a Carmelite pattern of waiting, accepting, journeying and birthing.

## A PRAYER IN THE TIME OF THE CORONA VIRUS

Loving Lord

We pray for your love and compassion to abound as we walk through this challenging season.

We ask for wisdom for those who bear the load of making decisions with widespread consequences.

We pray for those who are suffering with sickness and all who are caring for them.

We ask for protection for the elderly and vulnerable to not succumb to the risks of the virus.

We pray for misinformation to be curbed that fear may take no hold in hearts and minds.

As we exercise the good sense that you in your mercy provide, may we also approach each day in faith and peace, trusting in the truth of your goodness towards us.

Amen

Prayer: Mothers' Union

Ima

## SPIDIR DIARY 2021 – 2022

### **22<sup>nd</sup> March 2021 Spring Refresher Day**

Led by Revd. Andrew Woodhead

Topic: "Spiritual Care for those at the end of life".

Held either face to face or virtually.

### **28<sup>th</sup> June 10am – 3.30 pm**

Annual General Meeting and Annual Conference

Guest Speaker: Liz Watson

On "Silence and self-knowledge: Wisdom from the Desert".

Venue: Trinity House, Borough High St. London SE1 1HW

Cost £10 for members and £15 for non-members.

### **21<sup>st</sup> September 10am – 4pm**

SPIDIR two-year Spiritual Direction Course

at St George the Martyr, Borough High Street, London SE1 1JA

Normally on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of each month

Course led by: John Philpott-Howard. Jackie Sutcliffe,  
May Nicol, Rosemary Shaw.

### **20<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> October SPIDIR RETREAT**

Venue: St Michael's Convent, Gerrard's Cross

Topic: "LATE MUSINGS: Observations on aspects of life and Faith".

Led by: Revd Barry Preece

Further enquiries to [Sallylowe1943@gmail.com](mailto:Sallylowe1943@gmail.com)

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