

## Reflections on Silent Prayer at St Mary's

**The gathering:** I try to arrive a few minutes early. As I walk towards St John's Chapel I see few of the chairs, placed in a horseshoe in front of the altar, are occupied and I sense a stillness becoming established. I move carefully trying to minimise any disturbance. I take off my scarf and gloves, unzip my coat and leave my shopping bags before taking a place in the 'circle'. My neighbours smile a greeting and maybe adjust their position or their coat in a gesture of inclusion. We settle, without chatter and always making adjustments as others join us.

**The beginning:** This is signalled by Brian's or Robert's introduction and the important reassurance that they will be doing the timekeeping. Sometimes a Bible passage or a prayer is read. I make myself comfortable; soften muscles, close eyes breath regularly and gently push thoughts aside until my mind clears. After a few moments even traffic noise from outside slips past unregistered.

**The prayer:** Sitting in relaxed quietness is my favourite kind of prayer. I like the waiting in his presence, just in case he wants to communicate something. I have managed to sit in God's presence many times; at home, on a hill top, by the sea, in a church but usually until now by myself. Silent prayer with others is different. The presence of God feels more tangible, as if the total of all the presences (if that is possible) is great than the sum of the parts. It is a difficult perception to describe but it is very comforting. I feel connected and understood and loved.

**The conclusion:** This feeling diminishes towards the end of the half-hour. I would slip, away cuddling the memory, but remain because it seems important. I continue to sit, still, but taking in my surroundings; my companions, the stained glass, the gleaming brass cross, the crumbling plaster, the familiar odour of the church. This is the time when childhood strategies for dealing with sermons are resurrected. I might count – panes of red, or panes of blue, panes of green. I'd add them all together if I could remember the first total and I had more time.

**The departure:** The half hour is signalled, we say The Lord's Prayer and our departure begins. It happens gradually, each person leaving when the moment seems right but quietly and gently. A few words might be exchanged between individuals but I detect a general wish to go separate ways without. By the time I reach the High Street I have regained my usual brisk pace but feel calm. I am glad I joined in.  
27<sup>th</sup> February 2010

## Reflection on the Parish's Times of Silent Prayer at St Mary's

For me the times of Silent Prayer at St Mary's are times of gentle meeting. Gentle meeting with the fifteen or so who come together once a month to spend time to ponder and to pray. Gentle meeting with God who comes to receive us. God is often a very subtle companion. I arrive early, before any one else. After I've moved the furniture around and lit some candles I sit there anxiously waiting for some others to turn up, feeling quite alert and busy inside of me. And then I feel I'm being told to stop fretting and to settle down calmly, as if I am being gently led into an open space where many things might happen, some challenging, some reassuring. When half past twelve comes I welcome everybody and then I read a passage from the Bible which I have chosen for the day. We all then become silent and you can feel the palpable fellowship as people reflect and pray. I start off thinking about the Bible passage and how it speaks to us today. My mind sometimes wanders off in maverick directions, and I try to discipline my straying thoughts and focus my prayers. I even find myself waiting for God to respond as if we are fitting in a quick business meeting before

lunch, which I know is daft but I still do it. More often though I allow my thoughts to take me wherever they will go. And language then ceases, and I enter a world of images and sounds, memories and feelings. Out of this sometimes come questions which I know I am putting to God, and I know God will answer sometime in some way. And I am quite content with that. And then it's nearly one o'clock and I rouse myself to bring everyone together to pray the Lord's prayer. And I am grateful for the time we have all shared together in prayer.

*Brian*

