

15

How to plan a quiet day

A quiet day is a deliberate intention to share with people a day that will include times to be quiet together and space for individuals to be quiet on their own. Words, pictures, music, symbols and other things may be included, but the quiet will be the special emphasis of the day. It is important to be flexible in sharing and planning this day to suit the people and the situation.

Numbers

There is no difficulty in small numbers. Anywhere between 5 and 25 is fine. If there are more, then 35 is usually a maximum, to ensure elbow room and intimacy, a sense of belonging and a comfortable place in the company.

Place

It is better to be away from home. Use a Retreat House, another church, a private house or somewhere else where you will have rooms set-aside for your use only. If there are gardens and walks that will add to the day. You need a comfortable room to meet in, with enough chairs, but not too many. Avoid a desk or large table for the leader, who will need only a chair and small side table. The room could act also as 'chapel' if there is no separate place. You may like to add a worship focus.

You will need spaces, rooms and quiet corners to settle in. The place will make its own contribution to the day. You will need to visit it, to plan its arrangement for the day, so that the atmosphere you aim for will be created from the start.

Programme

There are many possibilities for the arrangements of the day. Do feel free to plan it for your local needs.

This is an example that may help:

10.00 Arrival and coffee

10.30 Introduction to people and plans for the day

10.45 Short opening worship, followed by a short talk leading into silence

11.15 A quiet period

12.15 Eucharist or guided meditation

13.00 Lunch

14.00 Another short talk leading into silence

14.30 Shared or guided meditation, sharing session, closing worship, etc.

15.45 Tea



This will be planned to suit the company. The theme may be focused for a particular group.

For a varied group the theme may be linked with the seasons of the Christian Year or themes like "The Journey", 'Dark and Light' 'Prayer', 'Peace', etc. The direction is towards meditation rather than preaching, reflection rather than discussion, inner strengthening rather than outward busyness.

Scripture will often form the basis for the day.

The day will have a natural rhythm that needs to be understood and accepted although it will have within it a life of its own. The natural rhythm will be, to begin with, the energy of arrival and morning freshness, and the need to settle and gather for the day. This will deepen the silence and the silence will take hold.

Even if there is talking at lunch it is possible to regain the silence and as the second part of the day proceeds people will be preparing to gather up the experience of silence and go back to home and demands.



Silence

The purpose of leading people into silence whether by words or music is to help them to be open and receptive to God. The plan for the day and the period of silence together and individual silence should be clearly explained in advance. Make sure that people know how long the silence will be and how they will be led out of this otherwise they may fill the time worrying about what they are supposed to be doing in the silence.

People like to be led gently out of silence. A few words might guide the group back to their original focus then invite them to become aware of each other and their surroundings and perhaps a short prayer.

Be prompted by the Spirit, keep it short and simple!



Meals

Have coffee ready on arrival. Tea at the right time - not too early, not too late, and light refreshments available for lunch. For light refreshments soup and bread, cheese and fruit work wonders. An alternative to this is to ask people to bring their own sandwiches, which may be shared if you wish, and provide tea and coffee as needed.

Meals can be taken in silence or with music. You may feel it right to break the silence at the end of the morning, to talk over lunch and to regain the silence later.

Resources

Worship can be structured, liturgical or silent. The gathered silence could be just that or a 'Quaker' silence, where some share a thought, but no-one comments or interrupts. A bookstall with books to sell or a library from which to borrow and return books is useful, and the day may include the use of music, pictures, creative writing or drawing. Participants might bring their own favourite devotional books or objects to be shared with others during the day. If handouts are to be provided take care about copyright.

Organisation

Two people are important for the day. One is the organiser, to see to all the practical arrangements of booking, welcoming, furniture shifting, labelling, car parking, toilets, cloakroom, diets, access, bookstall, etc. The organisation may well be done by a team of people. The other is the leader, preferably someone with experience of leading quiet days, to come with the thoughts and prayers which will give content and shape to the day.

The organiser or organising team would meet and keep in contact with the leader, before, during and after the day (for evaluation). They can consult about the theme and arrange the programme together. Find out from the leader beforehand what fee and/or expenses are needed. If expenses only are asked for, an additional gift may well be appreciated.

Publicity

A theme and title are good to advertise, together with an outline of the day, a word about the quiet, and detail of booking, payment and travel.

Go in Peace

A Quiet Day will have changed our pace. Be careful as you step out and negotiate busy traffic again.

Suggestions for using the time of silence

1. Do nothing at all...sit or kneel or lie down...and wait for God to lead, to speak, to put ideas and thoughts and prayers into the mind. Relax and rest. If literally doing nothing at all is impossible, do something creative with the hands.
2. Use something to 'spark off prayer'...the Bible, the hymn-book, phrases or short prayers...use something quite short and dwell on it. Read books about prayer or a book of prayers, being prepared to stop reading in order to pray.
3. Walk about in the garden, thinking, taking no notice of anyone else, being aware of God.
4. Stay in the chapel and use the time for your own usual prayers, with the added help that there is more time than usual.
5. Use the time to pray for others...perhaps a few, or only one (not a long list). Bring them to God to share his presence with you in the quietness.
6. Face up to yourself and your particular needs, knowing that God will deal with these if you give him time and room. Do not dwell only on the need but on the receiving of help.
7. A very practical and active use of the time could be to think out deliberately your own present method and practice of prayer (private and public worship habits). Plan afresh if necessary...write down ideas to try out. If the present pattern is unsatisfactory, now is your chance to do something about it. Remember, if you make an ideal plan you will not necessarily be able to keep to it perfectly, but it is worth a try.
8. If all else fails, do not feel guilty if you do something that does not seem an ideal use of time. If none of these suggestions appeals to you, and you don't find a better way of spending the time, talk to someone about it and decide why it has been unprofitable.