

Waiting on GOD in the silence

Julian Meetings A Julian Meeting is usually 6-15 people of various denominations, both lay people and clergy. They meet regularly in a house, church or chapel. A brief reading, or piece of music, leads into about 30 minutes of silent contemplative prayer. This may be followed by a time for tea or coffee and conversation.

Julian Meetings do vary. Our main guidelines are that: each meeting is centred on contemplative prayer in the Christian tradition; it welcomes people of all denominations; it welcomes those seeking a place for silent prayer.

We teach no specific method, but our 'Basics of Contemplative Prayer' booklet gives some guidelines. We encourage people to seek what is right for them; to discover how they can integrate contemplation into their daily prayer life and how personal and group contemplative prayer can enrich each other.

Those who attend Julian Meetings often take a full part in the life of their own church, but some have no formal church links. Local and regional quiet days or retreats, and occasional national gatherings, enable wider sharing between people from several Meetings.

**Julian Meetings
are groups of people
who meet regularly in order to grow
in the practice of contemplative prayer
in the Christian tradition**

How the Julian Meetings (JM) began

Contemplative prayer has been part of Christianity from the beginning. Jesus spent whole nights alone in prayer. The Desert Fathers and our own Celtic hermits sought places to be alone with God. But for some centuries the Christian churches neglected this most basic form of prayer; it became usual only in monastic communities.

In the 1960s and 1970s, with the great interest in eastern forms of mysticism and meditation, many people realised that the Church had not taught people about its own tradition of contemplative prayer.

In 1973 a letter in English church papers of various denominations led to people in eleven areas setting up contemplative prayer groups. Today there are over 300 Julian Meetings in the UK and a growing number worldwide.

JM today. JM keeps bureaucracy to a minimum but some jobs must be done: respond to enquiries; produce and send out the JM Magazine and literature; keep in touch with Meetings; organise any national gathering/retreat; manage JM finances. These jobs are done by the JM Council members, 12 volunteers working from home across the country. JM has neither offices nor paid staff.

Why Julian? The movement was named after Julian of Norwich, a fourteenth century mystic. Her inspired writings are sometimes used at meetings but JM is in no way a Julian cult.

The purpose of JM is defined as 'fostering the practice and teaching of contemplative prayer within the Christian tradition', and this accords with Julian's precept that the highest form of prayer consists in simply waiting on God.

What is contemplative prayer?

Contemplative prayer has been described as listening for God; opening ourselves to God; waiting silently upon God. Other descriptions are meditation, contemplation, centring prayer or 'the prayer of quiet'. In contemplative prayer we seek to be aware of the presence of God and to remain silently and attentively in that presence, completely open to God.

It is not just that words are unnecessary, but that they may even get in the way. Prayer involves listening as well as speaking, but so often we do all the talking and God doesn't get a chance to talk with us! Simply 'being with God' like this is a very natural way of praying. It may be the only way we can pray when we're tired or ill. Some children pray in this way quite instinctively. So did the old man who explained why he sat in church for hours: 'I look at Him, He looks at me'.

Why belong to a Julian Meeting?

If we feel we need to learn how to be still with God, we might start with some ways that other people have found helpful.

Belonging to a group of people who meet regularly to pray in silent contemplation can be a great help and encouragement. We do not feel isolated. Prayerful silence is greatly helped when two or three are together, and this complements our daily personal prayer. If we are having problems with our praying, sharing them can help us to grow through them. A Julian Meeting provides these opportunities.

Upper Wylde Valley Team of Churches

A new Julian Group began in the Upper Wylde Valley Team in January 2021 to encourage regular prayer in companionable silence. The group meets for 30 minutes on Monday evenings at 6pm via Zoom.

Further details including the link to join the group is available from The Rev Cliff Stride cgstride@btinternet.com and is included in the weekly Zoom Sunday Service email distributed each week.

Why not give a Julian Group meeting a try? All are welcome to drop in or out, as, and when. Commitment to weekly attendance is not expected or required. Prayer comes in all sorts of way, as they say one size doesn't fit all; what is important is that we encounter God and draw close to God at a time and in a way that is right for the individual.

Praying alone can be difficult and certainly meditation can seem impossible. If the mind wanders to composing a shopping list or thinking about your next holiday, so be it. Just park it to one side and come back to it later. God is interested in those small daily concerns of ours as well as the bigger issues in the world. Listen for what God is saying to you in the silence.