

CONNECTING

Being still amid ordinary life

- The service outline below is a guide, which you can adapt in any way you wish.
- Sections in **light green** are additional material for optional use.
- Introductions to each section may be spoken by the leader or by different members of the group.
- Please feel free to adapt them so that they are natural to what you would say.
- Text in *italics* represent instructional text for you, all other text are the words to be spoken.
- The participants' version is a separate document. You are welcome to print it off and give each person a copy, and/or use the PowerPoint slides if you have projection facilities.
- Participants will be most helped if your words **are spoken slowly**.
- **Don't forget to review how it went afterwards.** Take five minutes to ask: what went well? What could we do better next time? Do this on your own or with others who help you.

Connecting to one another

Welcome people by adapting one of the following or by making up your own.

- A** Welcome to Soulspace. This is an opportunity to connect with your inner feelings, to connect with others who are here, and (if you want) to connect with the ultimate purpose of life.

Take a moment to look around the room, notice who is here and what they mean to you.

They may be old friends or people who you don't know properly yet. They may be people you enjoy being with, they may be people you struggle with. But in this silent moment, just notice that they are here and be thankful for them.

OR

- B** Welcome. In this session we will be looking at how we are all connected to one another, to the world and to its questions. Please feel free to join in however you feel comfortable. You can talk, or not talk; share, or not share. Use this time to relax and explore.

As we start, soften your gaze and think about the people in the room. You may want to find a spot on the floor to focus your thoughts. Perhaps, in your mind, you may like to give thanks that we have gathered here together.

OR

- C** Welcome everyone. We are gathering to connect with the source of love in the universe, whom some people call God. And we are going to give an opportunity for this divine love to touch each of us in the room and the relationships between us.

A famous spiritual writer in the Christian Bible once said, "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them." (1 John 4: 16). In the power of God, let's connect in love to the feelings we bring with us today, to others who are gathered here, and to the divine source of all love.

OR

- D** Your own words.

Encourage people to connect. Here are three examples, which you can accompany with a track from the playlists supplied on the [Church Support Hub](#) (open the link and scroll down to 'Music playlists'). It's important to say the words slowly.

Option 1 *Light a candle. As you or another person does so, adapt one of the following or make up your own.*

- A** May we find a light to our feelings, to the feelings of others who are here, and to the source of love in our universe. Use this time, if you want, to identify your own feelings: Are you feeling anxious? Under pressure? Relaxed? Distracted? At peace? *(Pause)*

Again if you want, imagine what one or two others here might be feeling. *(Pause)* What might you wish to say to them?

OR

- B** The candle gives us light in the dark and comfort from the cold. As we focus on its flame, may we allow the light, and the comfort it gives, to fill us up. Think about what else fills you in the same way, or helps you connect to the world around you, and spend a few moments focusing on it.

OR

- C** We are now going to light our candle. Here is a short reading from a spiritual writer in the Christian Bible which we can use to focus our thoughts.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 5: 1-5)

Ponder silently: where would you like the light to shine into the darkness of the world, or into the life of someone in the group, or into your own life?

Or: Think quietly about others in the group or some people you know. Who shines like a light to you?

OR

- D** Your own words.

Option 2 *Place a stone in front of people. As you do so, adapt one of the following or make up your own.*

- A** Like pebbles on a beach, each with our own story and experiences, we come together to form one people. Take a moment to value the people who are here. What do they mean to you?

What do you find interesting about them? Silently in your thoughts, think of a word of encouragement to say to them. In this quiet moment, be glad for their presence.

OR

- B** Each of us carries burdens and cares, which can feel like weights around our necks. Think about some of the worries that separate you from other people and then imagine them as a stone like this one. Imagine throwing them out to sea and letting them go.

OR

- C** Like pebbles on a beach, each with our own story and experiences, we come together to form one people. God is here too, whether we know it or not. Jesus, known as one of the world's greatest spiritual teachers, said: "When two or three of you are together because of me, you can be sure that I will be there." What might Jesus want to say to the group?

OR

- D** *Your own words.*

Option 3 *Put some mud into the bottom of a bottle, fill the bottle with water, shake it up, let mud settle and allow the water to clear. This fits with a process of settling and finding some clarity in the midst of our confusing world.*

- A** Perhaps we are here today with our minds buzzing. Different thoughts are swirling around, like the mud that is clouding the water. Watch the mud begin to settle. Take some deep breaths and imagine that your thoughts are also starting to settle. Imagine your mind becoming still, and amplify that stillness. Enjoy the feeling of peace.

OR

- B** Some of us may be here today aware of conflicts and disagreements in our lives. These differences may cloud our connections with certain people. They are like mud that soils a friendship or dirties a work or family relationship. What would have to happen for the mud to clear, for the relationship to be cleansed? Ponder (if you want) your feelings about this. Imagine the dirt settling and the relationship becoming pure again.

OR

- C** Many of us face situations that seem unclear. Maybe it's a decision you face. Or there is a problem or challenge you don't know how to resolve. Or maybe the direction of your life feels unclear; you long for a greater sense of purpose and meaning.

Jeremiah, an ancient Israelite prophet, spoke these words from God: 'For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future' (Jeremiah 29. 11). *(Repeat these words, slowly, twice.)*

Ponder these words, and imagine that they are being spoken to you.

OR

- D** *Your own words.*

Shared reflection

Adapt one of the following or make up your own.

- A** As we draw this reflection to a close, have any thoughts come to you that you would like to share with others in the group? (Please don't feel you have to share.)

OR

- B** There is time for you to share some of your reflections now, if you would like to. There is no pressure to say anything and there are no right answers. You might like to sum your reflection up in just one or two words. For example, I felt...

OR

- C** I wonder if any of you had any promptings that you would like to share with the rest of the group.

OR

- D** *Your own words.*

Making spiritual connections

Choose from one of the following.

Option 1 *A reading from the Bible*

Select from:

- A** *This reading is from Revelation 21: 3-4 (to be read slowly):*

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

OR

- B** *Select a reading from those offered on the [Church Support Hub](#) (open the link and scroll down to 'Bible readings').*

OR

- C** *Work through one of the gospels, choosing an appropriate reading for each time you meet.*

OR

- D** *Choose a recent lectionary reading, a reading from your personal devotions or a Sunday reading, if appropriate.*

OR

- E** *Choose some other reading that will resonate with the group.*

Introduce the reading by adapting one of the following or by making up your own.

- A** We shall now have a reading from a famous first century spiritual text (sometimes known as The Revelation of Saint John the Divine.) I shall read it through twice, and as I do so you may want to ask yourself, 'What is this reading saying to me?'

OR

- B** This reading comes from the last book of the Bible, which is called Revelation. It is often thought to be an image of what life with God will look like. I will read this through twice. Feel free to just sit and listen to it the first time. Then I will read this explanation and the reading through again. Perhaps think about what images or pictures this reading brings to mind.

OR

C We shall now have a reading from one of the world's most famous spiritual books, the Christian Bible. I shall read it through twice, and as I do so you may want to ask yourself, 'What is this reading saying to me?'

OR

D Your own words.

Leave a few moments for quiet reflection on the reading, then continue to the next section, "Connecting with the world".

If you sense people would like to discuss the passage, you can choose from the questions in the 'Discussing the Bible Readings' download on the [Church Support Hub](#) (open the link and scroll down to 'Discussing the Bible readings').

Option 2 Reflecting on a picture

Instead of the reading, you can reflect on a picture. To avoid copyright issues, try the [Unsplash](#) and [Pixabay](#) websites, which have photos you can download for free. The photo used in the sample material is taken by Greg Rakozy. You can replace it with a different photo if you wish.

Invite people to consider one or two questions as they look at the photo. You can choose from the following:

- What is the piece doing? Does it tell a story? Evoke a feeling? Document an event? Present an idea? If so, what?
- How does it make you feel?
- What emotions are captured in the piece?
- Does the piece bring to mind any of your own life events or memories?
- Does the photo connect you to something greater? If so, in what ways?
- How have your feelings changed from the time you started looking at it till now?

Introduce this section by adapting one of the following or by making up your own.

A The photo you see (on your sheet or on the screen) is taken by (Greg Rakozy).

We are going to reflect silently now on the photo, and as you do so, you may want to ask yourself (choose one or two questions from the above).

At the end there will be an opportunity for you to share any reactions if you would like.

OR

B Spend time looking at this photo. Perhaps think about how this photo makes you feel or how you connect to it. There are no wrong answers; what does it make you think of? You might like to write some thoughts down on the photo or around the border. You can use just one word if that feels right to you.

At the end there will be an opportunity for you to share any reactions if you would like.

OR



- C** We are going now to look at a photo. Sometimes photos can spark spiritual feelings or thoughts. They can even be vehicles for a higher power or for God to speak to us, however we understand God. As we ponder this photo silently, you may want to ask yourself (*choose from the above questions*).

At the end there will be an opportunity for you to share any reactions if you would like.

OR

- D** Your own words.

Leave a few moments for quiet reflection on the photo, then either continue to the next section, “Connecting with the world”, or carry on with the option in light green below if you’re having a longer session.

After the silent reflection, adapt one of the following:

- A** I wonder if anyone has any thoughts they would like to share?

OR

- B** If you feel comfortable, place your photo on the notice board (or on the floor in a group) and gather round to look at how other people responded. If you would rather not share your reflections, that is fine. Feel free to fold your paper in half as a representation of this.

OR

- C** I’d now like to share this quote a from by Philip Yancey, *Finding God in Unexpected Places*.

“Jesus himself looked for God not among the pious at the synagogue, but in a widow who had two pennies left to her name and in a tax collector who knew no formal prayers; he found his spiritual lessons in sparrows sold at a market, and in the wheat fields and wedding banquets, and yes, even in the observation of a mixed-race foreigner who had five failed marriages. Jesus was a mastermind at finding God in unexpected places.”

What have you noticed in this photo? Might it contain hints of God?

OR

- D** Your own words.

Option 3 Reflecting on a poem

The poem is written by Mark Berry, a chaplain. You are welcome to give each person a copy. It can either be read out loud by yourself or someone else in the group, or it can be read silently. Introduce the poem by adapting one of the following or by making up your own.

- A** We are going to reflect quietly now on a poem, “To talk to you,” written by a chaplain, Mark Berry. You may want to focus on an image or phrase and ask why it strikes you.

At the end, there will be an opportunity for you to share the phrase or image if you would like to.

OR

- B** We are now going to read through (part of) a poem twice. It is called “To talk to you,” and is written by Mark Berry, who works for the church. As you listen, perhaps see if one or two things speak to you and what they might be saying. You don’t have to think about this too much; go

with your gut reaction and don't stress about coming up with a perfect answer. Think about what speaks to you and why.

At the end, there will be an opportunity for you to share the phrase or image if you would like to.

OR

C We are going now to reflect quietly on a poem, "To talk to you," written by Mark Berry, a chaplain. Sometimes poems can spark spiritual feelings or thoughts. They can even be vehicles for a higher power or God to speak to us, however we understand God. As we think about this poem, you may want to focus on a phrase, an image or an idea.

At the end there will be an opportunity for you to share any reactions if you would like.

OR

D *Your own words.*

The poem: To talk to you

Most days I find a space to talk to you,
I never quite find the right language to use though.
my words often pause in the depth of my mind,
as I wrestle with their appropriateness.
they shuffle on feet that don't know where they stand,
like a stranger who has found themselves in a conversation, they are not sure they have truly been
invited in to.

do I even need to speak?
is silence enough?
is it too much?
without seeing your face it's hard to know. sometimes I feel the need to shout,
to wait to hear if there is an echo,
a bounce-back when I cry into the emptiness.

so sometimes I just sit,
sometimes I am still,
often I fight the urge to shift and resign,
I struggle not to impose upon the secret conversation, and play in sand of my choosing,
or stare too long into the water at my own image.

my senses are wild beasts that run and roar,
as I become still they strain and pull,
for a moment I let them lead me,
and then return to the silence.

sometimes the silence speaks,
images painted,
melodies playing,
words form that are not mine,
and I listen.
and I listen.

most days I find a space to talk to you,
because some days you talk back.

Leave a few moments for silent reflection on the poem, then continue to the next section, "Connecting with the world", or carry on with the option below if you're having a longer session.

After the silent reflection, adapt one of the following:

- A** I wonder if anyone has any thoughts about the poem they would like to share?
 Were there any images, phrases or ideas that struck you?
 What emotions did you have as you read/listened to the poem?
 Were there any words or phrases that surprised you?

OR

- B** Provide pens and paper. This is a safe space just for you to reflect. You might like to draw or write your response to the poem. You are free to share or not share whatever you have drawn or written.

OR

- C** I wonder what reactions you had to this poem?
 Did you think about it in relation to God? Or in relation to a friend, family member or someone who is close to you?
 Were there any images, phrases or ideas that you relate to most?
 Did this poem remind you of any personal experiences or feelings?
 If you could ask the poet (Mark) one question about the poem, what would it be?

OR

- D** *Your own words.*

Connecting with the world

This section follows the reading, photo or poem. If you want some music to accompany it, you can play a track from the playlists supplied on the [Church Support Hub](#) (open the link and scroll down to 'Music playlists').

Adapt one of the following or make up your own:

- A** We now have a short time of silence when you can think about an item in the news, a person you are concerned about, or a situation you face. You can hold positive thoughts about it, or address the situation to a higher power, or to God as you understand God.

OR

- B** Think about or write down three specific connections that you are thankful for or that make you feel connected to more than just yourself. This might be people, or pets, or something that you think of as divine.

OR

- C** If God exists and was here with us, what would you say to God? We'll have a few moments of quiet while you think about this, and then an opportunity to share your thoughts if you would like.
(At the end, if appropriate, you could ask people to say a collective 'Amen'.)

OR

- D** *Your own words.*

To bring this section to a close, use the following prayer.

God of all things, we know that you are here with us even if we cannot always feel you.
 You are here in the small things, the bugs, and the birds,
 In the dust catching a ray of sunshine from a window,
 In the breeze through the grass, in the smile of a loved one.
 You are here in the big things, the mountains, and the meadows, In the vast oceans that
 disappear beneath the horizon,
 In the cities that sprawl across the map, in birth, life and death. Help us to know your presence
 in each moment of the day,
 Help us to recognize you in the small things and the big things.
 Help us to see you in all the people we meet and to see them as you do.
 We pray for those in suffering, pain and loss,
 We pray for communities and nations experiencing war, poverty, and disaster,
 We pray for each other, for those we know and those that we don't yet know,
 Thank you for the gift of love, help us to love each other and you with all that we have.
 Help us to care for this wonderful world you have given us.
 May we know you and notice you in the expected and the unexpected,
 The beautiful and the ordinary, the majestic and the everyday.
 We all say together: **Amen**

Conclusion

Use one of the following:

A We conclude our time with a short poem.

May the warmth of the sun nourish your spirit, whispers of the wind bring you fulfillment,
 and the steadfastness of the earth ground you in every moment.

May you find rest when you're tired, serenity when you seek it,
 and purpose in that to which you commit.

May your troubles be less, your blessings be more, and nothing but joy greet you at your door.

We say together, **Amen**.

OR

B Focus on one or two things that have spoken to you the most from this session. Hold it in your mind for a few moments. What might this mean for how you connect with people, the world, or the divine? You might like to continue to think about this as you leave here and/or over the next few days. We give thanks for the time that we have spent together, for all the reflections we have had, and for the connections that we have.

OR

C We conclude this time together with a short prayer.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
 the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
 the Lord turn his face toward you
 and give you peace.
 We say together: **Amen**

OR

D Your own words.

Too much silence?

The shorter version will be largely silent, with the option of accompanying music. If people would like more time to talk, you could:

- Use some of the discussion questions with the reading in the **Discussing the Bible Readings download on the Church Support Hub** (open the link and scroll down to 'Discussing the Bible readings').
- Allow time for reactions to the photo or poem, as suggested in the light green sections.
- Invite other members of the group to read the poem and the prayers (if you use them).