



Exploring Christian Distinctiveness

Developing Reflection Spaces

Why reflect?

We live in an increasingly busy and demanding world. Nearly everywhere we go we are bombarded by noise. When we do encounter the opportunity for quiet we often find it challenging, or uncomfortable. The Gospels highlight how Jesus took time to withdraw and find place and space to talk with God.

'Very early the next morning, long before daylight, Jesus got up and left the house. He went out of the town to a lonely place, where he prayed.' Mark 1:35

The philosophy of reflective space?

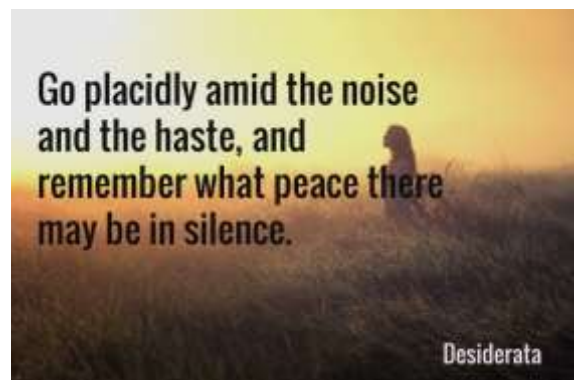
Reflection involves an inward journey from an outward stimulus. This internal journey may then lead to purposeful change.

Reflection and prayer may be interchangeable for each individual as they make their own personal response.

When God met Elijah, he did not speak through the strong wind, the earthquake or the fire, but in the gentle breeze.

'After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.' 1 Kings 19:12

'Children and young people are innately curious about life. Growing up raises lots of questions, some to do with their experience, both the good and the bad, and some to do with their sense of wonder at the universe we live in and whether there's more to life than meets the eye. Many have an interest in the non-material aspects of life, the spirit or soul, and want to explore how these ideas and experiences help them to develop their own sense of identity, self-worth, personal insight, meaning and purpose.' Prayer Spaces in Schools website.



In each school, within the building there are often at least 3 opportunities to create reflective spaces:

1. The main collective worship area is usually the hall. This will generally be a focal point when the whole school community gathers for collective worship.
2. The school entrance hall and corridors are thoroughfares where people can use interactive areas to pause and reflect.
3. Classroom spaces can have specific areas for reflection and quiet thought.

Things to consider

What opportunities do we currently give for reflection?

What is reflective space and what might it include?

Who are the intended users of this space?

How will the space be used?

Will it be open access?

How will it be supervised?

How will it be introduced to the children?

Who is responsible for looking after the space?

Is it a permanent feature or a moveable feast?

How will it be funded?

How is the place and space created? Whose ideas? Governors? Head teacher? Staff? Children? Clergy?

Where could reflective space be developed in the school? i.e. the hall/corridors/classrooms/outside space?

Does the space encourage interaction?

Does the space engage the senses and the imagination?

The space does not need to be elaborate – but it does need to be accessible and offer a focus.

A space that is suitable for reflection can be any sized area, even in smaller schools where a box or a small space can create a temporary portable space for reflection.



Ideas for reflective space?

- Potential themes linked to the name/history of the school
- Woodland walk with reflective stations
- Scented garden using flowers and herbs mentioned in the Bible
- Use of Bible verses. E.g. Psalm 46:10 'Be still and know that I am God.'
- Creation
- Labyrinth
- Use of liturgical colours
- Easter garden
- Prayer flags/stones/stations



Nativity painted on stones

- A general garden around a local feature
- If a memorial garden – how long will the memory be understood and how might this influence reflection?
- Commissions from local artists can enhance outdoor space and add something special



- Using designs created by the children
- Christian values written in places around the school to help people to sit, ponder and reflect what they are all about.





'If the only prayer you said was thank you - that would be enough.'
Meister Eckhart



'Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting oneself in the hand of God...and listening to His voice in the depth of our hearts.'
Mother Teresa



Prayer Space



Some schools are fortunate to have a special room set apart for prayer.

Other schools have special 'Prayer Spaces' days or weeks.



Others use every day resources to create a space.



Outdoor Reflection Spaces

Prayer Walk: Some ideas to ponder

Ask God to enrich your senses before you start, and walk in silence.

Find a space to sit and relax for a while to give yourself some space.

Look around. Notice what is there, at a distance and close at hand. Notice the colours, shapes, patterns, textures, contrasts, how things relate. Watch things move in the breeze. Just watch without trying to give it any meaning.

When you are ready, get up and walk to somewhere else in the garden, and do the same.

Feel the breeze, the textures of leaves, bark, or a wall. Look at the flowers and plants. Notice the smell of the earth and growing things. Pick up a stone and weigh it in your hand.

Listen to the sounds around you, far off, and near; the birdsong, the wind.

Move on, and think about what God has been saying to you. Is there an insight you can take back with you? A sense of peace? Give him thanks. If appropriate, bring something back that speaks to you, or you have particularly noticed. Gather your thoughts, maybe write a prayer.

Dr S McWhinney



'When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers, the
moon and the stars, which you
have set in place, what is man that
you are mindful of him, the son of
man that you care for him?' Psalm
8:4



"In prayer it is better to have a heart without words
than words without a heart." John Bunyan

'Any concern too small to be
turned into a prayer is too small to
be made into a burden.' Corrie
Ten Boom



The fire has its flame and praises God,
the winds blow the flames and praises
God....so all of creation is a song of praise
to God.' Hildegard of Bingen

A Church School's Journey

Cawood VA CE Primary School Peace Garden

The Peace Garden came about following our desire to create a quieter and more reflective space in the outdoor environment. Whilst we have plenty of outside space, children were wanting a quieter space for playtimes and lunchtimes and staff were wanting a space where we could have collective worship outdoors and a resource area for RE and other subjects.

The garden was designed by a team of children working with a parent who was a garden designer. It incorporated an existing willow enclosure and sought to utilise shade from well-established trees. The path of the garden leads through the space allowing children to 'stop' along the way, be it at the storyteller's chair, around the circular commemorative First World War bench or at the labyrinth at the end of the path. Plants have been chosen to provide colour, particularly in the summer, and as a draw for wildlife and plenty of different places to sit have been created on seats, logs or grass.

There was much debate about what the garden should be called ... a reflective garden, a spiritual garden, a quiet garden. The final consensus was a Peace Garden as it offered an area for peace and quiet; was a space to reflect on and think about the importance of peace; and importantly was a dedicated, peaceful place where children could pray if they wished.

Over the first year since being opened by Bishop John, the garden has been used during playtimes and dinnertimes for quieter activities; collective worship has been held outside; and classes have used it to work outside or hear stories. We plan for more use in the coming year for worship, including new prayer stations, and are also planning an outdoor classroom at the end of the garden to give covered space for classes to work outside more. The garden has flourished and we hope it will continue to be an encourager for spiritual growth over the years to come.



Further Resources

Prayer Spaces in Schools

www.prayerspacesinschools.com

'Prayer Spaces in Schools enable children and young people, of all faiths and none, to explore these life questions, spirituality and faith in a safe, creative and interactive way. Taking a broadly Christian perspective as a starting point, prayer spaces give children and young people an opportunity to develop skills of personal reflection and to explore prayer in an open, inclusive and safe environment. A prayer space is usually a classroom sized area that has been transformed for a few days or a week with a range of creative activities that encourage personal reflection on issues such as forgiveness, injustice, thankfulness, big questions, identity and stillness.'



INSPIRE

A reflective stations resource available for hire from the Education Team for use with adults in a school or church setting.



For more information on either of the above contact Olivia Seymour, Education Adviser at the Diocese of York

Books/Leaflets

Shahne Vickery – Creating a Multi-Sensory Spiritual Garden Imaginor

Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education: Leaflet on creating spiritual garden

<http://www.salisbury.anglican.org/resources-library/schools1/spirituality/2011%20spirituality%20in%20schools-%20spiritual%20gardens-%20information%20leaflet.pdf>