



*A Julian
Meeting
Health Check*

The Julian Meetings

*F*oster the teaching and practice of
contemplative prayer in the
Christian tradition

*E*ncourage people to practise
contemplative prayer in their daily
lives, and to explore ways of doing
this which are appropriate for them

*S*upport the individual ecumenical
Julian Meetings, whose members
meet regularly to practise Christian
contemplative prayer together



A natural cycle

Birth - growth - maturity - fruition - decline - rest or death form a natural cycle for all living things. A Julian Meeting can go through any or all of these stages at some point in its life. Each stage can present new challenges, to which we may respond in a variety of ways.

In this booklet we offer some ways in which a Julian Meeting may recognise and respond to these changes. We hope our ideas and suggestions may be of help to any Julian Meeting. Each Meeting is unique, and these are only sign posts to possible directions and actions.

Taking stock

It can be a good idea, every few years, to review or take stock of your Julian Meeting. Any person or group can get into a rut without even realising it. Small groups can become inward-looking; may seem unwelcoming to new comers; or resistant to any (possibly life-giving) changes. Some Meetings are growing, and in some the membership is ageing, both situations which pose their own challenges.

It could be healthy to look at how your Julian Meeting functions now. What good things can you celebrate? Are there things you might want to consider for the future? Don't wait for a problem to arise before doing a health check.

The centre pages of this booklet are a short health-check you could use each year, or in alternate years. You might undertake a longer / in-depth approach every few years. You can detach the centre pages and copy them as many times as you need to provide one for each of your members.

The health check has spaces to ✓ or x or add in your thoughts, so it may be helpful if members fill them in individually before you have a group discussion. This would also give people time to think about anything that strikes them.

You might discuss the health check after the silence at one meeting; meet at a different time, perhaps over coffee or lunch; make it part of a quiet day.

Welcoming Newcomers

How we welcome newcomers is so important - first impressions count. When people get in touch about JM it can be helpful to:

- take their name, address and phone number.
- ask if they know anything about the Julian Meetings, and then explain JM appropriately. Our free introductory leaflet *Waiting on God in the Silence* gives background information clearly and simply.
- give details of when and where the local JM meets, and provide any other relevant information.
- offer to meet them (if this is practicable) before the next meeting and / or arrange for someone to bring them to the meeting. Also confirm details about the meetings in writing.
- provide them with copies of JM literature, particularly *Waiting on God and our A5 leaflet 'An Introduction to Contemplative Prayer'*. Many Meetings find the JM bookmark is very useful for any enquirer.
- introduce them at their first meeting, explain what happens, how long the silence will be and how it is ended. Then take everyone through a centring exercise and remind them of how to sit, breathe, relax, maintain focus and be open to God. This is good practice for all of us, however long we have been involved in JM, and is especially important for those new to contemplation. They need to understand how to let God be with them in the silence.
- ensure they are not left unattended during the sharing time after the silence.
- check if they had any problems about *anything* - practical or spiritual - during the Meeting. A scented candle might have given them a headache, or if they have hearing problems they might not have followed what was said.
- make them feel welcome to come again, but not pressured to do so.

Don't be discouraged that some people do not return, it is inevitable that not all enquirers become regular members of a Julian Meeting.

The Thriving Julian Meeting

A Julian Meeting that grows a lot, either steadily or in a burst, can present various challenges:

- we can't (or soon won't) fit into our present meeting place.
- numbers are getting so large that people cannot get to know each other well.
- over coffee, people are tending to break into cliques.
- as our numbers have increased, attendance by individual members has become less regular.

Some ways to address these situations might be:

Group getting too large:

Consider dividing into two Julian Meetings - or more! Some towns have a number of JMs. The split could be on a simple geographic basis, or by having meetings on different days, and asking people to choose one group or the other.

Instead of dividing you could arrange to meet more often, so that members have the opportunity to meet on different days, or at different times of day. A monthly Meeting could become fortnightly, or a fortnightly Meeting become weekly, with the extra meeting perhaps on a different day, or different time of day. An evening Meeting might arrange an additional daytime gathering.

With more Meetings on offer, and at a variety of times or on different days, the numbers attending each time might be reduced. This does not always work, but may be worth trying.

Lack of space:

You may need more space when numbers grow. Look around for a new venue - a larger house; a local church or chapel with a suitable space. Be open minded. We know of JMs that meet in a religious house, hospital chapel, college chaplaincy, guest house.....

Cliques:

The problem of cliques, and people not getting to know each other, may be helped if some people agree not to sit in their

usual places - we are such creatures of habit!.

It is important to be aware that private chattering or 'insider gossip' may intrude on group-wide sharing.

Less regular attendance:

You could check if some people have transport problems; have developed mobility, sight, hearing or access restrictions; if new commitments have arisen which clash with the Julian Meeting. Some of these practical matters may be readily solvable, once you are aware of them.

With a larger group, where people may not know everyone, an individual can feel that their presence will not be missed. If people do miss several meetings, and no-one enquires about them, this would be true!

People may also feel more marginal to a group if they do not know them all well. Splitting into smaller Meetings may resolve this. All members should try to ensure that everyone does feel integrated, and fully part of the Meeting.

The Static or Declining Julian Meeting

- we have not grown in numbers over the last few years. New members have joined but existing ones have died, moved away, or just left, so our numbers stay the same.
- our JM still has only 3-4 people after two years - nobody else has joined us
- our JM has declined in numbers as people have died, moved away or moved on, but nobody new has joined
- we get people who come to one or two meetings, but few join us permanently

Some ways to address these situations might be:

Small, and not growing:

A Julian Meeting of only 3-5 people is perfectly viable. Do keep praying - you may be surprised by what God has in store at the right moment. And do keep advertising your existence, using the JM publicity material, and the suggestions below. One danger to be aware of is that you get to know each other

Taking Stock of a Julian Meeting

Julian Meetings foster the teaching and practice of Christian contemplative prayer, both at local meetings and in daily life.

Birth - growth - maturity - fruition - decline - rest or death form a natural cycle for all living things. A Julian Meeting can go through any or all of these stages at some point in its existence. Each life stage can present new challenges, to which we may respond.

Why take stock?

It can be a good idea, every few years, to review or take stock of your Julian Meeting. Any person or group can get into a rut without even realising it. Small groups can become inward-looking, and may seem unwelcoming to new comers or resistant to any (possibly life-giving) changes. It could be healthy to look at how your Julian Meeting is functioning now. Don't wait for a problem to arise before doing a health check.

We suggest that this short health-check is suitable for annual or biennial use. You might undertake a longer / in-depth approach every few years.

GETTING STARTED

You might take time after the silence at one meeting; meet at a different time; make it part of a quiet day. Here are some things you might discuss, with spaces to ✓ or x or add in your own thoughts:

TIME, PLACE AND SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

- How suitable is the time when we meet? Might it exclude some people eg workers carers of children those afraid to come out after dark others
- How suitable is the day we meet? Does it exclude possible members with commitments, perhaps at church, that day?

NEXT STEPS:

Where do we meet? *House / church or chapel / other*

- Is it easy to find? Is it easy to get to, for drivers or non-drivers? Has it enough parking? Is it accessible to the less mobile? Are there problems with heating space noise facilitiesseating etc
- If meeting in a home, do other members feel like 'visitors'? Is the door open ready or must they knock?
- How would a newcomer find the house? How might they feel about coming to a strange house?
- What happens when the host is ill or on holiday? What will we do when the host steps down from this role?

NEXT STEPS

- How do we behave as we arrive? Chat Hug Sit quietly How do the 'dynamics' of this feel? Be honest! How do we behave towards new people? How welcoming, or not, might they feel we are?

NEXT STEPS

- Do we socialize, before or after.....our silence? How does this feel? Do we like the status quo or wish to change
- Do we meet each other elsewhere or only at our Meeting? How does this affect the dynamics of the meeting?
- If we have a 'cuppa', do we take turns or let the host do it?

NEXT STEPS

MEMBERSHIP

- How many people, in recent years, have joined us left us come just once or twice
- Do we know why people left or didn't join?

If Yes, can we take account of their reasons?

If No, should we have asked them?

- Are we a mix of denominations? Which ones?
..... If not, should we consider why, and actively seek to change this?

NEXT STEPS

People can only come to something if they know it exists.

- Do we advertise our Meeting on noticeboards in local churches chapels library health centre etc.....?
 - Are our Meeting’s details in weekly news sheets Church magazines on Circuit lists.... Churches Together info.....
 - Should we advertise more and if so how?
- Do we use the free JM publicity posters / leaflet?
- Could we use the JM website / bulletin board?

NEXT STEPS

CONDUCTING OUR MEETING

- Do we all take our turn to lead in and out of the silence?
- If not, are some people reluctant to allow others to lead?
- How can we help those who find this a daunting prospect? Do we have copies of ‘Your Turn to Lead’ for members to borrow?

NEXT STEPS

- Do we always have the same type of lead-in and lead-out
- Have we tried using music ... holding objectsvisuals different sorts of prayers the collect other ways
- If the lead-in is a reading is it suitable to lead into silent prayer? Is it Christ-centred? Brief? Does it encourage us to contemplate (rather than think) and to focus on God

NEXT STEPS

- How do we use our sharing time? Spiritual matters general chat JM news other

Do any of us want more spiritual content?..... or less?
Do we listen to each other? Do we break into cliques?
Do we take care to include newcomers in our conversation?
NEXT STEPS

- Do we do anything that anyone finds uncomfortable, or difficult, or unhelpful for any reason? *How would we know?*
.....

- How do we handle people who may be, in some way, difficult?
- Is there anything we don't do that someone would like us to?

NEXT STEPS

- Do we all see the JM Magazine, either by sharing the group's copy..... (sent to the contact) or by individual subscription?
- Does our Meeting have all the current JM publications available for members to read or borrow or buy?

NEXT STEPS

ENCOURAGING SPIRITUAL GROWTH

- How do we encourage spiritual sharing and growth?
- Is there any sense in which our choice of readings might indicate that we are growing spiritually?.....
- Do we have other spiritual resources at Meetings for members to share or borrow? eg a book box audio or video tapes details of events / courses / retreats etc
- Do we share with others details of books, programmes, talks etc that we have found helpful? If so when?
- Do we - individually or as a group - go to Quiet Days Retreats Relevant events Might we do so? Might we organise a Quiet Day, perhaps with other meditation groups?

NEXT STEPS

too well. If someone new does arrive you may find it difficult to be as open and welcoming as you would like and expect to be.

Small, despite changes in membership:

A small meeting whose membership changes over time does not have the problem of over-familiarity, and is enlivened and enriched by the new input received. Keep praying, and advertising. Size is not everything.

Our JM does not grow:

Is your JM advertised on local Church / Chapel noticeboards; in the library, post office and medical centre; is it included on weekly pew sheets and in church magazines? People can only come to something if they know it exists.

JM has A4 and A5 posters, a noticeboard card and articles you can adapt to go in a local publication (see 'Starting a Julian Meeting'). Have you written something about your Meeting for any local publication, religious or secular?

Have you spoken recently to other local Christians about JM and contemplative prayer - to a Mothers Union or Women's Fellowship group; local prayer group; lay ministers meeting; clergy fraternal; Churches Together group etc? Or just on a one-to-one basis with the people you meet?

Many people are wary of the unfamiliar. They will come to a meeting only if they can find out something about it, and preferably if they know someone who will be there or will take them along. So personal contact can be very important, either directly or over the phone.

No new people come, or only come once:

Do potential members have problems with the timing of your meeting?

- A daytime meeting excludes most working people; some elderly people find an evening meeting difficult, particularly in the winter; an afternoon meeting could be awkward for parents with junior school children.
- A particular day or evening may clash with a popular local activity - Womens Institute, Mothers Union, Choir practice, Parent and Toddler group, Fellowship Meeting, luncheon

club etc.

Being flexible on the time and day you meet, or offering people alternative meeting times / days might pay dividends.

Does the place where you meet present practical difficulties for some people?

- Steps, even a few, can be awkward for the infirm and those with poor sight.
- If there is no parking nearby, or there are very busy roads to cross, people may be discouraged, or unable to attend.
- Can people without their own transport get there easily, or do you offer lifts (without being asked)?
- If the building is cold, or the seating uncomfortable, people may come once and never again.
- A lack of toilets in, or near, the building will also discourage some people.
- A noisy location is not conducive to silent contemplation.
- In a church or chapel with fixed pews it is difficult to sit in a gathered circle, as many meetings do.

You may be able to get feedback from some people who have come along only once or twice to your Julian Meeting. This needs to be handled delicately, but it could be helpful to know if there are any specific problems which you could address.

Our members come from only one denomination

We cannot seem to attract people from other churches, or they only come once.

- do you ask people to “come to *our* Julian Meeting”? They may then equate ‘our’ with your particular church or denomination? Saying “Come to *the local* Julian Meeting” avoids this, and is ecumenical.
- have you actively promoted your existence to other local Christians, perhaps offering to speak to a prayer group, women’s or men’s fellowship, etc?
- is your Meeting advertised on other churches noticeboards, or in the library, doctor’s waiting room, village hall etc. or in church newsletters or other local publications?

- Do you have your own website, rather than just being included on a parish, or equivalent, website? Increasingly people use the internet to search for information.

Your meeting place may discourage some people for other than practical reasons:

- a high-church setting (Anglo-Catholic, RC or Orthodox) may make those of other traditions feel ill-at-ease. They might find icons, crucifixes, statues of saints or incense intrusive.
- Some buildings can feel so spiritually cold that individuals may find it impossible to practise contemplation.

It is difficult to see ourselves as others see us. If you are all one denomination, particularly from one church, you may be:

- using denominational language or symbolism without realising it. An extreme case might be if a Julian Meeting closed the silence with the Hail Mary. But just talking in denominational terms - deanery, circuit, bishop, elder, presbyter, Mass, the Lord's Supper - can affect how at ease people feel, and whether they would come again.
- including something inappropriate. A Julian Meeting is solely and specifically for Christian contemplative prayer. Anything else - intercession, any form of liturgy, speaking in tongues, laying on of hands, saying the rosary - should be kept for a separate occasion.
- using something, like an icon or incense, which may have denominational overtones and make some people feel ill-at-ease. Ideally only use such things if everyone agrees.

Our Julian Meeting Seems Stale

We are all creatures of habit, good or bad, so try some of the following ways to break out of it!

- do a health check of your JM as outlined earlier
- change where you meet, since this may give a different feel to the meeting. You could look for one alternative venue, or go to several different places in turn. In summer, if it is fine, you could meet outdoors. You might have one meeting at a special venue, even if it means travelling further than usual.

- if you can't change venue, encouraging people to sit in other places to usual can make a surprising difference.
 - if you always have a lead-in using words perhaps you could try music, or visuals, or holding something - the JM pamphlet *Your Turn to Lead* has ideas
 - Introduce an appropriate perfume (flower, herb, resin, spice) using a scented candle, but do first check that it will not cause an adverse reaction to members.
 - invite an outsider to come and lead the meeting or talk to you. The Core Group may be able to suggest someone.
 - go away together for a retreat or a Quiet Day, or even half a day (see Resources on page 11)
 - meet up with one or more local Julian Meetings, if they are near enough, to share experiences and silence together.
- organise a Quiet Day – just for yourselves, or shared with other local Julian Meetings, or other Christian meditation/contemplation groups, or invite members of local churches to attend. Financial assistance may be available.

Being part of JM worldwide

- * do we return the JM Registration Form promptly, share the JM Magazine & Newsletter with our members and respond to any requests from JM?
- * do we notify any changes of contact details as they occur?
- * have we thought of writing anything, e.g. an article or book review, for the JM Magazine or Newsletter, or contacting the JM Core Group about our views on JM? Should we?
- * have we thought of sharing our situation, good or bad (in confidence if we wish) with a member of the Core Group?

Finally

These are only *signposts* for your Julian Meeting. Each JM is unique within the broad JM principles (see inside front cover). The challenges YOUR Julian Meeting may face are likely to have been faced by others. So please let someone on the Core Group know of anything about your Meeting that might be of interest, help and encouragement to others.

**If you wish to know more about the Julian Meetings,
and / or details of your nearest Meeting(s) either
Go to our website: www.thejulianmeetings.net**

or write to (sae please)
The Julian Meetings,
263 Park Lodge Lane, Wakefield
West Yorkshire WF1 4HY

We have members and Meetings in many counties

Julian Meetings Publications

Waiting on God in the Silence
(*free introductory leaflet*)
A5 leaflet on contemplative prayer
Try Stillness
Some Basics of Contemplative Prayer
Going Into Silence ... and Coming Out
Approaching Silence
It's Your Turn To Lead
The Ideal Julian Meeting
Starting a Julian Meeting
The Healthy Julian Meeting
Resources List
The Julian Meetings Magazine (*three issues a year*)
A bookmark (*with helpful suggestions for using silence*)
A pew / handbag / wallet card (*with meditation suggestion*)
Promotional A4 posters (*two*) and A5 poster (*one*)
An A6 noticeboard card

**Buy publications direct from our website
or download an order form from the website
or send an sae for one to:**

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