



*The
Ideal
Julian
Meeting*

The Julian Meetings

Foster the teaching and practice of contemplative prayer in the Christian tradition

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

Support the individual ecumenical Julian Meetings - groups whose members meet regularly to practise Christian contemplative prayer together

This booklet is reprinted, with minor revisions, over 30 years after it was originally written. Please note that those people who organised JM at the time formed 'The Advisory Group'. Today these people form the JM Council and JM Core Group.



www.thejulianmeetings.net

For the tenth anniversary of the Julian Meetings Magazine in 1984, Hilary Wakeman was asked to write down "some general thoughts about Julian Meetings".

This is those thoughts, with minor updates.

Julian Meetings

This was the original name, and is what we try to use today. For some years the terms Julian Groups or JM Groups have often been used - but Julian Meetings is distinctively 'us'.

This is all part of a flow, a momentum that carries the movement on without any real pushing from the eight or nine of us who meet three times a year as the 'JM Advisory Group'. Part of the same momentum that got it going in the first place when what I actually proposed, in a letter to the various church papers, was an organisation that was really quite different - and nothing like as good!

I sometimes think that most of the Advisory Group's efforts go into not impeding that momentum. We're very conscious of it, and often find ourselves agreeing not to do something that at first glance looked like a good idea, simply because it is not the JM way of doing things: too organised perhaps, too structured, inflexible or bureaucratic. And again and again we hear how people value this low-key approach.

Part of this unstructuredness is that nothing is laid down about how individual groups shall be run, other than they should be concerned with the practice of Christ-centred contemplative prayer and be, at least potentially, ecumenical.

Over the years since JM began, correspondence and conversation and personal experience have given us quite a full picture of the various stages in the life of an individual Julian Meeting, as well as the variety of Meetings that exist - and of course the occasional problems. From this composite picture I'd like to outline what would seem to me personally to be the Ideal Julian Meeting.

It stays simple

No liturgy, no healing sessions, no prayers for peace - no matter how valid these things are in their own right, no matter how much of a common mind the participants may have about them. These things can be done as a separate group.

I feel this way about it partly because someone may come along who is being drawn into contemplative prayer but who thinks that healing sessions are for cranks, or that prayers for peace are political, or who is not of the same denomination as the liturgy; and she/he may be put off. And partly because by linking contemplative prayer with prayer for healing, or prayer for peace, etc., we are implying that prayer always has to be *for* something. So we may lose this tremendous opportunity of showing that the best prayer of all is that which revels in God's very existence, delighting that God is, wanting whatever God wants, saying 'Yes'.

This is not in any way to deprecate intercessory and supplicatory prayer. But for far too many people - and this even includes some writers of books on prayer - prayer is primarily a matter of asking favours.

It stays single-pointed

This is a question of motive. Just because the practice of contemplative prayer may be observably good for us, it is very tempting to let that become our reason for continuing with it. Julian Meetings that have not yet established themselves are particularly prone to having an emphasis on contemplation as combating stress and facilitating self-discovery and self-development.

I don't deny that these may be by-products, and that they are good. But the ideal Meeting puts its emphasis firmly on a different motivation, seeing contemplative prayer as a way of making ourselves more and more available to God and so bringing God's marvellous kingdom a little more into being.

The more single-pointed the Meeting is, the easier it is for the individual participant to become increasingly single-pointed.

It has no set leadership

People take it more or less in turn to provide a short reading (or sometimes music) with which to begin. In the conversation time after the period of silence there is respect for what each person has to say, regardless of whether they wear a clerical collar, or a habit, or not. A situation of trust is built up, within which it is still possible to 'teach'; but all are teaching and all are learning.

I know that many clergy find it valuable to be able to share in spiritual growth without, for once, having to be present as an authority figure. This is easier and more likely when there are clergy of more than one denomination involved.

It has minimal organisation

Just enough to:

- ♦ contact participants if a Meeting time or venue changes
- ♦ see that refreshments are available at the agreed time
- ♦ produce a list of dates and places if these may vary
- ♦ register annually on the JM database
- ♦ respond to contacts from the Julian Advisory Group and from local enquirers
- ♦ keep participants aware of the wider Julian scene

It is of limited size

Up to twelve is thought to be the ideal size. I know it can be painful for a group that has grown bigger to sub-divide, but with increasing numbers it can be difficult really getting to know each other well enough to be able to talk trustingly. And, I suspect, the bigger the Meeting becomes the less regular the attendance of each individual.

It is multi-denominational

Real efforts on this pay big dividends. Of all the ecumenical events I've taken part in there is nothing to touch this regular being together attentively in the presence of God. The sensitive, listening awareness of the talking time must be almost unequalled. So a Julian Meeting that is all of one denomination is missing a whole extra dimension.

The ideal Julian Meeting will have asked itself "Have we done everything we can to let local people of all denominations know we exist?" and also "Are we doing anything which may actually be deterring any denominations from getting involved? Is the Meeting always held in the Vicarage and led by the Vicar, for example? Is a service - eucharistic or liturgical - regularly held in conjunction with the Meeting?"

A secondary disadvantage of a single-denomination / single-congregation Meeting is that the sharing session all too easily falls into familiar relationship patterns and conversation quickly descends to plans for the jumble sale.

It has experimented with form

People who are starting a new Julian Meeting often ask what form the meetings should take. We encourage them to find out, by initial experimentation and flexibility, what suits the participants. But with few exceptions the pattern generally becomes that of a brief reading, followed by 30 minutes of silence, followed by a time of fellowship.

This last, made homely by tea, coffee or fruit juice, is something that I have come to consider as important as the first part of the meeting. Where else, when else, can people talk to each other at such depth about the joys and the difficulties of prayer and of relationship with God? We have heard of churches that have come alive after the forming of a Julian Meeting, and it is not surprising.

It gives thought to newcomers

Somebody has a chat with them, preferably before they actually attend a Meeting, so that they know what to expect. Providing them with some of our booklets, particularly *Some Basics of Contemplative Prayer*, may also help them to understand more about the Julian Meetings, and to do this at their own pace.

If they simply turn up at a Meeting the person leading that session says a few words about the form of the meeting and the length of the silence. Also, if at all possible, they say enough about contemplative prayer to give the newcomer some sense of direction with which to go into the silence. Giving them one of our bookmarks, with its suggestions for using the silence, may be helpful.

It copes with 'difficult' people

The person who always takes over the conversation, the fanatic, the neurotic. Many Meetings have faced this one. I don't know that any of them have ever asked anyone to leave. Sometimes the difficult person simply stops coming after a while; no cause for guilt feelings if they have been shown kindness and courtesy. But sometimes, I know, the difficulties have been borne by the Meeting and the person has come through to better relationships. Marvellous.

It is adaptable

New life for old Meetings - that's something we're often asked about but there doesn't seem to be any one answer. There's a balance somewhere, between being immovable and seeking change for its own sake.

New life may come through going on a retreat together. Or organising a Quiet Day. Or through talking to other groups and churches about contemplative prayer - and being willing to split into two if the talks result in too many newcomers joining!

But being ready to respond to changing circumstances so that the Spirit of God can turn the Meeting upside down if necessary - that's basic.

And finally

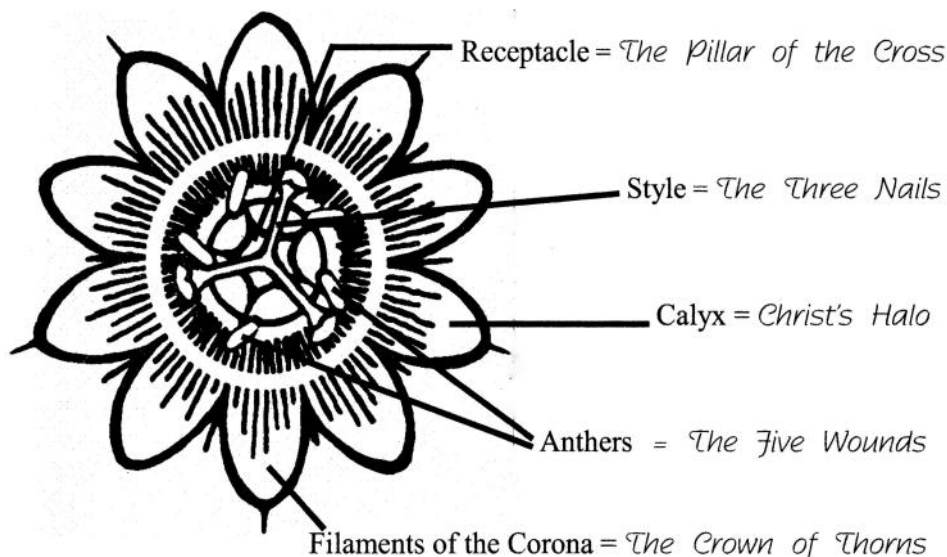
remembering that it is an absolutely ideal Julian Meeting we are considering!

- ♦ It answers promptly the Advisory Group's annual request to confirm its continuing existence by re-registering on the JM database.
- ♦ It shares communications from the Advisory Group, so that all its members are aware of JM concerns
- ♦ Its members subscribe to the Julian Meetings Magazine, so that they stay in touch with the wider JM scene
- ♦ It probably has a lay man or woman as its contact person. Clergy are busy people and the Julian Meeting could be just one among many concerns for them. It is usually better for the job to be done by a lay person for whom it may be an overriding interest and first priority.

The original article ended by hoping that by the time the Julian Meetings were twenty years old (i.e. 1993) the prayer of silence would be such a normal part of church life that JM would have ceased to exist

The Passion Flower

We chose this plant to decorate our publications because of its silent witness to the heart of the Christian faith.



The passion flower is a native of southern Brazil and first flowered in England in 1868. The name Passion Flower was given by the first Spanish friars and missionaries to tropical America, who were impressed by the symbolism they saw in the flowers.

The variety of this fascinating flower most often seen in the UK is *Passiflora caerulea*, the hardiest of the species. It can be grown successfully against a sheltered wall, especially in the south and west. Climbing by means of tendrils it may be cut back hard if it is too vigorous: it can grow to 15 feet or more, but may succumb to a hard winter. It flowers in midsummer and early autumn. Propagation is by seed, or summer cuttings of young growth.

**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,
28 Old Hospital Lawn, Cashes Green, Stroud, GL5 4GA

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:**

The Julian Meetings, 28 Old Hospital Lawn, Cashes Green,
Stroud, GL5 4GA

At our website:

www.thejulianmeetings.net

You can:

- * find information about the Julian Meetings
- * view our worldwide meetings directory
- * find a full list of JM administrative contacts
- * find our Facebook and Twitter accounts
- * view an events diary
- * use our message facility
- * link to other resources

You can also:

- * download many of our free leaflets
- * buy our publications by post or online
- * take out a magazine subscription
- * register a new Julian Meeting
- * make a donation

Other resources for Members of JM include:

- * a discussion forum
- * Members' Area and Directory
- * online renewal of subscriptions
- * online renewal of Meeting registrations
- * online events booking
- * publicity for Meetings and JM events

