

Retreat “Who Is The Gardener?”

Prepared by Sue Thomas



Image Sue Thomas

Overview of Retreat

“Who is the Gardener?” is a half day (three hours) reflective retreat offered for use in parishes and schools, for small groups, teachers, parents, parishioners, senior students, anyone preparing to receive any of the sacraments. The retreat is based on a novelette “The Man Who Planted Trees”, a gentle yet powerful story of a person who plants trees over a period of 40 years. It is a story of faithful dedication to the work of God, done quietly and without seeking acclaim, which results in transformation for all. The reflective questions in this retreat invite participants to take time away from distractions to tend the garden of their faith, to take time to hear God’s word and feel God’s breath, all the while doing God’s work of tending to the garden of faith.

This retreat process invites participants to reflect on their faith journey, asking the question “Who is the Gardener?” Who plants the seed of faith? How does one tend the seed of faith in order for faith to grow and bear fruit?

To maximise the experience, a suggested time frame is 3 hours. This includes morning tea (15 minutes). Consider concluding with a shared lunch (30 – 45 minutes). For an afternoon retreat, commence with shared lunch, and include afternoon tea. Of course, it is possible to extend the time to a full day, for example, commence with morning tea at 9.30am, start at 10am, break for a shared lunch at 12.30pm, and leave around 3.30pm.

This resource is adaptable to suit the needs of the group/community. For visual aids that may be relevant to this resource, please visit the VIDEOS and/or IMAGES menus on liturgyritualprayer.com

Preparation:

Give plenty of notice and advertise the retreat, at least three to four weeks.

On the invitation, include a date for participants to RSVP. Send a reminder 7 -10 days prior.

During this time, book the venue, access and gather the resources, and print out the reflective questions at the end of this resource, enough copies for each participant.

Use this resource to print Leader's Booklet. It is not necessary to print a booklet for each person. However, if you choose to, please be conscious of copyright.

As a sign of hospitality, arrange a simple morning tea with fresh fruit, crackers and cheese, something sweet, as well as tea/coffee makings.

Prepare name tags. Consider using first names only, unless there are multiple people with the same first name.

*Invite each participant to bring:
A pen and something to write on
Hat and sunscreen
A plate to share for lunch*

Have available some extra note books/paper and pens to write with.

Resources:

DVD/Multimedia:

The Man Who Planted Trees Jean Giono. London: The Harvill Press, 1995.

The Man Who Planted Trees DVD Frédéric Back. © 2010 Radio-Canada/Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

The Man Who Planted Trees <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTvYh8ar3tc>

Evangelii Gaudium

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html Paragraph 113, Paragraph 265, Paragraph 278.

Prayer Space:

Cloths reflecting the season, that is, Ordinary Time: green; Advent: jacaranda blue; Christmas/Easter: white/gold; Lent: purple, hessian.

Large Candle and lighter.

Large bowl with water.

Rosemary branches with leaves.

Oil – olive oil mixed with fragrant oil eg lavender or rosemary oil or patchouli.

Bible on stand.

Cross.

See image at the end of this resource for ideas of setting the prayer space.

Chairs in open circle around prayer focus.

DVD player/equipment to view **The Man Who Planted Trees**.

Equipment to play music.

Chime to time the meditation at the beginning. This can be a singing bowl or some type of meditation chime. A smart phone usually has a timer. Use the vibration mode on the phone, or download one of the many timer apps now available. Be aware of the type of noise to finish the time. An alarm clock is not suitable as the alarm is too jarring.

Supply extra pens and some journals/note books just in case a participant forgets to bring theirs.

Music Suggestions:

Christ Be Our Light (Bernadette Farrell – Christ Be Our Light)

Enfold Me In Your Love (Monica Brown – Let Your Heart Take Comfort)

Her Music for Piano Album (Kevin Duncan – Her Music for Piano: The Music of Margaret Rizza)

Holy Ground (Monica Brown – Holy Ground)

I Give My Work for You (Margaret Rizza & Kevin Mayhew Ltd – Margaret Rizza Complete Chants Volume II)

Into Life (Maeve Louise Heaney – Stand)

Lead Kindly Light (Maeve Louise Heaney – Nel Frattempo)

Lead Me, Guide Me (Monica Brown – Holy Ground)

Listen (Monica Brown – Infinitely More)

So Much More (Monica Brown – A Special Collection)

Take the Word of God With You (James Harrison – Catholic Worship Book II)

Too Deep for Words (Monica Brown – Let Your Heart Take Comfort)

Quiet My Soul (Monica Brown – Quiet My Soul)

Your God is There (Monica Brown – Let Your Heart Take Comfort)

Reflective music of facilitator's choice.

Music from Monica Brown available on CD or downloadable from Emmaus Productions.

Bernadette Farrell, Maeve Louise Heaney, Margaret Rizza and Kevin Duncan available on CD or downloadable from iTunes.

Opening Ritual:

Leader: *Greets the participants in words similar to:*

Welcome. Today is a time to focus on you, and your faith journey. I invite you to turn off your phones, so that you are not distracted, and also for the comfort of others that they, too, aren't distracted. *Allow time for participants to settle.*

Leader: *Using words similar to:*

Let's take some time now to introduce ourselves. Just say your name as we go around the circle.

This first part of our time together will last about an hour, when we will then break for morning tea.

We'll then gather for some further input and some quiet time, where you can wander the grounds or find a quiet spot to reflect on some questions I'll give you. You'll have the opportunity to meet with your companion for today and we'll come back together briefly before we have our shared lunch. After lunch, we'll have a closing ritual and then head off home.

If you haven't brought something to write with, there are some pens, and paper available for your use.

Today, we have the opportunity to come 'apart' from the rest of the world, to quieten our minds and bodies, and to come into God's presence, our God who is all encompassing, all embracing love, and who invites us to be breathed into life.

To gather ourselves, and to enter into this sacred time, I invite you place anything in your hands or on your lap onto the floor beside you. Sit comfortably upright in your chair and place your feet firmly on the floor. Take your shoes off if you like. Straighten your back comfortably, hunch your shoulders up, hold, hold, hold, and then relax them. Give them a little shake and let your shoulders drop. Place your hands gently on your thighs, or hold them gently in your lap, whatever is most comfortable for you.

Leader models the breathing by breathing with the group.

Take a deep breath in, slowly, down into your belly.

Slowly breathe out. Empty your breath as much as you can.

Take another deep breath in, slowly and as deeply as you can.

Slowly breathe fully out.

And one more time: deeply breath in, and now slowly breathe out.

And we begin.

Invite someone to light the candle.

Leader: We light the candle to remind us that where two or more are gathered in Jesus' name, then there is God present among us.

Softly close your eyes, or if this is not comfortable for you, softly gaze into the candle flame as together we listen to this piece of music.

*Play a reflective song. **Holy Ground** (Monica Brown – Holy Ground) **OR***

Lead Kindly Light (Maeve Louise Heaney – Nel Frattempo) **OR**

Quiet My Soul (Monica Brown – Quiet My Soul) **OR**

Christ Be Our Light (Bernadette Farrell – Christ Be Our Light)

When the song finishes, leader waits another moment in silence.

Then the Leader quietly stands, picks up the large candle, raises it a little, and says:

Leader: We'll now pass the candle around the group. As you receive the candle, I invite you to lift it up and say "The light of Christ!". The rest of us will respond with "The light of Christ". Then pass the candle to the person next to you.

Leader: The light of Christ!

All: The light of Christ!

The leader passes the candle to the next person. You may need to cue some people up prior in order to keep the movement flowing.

Continue around the group.

The leader takes the candle from the last person and returns it to the prayer space.

Leader: *in words similar to these:*

Thank you. Today is about you, and we'll spend time exploring our own personal responses to God's invitation to come to know God better. During our time together, I'll be inviting you to do some sharing, with one other person, and with the whole group. There is no obligation for you to share. If you feel you don't want to, that's fine. Just share as much or as little as you feel comfortable sharing.

A reminder that this is sacred time. And what is shared in the group or with another person stays in the group or with that other person. Please respect the dignity and confidentiality of each person, and the gift of themselves that they are giving in their sharing. This is not a time for debate or justification. It is a time of deep listening. We are each on our own path.

We are now going to hear a story, "The Man Who Planted Trees". Written in the 1950's, after the Second World War, a time of upheaval and healing, it is a story of a life-giving shepherd. I invite you to watch and listen with an open heart. It is a gently told story which takes about 30 minutes. Afterwards, we will take some time to sit with some reflective questions, and there'll be an opportunity to share afterward.

Watch "The Man Who Planted Trees"

After viewing, give each person a copy of the reflective questions, and invite them to quietly reflect on these questions:

What did you see?

What did you hear?

What struck you about this story?

What insights, if any, did you receive?

What feelings are you left with?

After 10 minutes of quiet individual reflection and writing, invite the participants to break into groups of 2 or 3 to share their reflections.

After 10 minutes, after everyone in each group has had an opportunity to share their reflection, invite all back into the larger group.

Leader: Would anyone like to share their experience, or something that was raised for you in the story or your reflection afterwards?

Allow enough time for people to speak.

When the leader senses that all who want to have shared:

Leader: *in words such as these:*

Thank you for your sharing. It may be helpful for you to keep your written reflections so that you are able to refer to them as your journey continues.

Let's have some bodily sustenance (*Morning tea*). We'll gather back here in around 15 minutes.

Leader keeps time, and calls people back after 15 minutes.

Leader: *In these or similar words:*

Thank you for honouring our time together.

Is there anything that was raised for you over morning tea or is there something further you'd like to share about "The Man Who Planted Trees"?

Allow time for participants to speak. Keep this time relatively brief. 10 minutes at the most.

Leader: *in these or similar words:*

Thank you.

For the next little while, I am inviting you to, like Jesus did, take time a-part, by yourselves. We frequently hear in the gospels, that Jesus took time out to be by himself to pray or rest or sleep, and encourages us to do the same. In Mark 6: 31 -32, Jesus said to the apostles to go with him to a deserted place, by themselves, to rest for a while. In our busy world, we sometimes don't prioritise time in quiet solitude. This is important for us to do as followers of Christ. We hear that Moses, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, took time to speak with God in silence and solitude. We hear in scripture that God comes to us in the still quiet of night, in our night dreams and in our day dreams; that God comes to us, not in the noise and cacophony, but in the quiet gentle breeze. In Psalms 46:10 we hear the invitation to 'Be still and know I am God.'

I invite you now to take the next 45 minutes to be apart, to be still and hear God's voice, as you reflect on these questions I'm about to give you. Use your journal to write or draw your responses. Stay here if you like, or wander the grounds. I do ask that you maintain silence

during this time, and don't engage others in conversation. Please respect each other's space.

After the 45 minutes, I'll sound the chimes, and invite you to meet with one other person, whoever you choose, for around 15 minutes or so. You can meet anywhere you'd like to. Feel free to share your insights or reflections with your companion. We'll then return here for a short time before we have our lunch break.

Go in peace and silence.

Leader in silence gives participants hand out with reflective questions.

Reflection: "Seed of Faith"

- Who/what planted the seed of faith in you?
- What signs did you see, feel, or sense that your seed of faith was ready to grow/growing?
- Who/what has helped you to recognise your seed of faith?
- Think of some recent life events. How has your growing seed of faith helped you to respond?
- How has your seed of faith caused any change within you?
- How do you/will you nourish your seed of faith?
- What stifles the growth of your seed of faith?
- Who for you has been a gardener of your faith?
- Who is the gardener for you?

After 45 minutes, sound the chime for participants to meet with their companion.

After another 15 minutes, sound the chime for all to re-gather in the prayer space. When everyone has gathered, invite people to share as they feel willing. This is not a discussion. Allow about 15-20 minutes.

Break for shared lunch. Suggested time 30 – 45 minutes.

Closing Ritual

Leader: Today, we have accepted the invitation to take time apart, to be still in the presence of God.

I invite you to share out loud a word or sentence that describes today's experience for you. *Allow enough time for all to share a word or sentence. This is not a time for long descriptions or for people to respond or comment on what has been shared.*

As our time apart draws to a close, and before we re-enter the everyday world, we ask for God to protect us, and to bless us on our journey of faith. We ask God to be The Gardener, to tend us, nurture us, feed us, and water us, as we journey in faith with the community.

I invite you to turn to the person beside you, and I invite each of you to place your right hand on your companion's right shoulder.

This will mean their arms are crossed over each other's.

Leader prays the following prayer:

Leader: Let us pray.

God, who is creator, who created the earth, and everything above and below and within;

God, in whose image we are created;

God, who created the cosmos;

God, who has no beginning and no end, and continues to draw us in and breathe us into life; nurture and sustain us just as You nurture and sustain the plants of the earth, the fishes of the sea, the birds of the air, every living thing on the earth.

Leader then invites the participants:

I invite you to raise your left hand in a gesture of blessing as I pray the words:

Leader also raises her/his left hand in a gesture of communal blessing.

May we, God's creation, feed and sustain our faith, through prayer, word, and action.

All: Amen.

May we listen and respond to the seasons of our lives and the lives of others.

All: Amen.

May our hearts open so that God's living Word is planted deep within our being.

All: Amen.

May we be co-creators with God, working in unison with God as we tend God's garden in faith, hope and love.

All: Amen.

We ask this in Jesus' name, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: I now invite each of you to come forward, one by one, to be anointed, and anoint the hands of the person following you, saying as you do so, “May you grow in the love of God.”

*Leader anoints the first person, and then steps away. Leader then steps forward to be the last person anointed. As participants are anointed in turn, play **Too Deep for Words** (Monica Brown – Let Your Heart Take Comfort)*

After the anointing:

Leader: As we leave this place, may we be watered and blessed by the presence of Christ’s light shining deep from within our hearts.

Leader: May we go in peace, love and joy, taking and nurturing the seeds of God’s Word with us as we go.

All: Amen!

Hymn: **Take the Word of God with You** (James Harrison – Catholic Worship Book II)

Leader takes the bowl of water and rosemary branch. As the hymn is being played, leader sprinkles each person in the group with the branch dipped in the water.

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Reflection “The Man Who Planted Trees”

Recall the animation “The Man Who Planted Trees”.

In silence, reflect on the below questions.

If you feel comfortable, write your reflections in your journal.

- What did you see?
- What did you hear?
- What struck you about this story?
- What touched you about this story?
- What insights, if any, did you receive?
- What feeling are you left with?

After 5 – 10 minutes of writing, break into groups of 2 or 3 to share your reflections if you feel comfortable.

After 5-10 minutes, after everyone in each group has had an opportunity to share their reflection, return to the larger group.

Reflection: "Seed of Faith"

- Who/what planted the seed of faith in you?
- What signs did you see, feel, or sense that your seed of faith was ready to grow/growing?
- Who/what has helped you to recognise your seed of faith?
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- How has your seed of faith caused any change within you?
- How do you/will you nourish your seed of faith?
- What stifles the growth of your seed of faith?
- Who for you has been a gardener of your faith?
- Who is the gardener for you?

After 45 minutes, find your companion, and share as much as you feel comfortable sharing.

Take about 15 minutes to do this.

Return to the gathering place.

Share as much as you feel comfortable sharing.

Prayer Space

