



Guiding thoughts for a Coracle like meeting

Charism and feel, logistics and practice

A need, at times, to be together and talk,
And then the finding we can walk
More firmly through dark narrow places, ..

A need for inns on roads, islands in seas,
Halts for discoveries to be shared,
Maps checked, notes compared;
From ASJ Tessimond's Not love perhaps

The Coracle Trust offers spaces of hospitality (spiritual and physical) for pilgrims and navigators, to share stories and compare discoveries, and to support the learning and exploration of faith through its many life transitions. This is for the wellbeing, maturity and faith development of

individuals and communities. But at a practical level how does this translate into content and form at a meeting level?



Introduction: A further journey

Jesus says, "By faith you will be saved" (Luke 7:50, 18:42). It is only by a foundational trust in the midst of suffering, some ability to bear darkness and uncertainty, and learning to be comfortable with paradox and mystery, that you move from the first half of life to the second half [the further journey]. (Richard Rohr)

Transitions require us to review what has become most significant and meaningful to us. Whether triggered by loss, profound love or uncertainty we aim to reflect well upon our inner life and outer world with readings, art and poetry.

Charism and feel

In our gatherings we desire to enable the right conversations to be had with the right person, which is invariably with God or self. This is not a debating chamber per se. We don't want to stay in our heads ('we must descend from our head to our heart', Theophan), or set things up so that the principal exchange is between the one who delivers a talk, argument or proposal and those gathered. It should be more than an I agree/disagree exchange. We attempt to attend to and learn from the movement we sense within us, to be attentive to questions such as What is useful, from what I have read, heard and feel? What challenges me? What resonates? And why do I think this might be?

There is a blend of both group interaction and personal reflective prayer space. Listening to others' stories, their reflections, invariably enriches the gathering and the impact on us. Discussion plays its part and may be likened to a circle of people gathered around a fire, watching the curious and many forms and shapes that faith narratives take.

It may also be worth noting what typically does not happen: sung worship, communal spoken prayer, teaching or preaching. Singing is readily available in many church services, though not all go to a church by any means - the Trust is set up to nurture faith. What time we have we intend to use in concentrating on prayerful reflection. We hold silence in the group as we each pray and reflect. No teaching or preaching or delivery of a message occurs other than an introduction to the evening's topic, which may involve reading a short extract, highlighting some phrases in the reading, stating sources and leaving resources such as books out for further perusal.

The Coracle Trust - Helping transition in faith through the life stages

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Photo by Arthur Poulin, unsplash.com

Logistics and practice

In advance

A topic is chosen and reading material researched and gathered, within the rough framework of faith transition and development as pertains to life transitions and maturation. The material proposes to be interesting, stimulating wider and deeper 'internal conversation', preferably drawing on a wide base of source material. A sample brochure of topics and core images and quotes are offered on our website and as a downloadable A5 pdf document. Also provided is a single A4 summary of the topic and its references around which an evening can be constructed.

It is best if the reading material is not long, typically 4 sides A4 as a maximum. We try to mix up the media so that reading is not the primary medium. Audio (eg audible active, podcasts, YouTube, mp3s), outdoor activities at least once a year (eg badger watching, meteor display, attending a monastery's Compline service, and barefoot walks, for us), storytelling, plus art and poetry are also employed at various times.

Some weeks prior to the meeting (which is monthly) an email is sent out attaching the reading material, naming the topic, the location (typically a home) and the time of the meeting. A short quote is added and source material and author are outlined.

On the night

As hospitality is a key component of our outlook we begin with a meal, cooked by the hosts. Life is to be shared and within homely contexts. Eating together is a fine whole-of-life setting. In coming to order after eating we begin with offering a space to tell what has happened since last we met. This is a linear, non-interrupted space. Freedom to speak without 'fear' of interruption is given and content received. There is no discussion, just open space to say what needs to be said. We 'halt for discoveries to be shared'. Alternatively a prayer bowl will be pinged to start and then end a period of stilling during which scripture, appropriate to the topic of the meeting, may be read.

The readings are then handed round and the topic briefly introduced. Some may see this material for the first time. For others this is a chance for further, deeper reading. 25 minutes in silence is set aside for this personal reflection and prayer time. Additional handouts are often offered, some poetry and/or artwork. Typical sources for these are wikiart.org.uk, unsplash.com and books such as *The poetry of the christian mystics* by Roger Housden or *Staying Alive, Being Alive* or *Soul Food* edited by Neil Astley. We then gather back together prompted by a question or two eg What did you find useful? Where were you stirred? What challenged or resonated? And why do you think that might be?

We end with thanks to the host, mention of when the next gathering will occur and an invitation to suggest and/or lead a subsequent evening. We may tie this up with a poem from the handout or a quote from the reading.

Summary (eg for 7-9.45pm gathering)

- Soft start with people gathering for a meal (1 h 30 mins)
- Stilling (silence plus short scripture) or free space (an opportunity to say what needs to be said, no conversation) (15 mins)
- Introduce the topic, hand out materials and personally reflect in silence (25 mins)
- Group discussion on discoveries and reflections (30 mins)
- Wrap up: Thanks to hosts, prayer/blessing, next meeting date (5 mins)

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