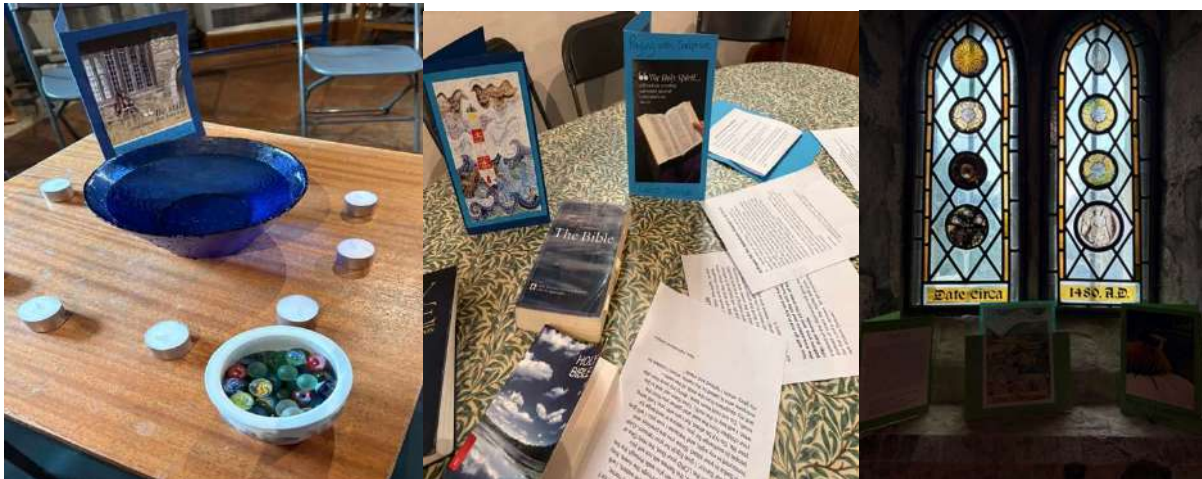


## Spiritual Wilderness Reflective Experience – Saturday 14 March 2026



### The event ran as follows:

1. Welcome and introduction
2. Guided meditation
3. Opening prayer
4. Introduction to the spiritual wilderness of Lent and invitation to look around the various prayer stations
5. Introduction to Franciscan spirituality followed by gathering in the Lady Chapel where the individual prayer requests on the prayer board were read out in turn by those attending the session – a deeply moving experience and feeling of privilege to do so
6. Closing reflections and blessing

### 1. Welcome and introduction

Everyone was welcomed to share and explore different ways to pray as we grow in our relationship with God. We discussed:

- a. Jesus explained the importance of knowing God as he prayed whilst walking with his disciples after the last supper to the Garden of Gethsemane (John 17:3), saying “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”
- b. Paul in his letter to the Philippians outlined the benefits to our well-being of praying (Philippians 4:6-7) “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made know to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” And;
- c. The comfort in Pauls’ letter to the Romans (8:26) “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.”

### 2. Guided meditation

The words of which were as follows:

So now I invite you to settle in to this session.

If you can do so sit in an upright position with both feet flat on the floor,  
If you wish please lower your gaze or closing your eyes.  
And while you're sitting here just giving yourself permission to be here,  
Leaving behind whatever happened before you came into this space and whatever may await  
you afterwards.  
And when you're ready now and you're in a comfortable upright position,  
Just noticing the breath as it comes in and as it goes out from the body.  
And as you sit here noticing the breath,  
You might realise that the mind often wanders off,  
Drifts off into thinking or daydreaming or planning.  
Just reminding yourself that's not a mistake,  
That's just what our minds do.  
You might like to add some counting as you notice the breath,  
So perhaps counting as you breathe in and counting as you breathe out,  
If that feels right for you.  
Or perhaps you'd like to try using some phrases,  
So, as you inhale you might like to think breathing in and as you exhale you might like to think  
breathing out.  
Again, just seeing if it works for you for the next few breaths.  
And now inviting you to use whatever helps you with your focus.  
So, either counting all the phrases or just noticing the strong sensations of breathing and just  
sitting with the breath,  
Allowing that to be your focus for a little bit longer.  
And when you're ready,  
Letting go of any counting or phrases you might have been using.  
Just bringing your awareness to your out breath and to your in breath.  
Just allowing the out breath and the in breath to be your focus.  
And if your mind wanders,  
Which it surely will,  
Just notice where the mind went and kindly,  
Gently,  
Escort it back to just noticing each out or in breath.  
And when you're ready now letting go of awareness of the breath and very slowly kindly and  
gently bringing your awareness back into the room.

Perhaps noticing the sounds inside or outside the room.

Opening your eyes or raising your gaze and bringing this settling meditation to a close.

### **3. Opening prayer**

In recognition of the dangers and uncertainty facing God's wonderful world - a simple Celtic prayer to invoke God's presence, safety and peace around us all.

Circle us Lord. Keep protection near and danger afar.

Circle us Lord. Keep light near and darkness afar.

Circle us Lord. Keep peace within and keep evil and anxiety out.

Circle us Lord. Keep hope within and despair without.

May you be a bright flame before us.

May you be a guiding star above us.

May you be a smooth path below us.

And a loving Guide behind us.

Today and forever. **Amen**

### **4. Introduction to the spiritual wilderness of Lent and invitation to look around the various prayer stations**

The forty days duration of Lent mirrors, of course, that period when Jesus prayed and fasted in the wilderness, tempted by all it was to be both human and God, in preparation for his three years of ministry.

It was not only a physical, but a hugely spiritual challenge, that He encountered out in the desert. We seek to imitate Christ's wilderness experience in some small way, by dedicating ourselves to self-examination, recognising our sins, remembering that we come from dust and will return to dust, and seeking a change of heart, a change to our prayer and meditation habits (our metanoia).

Many faiths and cultures focus on clearing away of clutter and letting go of things that fail to serve them, at this season, both literally and emotionally. So, too, do we ask God's help to help us commit to a "spiritual Spring clean", making space in our hearts, our minds and our souls to fully experience the joy of Christ's coming resurrection from the cross.

But now we strip back, and simplify to help us focus, our churches bare of flowers and our worships omitting "Alleluia", until that Easter Sunday.

The ancient stained glass in our church's porch is a focus of one of our Spiritual Wilderness prayer stations, today, as we choose to step outside to lift our eyes to the hills- they date from 1480-they're more than 500 years old, with maybe 18-20 generations having viewed, reflected and prayed on them. Our own existence may be fleeting, but God assures us that He knows every one of us by name, written on His heart.

While we often feel that we may be wandering in circles in our spiritual lives, which at times can feel barren and arid, and that we can feel lost, let's remind ourselves of our communion prayer, "...but only say the word, Lord, and I shall be healed"

Touching upon one of Nicky's All Saints and St Michael's Lent reflections on 1 Kings 19:12:

"Despite Elijah having come from intense spiritual battle, he is terrified and hiding in a cave, exhausted. He looked for God to show up in dramatic fashion-earthquake, wind or fire, but God chose a whisper.

While the wilderness often quietens the noise around us, it can expose the noise within us. Our anxieties and unanswered questions echo loudly. We long for God to shout over the chaos, to give us unmistakable signs, to silence our uncertainty with power. Instead, He often speaks softly.

In seasons when God feels silent, it may be that He is speaking in a different voice. Not in the spectacular, but in the subtle. Not in the earthquake, but in the quiet conviction. Not in fire, but in the stillness that settles over our soul when we finally stop running.

The wilderness teaches us to listen differently- not for volume, but for presence."

So, we come here this morning to listen to God's whisper: "Be still and know that I am God."

## **5. Introduction to Franciscan spirituality (from Lise's retreat day at Malling Abbey)**

The radical message of St Francis is that a care for God's creation should be at the heart of our radical reimagining of what God calls us to be as individuals and community. This inspired many of the displays around the church today. In animals St Francis saw God speaking directly to us. May we all speak to each other and the created world around us with the same love and purpose. Here is a summary of the rich and complex meaning of Franciscan spirituality.

Franciscan spirituality is a rich Christian tradition inspired by the life and teachings of Francis of Assisi (1181/82–1226). At its heart lies a radical commitment to living the Gospel through simplicity, humility, and love for all creation. Rather than focusing primarily on doctrine or institutional structure, Franciscan spirituality emphasizes a lived, experiential faith rooted in joy, compassion, and closeness to both God and the world.

One of its defining features is the embrace of poverty—not merely as material deprivation, but as a spiritual attitude of detachment and trust in God. Francis himself renounced wealth and privilege to live among the poor, seeing in them the presence of Christ. This "holy poverty" encourages freedom from possessions and ego, allowing individuals to depend more fully on divine providence. It is not about rejecting the world, but about engaging with it in a way that is unburdened and generous.

Closely connected to this is humility. Franciscan spirituality calls for a recognition of one's smallness before God, not as something negative, but as a path to authentic relationship. Humility opens the door to service, making it possible to treat others—especially the marginalized—with dignity and respect. This spirit of service is expressed in acts of charity, peacemaking, and solidarity with those who suffer.

Another central aspect is a profound love for creation. Francis is famously associated with seeing all elements of nature as brothers and sisters—sun, moon, animals, and even death itself. This

perspective reflects a deep sense of interconnectedness and reverence for the natural world. Today, this dimension of Franciscan spirituality resonates strongly with ecological awareness and environmental responsibility, encouraging care for the earth as a sacred trust.

Joy is also a hallmark of the Franciscan way. Despite hardships, Francis and his followers emphasized a cheerful, grateful outlook rooted in God's love. This joy is not superficial happiness but a deep, enduring sense of peace that comes from living in harmony with one's values and faith. It is often expressed through community life, music, and simple celebration.

Franciscan spirituality is also profoundly Christ-centred, particularly focused on the humanity of Jesus. Devotion to the Incarnation—the belief that God became human—leads to an appreciation of everyday life as a place where the divine is present. This is reflected in practices like the Christmas crib tradition, which Francis helped popularize, making the story of Christ accessible and tangible.

Finally, community plays an essential role. The Franciscan tradition is lived not in isolation but in fraternity, where mutual support, shared prayer, and collective mission are key. Whether in religious orders or lay movements, the emphasis is on walking together in faith and service.

In summary, Franciscan spirituality offers a holistic vision of life grounded in simplicity, humility, joy, love for creation, and deep compassion. Its enduring appeal lies in its accessibility and its call to live authentically, making it as relevant today as it was in the time of Francis of Assisi.

## 6. Closing reflections and blessing

As we search for ways to face our own emotional and spiritual deserts, we pray:

Christ, give us grace to grow in holiness, to deny ourselves, to take up our cross and follow You.

May the Lord bless us and keep us,

May the Lord make His face to shine upon us,

May the Lord lift up His countenance upon us and give us His peace.

Let us go in peace and serve the Lord! Amen

