

The process when working with *Seven Sacred Spaces*

The **aim** is pursuing closer following of Jesus and the forming of Christian character; it is far more than reading and discussing a book. It is about pursuing relationship, more than acquiring information. The points that follow are about the **style** that serves this aim.

This slow way of working is similar to the pace in any novitiate, such as occurs for those testing a vocation to join Northumbria Community and the discerning of what is right for each applicant.

1. Engaging with the Seven Sacred Spaces [7SS] is best thought of as a process; it is not a programme or a course, learning to be attentive to one another and the Holy Spirit.
2. Engaging with the 7SS is the process of facilitating personal, communal and spiritual *transformation* as a Christian. It is not mainly about acquiring or sharing information. However, some new knowledge may help to disclose what the agenda for inner transformation is.
3. The learning process is not really like 'formal education' such as doing a course, but is more like learning through 'socialisation' as the group interact with one another, aided by the host. Also it involves 'non-formal learning or apprenticeship',¹ in which *skills* of Christian personal and communal spiritual life are acquired, and which start to become *habitual* through practice.
4. Participants need to be aware this process is unlike most small-groups in church life. To make that distinction they are not called 'groups' but 'meet-ups'.
 - a. The meet-up size is smaller - only 6 people - because time for mutual listening and support is vital. Larger groups easily become unapplied discussions, or turn into seminars led by a presenter surrounded by an audience.
 - b. There is no 'leader', only a 'host', whose task is to enable mutual learning and support.
 - c. Meeting new content from the 7SS book occurs slowly. Only one chapter is read by participants between monthly meet ups. This slow pace seeks to avoid trying to learn too much too soon. Information overload hinders the sustaining of recently acquired spiritual habits. All new habits need time to put down roots.
 - d. Participants can also engage daily with a short reading for each day of the month, extracted from the 7SS book, as part of their practice of Cell.
 - e. People are responsible for doing that spiritual reading at home beforehand, assisted by the questions at the end of each chapter. From this they prepare a short account [say 4 minutes] of how they are engaging with what they have read. In the meet-up they relay how they are living out that space, and what is spiritually resonating with them. Other meet-up members then respond with encouragements and insights into that person's responses.
 - f. A key value in meet-ups is honesty. 'I don't know' is an acceptable answer.
 - g. Each member takes responsibility for what they are putting into practice. This includes sharing: lessons they are learning, mistakes made and creative discoveries found. They also give ongoing mutual support and prayer between the members who meet up.
 - h. For all these reasons meet-ups are a month apart and last for 90 minutes. The overall process includes breaks for the summer holidays and for major festivals like Christmas. This gives people time to assimilate and put the learning of the session into practice.
5. This whole approach also draws on the much older Early Church process called *catechesis*. This was a period of years, which did include teaching the Christian faith, but it was more about acquiring and demonstrating a Christian character, lifestyle and habits.²

¹ *Seven Sacred Spaces* pp 169-171 unpacks the relationships of these three types of learning, and which Jesus used.

² A source to understand this practice is Alan Kreider's book *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church* chapter 6.