

The Quiet Garden Movement

A Ministry of Hospitality and Prayer

By Jackie Lock

*“Come with me by yourselves
to a quiet place and get some rest.”*

(Mark 6.31)

Some 14 years ago in Stoke Poges, a village not far from London’s Heathrow airport, a Quiet Garden opened its doors for the first time. It offered hospitality to those seeking somewhere for spiritual refreshment, a place where people could simply come and be for a day or part of a day. We did not know it at the time, but this was the start of something that was to flourish and spread to many different countries across the world.

This simple ministry of hospitality and prayer is the vision of the Rev. Philip Roderick, founder and director of the Quiet Garden Movement. His vision for centres of hospitality began to form 18 years earlier when he was in Wales. It became a reality when, after a period of sabbatical leave, he shared his dream with students attending a course entitled *Contemplative Discipleship*. Many were looking for ways of going deeper, of sharing more with one another, of balancing the tension between their need for stillness and the demands of everyday life.

Philip mentioned the need for the loan of a house and garden in which to begin. Very soon, the Cooper family generously lent their lovely home at Stoke Poges, providing an ideal context for this new venture. Stoke Park Farm is a stone’s throw from St. Gile’s Church where Thomas Gray wrote his *Elegy in the Country Churchyard*. Philip named this venture the “Quiet Garden” after a line from a poem he wrote as a teenager: “a falling flower in a quiet garden.”

From this simple beginning, it soon became clear that the idea of low cost retreats in people’s homes and gardens could be



replicated anywhere in the world. As a Christian educator, Philip understood the need for the provision not only of content, but also of a context for transformation – sacred spaces for faith development, spiritual nurture and soul friendship. The Quiet Garden was, and is, a simple and fully grounded way of responding to the clear message of Jesus, who withdrew regularly with his closest friends to a quiet

place in a natural setting in order to have the resources to engage with the world again.

It was not long before people began saying “I could do this” and “I know someone who would really warm to this vision.” So the word spread, first to the East Coast of England, then further afield to Kansas, when in 1993 Philip attended the national conference for Spiritual Directors International. Having asked to speak to someone about spiritual development in the diocese, he was put in touch with the University Chaplain for Kansas, who was also the convenor of the spiritual formation group. Through the chaplain, Philip met Bishop Bill Smalley, who took the vision to his diocesan conference two weeks later and announced that they were going to “have Quiet Gardens in Kansas.” The following year, a trip was arranged so that Philip could visit the six Quiet Gardens or potential Quiet Gardens that the Bishop and his staff had identified in different parts of the state.

Philip once described this ministry as “the creative work of God in which we can share – creating contexts within which people can rest, receive spiritual nurture or perhaps rediscover their true path.” There are now some 270 Quiet Gardens around the world, over 40 of which are spread across 22 states in the United States, from Washington to Texas, from California to North Carolina.

“By a garden is meant mystically a place of spiritual repose, stillness, peace, refreshment, delight,” wrote Cardinal Newman in the 19th century (*Meditations and Devotions*, 1893). These are indeed some of the fruits of time spent in a Quiet Garden, contemplating the beauty of the world around, be it in a small backyard, a prairie, a vast forest or a church memorial garden. It is an opportunity to be



attentive, to hear God speaking and to respond, to leave refreshed and ready to engage with the world again.

Philip, reflecting in a newsletter (*Quiet Places*, Issue No.17, Pentecost 2004) on *What is the Point of Quiet* wrote: “At each of our local Quiet Gardens, individually and corporately, we are being invited to respond to the voice of the risen Christ who is longing to make himself heard in the depths of our heart and through the welcome and teaching at our hearths. It is when we learn how to submit in attentiveness, in the music of quietness, to the mystery of God’s presence that Jesus can, through his Spirit, direct our minds and hearts and lead us in the path of wisdom.”

Hospitality is at the heart of the Quiet Garden Movement. As Martha welcomed Jesus to her home (Luke 10:38, NRSV) and so enabled Mary to sit at his feet, so this ministry is dependent on the generosity of those who offer their homes and gardens so that others may benefit from a time of quiet reflection and teaching on Christian spirituality.

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www.quietgarden.co.uk

All photos from *The Myrtle White Paulsen Meditation Garden*, Episcopal Diocese of Spokane, Spokane, Washington.

Gardens and Grace, the first conference in the United States, was held May 21-24, 2006, at Kanuga Conferences in Hendersonville, North Carolina.

