

Contemplative Fire : Exploring the model of Three

The process and dynamic of participation in a group of three.

The essence of threes is a structured time of silence, personal story-telling, and deep listening in a safe context. In this, it is counter-cultural and contrasts with other groups which more commonly provide a place for dialogue and discussion. It contrasts also with the prayer of discernment (which draws more upon the imagination). The three will meet regularly, as often as they decide to. Especially initially, it might be helpful to focus on a particular question or topic as a stimulus. For example, “Being listened to” or “What is my invitation in this season?”. Alternatively, people can share anything from their own journey. In Contemplative Fire, we tend to be invitational, rather than dictating terms to one another. So perhaps consider deciding together a theme, but leaving an openness in case people want to talk about something else.

The **core structure** of a listening three follows this pattern:

There is an initial 15 minutes silence followed by each participant sharing without interruption for 15 minutes. They do not necessarily have to fill every minute of that time with speech, but the time-frame will be held so that that space is their own for sharing or for falling silent for a time. Each person is listened to attentively, with compassion and without judgement and without interruption.

After each person has shared, the pattern is repeated but with 10 minutes silence and 10 minutes per person sharing.

Finally the process is repeated with 5 minutes as the time-frame.

Key Points:

- It is essential that someone acts as time-keeper: this can be rotated as each person speaks. You may find it useful to use an electronic /phone timer.
- For those to whom the process is new, a decision might be made to reduce the time **but** it is well worth taking the risk and trying the 15 minutes.¹ Silence gifts the attentive listener, and creating space helps us to learn to wait, to listen and be available to ourselves, the others and God.
- The overall length of the meeting may be flexible according to the needs of the group.

¹ NB If the group is meeting online, we would definitely recommend shortening/adapting the length. Maybe 10 minutes, then 5 minutes, or vice versa.

- As the process moves through the 2 hours, there may emerge an interweaving of themes and insights as each person shares. This can enhance the quality and depth of interaction.
- It is useful to agree the order in which people will speak before you start.
- If the three do not already know each other, it could be helpful to meet once initially for a social time together.

It is recommended that someone who is already a practitioner of threes facilitates a new three by going through the process with them for one session.

The richness of such a time of sharing is undoubtedly in the discipline of a structured time of silence and listening to one another without interruption or dialogue. If this is maintained, the meeting becomes indeed a sacred space. It is therefore highly recommended to endeavour to keep this discipline.