



# Finding Stillness

**From 6.00pm on Tuesday 2nd until 11.30am on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> May**

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In many ways, this Conversation is the most 'foundational' for our core purpose of 'nurturing wisdom' because it develops that very ability. It will take us into the purposeful exploration and cultivation of practices that help us be more attentive to our experience and therefore make freer, clearer choices in aligning behaviour and purpose.

This is about self-awareness - being able to notice to what is happening on the inside whilst life is happening on the outside. These practices help us get past our reactivity, find wiser responses ourselves and nurture wisdom in others.

Attending this Conversation will also have the benefit of helping us get and give much more in future Conversations and strengthen us as a Fellowship to continue to raise the quality of our collective enquiry and engagement with the challenging issues of our times.

*Go placidly amid the noise and haste, remember what peace there may be in silence... Speak your truth quietly and clearly, and listen to others.*

(Max Erhmann, Desiderata)



## Agenda

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The Conversation will follow our usual flow in three key stages:

- **This is Me** – taking stock of where we find ourselves currently in relation to this theme and the questions that are arising from our experience
- **Tell Us More** – enquiring more deeply into our learning and insights as we probe into this experience
- **Yes I can, Yes I will** – turning wisdom and insight into intention and practice

## "This is me"

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After arriving in the Vicars Hall and sharing some introductory thoughts and questions, we will begin the conversation with a sharing and exploring of some of the big questions we are facing in our leadership right now.

These are questions that stretch us out of our comfort zone and challenge us to grow and to change. They are complex and dynamic and can only be resolved by living in the full experience of them, as the poet Raine Rilke describes

*"Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer..."*

One core aim over the three days will be to help each other embrace and explore some of these challenging questions together in a way that would not be possible in the normal cut and thrust of our lives.



# "This is me"

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Our other enquiry as we open together, alongside this purposeful leadership work and to support us in it, will be our theme of 'stillness'. This will be more of a practical development thread to the conversation. What do we mean by this and why does it matter?

'Finding stillness' is basically being able to return to a place of inner stability and equanimity from which we are able to make much more grounded, clear, wise and compassionate decisions as leaders. It is a process and a place that is unique for all of us – we all have different ways of doing it and when we access it, it has very different qualities and characteristics. It is also a paradox that stillness is rarely still – it is a tuning into the deep and constant flow of life and strength within us - more like the 'stillness' of a flowing river, the pulse of the ocean or the gentle rhythm of breath.

Stillness it is not something that can be taught or grasped, but rather something that arises within us. It needs to be cultivated and nurtured and so we will begin our sharing in the early phase of the conversation by talking about our relationship with stillness – when and how do we find it? What is our experience of it in our lives so far, and its close relations, silence and solitude. As we progress into the morning of the second day, we will explore this in more depth, looking at the impact of our upbringing and also exploring its opposite – our patterns of distractedness and the things we do to avoid the potential discomfort of 'just being'.

Having shared our stories and opened up our core enquiry for the conversation, we will take some time after lunch to do some practical work cultivating stillness. This will focus on simple techniques to focus and quieten the mind, settle the heart and relax the body.

Much of our reactivity is triggered in the body and we will spend a little bit of time together learning to access and listen to the 'wisdom of the body'. We will touch in to some of the science around this, but the focus of our work will remain experiential. Once the body is grounded the mind becomes clearer and the heart can open. We will use this mental clarity to work more on our leadership questions - and our developing insight, awareness and empathy to support each other in the process of doing so.

We will close this first phase of the Conversation with a break for a walk and reflection - and an opportunity to muse on the relationship between outer and inner stillness, where we will use nature and the environment at Windsor as a kind of 'mirror' in which we can see and sense our inner state.



# "Tell Us More"

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Returning from our break after Evensong, we will spend some time debriefing our experience of the day and starting to notice the energy that is flowing at a deeper level within us in relation to our core leadership questions.

What are we discerning and sensing about where change needs to happen?

Where is the invitation for us, what is holding us back?

As we start to surface a sense of excitement at new possibilities, we will also notice the presence of fear and self-doubt and other drivers within us that can limit our capacity to 'live everything'.

After some lively informal conversation and sharing over drinks and dinner, we begin the following day with a meditation and reflection – with a particular focus on cultivating and expanding our awareness in preparation for the deeper exploration we will do this morning.

This will take us into the 'wisdom of the heart' and how we deal with the substance of the emotional life in the context of our leadership. When the heart is at peace, a genuine peace, and fully online, not withdrawn or hiding, or numbed out with repressed emotion, then there is a tremendous expansion in our capacity to act with wisdom, clarity, energy and decisiveness.

We are much more likely to be 'in flow' and to be capable of sustaining positive relationships with others. In the morning, using all that is arising in the real leadership questions we are facing into, we spend some time working with each other to transform emotion into energy. We will practice some simple techniques for 'listening to the wisdom of the heart' and share/explore our own ways of doing this that work best for us.

A basic principle we will explore is 'don't be afraid of the dark' – learning to welcome and embrace apparently negative emotions such as fear, doubt, frustration, worry and anger. The paradox is that when we are attentive to these, they nearly always contain powerful positive energy. And as we release the grip of the emotions inside us we start to find much greater peace, clarity and conviction.

We will do this practically for the particular leadership questions and issues we have brought to the conversation, but we will also develop simple practices to enable us to keep on doing it back in the reality of our lives.



## "Tell Us More"

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By the end of the morning, we will have covered many approaches to finding stillness and applied these to the reality of challenging leadership questions we are currently facing into. We will also have developed a depth of trust, community and openness between us that will enable us to get into very powerful, potentially transformational conversations about how we live our lives as leaders.

After lunch we will take time and space in small groups to help each other explore and progress things we might not have thought possible at the start of the Conversation. Throughout this work, we will cultivate our awareness to sense when we are slipping into less productive states and use our stillness practices to rebalance and restore our inner compass.

## "Yes I can!"

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After a break and time for a walk in the afternoon, still cultivating our awareness as we do so, we move into the closing phase of the Conversation. The first part of this is to solidify our intentions for how we will handle the particular leadership challenges and issues that we brought with us into the conversation. We will spend the evening on this, helping each other solidify our intentions and resolves. This should leave us in a nice clear place for relaxed enjoyable wide ranging conversation over supper and evening drinks.

On the following morning, we will begin with some stillness to pause and notice the wisdom that is now present to us as a result of all the sharing and learning from the conversation so far. Following on from this, we will help each other develop a practice of stilling and presencing that will serve us in our conscious leadership going forwards. This will comprise a range of simple practices for stilling and awareness that are 'just right' for us and that we can build into the rhythm of our lives. We will also commit to support and help each other as we practice and experiment with these.

We will close the Conversation with a pause to look back and 'hoover up' all the wisdom that has been gleaned and shared – particularly the very practical wisdom, the little tips, practices and insights that emerge spontaneously, often in offline chats, as we talk and share experiences together. We will then pair up to help each other to firm up on our specific resolves - and maybe even offer to stay in touch from time to time to help each other with this. Finally we will come back together and end with a final moment of peace and stillness before moving out to resume the pattern.



## Timings: Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> May

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1430	You are welcome to check in to your room in St George's House
1630	Tea in the House for those joining Evensong in the Chapel
1705	Evensong ( <i>optional</i> )
1750	<b>Vicars' Hall.</b> Refreshments, then start of the Conversation at 6.00pm. Introduction to the Guiding Principles and then on to Stage One: <b><i>This is me!</i></b> We take our questions into small groups and then share our personal perspectives.
1940	Free time/drinks in the Sitting Room No. 25 The Cloisters
2015	Working dinner in the House Dining Room
2130	We go back to the Sitting Room after dinner drinks
2145	Private floodlit tour of St George's Chapel, departing the Sitting Room ( <i>optional</i> )

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## Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> May

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0745	Breakfast is served in the House Dining Room
0845	We start again promptly in the Vicars' Hall continuing on the ' <b><i>This is me!</i></b> ' theme with a deeper sharing of our personal stories.
1100	Personal reflection time
1130	Sharing our stories and an introduction to wisdom practices
1300	A hot buffet lunch is served in the Vicars' Hall and we work together in our groups

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## Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> May cont...

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1355	Team photo on the West Steps of the Chapel then back together in the Vicars' Hall and on to Stage Two: <b>Tell us more</b> where we begin to explore more deeply what is emerging for us as leaders – what is stirring within us and around us that is calling for a different response? How do we feel about this?
1600	Personal reflection time
1705	(Optional) Evening Prayer in the Chapel
1745	Refreshments, then resume the Conversation at 6pm.
1930	Free time and pre-dinner drinks in the Sitting Room of No. 25
2015	Dinner is served in the Dining Room
2130	We go back to No. 25 the Cloisters for tea/coffee/drinks

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## Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> May

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0745	Breakfast is served in the House Dining Room
0845	We start again promptly in the Vicars' Hall. Some personal space and then we begin work on our deeper enquiry
1100	Personal reflection time
1130	We shift our focus and start looking at how we are connecting with our deeper purpose and energy to make sustained shifts in our leadership
1300	A hot buffet lunch is served in the Vicars' Hall and we work together in our groups
1400	Work in small groups on key leadership conversations
1515	Refreshments
1615	Personal reflection time
1705	Evensong (optional)

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## Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> May cont..

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- 1750 Vicars' Hall. Refreshments, then restart the Conversation at 6pm. We move onto Stage Three **'Yes we can!'**
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- 1915 Free time then pre-dinner drinks in the Sitting Room from 7.30
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- 2000 Dinner is served in the Dining Room
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- 2130 Coffee, drinks and conversation in the Sitting Room
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## Friday 5<sup>th</sup> May

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- 0730 Breakfast is served in St George's House. Please clear your luggage from your bedroom because the domestic staff need to service the rooms. You are welcome to leave bags in the Sitting Room or bring them down to the Vicars' Hall where we will be for the remainder of the Conversation
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- 0830 Vicars' Hall. We start again **promptly** and invite any personal insights that draw on our discussions the previous evening. Then into small groups to work on our commitments to our leadership practice going forwards
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- 1115 We come back together as a whole group to share some final reflections before closing the Conversation promptly at 1130.
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## Video link-up:

In the final minutes of the Conversation we will arrange a time for a follow-up video link-up to hear how much progress we have each made in taking forward our resolves.

The key to us making the best possible use of our time in this is for Fellows to post a brief Whatsapp beforehand updating the rest of us on how you have acted on your resolves, and especially which one you found the most challenging. We then take it from there!

## Suggested time for Video Link-up: tbc