



Anna and Chris Hembury

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Location: Britain



What we do: Sharing life with people on the margins and supporting them to connect with themselves, each other, the planet and God



Discovering creative ways to share the hope of Jesus with people unconnected to church

Dear friends,

It's harder than we thought

Starting afresh, while still living in the middle of lots of continuity, is a tricky thing. Relationships with people and institutions aren't simply projects that can be scrapped for a better idea. We have been here for 28 years but now find ourselves in uncharted waters, having to learn how to navigate a little coracle with no pointy end to steer towards a clear destination! Still, we are in Lent as we write this, so it's a good season to embrace our watery wilderness and lean into a faithful kind of powerlessness.

John V Taylor (former CMS general secretary) described Jesus' temptations as temptations to provide, to perform and to possess – various misuses of our power in the context of our joining in with God's mission. We have learned over the years that much of what we have sought to do out of compassion can, and often has, led us into that patronising provider/needy power dynamic, which is a distortion of both our importance and the humanity of those we seek to serve. We have been quicker to divest ourselves of the temptation to possess, to control the method and outcomes of mission in our context. Perhaps our aversion to holding responsibility has helped us avoid too much of this! It does make it harder to give impressive stories of the kind of results or "fruit" often expected of us, when we're not in charge of the garden. Certainly the greatest temptation right now is to perform. We want to be able to say, "look, we did that!", to be (suitably self-effacing!) heroes who are making a difference, able to point to all the mouths fed and souls saved for the glory of God. Thankfully, we are suitably adrift and have to acknowledge we are under-performing! We have, of course, included some photos to reassure you we're not just sitting around idly doing nothing; but we are trying to lean away from the temptation to do stuff in order to be productive and justify our own indispensability. Pray with us as we pray with St Brendan, "Help me to journey beyond the familiar and into the unknown. Give me the faith to leave old ways and break fresh ground with you."

Prayer action

In the early 90s when I (Chris) first started going to church I came across a helpful book by Ronald Dunn called Don't Just Stand There, Pray Something!. I still do a lot of standing there and then go, "Oh yeah, I could say a prayer!" So in some ways it feels like I would be the most unlikely candidate for running a prayer course.



Chris and Sam cooking up some prayer courses

Support Anna and Chris Hembury:
churchmissionsociety.org/hembury

**With Jesus
With each other
To the edges**



Along with my friend Sam we have run three courses in the past year: Praying with Jesus, Bring Your Question to God and Praying with the Saints (using the Northumbria Compline booklet). All of them have taken a similar format: it starts with a check-in using picture cards, with the question “How are you?”. We sometimes also used the thought of “How are you seeing God at work?” or “How has he been speaking to you?”. Then a Taizé song followed by a block of silence, a lectio divina practice, then a chat around what struck us about the Scripture reading.

For our course Praying with Jesus, we used the verses which spoke of Jesus going off to a quiet place, walking up on the hillside and struggling with his emotions in the garden. Bring Your Question to God was perhaps the most profound of the courses. We asked each person to bring one question and sit with it over four meetings; for one lady it was perfect timing as she was trying to discern whether to put herself forward for ordination. I think my favourite has been Praying with the Saints – their stories are so inspiring and challenging, an eye opener into the hardships they faced and a reminder that being challenged is not such a bad thing.

My takeaway has been witnessing the relationships develop within each group and I feel the check-in has been the catalyst for these deepening bonds. People opening up and being brave enough to make themselves slightly more vulnerable than they are used to. In a safe space it works, people are held and God is given space to do his work.

At our Fridays@ gathering, one of the guys asked what the difference was between faith and prayer. Someone else suggested prayer was faith in action, investing in that relationship of trust with God. So much of our mission work feels like faith in action, full of stuff to do. So the prayer courses have been a blessing to me too, space for a different kind of action – to pause and invest in that relationship of trust, to check in with myself and sit in the company of Jesus.

Peace,

Anna and Chris



Photos from top to bottom: Some of the Fridays@ crew; co-creating the “river of life” (Ezekiel 47) with community groups for an Easter celebration; a session exploring Bible stories on a housing estate, led by Chris



Discovering creative ways to share the hope of Jesus

It's so encouraging to hear news from other CMS partners sharing the hope of Jesus with people not yet connected to churches. In Honduras, mission partners are providing mentoring for children who are likely to drop out of school, or not receive any education. They are introducing them to education and to the love of Jesus. Read more and get inspired by other stories of hope at churchmissionsociety.org/bringhope