



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.

Dear friends,

We are learning (late and very slowly!) to live with the seasons and pay better attention to finding rhythms of rest and recovery. Much of autumn and winter has felt like things frustratingly lacked momentum and our plans and dreaming were never getting anywhere as everyone simultaneously wanted to see things get going and lacked the capacity to do anything about it. So we gave ourselves permission to try to winter well, not live in overwhelm, and as a result the Christmas season seemed as full of connection and celebration but with less stress and more ease. Still, it seems we are prone to trying to do winter as if it were high summer, and feeling frustrated with ourselves for not having “got more done”. Much to learn!

Prayer space

Now, the days are getting longer and we are waking up alongside everything else beginning to bud and spring. One of the things we longed to get going was a new prayer room at Matt's House. The little room at the top of the house had served that function well, but a new job for one of the residents means it is now mostly used as an office for working from home, so it has really lost the peaceful prayer vibe and steady availability. But what seemed like a loss has created the opportunity for some prayerful reimagining. It felt important to re-establish the Christ-centred ethos of Matt's House with a dedicated prayer room at the heart of things, spacious enough for a gathering and a place where others in the wider community might encounter the life-giving living water that Jesus offers. The large reception room downstairs, which at times served as a music room but had latterly become a dumping ground for anything that didn't have somewhere else to go, is the perfect place. This week a few of us have been rolling our sleeves up and starting to sort out the woodwork and prep the walls for plastering and painting. It is exciting to get going again and see a vision take shape. Please pray that this space would be well used, that it might help our Matt's House community find a renewed rhythm of prayer with Christ at its centre, and provide a restorative soul space for others to reconnect with God.

Swimming upstream

Speaking of overwhelm, this seems to be the place most of the women we know are living in. The impact and continuous stress of living in poverty, dealing with poorer than average health and the lack of



Banner-making as part of the Bishop's
Walking with Angels Advent reflection

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opportunities that comes with that, as well as life events like childhood trauma or bereavement, mean that many feel stuck under too heavy a load to keep bearing and believe this means there must be something wrong with them. Anxiety and depression are commonplace and everyone is desperate for something from the doctor that will help them cope, or give them a diagnosis that validates the way they feel and means they can legitimately access support. Although those who get that far find the support systems are themselves broken due to overwhelm and insufficient support.

Frustrated with hearing our shared experiences of endlessly being fobbed off with a quick (often pharmaceutical) fix to manage symptoms, rather than look further upstream to address the “why”, we have been wondering together how to respond. We have secured some funding to take some time to explore these challenges with women we know through Orts, the Breakfast Club and other spaces, and come up with a programme of activities that might help us move out of the places we feel stuck in.

We are beginning with a Being Well day in March, in which we hope to open up a conversation through a series of curated activities and taster experiences around the question, What makes for being well? The day is designed to give women a safe space to speak about health struggles and foster some hope around things we can do to face issues together. Jesus said: “I have come that they might have life and life in all its fullness” (John 10:10). We hope to explore what that holistic life might look like, with attention paid to connection and spirituality, physical movement, rest and repair, understanding trauma,

nourishing food and some silly dancing just as a catalyst for joy! We'll be using the metaphor of fish swimming upstream in order to bring new life. Swimming upstream is hard but necessary work; we need pools in which to feed, rest and recover on the long journey. In a way the Being Well day can be seen as beginning the journey, with lots of pools to learn together how to reconnect with ourselves and our bodies and to find courage and agency for moving towards life and wellness. Please pray for those women who come, for the brave beginning conversation as well as the developing programme of opportunities we might offer, and for opening up space for the Spirit to bring healing and wholeness in our individual circumstances and as a community.

Shalom,

Anna & Chris



Photos from top to bottom: Surprise Christmas present delivery service at our Breakfast Club mums' meal out; Hull-grown young leaders at Peak District residential; prepping for prayer



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