



Hidden Houses of Prayer Gathering Coventry Cathedral, 23rd May

Companion Charlotte Wright reflects:

Much of my life revolves around my home and what happens in it. The world comes to me, communicating and connecting with me as it can and does in our technological times. But it all becomes too big, too heavy a burden to carry, when, for example, the traumatised and bereft people of Nepal fill my screen with their tears and cries. They are here with me in my home, and I am sharing their sadness. The reality is I start to shut my feelings down, close my heart, because I can't bear it – it is a burden too great. I have enough to cope with, with my own family; they are my life, their troubles plenty to pray and live for. In the small corner of the world that is my life, there is already more than enough need for prayer.

But then I heard Sister Julia speaking at the HHP Gathering. She was deeply honest, sharing her thoughts and feelings about this remarkable action we call prayer, speaking about 'the raw tenderness of now'. She shared how, at one time, she had real difficulty in praying for the homeless. It just made her feel guilty.

As she faced her feelings, in her body as well as her mind, and the feelings behind the feeling, she began to discover the truth of herself, with all her light and shadow. She found that God was taking her on a path to healing, integrating her with her deep 'true' self in what she describes as a purification process.

She spoke of how, as 'negatives' of shadow emerge, such as our confusion, our anger and fear, our projections and repressions, what we might think of as distraction, is prayer. She said,

'This is prayer for powerful healing. We are not doing it just for ourselves, but for and on behalf everyone. We don't do the healing. We present the brokenness in consciousness to ourselves and to God (with as little judgement as we can). God is the great whole, the great integrator, who brings perfection, in the sense integrating all of what we call good and bad into one seamless whole.'

Sister Julia found that, although she wanted to feel compassion towards the homeless, she instead felt guilt. Going deeper, she felt anger. The feeling behind that was of helplessness. Accepting this, a feeling of genuine compassion then emerged and was her prayer.

Solitude Connected



So here, in my quiet, hidden house, where I pray and cry, plead and process, for those I care for most, for myself as much as for others, I am beginning to understand that I am entering a profound and universal prayer. In connecting with the deepest part of myself, as I pray for my family, I am connecting with the deepest part of the universal family. Amazingly, mysteriously, in the Christ who holds all things together, my prayer

struggles may, quite possibly, interconnect with the struggles of other families everywhere, bringing wholeness and healing, not least for those broken and hurting families of Nepal.

Philip writes:

The heart of the vision and vocation of Hidden Houses of Prayer (HHP) is that of an invisible network of people drawn to the practice of contemplative, creative and intercessory prayer in their own homes. This affirmation and quiet validation of a “connected solitude” for ordinary and often hidden people has its genesis over forty years of my own explorations, vulnerabilities and ministry. The prompting for this simple venture arose both from the recognition that the number of monastic communities who pray at night is in significant decline, and from the prayer needs and witness of individual Christians who have been important to me in different decades and parts of the country. Thankfully, the vision has now been taken up by many others.



This year’s event in Coventry Cathedral on 23rd May had something of a desert and early Christian dynamic, with each of the presenters having been profoundly influenced by Eastern Orthodox spirituality: Sister Julia, an orthodox nun living as a hermit in Wales, who finds inspiration and nourishment in sacred chant and movement, in the beauty of

words and silence, in the abundance of nature and in a simple and hidden life, and Bishop John Stroyan, suffragan bishop of Warwick in the Diocese of Coventry, who has spent time on Mount Athos and visited Orthodox monasteries in Greece, Romania, Russia, Albania, Siberia - and most regularly of all Essex!

HHP was established as a sister project with my Spirituality Adviser work in the Diocese of Sheffield. Now, as the network seeds itself, for each national gathering we seek to partner with a church in a new area that agrees to host our annual (or perhaps in the future, biennial) gathering.

One of the lovely comments arising from the day was: *“I just wanted to express my thanks for all the work that went into putting last Saturday's gathering together, and my appreciation of the grace and blessings that poured from the contributions of Philip, Sister Julia and Bishop John. To be in a room with all those people and not feel different or odd, but united in a single body, was so encouraging and refreshing and affirming of a way that is truly of God, but not often found in the CoFE.”*

Holy Spirit,
dwell in us that we may become
prayer.
Whether we sleep or drink,
labour or rest,
may the fragrance of prayer rise,
without effort, in our hearts.

(A prayer after St Isaac the Syrian, C7th).

For further details about HHP and/or to put your name on the HHP database, please contact Valerie North or Philip Roderick on hiddenhousesofprayer@hotmail.co.uk

From Sheffield to Brighton

Philip and Jill are moving house and the CF office from the 8th – 10th of June. They would really appreciate our love and prayers. Their new address will be: 16 Chorley Avenue, Saltdean, Brighton, BN2 8AQ. Mobile numbers and email addresses will stay the same (with Jill's CF emails being diverted to Gill Greenwood for a short period). Landline number to follow.



Jill and Philip on Hang drums at CF North farewell afternoon.

**** Can anyone give the CF coracle a home? It's 55" long, 40" wide, 20" high****



7's with a difference



By way of encouragement to follow the flow of creative evolution within our recognised ways of knowing, being and doing.

On the evening of 7th May, at St Peter's Church in St Albans, our local group met for a 'Way beyond Religion' or '7s'.

We advertised it as an 'Agape' meal, a companionable and simple shared supper, with soup, bread and wine, a contemplative liturgy including lectio divina (contemplative reading of texts), stillness and prayer, lasting about two hours, and linked to the church's liturgical seasons.

Usually held in a home, we decided to try something different and meet in the church rooms. The Octagon room next to the kitchen made a fitting dining-room, while the small church library provided comfortable chairs and sitting area.

We decided to make it an open meeting, advertising it to all those on our local contact list and also to those in St Peter's church. The only proviso was that if someone wanted to join us, they needed to reserve a seat at the table as numbers were limited. This was another break from the usual pattern, which is to provide for an established group meeting regularly together.

New catalysts and liturgy were needed and duly prepared, reflecting the time after Easter but just before Ascension.

The evening was a rich one. Five local Companions met in happy reunion with another Companion, Simon Lambert, visiting from the US. We were also joined by a new friend, Revd John Hayton from St Albans.

We have more evenings like it planned for later in the year and are looking forward to their gifts, not least of variety through people and seasons.

Charlotte Wright (photo: Early Christian painting of an Agape feast).

Contemplative Fire Community Weekend, 12/13 September 2015

For the third year, our Community Weekend will offer the opportunity to be residential, using the lovely venue of Felden Lodge, near Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire. We use the outside area and its walks, the chapel and meeting rooms. There is the option to stay for Saturday night, and Companions can also book Friday night. We are delighted that some Canadian Companions are planning to join us.



The Community Weekend, whether or not you are residential, is fully catered by Felden Lodge. Some Companions live locally, returning home on the Saturday night, and we hope that some will be able offer hospitality to fellow Companions. Others may prefer to find their own local accommodation. It is our hope that a good number will stay at Felden Lodge again and see this as another opportunity to build community.

Please feel free to invite to the weekend someone you know who resonates strongly with CF and is exploring the possibility of becoming a Companion.

Timings: We begin on Saturday with arrivals from 9.30am for a 10am start and carry on into the evening, finishing after supper at approx. 8pm. We gather again on Sunday for a 9.45am start and conclude by 3pm.

Costs: Non-residential (including all meals, tea, coffee): Sat - **£56**; Sun - **£38**

Residential (includes accommodation for Saturday night plus all meals, tea, coffee):

- Shared twin room per person - **£104**. If you would like to share a room with a particular person, could you agree with each other beforehand and indicate on the booking form. Otherwise, we will allocate shared rooms for you.
- Single room/sole occupancy of twin room - **£122**
- Optional Friday night B&B: **£36** per person
- Optional Friday supper: **£13** per person.

- **PLEASE fill in and return the booking form as soon as you are able.** Send to *Gill Greenwood, 16 Graham Court, Graham Road, Sheffield S10 3DX* (gillgreenwood@tiscali.co.uk).
- If you are **unable to come to the weekend**, could you also kindly let us know (by email to Gill) as this helps greatly with overall planning.

Looking forward to seeing you at the Community Weekend.

