



Prayer at a Renew space

“A simple and accessible way of people meeting Christ” – interview with Ellen Price of Renew Stocky in Derby

Prayer is the heartbeat of every Renew Wellbeing space.

While each space will go about prayer slightly differently, a basic rhythm of prayer permeates them all. It's contemplative, liturgical, and centering, with silence, stillness and a focus on breath work often key. For Baptist minister Ellen Price it has been transformational.

“It's an inclusive, nobody shut out way of doing prayer,” she says, “and I've not experienced anything like it. I've seen people who haven't got faith begin their journey by joining in with this very simple and accessible way of meeting Christ.”

As the minister of Trinity Baptist Church, Ellen has overseen Renew Stocky since its launch.

“I'm just about to retire - and I wish I'd learnt about praying this way years ago.”

A place where inner habits of wellbeing are shared

Renew Wellbeing is a charity founded by Baptist pastor Ruth Rice which seeks to attend to people's mental and emotional wellbeing. It does this primarily through simple café style spaces run by local churches where hobbies and activities are shared or co-produced. Each church partners with a mental health professional from the

local council or other suitable organisation to ensure good inclusive practices for safe spaces.

Each Renew centre has a quiet room or prayer space where, the charity states ‘inner habits of wellbeing are shared’. The three simple principles underpinning all Renew spaces are: *being prayerful, being present and being in partnership.*

There are now around 250 Renew spaces around the UK (plus a further 20 children, youth and family Renew spaces.)

One of these is Renew Stocky, run by Trinity Baptist Church, Derby. It launched in September 2019 and opens each Tuesday from 12:30 until 19:00 in the Derby Homes Boyer Street Community Room, a short walk from the church.

The prayer rhythm at Renew Stocky

There are three prayer times at Renew Stocky, and the prayer space is open for anyone to use anytime.

The first prayer is at 13:30 based on Psalm 103. This is the Renew morning prayer with a section for people to express how they have experienced God, which is effectively praise; one for giving thanks; one for confession; and finally praying for others.

The same set wording is used each time. Participants can say something at each point or reflect in silence. Everybody in the Renew Space is invited to participate; not everyone will, but all will be aware that prayer is happening and will hear something of what's going on.

The second prayer time is at 15:30. This has evolved in a way that's specific to Renew Stocky, shaped by suggestions from the Renewers.

Ellen has learnt this prayer works best by beginning with quiet and encouraging deep breathing. The first part involves saying “Wow”. “It's encouraging people to think about what has made you say ‘wow!’ this week,” explains Ellen. “And I say if you think God's there, then you're saying: ‘Well done, this is amazing.’ The ‘wow!’ might be a blackcurrant crumble, a robin singing, someone being kind.

The second section is about giving thanks; the third is around concerns, either saying them out loud or reflecting on them in silence. The section ends with more silence and deep breath work, as Ellen invites those present to breathe in the peace and love in the room, and breathe out their concerns. “Not that the concerns are gone. But just for this moment we let go of them.”

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The evening prayer at 18:30 uses an Examen, a prayerful reflection on the day's events to detect God's presence and direction. There's a focus on what was good, and not so good, and asking help for tomorrow. "This is a quiet and peaceful ending of the day," notes Ellen.

'It's heavenly' - reflections on praying this way

Ellen says the consistency of approach – the liturgy is the same each time – has made it accessible to people not used to praying. They feel safe knowing what to expect. Nevertheless, each session looks different because different people take up the invitation to participate in the space, and each bring their own joys and concerns.

The middle session is the one in which most participate (other Renew centres report this, too), and Ellen believes 'wow' and 'giving thanks' have particularly resonated.

"It's about stopping and noticing the world around you, being in the moment.

"The 'wow' has become very special. Some people message me during the week to say a wow that has happened to them, something they've noticed.

"It's worship. Some don't get that, but for others it becomes clear over time. And for me it's what worship has become: stopping to enjoy what God is doing in the world."

There are clear health benefits, she continues, referencing the Bible verse '*Give thanks in every situation.*' (1 Thess 5:18)

"Research has shown this (noticing the good and giving

thanks) lowers our blood pressure, raises our immunity and makes us more creative. And if you do it with others, it unites those participating.

"God knew way back that this is actually having a physiological as well as a spiritual effect."

This more contemplative, liturgical way of praying is different to what many Christians are used to. It means some have to learn to adapt when they participate in the Renew space, for praying longer, extemporary prayers can be off-putting to those not used to it, notes Ellen, whose dissertation focused on community prayer. Praying alongside others, being considerate of them, with them rather than for them, and following a set liturgy is safe and accessible, and people connect with it.

Ellen adds how people encounter a peaceful presence when entering Renew.

"It's because it's all shaped around this rhythm of prayer. Everyone has that awareness that prayer is happening, whatever they think about God, as our prayer space is a screened off corner. People recognise that God is there.

"I've come to believe that the presence of Christ is in all of us in some way," she continues. "And so what I'm doing, particularly through that middle prayer, is helping them to recognise the presence of Christ in them.

"When they do, it's heavenly."

To find out more, visit renewwellbeing.org.uk

See books, page 39.



Photo from Renew Stocky | Trinity Baptist Church, Derby