



# newsletter Winter 2018-19

**WELCOME to this bumper newsletter! 2018 was quite a year, and 2019 promises all kinds of exciting developments, so read on...**

## **What's been happening?**

Back in 2015 when we chose the name 'Retreat House Chester' for a new charity finding a new way to offer retreat, we had two reasons: one was that it was the name of the old retreat house in Abbey Square, and the other was that this name was about a house (rather than an institution) and a city. So as well as drawing on the rich heritage of retreat here in Abbey Square, we also had in mind the fact that we want to say that retreat is something for us all in our everyday city living: it's about learning how we can 'retreat' wherever we are by turning aside now and again from our everyday demands and distractions to engage with something deeper, in order to nourish and help us in our living. Rooted gently and deeply in Christian spirituality, we believe too that this ancient practice has much to offer us all, whoever we are.

Throughout 2018, we have continued to build the ways in which retreat can be experienced here in Chester. Our diverse programme is underpinned by the Retreat House blessing – taken from the Latin words over the door of the old retreat house in 10 / 11 Abbey Square – 'Peace to this house. To those who enter, to those who dwell here, to those who depart – Peace.' While this year has been a time of change and growth, and challenge, underlying it all is Peace.

A new kind of retreat this year has been our 'Peace Days'. These days offer a quiet experience of rhythm and balance as we gather for three short times of reflection and silence and spend the rest of the day as our own time. We are finding that it really is the case that peace can be found even in a shared building in the middle of the city. Our newly-refurbished Back Room, and the lovely setting of Abbey Square, play no small part in ensuring this. Offering a little more input – drawn from Christian spirituality with our characteristic deep and gentle way – our monthly Short Retreats are a mainstay of the programme, and have been a feature of our activities for the last two years. As we mark the passage of the months and seasons in this way, again a gentle rhythm is growing to the pattern of a year of retreat in the city. In December we offered a weekly drop-in time of 'Midweek Peace' on a Wednesday lunchtime – a rooting in Peace at the heart of each week.

*Peace*

To this house;  
To those who enter;  
To those who dwell here;  
To those who depart,

*Peace*



W777 Photography by Will Hay

Soulful Saturdays have continued, in a variety of settings including the Cathedral Cloister Room, Wesley Church Centre, Abbey Square and out and about on foot, ensuring that 'retreat in the city' is about more than being in just one place. These weekend days have seen: a pilgrimage walk; a singing retreat; a day with Benedictine spirituality; Celtic spirituality and mosaic-making; a day with medieval mysticism; poetry (twice!); a day with contemplative spirituality; and – to close – a day inspired by Advent saints.

Whether attracted to just one or coming along to most, these days offer a rich opportunity to develop our awareness of Christian spirituality, in a variety of ways. We are also delighted by the 'regional' character of these days – with people coming from some miles to be here, and all the retreat-givers being local people sharing their depth of talent and spirit.

Walking and creativity have offered other ways to retreat. Pilgrimage walks (in February cold and June heat), reflective city walking, and a mindful walk (in the April rain) have been active ways of being attentive. Creative workshops – usually around the table in the Front Room, with its lovely view of Abbey Square, and plenty of refreshments - have enabled us to be absorbed in the very human activity of making: we've made mosaics, paper-craft cards, Advent wreaths, poems, music – and marmalade. This table has also seen our drop-in coffee mornings and afternoon tea; we love the idea of being able to sit round a table together.

If we want to be as accessible as possible and make retreat widely available, it's important that we offer 'retreat' in the evenings as well as the daytime. There have been one-off Reflective Evenings – on the desert experience, and on Wisdom – and three short series of Reflective Conversations – on Pilgrimage, on Glimpsing God, and on Spirituality Alone and Together. The chance to explore deep spiritual themes gently in conversation and in the comfort of our rooms has been warmly appreciated by those who have often come along after a day at work. Reflecting alongside others is quite different, we find, from reflecting on our own, or trying to.

St Irenaeus, back in the second century AD, said that the glory of God is the human being fully alive. Looking over a year's programme, it doesn't seem too bold to say that RHC offers ways for people to be alive. We're excited about the ways we'll be able to add to this in 2019 (see later in this newsletter). As well as the programme, making all of this happen relies on the enthusiastic contributions of many people – retreat-giving, volunteering, co-ordinating, doing the admin. Life here at RHC is about the people who come along, and who then return to their diverse places. It's about engaging with our spirituality, about ways to be soulful, by ourselves and with others. In other words, it's what RHC is set up for: retreat in the city, to find, experience, explore and connect.

## Thank you...

... to everyone who has helped us this last year, front of house and behind the scenes: those who came along; those who led retreat days and workshops, and those who supported these events as volunteers; those who typed and those who tidied; those who wrote poems, those who crafted and those who baked; those who put the kettle on and those who washed up; those who planned and those who prepared; those who fundraised and those who spread the word. One of the joys of the Co-ordinator's role is being aware of the many contributions of many people – and some who are true stalwarts. THANK YOU for your part in making RHC.

## Two Gifts



At the end of 2018 RHC received two wonderful gifts which add significantly to what's on offer here. We have a splendid new library of spirituality books, donated by Rev Andrew Parkinson who has fond memories of the old retreat house. He offered us the pick of his collection and as a result there are now four bookcases in the Front Room, already being well-browsed and used. We are working out how we can make this a lending library: it is certainly a unique offering in Chester. In addition, the Back Room now holds a beautiful cross-stitched Retreat House blessing, a prayer for us all, which was commissioned by us and given anonymously 46,592 stitches later!

## What's coming up?

In addition to continuing along the lines of our current programme, we've been busy developing new ways to offer retreat in the city in 2019. Coming up will be...

**Reflective Chester:** a year-long project inspiring and inviting reflection on our life in our city

**a Lent Retreat:** with daily material for your own use and weekly gatherings for conversation

**Book Club:** starting after Easter

**Christian Meditation:** starting later in the year

**one-to-one short retreats in daily life:** meet with a retreat guide each day across a few days or each week across a few weeks, for conversation and accompaniment as you take time for your own retreat in the midst of your everyday living. We expect the first of these to run in May (9th – 12th): please contact us for more information if you may be interested and to help us gauge numbers.

**group retreats:** the chance to use our space for your own small group retreat or reflective time, led by you or us (up to 10 people)

**room booking** for retreat-related work or small group reflective activity

See our website, or get in touch, for more.

## Spring 2019: dates for the diary

Please see our website for full details. We are hoping to add Eventbrite online booking soon, but until then, please book by email or telephone, with payment to follow. Thank you.

Friday 1st February	A Short Retreat 10.30am—2.30pm
Tuesday 5th February	Coffee Morning drop in 10am—12, and the Back Room open
Monday 11th February	Cathedral Contemplative Prayer 7.30—8.30pm (no need to book; please check website for future months)
Wednesday 13th February	Peace Day 10 / 10.30am—3.15pm
Monday 4th March	A Short Retreat 10.30am—2.30pm
Friday 8th March	Reflective Chester: Retreat for Students
Tuesdays (5, 12, 19, 26 March; 2, 9 April)	Lent Retreat: Conversation Mornings 10.30am—12
Thursdays (7, 14, 21, 28 March; 4, 11 April)	Lent Retreat: Conversation Evenings 7.15—8.45pm
Wednesday 13th March	Peace Day 10 / 10.30am—3.15pm
Thursday 14th March	Reflective Chester Word Workshop tbc
Wednesday 20th March	Craft Workshop Card Stitching for Spring 10am—12.30
Saturday 16th March	Soulful Saturday How on earth do I pray? A day on ways 10.30am—4pm in 9 Abbey Square
Wednesday 27th March	Reflective Chester: Taster Retreat
Saturday 13th April	Soulful Saturday: Christian Meditation <i>with David McKenna</i> 10.30am—3pm in 9 Abbey Square
Tuesday 16th April	Peace Day 10 / 10.30am—3.15pm
Friday 26th April	A Short Retreat 10.30am—2.30pm

## Not Just Chester

We're always impressed when people travel miles to come to our events—though we believe that what's on offer here is worth travelling for! An independent, non-denominational, grassroots Retreat House in the middle of a city is rare thing, and we have attracted national attention from the start, when the story of our beginning featured in the 2016 Retreats Handbook of the Retreat Association. In 2018, there was a feature article on us in Quiet Spaces (September—December) published by the Bible Reading Fellowship, and we're told we're about to appear in an article in the Church Times on urban retreat. So—if we are right on your doorstep— why not give us a try?

## Retreat Housekeeping

### 15 Appeal



Named after the original fifteen Founding Benefactors of the old Retreat House in 1925, The 15 Appeal was established as our start-up appeal, with an aim of enabling Retreat House Chester to offer retreat in the city in a contemporary way. As a result the charity is now established on firm ground. We are able to offer space in Abbey Square, although as announced in March the cathedral's plans for its properties has changed in the last year and the old retreat house in numbers 10 and 11 is no longer available to us. Nonetheless, the aim of establishing Retreat House Chester and 'retreat in the city' from grassroots has been achieved, thanks to the donations and support of hundreds of people. As a result, the time is now right to close The 15 Appeal, as we enter 2019.

As a registered charity, our need for funds remains. Without ongoing donations, fundraising activities and grants, we will not be able to meet our costs, sustain retreat in the city or develop further this innovative way of offering ways to engage with spirituality – to offer ways to 'find, experience, explore and connect'. There is much we can do, but we need your help to do it.

### Giving

We are now able to accept donations straight to our fundraising bank account. If you would like to donate in this way, please use the details below, using your surname and 'donation' as the reference (eg: 'Jones donation')

**HSBC sort code 40-17-14**

**account number 62722100**

**account name Retreat House Chester C.I.O**

Alternatively, it is still possible to send us a cheque payable to 'Retreat House Chester'. A cash donation can be made in person: please do not send cash in the post.

For UK taxpayers, gift aiding your donation means we can claim an extra 25% of its sum direct from HMRC. The Gift Aid form for this can be printed off or downloaded from our website, or you can ask us to send you one.

### Be a Friend!

Aware of many who wish to support us with regular giving and stay in touch, we are excited that at Easter we will be launching our Friends Scheme: more details coming soon.

## Somewhere to Sit: donate a chair for 2019

Now that our Back Room has had its walls, ceiling, floor, window and lighting all refurbished, we need to offer people a comfortable way of sitting down! Currently we have chairs that we inherited when we started renting the space – and not really enough of them; now we would love to offer a range of seating to suit the different needs of our activities and visitors.

The refurb of the rooms was supported by grant funding from the Teresa Briggs Trust and (for the energy efficient lighting) Chester Community Energy. Not only is this of immense financial help, it also reinforces the fact that Retreat House Chester is a community venture – and we are very thankful for both the funds and the support.

Now we are asking those who know us if you might consider giving a new chair to Retreat House Chester for the new year, and help to provide a comfortable welcome to those who come our way. With your help, we will be investing in both upright and easy chairs, some with and some without arms, and we need 16 or so. We intend to use Rosehill as our supplier, a Cheshire-based company with a long-established record of supplying faith organisations nationally and with a firm (but not exclusive) UK manufacturing and supply base.

We are asking for donations for the approximate average cost to us of a chair: £100 for an upright chair and £200 for an easy chair. (These are approximate figures and any small difference will go into or come from our general funds for the furnishing of the room.) Please **print this page and use the form below** if you would like to offer a seat in Retreat House Chester... Thank you.

Your name:

Your address:

Your email and / or telephone number:

I would like to donate a chair to Retreat House Chester. (Please tick the appropriate statement below.)

- ◆ I enclose a cheque for £100 / £200 (please delete as applicable), made payable to 'Retreat House Chester'
- ◆ I have made a direct payment of £100 / £200 (please delete as applicable) to the bank account below, using my surname and 'chair' as the reference (eg 'Smith chair')

HSBC sort code 40-17-14  
account number 62722100  
account name Retreat House Chester C.I.O

Please note that we will need to keep a record of this donation for accounting purposes. If, in addition, you would like us to keep in our records any dedication you would like to make with this donation ('in memory of...' / 'with thanks for...'), please add the information here:

Since these donations are for the purchase of specific items, they cannot be gift-aided.

Very many thanks for your generosity and support.

## Be a Founding Benefactor

The success of Retreat House Chester has been significantly assisted by the generous donations of our Founding Benefactors, who are able to give £5000: The Society of Retreat Conductors; two faith organisations preferring anonymity; local funder The Teresa Briggs Trust; and three private donors. Such a donation goes a very long way in supporting retreat in the city, and we warmly welcome interest from individuals or organisations. If you would like more information on becoming a Founding Benefactor, please see our website or contact us by post or telephone. To protect you and us against fraud, we do not manage these donations by email.

## Be a Trustee

Trustees take on the task of overseeing the work and administration of a charity, with the responsibility of ensuring that the charitable purposes are being met and the requirements of the Charity Commission are followed. It is a voluntary role, for those wishing to support the charity by being part of a team whose combined gifts, knowledge and experience help the charity to thrive. For a small charity like RHC, a good trustee body can make all the difference. And volunteering is known to be good for you!

Currently RHC has four trustees, who meet 4 –6 times a year preferably in the daytime. We are seeking to expand in number, expertise and diversity. This means we would love to hear from you if you are interested in finding out more about joining us as a trustee and can help us in the following ways:

**experience, skills and knowledge:** It would be a great help to us to have someone (or more) on board who has experience of working in the management of an organisation and meeting the requirements of regulation and stakeholders. We need people who can work as part of a team, and who can also bring their own sense of initiative and responsibility. We also imagine that you will already have some familiarity with us through having been to some of our events.

**diversity:** First and foremost, trustees have a deep commitment to the good of the charity and its beneficiaries; for RHC, this means people who feel enthusiastic about retreat in the city, run in a contemporary way and suiting today's needs, and who fully understand and support the character of a non-denominational Christian charity. Currently the four trustees are men, three from the Anglican tradition. We are therefore keen that one or more women from other Christian traditions join us.

If this speaks to you, please get in touch!



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## Please help us spread the word

THANK YOU for being a reader of this newsletter. Staying in touch is so important to us, and one of the challenges we are always seeking to meet is how to spread the word further, so that more and more people know about retreat in the city. For a small organisation, it's a large task – and we need your help. Please share RHC with others: tell your friends, your colleagues, your communities. We know that people come along because a friend or family member has suggested they come together, or because they saw a poster or flyer, or because they saw a link to our website or Facebook page, or because there was a notice in their church newsletter. If you can invite a friend, or share our publicity, or ask that our events be included in your church news, PLEASE DO! We can't do it without you, and we'd be very glad.

(And if you are familiar with marketing and publicity and would be willing to undertake some of this for RHC, then we'd be delighted to hear from you...!)

Peace.

## THANK YOU - and looking forward to seeing you

### retreat in the city

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