**Time for Reflection:**

**Working with different faiths**

**Part of Quaker life is to work gladly with other religious groups in the pursuit of common goals.** As a young Catholic girl in Northern Ireland I didn’t know any children of a different faith to mine. When I moved to England I met children of different faiths and backgrounds. A friend invited me to her church Harvest Festival. I had never heard of this festival: I accepted but was nervous - What would my mother say? So I didn’t tell her.

The Harvest Festival was a lovely experience. I made new friends and was given a box of fruit and vegetables by the minister to take home for my mother. How to explain this box of delights? She was actually pleased, she didn’t mind where it came from!

Later, in the 1970s and 80s, I worked as a Rehabilitation Officer in a large psychiatric hospital. One of my remits was to liaise with the various ministers of religion. One was a Rabbi: I came to know him quite well; the hospital was near a large Jewish community.

The Rabbi was planning for Passover; I had to find a room in the hospital for the service and list Jewish patients for the Rabbi. On the day, far more patients turned up than were on the list! Oops! What to say to the Rabbi? But he laughed. He said, “Do you think it could be something to do with the Jewish Women Volunteers, who bring those delicious little cakes and biscuits and the sweet raisin wine? Non-alcoholic of course! Word must have gone around about the cakes. It doesn’t matter if they are not Jewish, they are still welcome, after all, you’re not Jewish and I’ve been working with you for the past three years.”

The Rabbi even invited me to the synagogue and to his son’s bar mitzvah. I learned much in my role working with him and various ministers.

Later I became a Quaker and joined an interfaith group, meeting people from different faiths. We organize events such as shared meals, outings and forest walks. I reflect on this journey - from being a young girl with limited knowledge and understanding of those with different beliefs to mine, to now. I have forged many friendships, bonds and mutual understanding through working alongside those of other faiths. And it is a joy to have a grandson who is Muslim.

**The key is sharing hopes and working together.**

**(407 words)**

**Sila Collins-Walden**

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