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2013

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Scottish Friend


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Please send material for next *Scottish Friend* by 17 October to Margaret Peacock, 16 Drumlin Drive, Milngavie, G62 6LN, or nmjpeacock@yahoo.co.uk.

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Scottish Churches House, reincarnated

Margaret Peacock

The house is now leased to the Fusion Group, under the direction of Alex McKie. It has re-opened under the name of "Old Churches House", with some changes in facilities, designed to appeal to Fusion's normal commercial clients.

The dining room is now a licensed restaurant, still presided over by the "snowdrop" clock, which was made and presented by the inmates of Aberdeen Prison to the community of bereaved families of Dunblane after the shooting in 1996.

There are now extra tables just outside at the back - highly necessary in weather as hot as it was at the opening! The Ian and Margaret Fraser room can also be used as a restaurant, but can be hired as a fully equipped reception or conference room. (Wi-Fi is available throughout the house.)

A place of high honour there is occupied by the spinning wheel gifted to the Scottish churches by Pope John Paul II on the occasion of his visit in 1982. The bedrooms are now a bit more luxurious, with double beds. The chapel will remain consecrated and after refurbishment it will be used for suitable events - mostly weddings, of course. Alex also intends it to be available to anybody connected with the house for private prayer and contemplation.

Ian Fraser, the first warden of SCH, is so impressed by the sensitive way the alterations have been done that he consented to be the speaker at the opening, offering the guests a potted history full of anecdotes - some of them hilarious.

Leighton House is not included, and has been sold to an individual.

Meeting for Sufferings held at Friends House 6th July 2013

Jane Pearn

Our meeting included a reflection on the experience of Yearly Meeting, and some ministry has stayed with me: 'If we come away heartened and supported and strengthened for our individual witness in the world, that may be a function of Britain Yearly Meeting just as much as a corporate decision'.

Our Arrangements group has been looking at our ways of working: what would support us in our role of visioning? In-depth reports from central/standing committees and staff would provide helpful context. We were assured that this would not entail much extra work for staff. Acknowledging that there may not always be a distinct dividing line between Trustees' and Sufferings' responsibilities, we asked for Trustees to make clear whether they are informing, asking for advice, or consulting. Another suggestion to help strengthen the links between Sufferings and Area Meetings was for regional gatherings. These would be for AM Clerks, Sufferings representatives and alternates, Arrangements group members and staff to meet together to talk about ways of working and share good practice. It was agreed that 'regional' in this context meant 'national' for Friends in Wales and Scotland.

On to the main matters before us. We heard from QCCIR about a document produced by the World Council of Churches 'Economy of Life: Justice and Peace for All'. This is a clearly expressed and powerful document. Although many of us had difficulty with some of the language and theology, we were able to hear what lay behind the words, and to unite with its intention. I was struck by a passage from Section 22.

'Transformation must embrace those who suffer the most from systematic marginalization, such as people in poverty, women, Indigenous Peoples and persons living with disabilities. Nothing planned without them is for them.'

The paper ends with a paragraph including these words:

'The process is envisioned as a flourishing space where churches can learn from each other and from other faith traditions and social movements about how a transformative spirituality can counter and resist life-destroying values and overcome complicity in the economy of greed.'

We were asked by several Area Meetings to consider making a public statement about the current welfare reforms and their impact. Doubts were expressed about the usefulness of a statement – our lives may speak more powerfully than any form of words, and we were encouraged to tell Friends House what we, as individuals and as Meetings, are doing. A survey form has been provided for this, which is open until August 31st. <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/qwelfare>. A paper version is also available from Friends House.

There was a rich variety of ministry, expressing anger and guilt, as well as the need to trust in each other, to work with others towards a healthier society, and to do what we can to relieve immediate hardship. We wished for a focus on positive alternatives, and to be able to articulate clearly what a more just economic system might look like. We agreed not to make a statement at this time, but to ask QPSW to examine some of the radical alternatives being suggested and to come back to us in October with their thoughts about the possibilities for a long-term, focussed commitment by Friends in Britain.

Jane Pearn

A Caravan Holiday in Tiree.

An attender from Edinburgh.

My two sons have listened to Mister Stourworm and the Kelpies's Gift (Savourna Stevenson's musical adventure) many times in which there is a story about the formation of Coll, Tiree and several other islands. We had wanted to go to Tiree for more than two years before going. As we don't have a car and the boys are not yet able to carry enough camping equipment, I decided that we needed to stay in a caravan. Since it is fair way to travel from Edinburgh, involving an overnight stay in Oban it seemed sensible to go for at least two weeks.

I work part-time as a single mum, which allows me to be there for my children as much as I can. My job involved a career change and a great deal of qualification-gaining including a post graduate degree which I am self-funding so I don't have much money, so receiving this grant from the John Wigham (Enjoyment) Trust allowed us to realize our dream to go to Tiree, and we were able to say to friends that we were in Tiree and they were welcome to visit us, so sharing our island experience.

Tiree is an amazing island of coasts, with clarity of water and deserted beaches, the water being used by kite surfers doing amazing stunts - twirling meters in the air to disappear under water then re-surface to carry on surfing! We visited an old fort-Broch - and watched a shark patrol the coast from our vantage point.

We walked, and hired bikes to get around, enjoyed solitude and company. The sun shone for us and there was a play on at the Community Centre: Angus Weaver of Grass that was incredibly well done, in Gaelic with masks and puppets. There were many people at the show; it is a lively island whose population has many farmers. It is mostly meat farming which I found a little sad as a vegetarian. But the boys enjoyed seeing the sheep-shearing and we witnessed the first two weeks of a new-born cow's life.

“Island Spirituality, spiritual values of Lewis and Harris”
by Alastair McIntosh, The Islands Book Trust, 2013, ISBN
978-1-907443-45-9, £10.00.

Sheila Peacock

This book is from a lecture given by Alastair McIntosh in October 2012 to the Islands Book Trust. Alastair, now a Quaker, was brought up in the Lewis Presbyterian tradition. Now he works in ecological theology and holds honorary fellowships at both Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities. The book is consequently a scholarly work: the first 88 pages are the talk, then there are 60 pages of notes, 16 of bibliography and six of index.

I took on reading it as a chore, sure I was going to be wearied with mooning over God in nature and standing stones, or, worse, God in modern science (one of my bugbears). Instead I was delighted to read a history, albeit a coloured one, of the Presbyterianism of the Long Island (Harris and Lewis), which has dented my liberal Quaker prejudice against the “Free Kirk” and its religious oppression. The Calvinist doctrine of predestination, that only the “elect”, not the “damned”, will achieve salvation whatever the behaviour of either, was strongly repudiated in 1676 by founding Quaker Robert Barclay (whom Alastair quotes). The islands were converted to this unremitting form of Protestantism at the instigation of the government of George I, as part of the cultural suppression after the 1745 Jacobite rising. Alastair describes the life of Lady Mary Stewart Mackenzie, patron of zealously evangelical preachers, such as Alexander McLeod who in 1824 put “a sense of fear, amounting to well-nigh terror” at the wrath of God into his congregation.

The text is, I imagine, Alastair McIntosh’s attempt to come to terms with this awful spiritual past and his discomfort at the relief of

shaking free of it. He seems to be trying to prove that Free Church Calvinism “wasn’t that bad” or was “understandable in the circumstances”. He recounts going to Donald McLeod, retired Principal of the Free Church College in Edinburgh, with the question “Do you believe in the doctrine of limited atonement that follows from predestination?” He gets the straight answer “yes”, but chooses to interpret it ambiguously by quoting two other sages in the paragraphs between the question and answer, both of whom say that the question should not be put, because it is beyond the remit and competence of humans.

A little of the history: Calvinism is the backbone of both the Church of Scotland and the Free Church, both using the “Westminster Confession” drawn up during Cromwell’s republic. That was influenced by the Dutch version that also led to the Dutch Reformed Church that supported apartheid in South Africa. The Church of Scotland failed John Knox’s original ideal of a church owned and governed by the people, because the nobles acquired the former Catholic church lands and the power to appoint ministers. As ministers let landowners carry out the Clearances, the people formed the Free Church in 1843 (unfortunately the painting of this momentous assembly is so poorly reproduced in the book that we cannot appreciate the points Alastair draws from it). England threw out the Westminster Confession in favour of episcopalianism (the current Church of England) at the Restoration in 1690 but Scotland kept it and had bloody conflict between the episcopalians and covenanters. Alastair points out that the seeds of British and Dutch colonialism around the world were sown in these centuries: “the oppressed, by now duly insensitised, could join the oppression of faraway lands”. It’s a relief to read that in 1986 the Church of Scotland, recognising, I suppose, that such a doctrine is incompatible with a role as a national church in a modern diverse nation, asserted the subordination of the Westminster Confession to Holy Scripture and dissociated itself from the nastiest anti-

Catholic clauses.

Calvinist doctrine has in modern times been summed up (and oversimplified) as "TULIP". No, not the elegant flower: "T"otal depravity of all people; "U"nconditional election of "the elect" regardless of their actions; "L"imited atonement - Christ's sacrifice saves only the elect; "I"rresistible grace - the elect cannot resist being turned towards Christ (hence no non-Christian can possibly be among the elect); "P"erseverance of the elect (saints) - they can never fall away from grace. This summary is popular in U.S. Calvinist churches. The "appeal" of such a doctrine to the islanders is couched by Alastair in psychology as "Stockholm syndrome" following their self-worth being cut down by oppression after the Jacobite risings and their betrayal by their clan chiefs who instigated the Clearances to farm sheep profitably. The God of predestination also mirrors the role of the sea in island life, as a source of bounty but also an indiscriminate taker of life.

Alastair is at pains to point out the chinks of light in the most rigidly Calvinist church. As a "reformed church" it is capable of further reformation (succinctly in Latin, "Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda"). Most obvious of these is the 1990 Rustenburg declaration in which the South African Dutch Reformed Church repudiated apartheid. He quotes a prominent Free Churchman's "Stornoway Gazette" column challenging readers to consider whether a much prayed-for Christian revival might lead to other churches than theirs filling with new members. He also describes the church's silent accommodation of the "second sight" possessed by numerous inhabitants of the Western Isles (some known to him), notwithstanding the same church's legacy of witch-burning.

The sixty pages of "end notes" are dense in both history and illumination - so much so that the 124 notes could be read one-by-one as daily spiritual inspiration. It is here that you find

quotes like "What is said to be believed at a head level, and is often an obstacle for liberals, is less important than what is manifested at the level of the heart." Alastair also draws in the modern Greek Orthodox theologian Paul Evdokimov's view of Hell, as contrast to the Calvinistic one, as self-made or, quoting Dostoyevsky, "the suffering caused by not being able to love any more... the flames of thirst for spiritual love." He also quotes an Indonesian view (he wrote the book while working in Indonesian Papua on local spirituality) that, in both Christianity and Islam, "when the emphasis shifted from oral traditions to the written word, a hardness set in, the head came to dominate over the heart, and the indigenous sense of the spiritual feminine and the animation of nature was suppressed", to which he responded by citing St. Paul, "the word killeth but the letter giveth life" (sic - he meant "the letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life", 2 Cor 3:6, quoted by the Elders of Balby in the preface to *Advices and Queries*) (this, other errata, notes and reflections are at <http://www.alastairmcintosh.com/islandspirituality.htm>).

Recommended - wish I'd been at the live lecture. Sheila Peacock, July 2013.



Dunblane Cathedral

MP

General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, May 2013
David James

There was a sense of inevitability, of impending catastrophe, like watching a slow motion film of a car crash.

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, meeting in session in May 2013, spoke of many things; the inspirational work of its World Mission Council and its partner churches in war torn parts of the world and the quality social services provided throughout Scotland by its Social Care Council and its partner organization, Crossreach. But hanging over the Assembly, like a big black pall, was the weighty issue of the ministry within the Church of Scotland of openly gay ministers in civil partnership.

Since 2009, when the appointment of the openly gay minister, Scott Rennie, to Queen's Cross Church, Aberdeen was legally challenged, the Church of Scotland has been weighed down by pressure from those on both sides of the argument, to come down off the fence and give a definitive ruling one way or the other. That moment had finally arrived. The Special Commission appointed in 2009 and subsequently a Theological Commission appointed by the Assembly in 2011 had completed their work. The Theological Commission presented the Assembly with two diametrically opposed proposals.

The first option, labeled the 'revisionist option' allowed the training and appointment of ministers in a civil partnership, with a 'conscience clause' allowing Kirk sessions to require that a ministerial candidates should not be in a civil partnership.

The second option, the 'traditionalist option' re-stated the Churches existing policy, that those in civil partnerships are not eligible for training or appointment as a minister.

Which way would be Assembly vote? The 'clever money' favoured the adoption of the 'revisionist option' but there was considerable doubt as to whether this measure would subsequently gain the necessary support of the presbyteries. Despite this, the revisionists were determined to press on so that the matter might be finally resolved and, as they see it, the injustice of discrimination ended. But spectre of the disruptions of 1843

and 1897 stalked the black and white corridor (the main corridor leading to the Assembly Hall). Some flourishing 'traditionalist' churches and their ministers have already left the Church of Scotland, others are considering doing so. The mood was subdued; one commissioner confided that no other elder from his church was willing to attend the Assembly as they did not wish to witness their church coming to grief.

So on Monday 20th May the debate began, presided over by the indomitable Lorna Hood, the newly appointed Moderator. Warm, charismatic, with a natural manner and engaging humour, she brooked no time wasting. No stranger to dispute, she has been a parish minister for 33 years and is the third woman Moderator of the Church of Scotland

The debate starting with a seemingly endless nit picking, the Assembly appeared to have little appetite to discuss the substantive issues. The Glasgow Herald made the observation that the subdued mood was an indication of a fear of disruption. That was the mood when the Commissioners adjourned for lunch that day. But on their return, the Herald acclaimed a miracle! Commissioners were handed a brief and hastily written counter motion tabled by the retiring Moderator. Albert Bogle, a 'traditionalist', gave a heartfelt and humble plea that the majority, the revisionists, look with compassion on those who felt that, for conscience sake, they could no longer be part of the Church of Scotland if the 'revisionist measure went through. He presented a compromise affirming the Church's traditional position but allowing Kirk Sessions the freedom to call a minister in a civil partnership if they so choose. The discussion gained pace, the mood lifted, the way was now open for the silent majority to express its view that, if no agreement on this subject could be found, then their main priority was unity. Arthur Bogle's compromise motion was carried by a comfortable majority. It will now be considered by Legal and Theological panels and a new act brought back to the next Assembly

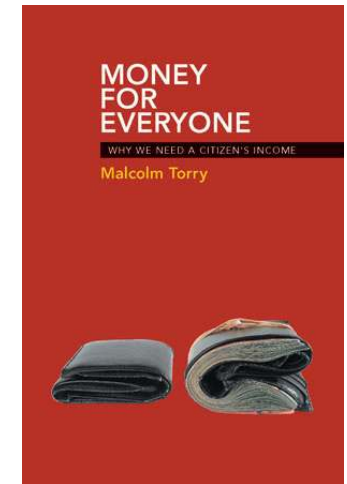
Many readers might well be dismayed at this outcome and further delay in affirming the Church's full acceptance of ministers in civil partnership. However, the outcome reflected the commendable feeling of the

Assembly that every attempt should be made to maintain unity. The parliamentary style of debate and majority voting of the Assembly tends to polarize views and encourage schism, but this is a church that can ill afford a suicidal split. Its communicant membership is in inexorable decline. In the last 10 years membership has dropped 30% from 590,000 to 413,000. More significantly, admission of new communicant members has fallen 50% from 11,200 to 5,700. In the next 10 years, at least 350 of the current 850 ministers will have retired but as there are only a handful of new ministers in training, the present shortage of ministers will grow. Money is desperately short. The black hole that is the church's pension fund is many millions of pounds in the red. Inevitably a future Church of Scotland will become a very different animal.

The retiring Moderator Albert Bogle did something which I thought prophetic at the start of the Assembly. He had travelled extensively during his term of office. On one trip, he had in his luggage the ancient cross and ring, traditionally worn by the Moderator in office. His luggage was lost and with it, the cross and ring. It is customary for the retiring Moderator to hand the gold ring and cross to the incoming Moderator at their installation. When the time came, movingly Albert took out a simple wooden cross made by one of his parishioners and gave it to the new Moderator, with the words of Peter spoken to the beggar at the Gate called Beautiful, 'gold and silver have I none but what I have, I give to you'. Perhaps a future Church of Scotland stripped of worldly glory and past wealth will simply give in love to those of need.

May the words of a statement to the World Council of Churches, quoted in the Ecumenical Relations report, guide the Church; 'To be a credible sign, our life together must reflect the qualities of patience, generosity and attentive listening to one another, a willingness to stay together, not saying "I have no need for you"'.
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Money for Everyone:
Why we need a citizen's income
by Malcolm Torry Policy Press 2013,
ISBN 978-1-44731-125-6 £25
Review by Chris Stapenhurst



A citizen's income (CI) is an unconditional, non-withdrawable income paid by the state to every individual as a right of citizenship in addition to other forms of income. This book demonstrates how such a policy can solve many of the problems with our present benefits system and answers key objections (for instance you're probably wondering how our government could afford this, or why we'd want to give money to idle people and rich people). The title isn't as compromising as my quakerliness would like, but the author writes to bring this debate from academia to the public, and makes a strong case in favour so as to provoke more discussion. As it is I find it hard to object: a CI would make means tested benefits redundant, while being much simpler to administer and removing the stupidly high marginal deduction rates (limited to 76% by universal credit) faced by means tested benefit claimants. Torry examines the consequences for economic efficiency, the labour market, enterprise, informal economic activity (e.g. caring, volunteering), household composition, personal relationships, injustice and inequality. He also devotes chapters to:- the history of the benefits system; other CIs around the world; affordability; political feasibility and - admirably - the problems a citizen's income
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cannot be expected to solve. CI is inhibited because political advisers in HMRC and DWP stand to lose from administrative simplification.

Friends should be particularly interested in a CI since we recognise that 'we do not own the world' and that the circumstances into which we are born; our natural talents; our capacity and motivation to work; and our collective wealth inherited from previous generation; are all gifts of God's Grace. Therefore we have no particular *right* to these goods; a CI effectively allows everyone to enjoy a part of this wealth unconditionally.

I found the continual heroism of the CI a bit repetitive, but this seems to be deserved and is certainly not rhetoric frivolity. Money for Everyone forms the prescriptive wing of the debate popularised by Wilkinson & Picket's *Spirit Level* and Dorling's *Injustice*; Friends who enjoyed those books, and certainly anyone with the remotest interest in social/economic policy should be excited by this offering, especially those of us needing a reason to be optimistic. Despite my initial hesitancy, I have become thoroughly persuaded that this is the single most effective policy proposal to improve our society and I look forward to the response.

Experiment with Light at Swarthmoor Hall 4-7th July

There we were at the place where it all started, reaching for the vision and practice of the old Friends. Sitting in the Great Hall where they met, their spirit was alive in us. What could beat sitting in the very chair that Margaret Fell sat in but to sit in that where George Fox himself sat, to place your feet on the flagstones where the oldest generation of Quakers placed theirs to wait on the Lord in silence. Outside, in a garden full of flowers and bees, you could almost see George Fox standing on the balcony to admonish us to "stand in the light".

We were eleven, here to deepen our practice of experiment with light so we concentrated on four aspects: mind the light, open your heart to the truth, wait in the light, and submit to the light.

Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts.

What light doth make manifest and discover: temptations, confusions, distractions,

do not look at temptations, confusions, corruptions

but at the light that discovers them, that makes them manifest.

For looking down at distraction, you are swallowed up in it but looking at the light that discovers them, you will see over them and you will find grace and strength and there is the first step to peace.

After a brief introduction and the prompts each individual held the silence then went off to 'print' their experience with paints using templates they had created. A worshipful sharing in small groups followed. I was very conscious of the role of group in upholding each individual's process creating the trust and stability to allow each to encounter the light as it moved within. For me this was showing the darkness that shadows but can't obscure that 'ocean of light'.

As always where Friends meet there was that deep sharing of our experience in our individual meetings and journeys. On this

occasion I felt privileged to meet Helen Gould and to be introduced to her book, *The Quaking Meeting* which was the James Backhouse Lecture, the Australian equivalent of the Swarthmore Lecture. I must recommend this lecture to all meetings seeking a deeper spirituality. For once here is the process explained clearly. I was strengthened in particular to read her descriptions of a 'gathered' meeting and the role of weighty Friends in enabling this. And we were all amused at her 11-step chart on discernment – step X, not truly led by spirit, then back to step 1, step Y . . . back to step 1.

It was a loving and deeply refreshing four days. One shadow was the future of Swarthmoor Hall which is a great financial burden. One hopes the issue will be resolved and the Centre once again be a place that sends out the spirit of Quakerism teaching us to reach the light and to uphold each other to 'stand in the light'.

Via Stephen Smyth, General Secretary of ACTS, we have this website for survivors of child abuse:
<http://survivorscotland.org.uk>



Dementia in My Meeting

Constance M Tonge

The first thing to get your head around is that there is absolutely no point in expecting the person with significant¹ dementia to change his ways. Although the thing many workers learned when they trained in the past - that people with dementia are un-learning and they can't learn anything new - is wrong; they learn whether they are safe, they learn who is on their side and who cares and who doesn't. Trying to train them by saying and doing "she'll have to learn" actions is not going to work.

Sorry.

There are probably two keys to this. First is to know the person with dementia (that means you have a chance at knowing the baseline - what is "normal" for this person; it's different for everyone). Second, meet the person with dementia where he is - not where he was or will be. For the person with dementia there is only the present and memories (some of them constructed by the person from whole cloth) from the past. There is little concept of the future in his mind - so don't expect planning.

Most people, including most professionals, think that memory is the first, and worst, thing to go; that "people are their memories." This is way too simple. Some of us think that judgement starts to disappear much earlier - hence the numbers of people, later diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease or another kind of dementia, who get into otherwise inexplicable road accidents involving them driving around a roundabout in the wrong direction, misinterpreting a red light as meaning "go" or entering or exiting a motorway on the wrong ramp in the wrong direction. Most people are reluctant to give up driving, a

¹ I use the word because I have never found the oft-quoted stages i.e. mild, moderate and severe, helpful. Different authorities mean different things by them - and some effects "jump" out of the relevant(!) stage anyway...

huge surrender of independence, when they are fairly sure there is nothing wrong with them.

When you notice a person with dementia not relating something you know to have happened, as you know it happened, don't assume (s)he is lying. The likely answer is that she is "confabulating", that is, fitting a believable (to her) story around the facts as she feels she knows them. (S)he rarely finds the result to be peculiar - it's generally a case of best fit.

It's just that it has a tenuous connection with reality.

All that's needed (all?) is to move the goalposts. What makes sense to you isn't necessarily what makes sense to the person with dementia. In fact, one description of dementia is that the person sees a world which tends to make less and less sense every day. (S)he will frequently be unable to see your reality.

It isn't easy to deal with this - especially when you have known the person with dementia for many years and have a tendency to mourn them as lost to you. This last is almost certainly a mistake. Just as a person is not his memories; a person is not her disease. She is still Mavis, underneath all this; he is still Tom - at some fundamental level. Everything changes except this.

What can you do to manage better? When Oliver Sacks² wrote to A R Luria (known as the "father of modern neurology") about a patient with whom he did not know what to do, Luria said, "Do what your heart and your ingenuity tell you!". This is still good advice because you need both your compassion and your intellect to do the best possible job.

Sympathy doesn't really help; empathy (the ability of being able to put yourself imaginatively in someone else's shoes) does. The chances are that

² in "The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat" Picador
1985

the person with dementia is worried or even frightened, to a more or less extent. This can manifest itself in shouting, moaning, crying, swearing, being belligerent and bullying, paranoia, aggression, compulsive and/or dangerous behaviours. Minimising some of these does not mean outlawing any risk at all - life is about risk; anything else is just existence.

What do people with dementia need? There are a lot of answers to this, including what we all need - a bit of loving - but we like the one developed by psychologists Cheston and Bender: they need all the things everyone else needs except that they need to maintain their identity more than other people and that they need a sense of security more than the rest of us. Everything else comes from there.

For security, we often have to reassure by explaining where the person is if (s)he doesn't know, reducing malignant social psychology and positioning (where the person is ignored or neglected because (s)he is old or black or has dementia, or any other perceived "difference"; where her personhood is forgotten in favour of classifying her as a "client", "patient"; or, otherwise, a person with dementia rather than a wife, mother, daughter, Quaker, gardener, needlewoman, activist etc., who happens to have dementia). As the dementia gets worse, you may need to introduce yourself every time you see him - will it kill you?

When we are children, our parents help form our identities and keep us in them until we are able to decide for ourselves whether the "self" our parents gave us is still true for us. As we grow and mature, given a healthy process, we can change our version of self to a more truthful one of ourselves in the present.

For many aspects of our identity, though, we rely on the communities to which we belong. These include our meeting (or should do!). If these communities continue to function as supports and don't ignore us because they don't know what to do, we can function in a fuller and better way. The community can "hold" the identity of the person with dementia by continuing to tell the true story of the person.

Meetings need to take these things very seriously indeed, because many of the other communities to which we belong, the Embroiderers' Group, the Chess Club, the Allotments Association, are much less likely to understand - much more likely to refuse to accommodate the person's changed circumstances. Meetings should be better than this; need to be better than this. If you don't know enough, please find out. It really is your responsibility!

There is still that of God in every one. If we don't believe that, we should pack up and go home.

One thing which meetings (particularly those which are small with very grey members ageing fast) sometimes do, is to telephone the member's or attender's relatives, in the expectation that they will "do something". In our experience, this is very rarely the case (and sometimes leads to the relatives ceasing to co-operate with the meeting!). Because there is that of God in relatives too, we shall assume that they would if they could. But, mostly, they can't think of anything either - and it's important to keep them on side.

What can the meeting do?

If the person with dementia still wants to come to meeting, try to enable this. Don't expect a high level of organisation (don't expect him to know how he's going to get home) and facilitate transport. If you can't get a lift within the meeting (and it's sometimes impossible, we know), try an ecumenical effort with another church, ask local services like Crossroads, Alzheimer's Scotland or Hospital Transport Volunteers. Ask the person's other friends if they could join Friends on a rota - even ask a Friend from another meeting!

Do not worry too much if the person with dementia looks like giving verbal ministry! Most will do what they have always done - some Friends speak regularly and some don't. This rarely changes when they get dementia. If (s)he does speak, don't automatically assume it's going to be a problem. Look for the truth within what is said for you; if you can't find any, maybe the message was for someone else. Maybe the meaning will emerge later, when you are mowing the lawn. Remember too, "in all things charity". If you have

a strong meeting, a bewildered contribution will not disturb it. Should there be a definite need to have it stop, it is the elders' responsibility to deal with it sensitively. They are competent to do this. If not, why not?

If the Friend with dementia can't manage to get to meeting, organise a meeting in his home - if he wants one - or in the Care Home where he lives. You probably only need a few Friends to go - and, remember again, ask neighbouring meetings to send someone!

Don't forget that dementing Friends sometimes want to maintain their interests and work as activists. These are both likely to reduce as the dementia progresses but it really helps slow the illness down if this can be done. Obviously, it isn't necessarily a good idea to take a very elderly Friend with advanced dementia on a demo in winter - but if she's going to get a taxi and go anyway, think about arranging something (for the same time) nearer home - so you can provide a meaningful distraction whilst still doing good. If she's going to talk to passers-by, have someone partnered with her, not to tell them she's not quite with it, but to plunge in and divert them!

Don't forget about the financial angle. Yes, I know, it's awkward. Some Friends will have enough financial resources to get that taxi, some won't. Don't try to pay if (s)he does, it's humiliating. If this is a Friend in reduced circumstances (don't know? why not?), get the taxi firm to send a bill to the treasurer. Come to that, why not organise that taxi for every Sunday, if there are no other possibilities? Both ways.

Lastly, a note about going to visit people with dementia. I'll come out and say it unequivocally. Please do, even if other people tell you there's no point and (s)he won't recognise you. It's hard to know whether (s)he will recognise you or won't but, just think for a minute, how important is that anyway? The only reason not to go is if you upset our Friend. If you provide a pleasant diversion, this is very welcome - in a life which is often boring. If (s)he doesn't know who you are (and, don't forget, (s)he might), (s)he can still appreciate you *while you are there*; in the present. After all, that's all any of us have.

General Meeting for Scotland

We are seekers but we are also the holders of a precious heritage of discoveries. We, like every generation, must find the Light and Life again for ourselves. Only what we have valued and truly made our own, not by assertion but by lives of faithful commitment, can we hand on to the future. Even then, we must humbly acknowledge that our vision of the truth will, again and again, be amended.

In the Religious Society of Friends we commit ourselves not to words but to a way.

Introduction to Quaker Faith and Practice

General Meeting for Scotland will be held on 7 September at 11am - but come early and meet people.

It will be held in St Matthew's Church, Tay Street, Perth PH1 5TF.

Tay Street runs alongside the Tay. St Matthew's is the church with a spire situated between the two road bridges. It has very few parking spaces. (But it has got peregrines living in the spire)

Please book one of these in advance if needed by contacting Philip and Felicity Bryers (01738 560250). For most people the nearest likely parking is at the South Inch, a 5-10 minute walk, along Tay Street.

If arriving by train, turn right out of the main station entrance, go under the railway bridge and walk down Marshall Place, with the South Inch on your right, to the roundabout at Tay Street. Turn left and continue past the Queens Bridge to the church, a 10-15 minute walk.

General Meeting for Scotland

Dear Friends and Attenders throughout Scotland,

Our meeting in September will be in Perth. See inside for details of venue and travel arrangements. We start at 11 am, with tea and coffee available from 10.30 am. Please bring your own lunch. Refreshments will be provided after the meeting, which is expected to end about 4 pm.

The morning session will include a report on alternative World War 1 commemorations and on a conference on conflicts within faith communities, as well as an update on our parliamentary liaison work.

In the afternoon we will welcome Paul Parker, Recording Clerk for BYM, the most senior staff member in Friends House. His topic will be "The future of Quakers in Britain – why it's exciting to be a Quaker today". This will be an excellent opportunity to meet Paul, to hear his vision for the Society of Friends, and to share our thoughts and ideas on the subject.

Please join us in Perth, meet new Friends, and participate in our deliberations. Do please encourage anyone in your Meeting who might not have been to a General Meeting before.

Robin Waterston, Clerk