



May 2021

# Scottish Friend



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April Snows



Welcome Friends to the May 2021 edition of the Scottish Friend. As lockdown eases we are still communicating by Zoom, but who knows? - we still live in hope of meeting face-to-face soon. Comments and suggestions would be welcomed. When sending in contributions, please note your LM.

In Friendship, Sila

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Scottish Friend is distributed by Sue Proudlove

Please send articles as an **editable attachment** to [silartist100@gmail.com](mailto:silartist100@gmail.com) or typed or hand-written to 27 Creag Dhubh Terrace, Inverness IV3 8QG to arrive five weeks before GM, ie, by **7th August 2021**. If you submit **images**, please ensure that they are about 1Mb in size. Any captions provided with your images should be short!

Scottish Friend will be posted on the GM website and can be emailed to you at the same time as it goes to the printer. If you would like an email copy instead of a paper one, please email [scotfriends@gmail.com](mailto:scotfriends@gmail.com) to let your Administrator, Sue Proudlove, know. You are strongly encouraged to do this in view of escalating postage costs – and you get the photographs in colour as an incentive!

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The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the writers and not necessarily the opinions of the Society of Friends in Scotland, Britain or elsewhere.

**Calling for General Meeting for Scotland  
Saturday, 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2021**

Dear Friends,

Greetings to you all! I hope you are well and enjoying some of our new freedoms!

**Our next General Meeting will be on Saturday, 12<sup>th</sup> June. It will be by Zoom. We will start with worship at 10.15 am, break for lunch from 12.00 noon to 1.00 pm, and our afternoon session will finish by 2.30 pm. I will send out details of how to join nearer the time.**

**This is an opportunity to meet virtually with Friends from across Scotland. We worship together and in a spirit of worship we attend to our church affairs, and matters concerning the spiritual life and witness of Quakers in Scotland. Please do come! All are welcome.**



*Elizabeth*

In June, the business we have to attend to includes the GM Annual Report and Accounts 2020. We will hear from the Parliamentary Engagement Working Group about Quaker advocacy work in Scotland on the climate crisis, economic justice and peacebuilding, including the work done by our Parliamentary Engagement Officer, Andrew Tomlinson. Some of Andrew's recent work has been on how we can engage with MSPs, post election. We will also meet our new Local Development Worker, Zoe Prosser. Both of these posts are made possible by Britain Yearly Meeting. We will hear more about BYM work in Scotland, and how we can support it.

We live out our faith in the world individually and collectively as a church. Sometimes it is appropriate for us to go it alone with our Quaker witness, but where possible we work with others. To extend the social witness we do in our local and area meetings, General Meeting links with: Scottish Faiths Action on Refugees; ACTS Group on Human Trafficking; Interfaith Group on Domestic Abuse; Together Scotland; Faith in Community Action Fund; Scottish Churches Housing Action; Prisoners Week Trust; and Jubilee Scotland. We will hear from our representatives on some of these bodies about their work, and their experience of bringing Quaker values and ways into that work.



*Nicola*

Papers and the draft agenda will be circulated about a week prior to GM. If you do not receive them, please ask Sue Proudlove [scotfriends@gmail.com](mailto:scotfriends@gmail.com) for a copy. If you have any questions, please contact me, your clerk, by email [essallen@msn.com](mailto:essallen@msn.com) or telephone 01620 894834.

Elizabeth Allen



Jacob Family by Oriole Hall

**Report on General Meeting (GM) for Scotland 6 March 2021**  
**Jane Mitchell, Argyll Meeting West Scotland.**

This was a well attended meeting with over 80 Friends on about 75 devices. I'll just mention some of the main items.

There was a report on the Parliamentary Engagement Working Group. This year it is preparing for the COP26 meeting due to be held in Glasgow. It encourages us to view to their page on the Scottish Quaker web site. This holds several submissions that the Group has made to Government. The address is:  
<https://quakerscotland.org/our-work/parliamentary-engagement>

We discussed a letter from the Scottish Quaker Community Justice Network, an open informal network of Friends. We set up a formal group of the GM so that the GM can own and speak for the work done on social justice in Scotland.

Our representative on Meeting for Sufferings raised her concern about the effectiveness of the system of alternates used; the people actually present differ every time. She felt a lack of cohesion. She has found residential meetings, home groups and Zoom break-out rooms useful. She also felt that since the formation of Yearly Meeting Trustees, the responsibilities of Sufferings are not clearly understood. The GM decided to hold a threshing meeting to which current and former Sufferings representatives from the GM and the Scottish Area Meetings will be invited.

At lunch time some Friends indicated how pleased they were to be able to meet by Zoom. But a written report for the meeting from one of the five representatives to interfaith and ecumenical bodies included the statement that its writer was not prepared to be there via Zoom.

## **North Scotland Area Meeting Concern.**

The main business of the day was a matter first raised in North Scotland Area Meeting (NSAM) in 2015.

I think I need to set the scene. The Area covers two cities, one with an old city-centre meeting house, and it stretches right up to Shetland and west to the Western Isles, Skye and Appin on the mainland. In the new tabular statement it has 237 adult members and attenders. The vast majority of these live on the mainland between Aberdeen and the neighbourhood of Inverness. These cities are over 100 miles apart. Elsewhere Friends are very thinly spread, except perhaps in Orkney.

NSAM ran a listening project in 2016. They have found the demands of being a charity a heavy burden, particularly in finding people to fill some essential roles, and reported to GM late in 2017, suggesting a possible single charity for the whole of Scotland. In 2018-19 the GM held a meeting with the (Yearly Meeting) Simpler Meetings Project in Scotland. Since then the GM has established a GM Communications group and arranged support / training for role-holders and worked on templates for matters such as safeguarding and data protection. Last autumn NSAM reported its further discernment to the GM, requesting continuing assistance from the GM and other AMs in Scotland and reiterated its suggestion of reducing the number of distinct charities in Scotland.

The meeting decided to proceed in small steps. It will set up a working group to explore and evaluate options for later consideration. They will note the recent experiences of Wales, London and Yorkshire.

We seemed to have worked hard, but I felt it was a productive meeting. ■

## General Meeting for Scotland

Report of a Special Meeting on 'Blended Meetings' held online on 6 February 2021

Jane Mitchell, Argyll LM. West Scotland.

There were over 90 participating devices, but some of them were shared by two Friends, so a very large attendance. I am aware of the logical difficulty in using a Zoom meeting to decide whether to promote further usage of online meetings in the future; but it would be unusual to get 100 Scottish Friends together in person representing a wide range of interests.

Quaker faith & practice 26.18 was read.

*It is because the learning process is continued throughout life that Friends are seekers as well as finders – not one or the other, but both. One only has to think of the need for a continual search for fresh language, unsoiled by use, to know that we must, if we care about truth, continue to be seekers. We may have a firm hold on old truth ourselves, but unless we are eager to find new ways of expressing it we may be unable to speak the word of life to others just when they most need it.* Ruth Fawell, 1987

A new feature for me was that the meeting had subtitling, which mostly worked very well but with the occasional misreading.

'Blended meetings' are those where there is a group of people in a meeting house or hall, and also other Friends at a distance taking part by video conferencing on a computer, tablet or phone. They are being used for Quaker worship with or without business.

Several Friends spoke enthusiastically about their experiences with blended meetings. People living at a distance or with transport difficulties were able to join when they couldn't before, and think of the fuel being and travelling time saved.

We split into six breakout rooms each with a designated facilitator and reported back. This gave everyone an opportunity to air their views.

**Against:**

Some of us found worship online unsatisfactory, and preferred just worshipping at home at an agreed time.

Technical help may be required.

Inadequate broadband.

How to be available to enquirers.

**Issues:**

What is needed in the central location depends very much on its size and shape. High quality sound and picture are needed for a large space. And thought is needed about where people in the main room sit, so that they can be seen by remote participants.

Clerking/ hosting. In a large meeting assistants are needed. Perhaps they might consult each other via a breakout room or the chat facility. Care is needed to ensure that remote users are noticed equally with those present in person; it may be harder to detect a need for pastoral care.

Sessions must not be too long. More frequent shorter meetings might be appropriate. Those who are online in their everyday work may not wish to do it again at the weekend.

Thought is needed about how to allow people to interact socially before or after a formal meeting.

Divorce from location. This changes how the Quaker community is perceived.

The meeting decided to initiate a consultation with Friends on inclusion / exclusion in face-to-face and online meetings. They suggested that the Area Meetings should survey what facilities for blended meetings are available in their areas.

Finally, I want to say a little about my own limited experience. As a person used to very small meetings for worship and in a widely scattered local meeting, I have been rejuvenated by attending online meetings every Sunday with three neighbouring small meet-

ings. We have some visitors from elsewhere and we have two newcomers who have returned several times. The total number attending has been around 10-15 and I have experienced a much better sense of community, with Friends from five islands and parts of the mainland, than before. But I have no experience of blended meetings yet. ■

**Notes on the Zoom information session regarding Local Development Workers organised through BYM and Woodbrooke, November 26.**

**Andrew Collins. Aberdeen-North.**

**T**his session was convened by Sophie (Friends' House). Speakers were Rachel from BYM, Sandra from Woodbrooke, Wendy the current LDW (Local Development Worker) for NW England, and Jenny and Brian, two Quakers from areas having the benefit of a LDW.

Rachel talked about the historical role of BYM in supporting local meetings, and the realisation that 'one size fits all' doesn't work. The Vibrancy in Meetings project aimed to provide customised support (of various kinds) for meetings, with four pilot schemes. The project was externally evaluated and found to be a success, and as a result, it was planned to roll it out over the country. Scotland, Cumbria, Yorkshire and East Anglia are the next four 'patches', with the aim to have LDWs in post by April 2021. Sandra then spoke about Woodbrooke's role as a partner in the scheme; Woodbrooke is financially independent of BYM, and the constraints imposed by Covid-19 (reduced income and redundancies), and could, for instance, provide information for LDWs and their 'constituents' via webinars.

Wendy, the LDW for the NW of England, described her activities at different levels. For instance, she was able to assist individuals having problems operating Zoom. She had been asked to help meetings with nominations and had explored different ways of finding people to fill roles, e.g. as elders and overseers. There have been coordinated actions involving all four patches. Daily epilogues were a success. In answer to a question, she emphasised that the first step was to go to meet people (Covid-19 permitting); it was pointed out that it would be particularly difficult in large areas such as Yorkshire and, of course, Scotland, to visit all meetings and worshipping groups. As an aside, Rachel said that her hope was that when resources permit, Scotland would have two LDWs.

LDWs cannot be experts on everything, but they can put meetings in touch with those with specialist knowledge (e.g. legal, financial, or to do with property), whether centrally, or in regions, across patches, or through Woodbrooke – a networking and facilitating role.

The last two speakers spoke about their experience of being helped by LDWs. Jenny is from Kendal and Sedbergh; she described how their LDW (Wendy) had given advice on the future of a particular local meeting, and its building. Brian, from Fishguard, remote from the rest of South Wales area meeting, wished to set up a worship group and was helped in this by the LDW; it is now attended typically by up to 10. There was also help with a spiritual review, and linking up with those not on Zoom.

About 50 attended this session (the second of two on this topic). The session began and ended with a few minutes of silence. ■

## **New Initiative for Churches to Unite to Fight Poverty** **Marilyn Higgins , Central Edinburgh- South East**

**I**n January, on behalf of General Meeting for Scotland, I attended an online conference/consultation that Church Action on Poverty is undertaking as part of a research project called Life on the Breadline. The purpose of the project is to look at the impact of austerity and Christian action on poverty so that government policy and faith-based action can be improved. In addition to the conference, case studies, surveys and interviews are being conducted. It was energising to meet people from many different churches who share a commitment to social action and I was reminded what strength there can be from joining with others in our communities to tackle burning issues. It was also inspiring for me to be with so many young people who are working in the field of economic justice.

The discussions started with an analysis of key issues to do with dignity, agency and power, the foundational values for the research. This resonated with me as a Quaker because we have been examining locally and nationally the role of power and privilege, underpinned by our testimony to equality. Poverty is seen as a violation of dignity and recent changes in our society have caused increasing inequality and fear, including amongst ethnic minority communities. We heard many interesting speakers and discussed issues such as the impact of austerity on black churches and the underpinning principles of social movements. The emphasis now is on listening and acting alongside, not doing things ‘for’ or ‘to’ others – solidarity/allyship and not charity, social justice and not social welfare, community empowerment and not service delivery. The Church of Scotland’s Priority Areas Programme was cited as a good example of a national church putting resources into marginalised local communities. For several years, the Church has been channelling resources into areas within the lowest 5% of social and economic indicators across Scotland, sup-

porting 64 congregations with a wide variety of projects to tackle disadvantage and build capacity amongst people locally.

We were invited specifically to think positively about how we might join with others to affirm and empower those who are usually on the margins of the structures associated with power and privilege. We were encouraged to ‘**diversify** the voices, **divest** the power and be **daring** in our agendas’. All of this chimed with a number of Quaker discussions I have been involved in over the last couple of years. The phrase ‘speaking truth to power’ kept cropping up and as we discussed these issues, the phrase ‘that of God in everyone’ kept crossing my mind, a phrase that was much liked in my small discussion group. There was talk of putting theology into action, which sounded somewhat strange to me, coming from a Society where theology is based in human activity. It was a good opportunity to do some outreach work with members of other churches!

The conference was the start of a conversation, supported by a three year Economic and Social Research Council grant, Life on the Breadline. There will be another capstone conference 24/25 June when it is hoped an anti-poverty charter will be agreed for churches to sign up to, an action statement rooted in values challenging the culture of poverty. The emphasis is on thinking big, tackling inequalities systemically: the aspiration is to make sure there is no longer any need for Foodbanks (for example). The big question is: how can faith groups take effective action together to promote economic justice for individuals and communities? Watch this space! ■

**The Better Angels of our Nature and the Last World War. The Inaugural Adam Curle Lecture delivered by Steven Pinker hosted by Division of Peace Studies and International Relations at the University of Bradford.**

**Tim Denvir Dunblane- West**

I attended this lecture (by Zoom) on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2021. It was featured in the 18<sup>th</sup> February issue of *Quake* and was the inaugural Adam Curle Lecture, which is a new annual event. The [Adam Curle](#) Lectures are sponsored by the Quaker Peace Studies Trust and quite a few references were made to Quakers during the course of the lecture.

After 20 minutes of introductions, which included a helpful profile of Adam Curle, the Quaker Peace activist and first professor of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford, the lecture itself lasted 30 minutes and was followed by some hour and a quarter of questions. I had read the two books by Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, and *The Better Angels of our Nature*, which were the bases of this talk, a few years ago. [Steven Pinker](#) is a professor of Psychology at Harvard. I must admit to being a bit of a fan of his: I have read three others of his books, and this was one motive for my logging into the lecture. Steven Pinker's talk concentrated on the thesis that peace has slowly but progressively, with some fits and starts, been improving over the centuries, and that conversely, war and violence have been diminishing. He supported these assertions with many graphs and statistics, presenting them too rapidly to enable the taking of notes of the data. Pinker asked, what *caused* the "long peace"? He cited Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace*, referring to "Kant's triangle", Democracy, Trade, and International Community. He showed graphs and data supporting the claim that all three points of Kant's triangle

have increased in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and that militarised disputes have decreased. There have been changes in international laws about war. War is no longer a legitimate option, although there are “occasional” violations. States are “immortal”: they have not been conquered over the last 75 years; borders are “grandfathered”. I must say that this last claim gives me pause: Russia is doing its best to subjugate Ukraine, and Israel is preventing Palestine from becoming an autonomous state. The [Croatian War](#) of 1991-1995 was a significant European conflict. One could suspect Steven Pinker of adjusting his definitions to suit his thesis. He continued.

Steven Pinker cited John Mueller’s book, *The Stupidity of War*, in which that author shows how war has moved from being seen as heroic and glorious to being seen as stupid and cruel. Is the last World War the *Last* World War, asks Pinker. We cannot know, but it is not insanely romantic to think so: barbaric customs, in general, once abolished, stay abolished. Examples are witch-hunts, religious persecution, duelling, blood sports, slavery. (That last one is contentious, surely: slavery still exists but has been driven underground, one may reasonably contend). He cautioned, however, that contributors to peace can always be threatened.

There followed a question and answer session, chaired by Shirley Congdon, vice-chancellor of Bradford University. Throughout the lecture, one could look at the list of questions raised and also comments in the Chat facility. The questions were of an extremely broad range of competence and relevance. I was amused to see that two of the audience in the Chat column thanked the speaker for his “inciteful” presentation!

Steven Pinker clarified that his statistics included deaths directly due to war, military and civilian, but not the second-order, consequential deaths, such as deaths due to subsequent deprivations following a war. The data is that anxiety and depression rates have been flat (over the last century) but world-wide suicide rates have massively declined.

He doesn't think of his two books as being "optimistic", just reporting on observations. One gets a pessimistic impression from the press: if two countries do not go to war, it's not a headline. There is a natural bias of negativity in journalism. But the rise of authoritarian populism is a worry: Trump, Putin, Erdogan.

In conclusion there followed some reflections from a student. This was, I suppose, by way of a vote of thanks, although it was not precisely presented as such.

She was greatly moved, from hope to positivity. She hopes that violence will diminish. She comes from Nigeria. It is easy to believe only in what you know: Nigeria used to be very peaceful compared to today. Violence has created havoc. Listening to the talk made her realise that things [in general] have been much worse. With the right action, peace can make progress. But complacency is not acceptable.

There was a final formal round of thanks.

The talk prompted me to recall a lecture I went to in 1961/62 by the late [Leopold Kohr](#) entitled *The Breakdown of Nations*, in which he maintained that there is less war and bloodshed amongst small nations than large ones (although one might get more but smaller wars), and that levels of violence are strongly related to population density. That talk was based on a book with

the same title published in 1957 and subsequently reprinted a number of times; a [complete text](#) is available online.

Steven Pinker has a forthcoming book, *Rationality: What it is, Why it seems scarce, Why it matters*, scheduled for 28<sup>th</sup> September 2021. The title of his talk and of his previous book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, has been ringing faint bells in my mind. I eventually traced it to the final sentence, indeed the final phrase, of Abraham Lincoln's [inaugural speech](#):

*In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to "preserve, protect, and defend it."*

*I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.*



**United Reformed Church Synod – held via zoom March 13 2021  
Mary Woodward. Portobello & Musselburgh.**

**L**ast year I got all excited at the prospect of being invited to 2021's URC residential Synod, due to take place at Tulliallan Castle, home of the Scottish police college. Alas, my hopes were dashed by lockdown...

Instead, a seriously truncated Synod was held by zoom – with the opportunity to practise zooming before hand for those URC people who presumably hadn't spent the previous year zooming happily in all directions and for all sorts of occasions. At the training session we were not only shown how to turn our mikes and cameras on and off, but also how to raise our hands electronically if we wanted to speak and, more importantly, how to VOTE...

In the normal way, URC Synod decisions are taken by “consensus decision-making” – gathering the sense of the meeting, though not, I think, in quite the way Quakers do. The Standing Orders sent out in advance of the Synod explained that “because consensus decision-making is impractical to operate in a virtual meeting of this size” [84 screens on the day] it would be replaced by voting, with a clear 2/3 majority being needed for any decision. Bizarrely, I had gained practice in voting by taking part in my daughter Claire's latest on-line show, *Roulette*, in which the audience had to vote and take part in on-line polls to help determine the course of the action – so I was a dab hand at this already! But, of course, I was a non-voting attendee, and so was instructed to add ‘NV’ in front of my name [as well as adding my Quaker credentials after my name].

On the day itself, I logged in, made sure my name was as it should be, and prepared to listen and observe. I was delighted to see three familiar faces: John Bremner, the URC Ecumenical and Interfaith officer, whom Friends may remember came to GM at

Victoria Terrace a few years ago, Sandy Horsburgh, the rep from the Church of Scotland, and Miriam Weibye of the Episcopal Church. It was sad not to be able to rush up to them and hug them, but we did at least manage a very brief on-line hallo.

The morning session opened with worship celebrating God's creation and its diversity. We were reminded of the need to bear others' burdens, caring for one another in these days of pandemic; and also of its being the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Dunblane shooting. There were a lot of wordy prayers, which tended to pass over my head, but I appreciated the exhortation "*let us recognise heaven in the ordinary and bring heaven into the ordinary*".

There was a lot of business to attend to, but it was well-handled, the several short breaks not affecting the generally excellent time-keeping. The electronic voting means that results could be obtained almost instantly – far quicker even than counting hands, and definitely quicker than manually counting voting papers!

The youth executive brought a concern for the environment – a suggestion that travel claims should include the cost of carbon off-setting, which would then be donated to an appropriate charity; and that the most environmentally friendly mode of travel should be chosen. They also suggested an audit of current recycling and use of single-use plastics. There was a lot of discussion of the carbon off-setting and some objections to it because of certain tax considerations that I didn't really grasp. Parts of the resolution were agreed, but others were not, and the young people were understandably frustrated. The suggestion was made of working ecumenically on the tax issue. The Moderator had remarked that deferring agreement on some parts of the resolution didn't mean that people couldn't start working on these matters, and thanked the young people, saying "you have set us on the road".

Delegates attending the Synod were expected to have read the papers, and thus didn't have them introduced at any length. The Children and Youth Ministry report highlighted the Pray It Forward project, which aims to "flood the community with prayer in May" and is going to make prayer rabbits to leave around for people to find. Finance & Property committee had nothing to add to their paper. John Bremner with his Ecumenical and Interfaith hat on pointed out that there was a vast amount of information and resources available on line, and also that he sends out a lot of information that is sent to him, but receives very little feedback... He also said that the Church Leaders Forum had been very helpful during the previous year, keeping church leaders informed of Scottish Government information, and feeding back churches' concerns to ministers.

The Church and Society committee's call to churches to do all they can to achieve the URC's resolution to achieve net zero carbon by 2030 included the recommendation that new heating systems being installed should not be carbon emitting ones [eg oil, natural gas]. Local champions were asked for, to carry the work forward and get people engaged at local level. It was pointed out that, while "we need to do all we can" the important thing is *working towards* rather than achieving, and that a 'both/and' approach could be used, with the installation of solar panels on church roofs to augment existing heating systems.

The Framework for Ministry for the National Synod of Scotland highlighted the challenge of providing ministers for congregations and the limitations imposed by the amount of funding that can be raised to pay them. It was pointed out that *we need to focus on the future, rather than on "how we've always done things"*, and that closing congregations is not always a bad thing – things that have reached the end of their life need to be laid down. [familiar?]

We then went into breakout rooms to discuss the framework, not with the idea of finding solutions, but of passing ideas back for future consideration. Many familiar thoughts emerged – *how do you plan for a future when almost everyone is aged 70+ or in full-time work? Group ministries can serve a number of churches, but the minister can't be involved in every community in the group. E-worship needs to be kept alongside face-to-face; e-congregations can be a lot larger; many OAPs are not "tech-savvy"; people are desperate for face-to-face contact, especially if they have been staring at their work screens all day.* Miriam Weibye mentioned that in Moray, Ross, and Caithness, *"congregations stay the same but move round the various churches depending on which minister is available"*, and that in rural areas there is a strong core of retired ministers who are able to help out. The URC have been giving iPads to older members of their congregations.

There was an interesting discussion of the purpose of stipendiary ministers – they can be “free to do the tasks other people can't, because they have the time”; they need to preach, proclaim, and motivate a community, and “deal with the pastoral crisis” – but how can you do this if you don't know the people in your community? “Congregational sustainability” is an important factor: how do you find and chase energy? Is that a positive course of action? Is a different model needed? Is the need to reassess the model of how things are done, and ‘who can do what’? Interestingly it was one of the [much] younger participants who said “but people want a minister in front of them”...

Early in the session, voting attendees were invited to support one of two names to go forward as Moderator of the URC's General Assembly 2022-3, and the name of Rev Fiona Bennett, minister of Augustine United Church in Edinburgh was overwhelmingly supported.

Our closing worship led us to ponder Elijah's story [1 Kings 19: 5-9] – after being fed in the wilderness by angels for forty days and

forty nights, he went to Horeb, the mountain of the Lord, whereupon the Lord asked him “what are you doing here, Elijah?” We were asked to consider how we would respond to this question right now – would we say “haven’t I done enough already?” *Are we waiting to go back to “the old normal” or are we facing up to the challenge of changing the world and ourselves into “the new normal”?*

Our final prayer reminded us *the future belongs to God – may God show us the way into it. We prayed for the waiting time, for action when the time arrives, and for company as we walk into the unknown.* The session closed with everyone who could joining in the singing of [a rather off-puttingly upbeat version of] the old Irish prayer – *Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart.* ■

*As you grow up, always tell the truth, do no harm to others, and don't think you are the most important being on Earth. Rich or poor, you then can look anyone in the eye and say, "I'm probably no better than you, but I'm certainly your equal!"*

**Harper Lee, b. 1926, letter - from Living Our Beliefs - An exploration of the faith and practice of Quakers.**

## Stitches for Survival

Cathy Homan and Jane Lewis. Portobello & Musselburgh.

***Mass-craftivism to put the Earth centre-stage at COP26: Act now together***

The climate and ecological crisis has left Earth in dire need of care – soft blankets to comfort and nurture, beautiful stitches to celebrate nature.

***Stitches For Survival*** is a group of knitters, crocheters, stitchers and crafters, from across the UK and beyond, with a heartfelt plea to the COP26 climate talks to be held in Glasgow 1-12 November 2021:

***It is time to put the Earth – the basis for our very survival – and not money, centre stage at the talks. This is the time to take bold and binding action to stop the devastating climate havoc and ecological breakdown that is evident across the world.***

This last year has shown how radically our lives can change overnight when the political will is there and people take responsibility. It is time to act with the same urgency on the climate and ecological crisis!

### **What are we doing?**

We are knitting, crocheting, stitching and crafting 1.5 miles of climate messages for the negotiators, to remind them of the urgent need to take bold action together on climate change, and the support they have in doing so.

The length of the scarf represents the 1.5°C target in the Paris Agreement.

During the conference we will display the ‘scarf’ near the SECC conference centre where the talks are taking place.

### **How can you take part?**

Knit, crochet, stitch or craft a 60x100cm green or blue section of scarf for the earth to:

- Support bold and binding actions on climate change
- Tell world leaders they must act now together
- Create a colourful protest that can be recycled into warm blankets for refugees

We are inviting everyone to stitch for the survival of the Earth – the *#knit- ters4critters* stitching for the smallest in the ecosystem, the *#togetherknits* crafting links of solidarity with those hit hardest by climate devastation, or creative craftivism for the climate issue that you are passionate about.

Sections can be plain or intricate – the Earth needs us all!

You can also take part in ‘knit-ins’, share your story on social media using our hashtags, or bring people together to raise awareness of a climate and/ or environmental issue where you live. In the lead up to COP26 you could do this by – for example – displaying your completed sections at the offices of fossil fuel companies, oil refineries and other places local to you that are contributing to the destruction of the planet.

### **Be part of it!**

For the latest on knit-ins, how to make your bit of the scarf, where to send it and pictures of how we are getting on: <https://stitchesforsurvival.earth/>

Look for *#Stitches4Survival* on social media

Join the *Stitches4Survival* Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/272262957684289> and follow/like our page

<https://www.facebook.com/Stitches-For-Survival-102929728565275>

Contact Jane Lewis: [jane@gn.apc.org](mailto:jane@gn.apc.org) or Cathy Holman: [cathy-holman1@gmail.com](mailto:cathy-holman1@gmail.com)



**Kindred Spirits: Choctaw's Generosity ,  
Commemorated by the Sculptor Alex Pentek.  
Sent in by Fran Brady, Eustace St Quakers, Dublin**

**D**espite the hardship faced by Choctaw Indians following the Indian Removal Act of 1830, a group of Choctaw people gathered in Scullyville, Oklahoma, on March 23, 1847 to collect money for the starving people in Ireland. They felt an affinity with the Irish people on hearing of their suffering. This was one of the most surprising and generous contributions to Irish famine relief.

Legends tell us that the Choctaw Indians originated from "Nanih Waiya", a sacred hill near Noxapater, Mississippi. Nanih Waiya, an ancient earthwork mound constructed by indigenous people during the Middle Woodland period about 1-300 [CE](#), was venerated by Choctaws as their sacred place of origin.

The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek signed on September 27, 1830 resulted in the Choctaws, and other tribes, signing away the remainder of their traditional homelands in Alabama, Mississippi and Florida. Forced relocation followed the Indian Removal Act, which invested the president with power to exchange land with Native tribes in order to carry out infrastructural development on their existing lands. The Choctaws, among other tribes, were stripped of their native land by President Andrew Jackson and compelled to make a 500 miles trek to Oklahoma, a trek that became known as the Trail of Tears.

The winter the Choctaws spent on the Trail of Tears was one of the coldest on record. Half of the people perished along the way due to malnutrition, disease and exposure. Even those who survived the journey to Oklahoma faced further adversity as they had to create new communities and new homes for themselves in a strange place. Andrew Jackson's role in the compulsory resettlement of Native American tribes, as well as his extensive slave-

trading, tainted the reputation of the seventh president who ironically had been born into poverty himself.

The gruelling journey, where family members perished along the route, as well as the kindness shown by the Choctaw Indians who had very little themselves, inspired Alex Pentek in his creation of a sculpture, entitled 'Kindred Spirits'. The 20 foot high sculpture now stands in Bailic Park on the edge of the town of Midleton in County Cork. It consists of nine giant stainless steel eagle feathers. The feathers, each with its own fragility and imperfection, form a shape like an empty bowl, symbolic of the Irish Famine. The sculpture was crafted by the Cork sculptor in praise of the courage, fragility and humanity of the Choctaw people.



In close view of the Choctaw monument, the traffic whizzes along on the N25 dual carriageway. Perhaps some of the occupants of the passing vehicles spare a thought for the story of the Choctaw Indians. But many may not have heard yet about the nine giant feathers arranged like an empty bowl to represent our Great Hunger.

In 1990, Choctaw leaders travelled to County Mayo to take part in a re-enactment of the desperate walk undertaken by destitute people to their landlord's residence. This Famine Walk has been

organised by Afri (Action From Ireland) each year since 1988. Choctaw leaders, including Gary White Deer, have been closely associated with the walk, from Louisburgh passing the shores of Lough Doolough, where hungry people trudged through a cold March night in 1849 and where many perished on their way back, empty-handed and hungrier after their long walk. In 1992, the gesture of Choctaw solidarity was returned when a group of Irish people took part in a 500 mile trek representing the Choctaw Trail of Tears, donating the money raised through the walk to famine relief.

Awareness of the plight of Native American communities has been re-kindled by the events of 2016 at Standing Rock. News of the Dakota Access Oil Pipeline and the [Standing Rock Sioux tribe](#), whose land and water would be adversely affected by the project, emerged from relative obscurity and brought with it awareness that Native Indians still have their struggles and a will to resist peacefully. The standoff between developers and indigenous people, who are trying to protect their land and water from a pipeline routed upstream from them, has featured in headlines across the world. The media, especially films in former times, portrayed Native American people as primitive or exotic. This view was very mistaken. The act of kindness, commemorated in County Cork, and the events of 2016 at Standing Rock demonstrate the wealth of wisdom and humanity which endures in the Native American tradition. They are serene and peaceful, involved in a solemn struggle. Peaceful and prayerful solidarity is what elders requested when asked how supporters can be of assistance. As I reached the destination of my pilgrimage to the Choctaw monument at Bailic Park on a November day I was mindful of those gentle people, who came to our aid almost 170 years ago, and mindful too of the struggle of the Sioux Tribe now trying to prevent destruction of their sacred land and water



## POETS' CORNER

### A Sonnet

#### Awakenings of Springtime

by Fran Brady, Eustace St Quakers, Dublin

Like speckled magic carpet on the air  
A flock of starlings swirl and come to rest  
On branches of the oak tree, winter bare  
Refuge for weary wings when sun sinks west

White snowdrop petals withstand winter breeze  
On slender stems surviving frost and cold  
Closed buds envelope embryonic leaves  
Till vibrant vernal foliage they unfold

Gold daffodils await a warmer earth  
To coax their bells of joy to open wide  
The sun and length of day both play a part  
Awaken all the glories of springtime

Humanity with information new  
Could not design these miracles on cue.



## Fruit Tree

For my son Tom, written by Colm Hefferon,  
Eustace St Dublin.

Pedro sowed his tangerine seeds on the side of the hill  
No-one thought it would work.  
Each day as he passed the men there was a sly wink or a nod  
slowly he watered the sandy soil, placed hay at the base in winter  
built stone walls to keep the roots in place, when they would  
come.

In spring a leaf appears and then another  
a stalk the size of girls hand  
in March, Pedro broke his ankle in a storm  
he thought of  
his tiny tree facing awful wind and rain

Each night he prayed that the sun  
would not parch the stony soil  
After many months of mending himself  
he climbed to the field above the white village  
and saw the slim green stalk  
two leaves and one flower  
flourishing inside the mud packed walls.  
Keeping floods out they also kept the water in

Later, a harvest, orange as the sun  
was carried to market, the men said  
“No one believed you could grow them there, in the face of the  
north wind”  
and Pedro smiling said “I am not “no one” and I did believe”.

“Would you like one, my friend, as I have plenty?”

**Something to Watch For**  
**Marian Burrell, Skye-North**

Something to watch for  
When light's at it's lowest,  
Before the Solstice  
You poke your green spear-tips  
Through the dead-looking earth...  
Through the leaf-mould...  
Under the apple trees...  
Over the rockery..  
Behind the rubbish bins...  
Spilling out of the garden  
Onto the road verge...  
Promising new life  
If we just hold on a bit.  
What? – no, I'm not talking  
To the Snowdrops,  
Much as I love them.  
But to you, the poet's true-love--  
The generous, golden  
Daffodils.



Daffies by Oriole

## My Journey Sila Collins-Walden

Life is a journey, like travelling on a train, passing through the  
stations  
making stops along the way....should I stop here?

Life can be disappointing, roughs and tumbles along the way  
There are dreams, inspiration, there are hopes, there is happy,  
there is sad ,

There are many roads, many paths to choose but which  
one?

We don't always choose our own path, or do we?

Life is like a river flowing down-stream, bubbling, splashing over  
rocks, on its journey under the bridge

Life divides, life entwines, complex, obstacles, rocky, smooth, like  
riding on an ocean wave, what is our purpose, our destiny?  
We learn about ourselves through our journey, we evolve through  
life's journey from childhood  
school days, love marriage, giving birth, my thoughts deep  
thinking of my life's journey, the young girl I once was...locked in-  
side me, middle age?.. I glance in the mirror..... old age.. ah!

