

West Scotland

Quaker News

October 2015

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Clerk's Letter

This month it seems right to pass on the Statement issued by Quakers in Britain.

The representative body of Quakers in Britain, Meeting for Sufferings, has made the following statement in reaction to the unfolding refugee crisis.

“Quakers in Britain urge the UK Government to welcome those desperately seeking a place of safety, in Europe, from the dangers in their own countries. In this urgent situation it cannot be right to harden hearts against people who are struggling and dying on European soil and in the seas around us.

“In Britain we have a tradition of sheltering those in danger, as we did with the Kindertransport, rescuing thousands of children from Nazi-occupied Europe so many years ago, and more recently, when we welcomed refugees from countries including Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Iraq, Bosnia and Kosova. It is time to open our hearts and communities again.

“This exceptional time of need calls for a proportionate response from all the governments of Europe working together. We call for mechanisms to be created that will enable people to travel safely and to secure legal protection – including in Britain.

“Refugees are fleeing from fear. Further violent interventions in countries such as Syria will not provide a solution. Difficult but compassionate decisions need to be made to secure peace for people in these regions.

“Quakers assert that all human life is precious – each person is a child of God and the loss of one diminishes us all. In this severe crisis, we hear the Spirit calling us to throw ourselves into the fray with all the love and courage we can muster.”

'That which is morally wrong cannot be politically right' *Quaker faith & practice* 23.26

Michael Hutchinson

Clerk, West Scotland Area Meeting

Area Meeting at Tarbert, Loch Fyne, 22.8.2015

The August Area Meeting has been held in Argyll for several years now and has often been an occasion for a large gathering of Friends from all quarters of the Area Meeting, many taking the opportunity to spend a few days exploring the west. This year, by contrast, we were a small company, with only eight Friends present from outwith Argyll. The local meeting had made a great effort to welcome us and must have been disappointed at the turnout. Those of us who were there had a choice of three wonderful soups - Cullen skink, mushroom and minestrone, plus a spread of excellent cheeses, salad and fruit. And that was lunch. No need to raid the Coop, they said. Tea saw the cheese board again, and other good things.

Our clerk, Michael Hutchinson, made sure we didn't go to sleep however. He had drawn up a huge agenda, or so it seemed at first glance. And being a small, indeed intimate meeting, helped the manner in which the business was conducted. Twenty-one minutes were agreed! The good bits included a helpful discussion on membership, in which we accepted some clarifications to the procedure agreed in 2009; the principal point is that visitors' reports will be brought only to those meetings where we are gathered in person, rather than those where we meet by 'phone. Kate Gulliver, our treasurer, made a special trip just to present her report, but as always this was done with panache and a smile. She asked us all to remember our commitment to supporting the General Meeting's appointment of a Parliamentary Engagement Officer, and not to let up on our contributions in the second half of the year. A worshipful discussion was held around a request from Southern Marches Area Meeting (meetings either side of the Welsh - English border) for support of their concern to create a memorial in the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire for the "innocent victims of war". We wanted more information but were unhappy about the choice of words. Innocence implies others are guilty: are we not all in some ways complicit in the conduct of wars? A good minute was sent to Southern Marches with a copy for Meeting for Sufferings.

Far too little time was spent on the Yearly Meeting theme of "living out our faith in the world", though a few ideas were aired of how we may best take the matter forward in subsequent meetings. A paper on communications within the Area

Meeting received support in principle, and a steering group will be set up. It would have been good to have had a better debate on this but it was definitely a matter where we were too few in number for that to happen.

An unnecessary amount of time was perhaps spent on some routine matters. What happened to the idea of letting a small group deal with such things? We do not need the full membership to settle such matters as dates of meetings, to take one example. And we should consider starting first thing in the morning to tackle profound issues in which meeting together in person is essential.

Thank you, Argyll Friends, for your hospitality.

Robin Davis, (*Dunblane Meeting*)

Meeting for Sufferings 5 September 2015

The evening before attending my first Meeting for Suffering I read the Pendle Hill Pamphlet by Barry Morley ‘Beyond Consensus’ as a Friend had suggested I read it a while ago and on the train down to Euston I thought I might find it in the bookshop in Friends House, which I did. Was it a good preparation? Well, yes and no! Those of you who’ve read this pamphlet will know it is expressing the concern of Barry Morley about what ‘he calls’ doughnut Quakerism’, a process by which Quakers dedicate themselves to Quaker values and concerns but diminish the spiritual core from which the values and concerns originally emanated. He’s convinced that more power flows through a Religious Society of Friends than can be generated by an Ethical Society of Friends.’ And he says that the sense of the meeting is a gift.

Well, it felt like a gift to be part of this large gathering of representatives from 70 Area Meetings. I was sorry Ed Tyler, our alternate rep for MfS, couldn’t make it as he was attending that day the celebration of the 20 year old garden in Newcastle that he’d designed and initiated. Although Michael had with great kindness given me a thoroughly enjoyable whistle stop tour of the history and development of MfS I also appreciated the care taken by the Arrangement Group in introducing us ‘newbies’ to the composition of the Meeting, how each of the Working Groups organised different aspects of the work undertaken, including

who sets the Agenda and setting out our role and responsibilities. We'd received quantities of paperwork electronically a fortnight before the Meeting and were advised to read it through before attending which I found rather daunting. But I was glad to have done so because this preparation helped me to hear better some of the unfamiliar terms and acronyms.

Over lunch, we spent time in small groups, organised so that Friends from the same and neighbouring meetings could meet each other and talk together.

And then after the mornings induction we turned to the minutes from Yearly Meeting and heard the call to all AM to think about how they might engage locally to take the work on social and economic injustice forward. MfS has been asked to coordinate the work of local and area meetings who wish to become more deeply involved and encourage the deep spiritual and intellectual search that could underpin a 'true social order' for our age.'

Friends are also encouraged to locally engage with the issue of Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP):, including taking the matter to their MPs and MEPs where appropriate". As was mentioned in the meeting, this is a very complex issue and the more we can educate ourselves about the details the better placed we are to respond.

In this afternoon session issues concerning the current plight of Refugees and asylum-seekers were considered which led us to the troubled acknowledgement that climate change and political conflict were not unconnected to this current crises. Other faith groups as well as NGOs are actively campaigning on these matters, and Friends are being urged to work alongside and support such initiatives and to challenge the rhetoric wherever possible and appropriate.

Finally we looked at the minute regarding a revision of Quaker Faith & Practice and heard of the Terms of reference for the Preparation Group who will be 'engaging Quakers in Britain in learning, mutual exploration and growth; to provide and encourage a threshing process leading into readiness to participate in any revision of our Book of Discipline.' This promises to be a remarkable process and we will all have the opportunity of renewing our relationship with our book.

We were too late to recruit 2 Young People to participate in this year's Participation Day at MfS but Ed will be inviting Young People from West of Scotland Area Meeting to apply for next year by which time our children's and Young Person's safeguarding policies will be in place.

Barbara Robinson (*Glasgow Meeting*)

The Wandering Banana

A report on the Treasurers Conference 2015

Janet Garner of Dunblane Meeting and myself attended the one-day Treasurers Conference at Friends House in London. The theme was The Power of Money: Living out our faith in the world - spending the Quaker pound.

For anyone who wants to pursue this theme in depth there is a website set up by Quaker Peace & Social Witness in conjunction with the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility, namely www.yourfaithyourfinance.org.

The day was divided into two lectures and two group sessions. The keynote speaker was Paul Gibson who is heavily involved in many commercial, environmental initiatives. His theme was that 'Business' can cover a spectrum from purely charitable through socially useful, via businesses with a social conscience to big bad business itself, so that when a politician says he is in favour of business, he should be asked what business exactly does he mean. The three points of his talk were economic justice, tax justice, equality. The internationality of business is the main barrier to these. He gave the example of a banana. Physically it travels from the producing country to the country where it is eaten, but on paper it will pass through half a dozen different tax havens, so that by the time that banana arrives in Southampton there is no UK tax to be paid on it.

He talked about the Fair Tax Mark movement, in which he is involved. This awards the Mark to businesses who do just that - pay their fair share of tax.

The session on sustainability started as a talk on how meeting houses can be maintained for the benefit of the wider community. We touched on solar panels,

orchards, community gardens. Inevitably as always happens when two or more treasurers are gathered together the discussion homed in on the perennial problem of maintenance of meeting houses that are old, too big, or in the wrong place. I hadn't much to contribute to the workshop session on how meetings should invest their reserves. One area meeting has reserves of over £1 million pounds, and others not far short of that, so of course they had a dilemma about appropriate stock exchange investments. It is not a problem we have in West Scotland Area Meeting.

Peter Ullathorne, BYM treasurer, then gave us a quick rundown on the annual accounts for 2014. The funds are generally healthy but BYM relies too heavily on legacies for comfort: the dead are more generous than the living. But then (I think but do not say) the dead don't need the money any more.

Paul Gibson's talk and notes on the various sessions in fuller detail are on the Quaker website.

Janette Walkinshaw (*Wigtown Meeting*)

No Future without Forgiveness *Desmond Tutu*

An extract on Ubuntu.

Rider ISBN 0 7126 7013 0

This is an extraordinary book by an extraordinary man that has much to teach us Quakers in how we go about our 'activities'. In particular I was moved by his concept of *Ubuntu* which is so fundamental to much African tribal culture and is also reflected in our own Celtic culture. Why did South Africa after apartheid not construct trials such as those at Nuremberg, or grant a general amnesty to all? The victims needed to be heard and their stories were such that would not fit in with the dry evidence of courts of justice. Some kinds of punishment lead only to on-going resentment and hate. South Africa needed a new start but all the wrong needed first to be acknowledged. Healing is an outward movement, left inside poison festers. They needed to find their core human values, and Ubuntu was central to that.

‘Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human. When we want to give high praise to someone we say, ‘*Yu, u nobuntu*’; ‘Hey, he or she has *unbuntu*’. This means they are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate. They share what they have. It also means humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in theirs. We belong in a bundle of life. We say, ‘a person is a person through other people.’ It is not ‘I think therefore I am’. It says rather: ‘I am human because I belong.’ I participate, I share. A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good; for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.

‘..... Anything that subverts or undermines this sought-after good is to be avoided like the plague. Anger, resentment, lust for revenge, even success through aggressive competitiveness, are corrosive of this good. To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. What dehumanises you, inexorably dehumanises me. Forgiveness gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanise them.

‘*Ubuntu* means in a real sense even the supporters of apartheid were victims of the vicious system which they implemented and which they supported so enthusiastically. Our humanity was intertwined. The humanity of the perpetrator of apartheid’s atrocities was caught up and bound up in that of his victim whether he liked it or not. In the process of dehumanising another, in inflicting untold harm and suffering, the perpetrator was inexorably being dehumanised as well.’

In our ‘activities’ what do Quakers offer that is different from a political party? Basically, we are not partisan. We are not war-mongers who think with an us-and-them mentality. We act in our support of that which unites us, our common humanity, that of God in Everyone.

Margaret Roy, (*Lanark Meeting*)

Extracts with permission from Penguin Random House.



*The Quaker
Wedding of
Nuala Watts
and
Alastair McIver
on 13th
September*



Islay and Jura Local Meeting

The Meeting began in 2007, first as a small group meeting in Islay which started as part of Argyll Local Meeting, then last year became our own Local Meeting. While Islay Friends and attenders going across to Meetings in Tarbert or Campbeltown in Argyll or further afield was something several

of us wished to do, the long travel times involving 2-hour ferry crossings became difficult to manage regularly for Islay folk. We keep the connection

with Argyll Friends and attend Meetings for Worship when we can.

Meeting for Worship started off in Islay with just Bronwen Currie and another Friend meeting in Bronwen's home, then progressed as attending increased

first to Kilmeny Church on a Sunday afternoons monthly. More recently, our Sunday meetings held on the last Sunday afternoon of each month have moved to the Baptist Church in Bowmore, Islay, and Second Monday Meeting for Worship is held in a member or attender's home, as available. Meetings for Worship are also held in the Isle of Jura Care Centre for Jura Friends who are finding it difficult to travel, and others who may be interested in attending.

We now regularly have half a dozen people or more attending Meetings, a mixture of Members, Attenders and Enquirers or visitors. As Islay and Jura are becoming well known as holiday destinations, we often have visiting Friends or people interested in Quakers coming to an island meeting during the summer, and it is always a lovely way to meet new people and learn about their Meeting if they attend one.

My own connection with Quakers came about through Islay; I had known about Quakers since childhood but was never aware of having met any

Friends, either in New England USA where I grew up. Later, after settling in Scotland and being a Hebridean island dweller all my grown-up life, often living in what many would regard as entirely the back-of-beyond, I had not met any Quakers then either. In response to a notice in a newspaper I contacted Glasgow Meeting and was sent an encouraging reply with a copy of Advices & Queries, which increased my interest in knowing more. Finally, it was a notice in our Islay community newspaper about a Meeting for Worship to be held at Kilmeny Church, when some Argyll Friends came over, that prompted me to go to Meeting for the first time. I enjoyed the Meeting and the people, and began to attend regularly in Islay and occasionally in Tarbert or Glasgow. Recently I have applied for Quaker membership, have been visited and hope to be accepted at the upcoming Area Meeting.

Susan Campbell (*Islay and Jura Meeting*)

Visiting Wiston Lodge.....

Early in September there was a wonderful sunny weekend away for Children's Meetings from South Edinburgh, Polmont and Portobello and Musselburgh. In all there were 43 staying, 15 children and their parents and a small group of older friends. The South Edinburgh Friends have been coming to Wiston Lodge for a number of years and their children have now passed through the stages of Summer Shindig and reached young adulthood. For this weekend, the children and parents come from Polmont and Portobello & Musselburgh.

The weather was perfect allowing Hugh to lead a walk up Tinto Hill and for time to be spent outside. Susie Reade ran an all age clay mask making session and Anna Levin ran a writers workshop. For some, the days started with Chi Gung sessions run by Margaret Anderson. Some of the older Friends looked after the wee children allowing their parents to take part in other activities. And the children had canoeing and archery run by Wiston Lodge programme staff. And as usual, Saturday night was Ceilidh night.

And of course Sunday morning was time for an All Age Quaker Meeting organised by Deridre Armstrong and Mary Jane Elton. The visiting group was joined by Lanark Meeting, whose members enjoyed the greatly expanded meeting. Meeting heard a story and did art-work focussing on our need to take care of the natural world, flowers, bees, butterflies.....and following Meeting and teas and coffees, there was a discussion about the refugee crisis and how, as Quakers, we can respond through our meetings; the work of Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network was described and the importance of working on this vital problem with other faith groups was stressed.

After a traditional Wiston Lodge Sunday lunch, came home time and happy memories of a lovely peaceable Quaker time. And we are looking forward to next year.

Meg Beresford, (*Elder Lanark Meeting*)

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