

# *West Scotland Quaker News*

*November 2011*

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*The opinions expressed in this Newsletter are those of individuals. They do not necessarily represent the views of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)*

**Islamic Mihrab: Ornamental indentation in a mosque's wall (usually shaped like a doorway) marking the direction of the qiblah (Kaaba in Mecca). [Pergamon Museum, Berlin: BGB.]**



*The deadline for the next issue of West of Scotland Quaker News is January 8th. Copy should be sent to the editor Bryan Bowes preferably in word or plain text email to: [botany64@waitrose.com](mailto:botany64@waitrose.com) or by post on paper or disc to: Bryan Bowes, 3 West Chapelton Lane, Bearsden, Glasgow G61 2DF. Tel 0141 942 3346*

# Clerk's Letter

## *At the end of the triennium*

As we near the end of the current triennium I have been reflecting on how the Spirit is prospering in West Scotland Area Meeting. As clerk of this meeting I am concerned with the minutia of the business but I have taken a step back to see the wider picture.

Over the past three years our Area Meeting has been growing: to date we have welcomed 15 Friends into Membership. We have expanded northwards, with the addition of Tobermory Meeting in December, 2010 and roots have been put down in the west, with the opening of a new Meeting House in Wigtown in the spring of 2010. Our engagement with the world has been focussed on our support for the Viva Palestina medical aid convoys to Gaza, and our concern for the environment. We have agreed to look more deeply at how we live in a right spiritual relationship with our environment, a challenge to the concept of perpetual economic growth.

It is often said about Quakers, we don't build churches, we build worshipping communities: so how is the Area Meeting community fairing? Our community is spread over ten Local Meetings and over the last three years eight of these have hosted Area Meeting. These Friendly visits have been happy occasions and I believe they help tie us together as one people. Of course our community goes beyond Area Meeting and we maintain our connection with Friends throughout Britain Yearly Meeting through our representation on Meeting for Sufferings and Quaker Life Representative Council. The experience of being part of a national gathering is often energising and inspiring and our representatives have conveyed this when they have reported back. I take it as a sign of our engagement that we have contributed to two significant Meeting for Sufferings consultations: "Using our Resources Well" and "Strengthening our Area Meetings". Our young people are linked in to the wider Society of Friends through Junior Yearly Meeting and the Northern Young Friends Summer Shindig, which Area Meeting supports financially.

When we join together at Area Meeting, we do so in worship and when difficult decisions have been before us, we have approached them prayerfully. At the end of 2010 we were consulted by General Meeting for Scotland on the End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill. To aid our discernment we asked Local Meetings to discuss the issue and their feedback was shared. When Area Meeting returned to this matter it was in a worship sharing session.

Service has been a significant part of my spiritual journey. Area Meeting provides Friends with the opportunity to serve their worshipping community. Nominations Committee has worked tirelessly to fill our posts. We have supported Friends giving service to Area Meeting and helped them in the tasks they do by sending some of them for training. Trustees; Elders and Overseers; Nominations Committee members; Registering Officers; the Children and Young People's Advocate and Treasurers have all benefited from this.

**Elizabeth Allen** (*Lanark Meeting*)

## Area Meeting in Lanark on October 15th

It was quite a while since I had last attended Area Meeting. Lanark is an easier journey for us than some other AM localities and I was further blessed that my generous husband arranged work to do in the town for the day and drove me there.

I soon found St. Nicholas Church Hall, a large, high ceilinged space that struck very cold. I was quickly cheered by a warm welcome from dear Friends I had not seen for ages and fresh coffee served in the dining room where local people were enjoying a Saturday 'catch up'. You just had to say you were from the 'quakers' and the tea or coffee was free!

A line from the reading stayed with me – it was about healing coming to those who pray and I found myself composing a prayer in my mind during the day. I am still working on it.

First business was to record the death of Ray Barnes. One Friend spoke of sadness at losing touch in recent years but another had spent a lovely day with him in his sheltered house in Skelmorlie. Although no Friends managed to attend his funeral we were reassured to hear that Jenny Auld had been in fairly regular contact.

This was an AM of many reports, beginning with the Clerk's. We heard of Dumfries Meeting's new clerk, Claire MacLeod and names will be needed for the 2012 QPSW Conference to be held 23-25 March at Swanwick in Derbyshire on the topic of 'Faith in Action'. My heart always jumps when Swanwick is mentioned as it was there aged 15 that I first experienced the joy of attending a 'residential' with a spiritual basis; this is such an enduring memory for me.

Recording the release of a Meeting for Sufferings representative I became aware of the approaching triennium and all the painstaking work for Nominations Committee finding Friends willing to serve; today a new convenor for Nominations Committee itself needed to be considered. Later in the day, a search group of three was set up to do this, including the current convenor Christine Davis who is stepping down.

A report of a discussion called 'Strengthening our Area Meetings' had been circulated with AM agenda. We heard how Quaker Life Representative Council is looking at AM's through the technique of 'Appreciative Inquiry' and we were told of three queries associated with this: -

1. How clear is your Area Meeting about its purposes?
2. How good is your Area Meeting at achieving these?
3. What support does your Area Meeting need to do this well?

A clerk's conference 16-18 November 2012 at Woodbrooke will help Quaker Life respond positively to AM needs and draw this work together. I have used Appreciative Inquiry in my work as a social work trainer and found it to be both supportive and challenging. I also thought guiltily how I could probably do more to support AM and was pleased at lunchtime to agree with some of our neighbours from Wigtown Meeting that we could get together for exploration and study.

Margaret Peacock, in a Meeting for Sufferings report, urged us to challenge our 4

proposals and the need to protect the most vulnerable members of our society when cuts are made. Islington Council's Fairness Commission has information about how to do this. Margaret also spoke of AM being like a 'midwife' supporting committee representatives – I guessed this had amused her!

The problem of clerking came up in Mary Latham's report from Trustees. After careful and loving debate it was agreed to appoint a Clerk, an Assistant Clerk and a Membership Clerk for a year and address the more difficult challenge of how to manage our AM roles and duties longer term by convening a group of 8-10 people to consult with local meetings and come up with proposals to make AM 'Fit for the 21st Century'.

Over lunch, more joy catching up with dear people. Discussing an issue I have been struggling with, Elizabeth Allen thought it OK to get angry sometimes and to 'poke people in the ribs'! I resolved to be braver and kinder in equal measure when addressing my concern.

After lunch we gathered our papers and continued AM in the dining room, a cheerful, heated space where the walls were covered in bible iconography in nursery colours. At last I was warm enough to take off my coat.

There were more reports; Nominations Committee, already mentioned; the Annual Report and Accounts 2010 circulated beforehand; an appeal for financial support for the Northern Friends Summer Shindig, so valuable for young friends – £716 was agreed for 2012.

Beth Laidlaw is to be welcomed into membership and visitors for Hannah Theaker were happily arranged. We transferred Derek McLean's membership to Orkney and will miss him.

Our three telephone conferences are scheduled for 2012 – in March, June and December. Meeting for Sufferings had received our report well, the AM working group was laid down and we can be proud to have pioneered this development. Contact the Assistant Clerk for details.

AM dates for 2012/2013 were given out, appointments were made to residential GM, and the GM Working Group on Same Sex Marriage has asked that individuals write to the Scottish Government who are consulting on this. An email by Bronwen Currie relates to this issue.

There was one item of other business. We heard that Daphne Wasserman seeks contributions linked to a list of questions about environmental issues for a Woodbrooke conference she is appointed to attend. This request has already gone out by email.

We settled down to a last period of worship and the usual tea was then enjoyed thanks to local friends. I took a 'doggy bag' for Gavin who had been walking the streets of Lanark, carrying out market research. I'm sure my report has missed out a lot and I urge you to read the minutes! I was very pleased to have made the effort to attend.

**Clare Phillips (*Castle Douglas Meeting*)**

# Economic Justice & Sustainable Global Society

As Area Meeting's representative I attended a day conference at Friends House and a weekend seminar at Woodbrooke on the above topic. I rounded this off with the November General Meeting on 'Economics and the Quaker Way'. This report combines some of the factual information (my personal understanding and interpretation) from these three events and outlines possible changes in our local and global economic systems. I hope that this can form the basis for a discussion at Area Meeting on January 21st where we can consider what action we may wish to take:

\*Food is a commodity in the market that speculators invest in, driving prices up to the detriment of those who wish to eat.

\*Water, that essential for life, is privatised for personal profit.

\*Lending to those who have no means to repay; the debt gets repackaged and sold as an investment, leading to the collapse of banks and public bail-outs.

How did this come about?

After the second world war economics was only part of public planning and policy, along with culture, the arts, welfare and other 'goods'. Over the last 50 years the trend has been to put the economy centre stage.

The Bretton Woods agreement in 1944 was a response to the inflation and unemployment of the 1930s. The solution was perceived to be free trade and GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs) was the result. By the 1970s this had been extended to services (GATS) so that global corporations were entitled to bid to run services such as schools in another country.

This led on to the establishment of the World Bank and the IMF. The original intention of the World Bank was for reconstruction and economic development. However, the projects are usually implemented by the private sector which has a tendency to 'build a road' rather than to 'teach people how to build a road'. The role of the IMF has changed over time. In 1989 it was agreed (Washington consensus) that loans should be dependent on reduction in public expenditure, flat tax systems, financial deregulation, competitive interest rates, protection of property rights and the promotion of foreign direct investment. So the rich get richer, particularly global corporations.

Our current banking and financial system is based on debt. Originally people traded gold. Then they traded notes which represented gold. Then the banks realised they didn't need as much gold as the value of notes unless everyone wanted the gold at once. So an economy based on lending and debt was born. If I borrow £1, then the bank I borrow it from now has my pound as an asset – potentially I could be asked to repay it. But if I lend it to someone else or buy something with it, it becomes £2: £1 of goods for me and £1 for the person I bought them from. In the 1940s, 46% of the money in circulation was debt-based. The rest was assets that the bank had. The banks were required to have a certain fraction of assets as 'reserves'. Then the banks were deregulated and no longer required to hold reserves. Now 97% is digital and debt based: created by all the lending institutions. The remaining 3% is notes and coins that also only have symbolic value but are controlled by the Bank of England. This has led to a situation where if we all paid off our debts, the economy and GDP

would shrink. And we need constant growth to keep paying the interest on all our debts.

The Positive Money campaign suggests an alternative way of running the banks ([www.positivemoney.org.uk](http://www.positivemoney.org.uk)):

- \*Full reserve banking (need to get the permission of the lender to lend out the money again).
- \*On interest bearing accounts the lender shares risk with the bank
- \*Transparency – how does the bank use our money?
- \* Return money creation to a democratically controlled body such as the Bank of England.

We need to step back and consider what the economy is for, then create an economy that delivers this. What would an economy based on the Quaker testimonies look like? The challenge is arguably the greatest in the history of Quakerism.

A system is required that meets the needs of everyone. It must distribute wealth more fairly and support our non-material needs as well as our basic material needs. Here are some possible changes in the system.

On an international level:

- \*The Tobin Tax (Robin Hood Tax) on financial transactions. Proceeds to go towards development or sustainable projects. This should also dampen money speculation a little.
- \*Require open-ness from global companies as to their profits and payment of tax in the country where the profits are made.
- \*Remove tax havens – a corollary of the above.

Nationally, UK or Scotland:

- \*Push for a citizen's income: paid equally to everyone. A basic income that is enough to live on but requires work to provide luxuries. (Simpler than the benefits system to administer without the disincentives to get back into low paid work.)
- \*Greater involvement in the activities of the banks that we now own.
- \*Introduce a Post Office bank with full reserve accounts (i.e. only lending the money it actually has).
- \*Greater regulation of the banks and financial institutions.
- \*No-growth economy fostering non-material wealth.
- \*Separate the approval of accounts from approval of directors' pay in company AGMs.
- \*Introduce a Land Value tax and capital gains tax on first homes when trading down.

Projects for our Meetings:

- \*Pilot projects, for example community housing.
- \*Car share / giving lifts / shared meals.
- \*Campaign e.g. against the arms industry.
- \*Run a public meeting.
- \*Show a DVD of 'The Spirit Level'.
- \*Fund a Chair in Sustainable Economics.

- \*Run campaigns through email organisations such as Avaaz and 38 degrees.
- \*Work with other churches, faith groups and campaigning organisations.

There are also actions that we can take as individuals:

- \*Bank and invest ethically.
- \*Consider whether we should invest at all in the stock market. There are social enterprises where we can put our savings.
- \*Or do we need our savings at all?
- \*Support local credit unions, LETS, transition towns.
- \*Join the Living Witness project.
- \*Join the Quakernomics blog ([www.quaker.org.uk/quakernomics](http://www.quaker.org.uk/quakernomics)).

And we can try to change public perception and attitudes. People take note of their friends before anything else:

- \*Promote ethical consumption and make non-consumption trendy.
- \*Persuade the rich to help the poor e.g. support millennium development goals with millennium consumption goals.
- \*Convince a celebrity to choose a simple lifestyle.
- \*When you're feeling low...don't spend, phone a friend, give something away, go for a walk or plant a tree.
- \*Fair trade, good wage rates worldwide, sustainable production.
- \*Emphasise the positive side of simplicity.

Economic change is a movement whose time has come. From BYM in Canterbury to the Occupy movement, people are looking for new ways of doing things.

Can Area Meeting be part of this?

**Daphne Wasserman (*Glasgow Meeting*)**

## **The Kingdom of God is Within You (*L. Tolstoy, 1894*)**

*"Further acquaintance with the labors of the Quakers and their works — with Fox, Penn, and especially the work of Dymond (published in 1827) — showed me not only that the impossibility of reconciling Christianity with force and war had been recognized long, long ago, but that this irreconcilability had been long ago proved so clearly and so indubitably that one could only wonder how this impossible reconciliation of Christian teaching with the use of force, which has been, and is still, preached in the churches, could have been maintained in spite of it."*

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*"The most difficult subjects can be explained to the most slow-witted man if he has not formed any idea of them already; but the simplest thing cannot be made clear to the most intelligent man if he is firmly persuaded that he knows already, without a shadow of doubt, what is laid before him."*

## A Unique Silver Wedding Anniversary

Diane and Bryan Bowes' silver wedding on 9th October was a modest affair compared with most first Quaker weddings. They did not want to lose all the Meeting for Worship, so most Friends were surprised near its end to hear Norman, as a former Registering Officer, announce that our good Friends were about to renew their marriage vows. He referred to paragraph 16.03 of the current QFP\* stating that marriage is a religious act, and reminded us that he does not marry the couple: they do it themselves by their declarations in front of witnesses.

Their declarations were appropriately adapted from the normal Quaker marriage, and they duly signed their new certificate and the Meeting finished slightly later than usual. All the witnesses then signed the certificate, and a separate space at the bottom was provided for well-wishers who couldn't make it to the Meeting.

A chocolate cake was ceremonially cut and with sandwiches and a glass of wine an impromptu party followed! Bryan and Diane expressed their delight at being properly married at last - their original wedding having been in a registry office.

\*This paragraph is a shortened version of the statement of Yearly Meeting of 1848: "We think it right to remind our members of the ancient testimony of our Society, that marriage is not a mere civil contract, but a religious act; that it is God's ordinance, and not man's; and therefore, seeing that the Legislature has fully confirmed us in our privilege of solemnising marriage according to our own long-established religious usages, we desire that none of our members may be found departing therefrom. We further think it right explicitly to state our judgement, that marriage of our members before the Superintendent Registrar, though not open to the special religious objections connected with marriages by a priest, are nevertheless inconsistent with the good order of our discipline, and with our testimony to the true nature and character of the marriage ordinance."

**Margaret Peacock** (*Milngavie Meeting*)

## Spoken Ministry

I was very interested in our Friend Malcolm Whalan's comment and well-considered guidance regarding spoken ministry in Meeting (WSQN, October 2011). Our Quaker worship services are clearly unique in many ways. For instance, our services of worship are the only ones I am aware of which grant us mere mortals an opportunity to answer God back. Like any good and understanding parent however, I have always found her to be very patient, kind, and an ever willing listener.

**Bill Bingham** (*Glasgow Meeting*)

## **Area Meeting in Glasgow**

This will be held in Glasgow Meeting House on Saturday  
December 3rd at 11.00 for 11.30.

Soup and tea/coffee will be available at the lunch break.

*Sing Carols*

*Eat Mince Pies*

*On Friday 23rd December at 7.30pm*

*At the Peacocks'*

*16 Drumlin Drive, Milngavie*

*Tel: 0141 956 1183*

*Please let us know that you are coming*



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