



May 2020

Scottish Friend



Lego MfW via Zoom at Edinburgh Quaker House



Welcome Friends to the May edition of the Scottish Friend. At a time like this when we are all in lockdown, Zooming away! I hope all Friends are well and coping with it. Of course it's going to be Zooming GM too with our clerks Elizabeth, Nicola and administrator Sue at the helm. Comments and suggestions would be welcomed. When sending in contributions, please note your LM. In Friendship, Sila

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Please send articles as an **editable attachment** to silartist100@gmail.com or typed or hand-written to 27 Creag Dhubh Terrace, Inverness IV3 8QG to arrive five weeks before GM, i.e. by **8th August 2020**. If you submit **images**, please ensure that they are about 1Mb in size. Any captions provided with your images should be short!

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<p>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.</p>
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Calling for General Meeting for Scotland
Saturday, 13th June, 2020
Elizabeth Allen, GM Clerk.



Dear Friends,
Greetings to you all!

Since my calling letter in February, our families, our communities, our country and our world have changed. There were early signs of change at GM in March: we were told that we shouldn't greet one another with an embrace or a handshake and reminded about the need for meticulous hand washing and the use of hand gel, which Edinburgh Meeting House had provided. Then the full implications of the Coronavirus pandemic hit. By early April, as lock down continued, it was clear that our plans for GM in June would have to alter. Instead of a face-to-face meeting in Elgin, it would have to be by Zoom. This is disappointing for our Friends in the north, who were looking forward to being our hosts and it is also regrettable that the much anticipated Journeymen Theatre performance on militarism, "Over the Top, in Our Schools", planned for the close of General Meeting, will not take place.

But for now we focus on what we can do and how the spirit is prospering amongst us.



Our next General Meeting will be in the morning of 13th June. It will be by Zoom. We will start with worship at 10.15 am and we will finish at 12.00 noon. I will send out details of how to join the call nearer the time.

*Nicola
Maharg*

The good news that there will be a Local Development Worker in Scotland will be shared. This is one of four new jobs, the first batch of Local Development Workers in

the role-out of BYM and Woodbrooke's joint partnership to support Quaker communities. The appointment had been planned to start in September but it is now anticipated that it will begin in the first quarter of 2021.

GM trustees have prepared the Annual Report for 2019, which will be presented to us. We will also hear how at this time of lock down our GM work continues: there will be updates on our parliamentary engagement work, and the restarting of the Quaker Community Justice Network. The COP 26 Hub Group will tell us the latest about what is happening with the postponed COP26 and the group's ongoing work to highlight the climate crisis.

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, concerning the spiritual life and witness of Quakers in Scotland. Please do come! All are welcome.

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 for a copy. If you have any questions, please contact me, your clerk, by email essallen@msn.com or telephone 01620 894834. ■



General Meeting Report Edinburgh March 7th 2020.
Stella Cranwell. Perth Meeting.

Having trudged up the hill from the railway station to Friends Meeting House in Edinburgh I was very grateful to find coffee and biscuits on offer as part of the warm welcome with which I was met.

This was my first time at General Meeting – I’ve been an Attender at Perth Meeting now for almost 2 years and this year my personal intention is to take more opportunities to explore the Quaker faith and how the many branches attach to the central vine.

There was a minor hiccup when I discovered that all the Papers that I should have received by email hadn’t arrived, I’ve since had them emailed to me and don’t feel I actually missed out by not having read them beforehand. In fact it meant that I listened more keenly!

The Clerk orchestrated the Meeting wonderfully well – she was clear and decisive and managed somehow to get through the very full agenda right on time. I particularly liked the way that on the few occasions that people spoke of burning issues related to a subject but not to GM they were listened to patiently and then offered a response which absorbed their comments while using them as examples of what wasn’t part of GM business.

The times of silence as we upheld the Clerk while she wrote minutes provided space for the whole meeting to ‘re-gather’ and continue refreshed.

Lunchtime was a delight – good food and good company.

We split into groups to discuss the Communication item on the agenda – with the opinions written on the flipcharts to be used by the Communications group. A rather dull, though useful, exercise.

The item headed ‘Engaging with the revision of the Book of Discipline’ drew my attention to the fact that I have not actually read the current one yet. I now feel inspired to do that as it sounds as though the revised edition will be some years in the compiling!

There was a witness during worship which caught my attention – the speaker linked conscientious objection during the 2nd world war leading (unexpectedly) to the setting up of the NHS, with the current climate change objectors also leading to something positive – even though we don’t yet know what it is. I have only ever thought of Conscientious Objection in terms of war, so the revelation that there are many ways of conscientiously objecting was an ‘aha!’ moment.

A thoroughly worthwhile day – enjoyable, informative and full of interesting conversation and ideas. ■



Lego MfW

Populism and the Far Right.

Anne Macarthur, Castle Douglas Meeting West of Scotland

I went to this one-day conference at Woodbrooke on Saturday 1st February. I found it very stimulating. The three speakers were Molly Scott Cato, Al Barrett and Anthony Reddie. Molly is an economist and until Brexit was an MEP for the Green party. She's also a Quaker and gave the 2017 Salter Lecture at BYM Gathering on 'Conscience in the Political Life'. She gave a very good analysis of what 'populism' is and what we can do about it.

Molly says 'let's call out populism, how we disagree without being disagreeable?'

Populism is 'against things' and not 'for things'. Populists promise the impossible. Both of these stymie democracy. Populism is the handmaiden of fascism. There's a politicising of media relations. This is endorsed by Orban (Hungary) because it's a move towards the kind of Europe he wants.

'The first appeal of a fascist or prematurely fascist movement is an appeal against the intruders'. Umberto Eco 1994

Be aware of the populist myth about an 'elite' which is to blame for the existing population's problem. The fascist will claim to represent the 'will of the people' despite concentrating power in the hands of the few and the rich. (Does this seem familiar?!)

UNDERMINING OF DEMOCRACY can be a sign of fascism.

The undermining of the judiciary by the Brexit campaign (judges are traitors), The Trumpian 'clean the swamp' narrative about the civil service, Dominic Cummings joking of 'purging' the civil

service. The lack of scrutiny of future Brexit negotiations by parliament (the negotiations are going on behind closed doors). These are dangerous signs.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Resist the rise of disinformation by not spreading it yourself. Resist the phrase ‘fake news’ (if it’s fake it’s not news!) Ask for evidence and reliable sources. Value intellectuals.

LISTEN TO THOSE YOU DISAGREE WITH

A flourishing democracy needs respectful disagreement. Avoid offensive or militaristic language. Avoid the ‘echo chamber’ (only engaging with those with the same views as ourselves e.g. on FB)

CAMPAIGN FOR CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

We need a more fair voting system

RECLAIM WHAT WE VALUE

Genuine freedom of speech. Representative democracy. Citizen’s assemblies? Referenda? Molly urges us to join clubs and societies and build community. Be the change you want to see in the world. We become the stories we tell. Do things with an urgent slowness, walk with God. Really important stuff moves at the speed of trust. She reminded us of the resurrection and that evil never has the last word.

ANTHONY REDDIE THEOLOGISING BREXIT

Anthony argues that British Mission creates a framework in which White people are superior to people beyond her borders and more authentic than non-Whites within the nation.

The empire and colonialism that made the British imagine themselves to be special people of God has gone, but the theology that underpinned it remained and empire theology outlived the empire.

At its peak, Britain owned or controlled 24% of the world. The presence of the empire is seen as a proof of God's blessing on the British.

This theology of English Nationalism that finds its underscoring in the Church of England is why the Anglicans voted to leave the EU in larger numbers than any of the Christian traditions in Britain. It's why the Brexit party nearly as white as the BNP and the NF before it. Visible minorities can join but the agenda is a White nationalist one.

Anthony says that Brexit is a triumvirate of English Nationalism, Conservatism and White Christian notions of cultural identity.

AL BARRETT, the rector of Hodge Hill Church, a local Ecumenical Partnership with the United Reformed Church in the Bromford estate in east Birmingham. This is an intergenerational community building project called Together We Can.

'The root of racism is austerity. People on benefits turn against others on benefits. If you're backed into a corner it brings out the worst in you. As human beings, we know how to make things better for each other but the economics of austerity stops all that. We're under the cosh and we're fighting for our lives.' (Cathy Milligan, 53, Glasgow)

‘The reality is that the conditions of poverty in which much of this anti-immigration sentiment is found are so severe they affect the way people think, feel and behave.’

It’s not rocket science: listen and those who feel ignored will re-engage passionately. People used to being dismissed will form bonds of trust with the individuals, movements, organisations and political parties that include them. This creates the social electricity that can be harnessed for positive political momentum. If we can change our posture towards some of the anti-immigration sentiment and engage it, many will begin to believe there is value in dialogue and turn away from the far right, which preys on anger and exclusion as political propulsion’

(Darren McGarvey, *Poverty Safari*)

When arranging a community event, Al found that when the church hosted, a lot of people came and had a lovely time but did not necessarily connect with their neighbours. When local people hosted, it was a smaller event (in a family home) but the people who came really got to know their neighbours in a new way.

In the small group sharing, a German lady who had lived in England for a long time shared with us some of her experience. Her daughter and granddaughter, both bilingual, who were born in the UK were told (separately) to ‘go back where you came from’ because they were heard speaking German in public. This attitude is on the increase and I think we need to be on the lookout for it and ‘call it out’ as Molly urges us. ■

Book of Discipline Revision Committee update March 2020
Mary Woodward Portobello and Musselburgh - South-East

Your committee met in January at Friends House in London, and will be meeting again in April, at the University of Warwick.

We spend time each weekend listening to each other as we worship-share: this time we spoke about how we ground our work in the Spirit and how gradually we move towards clarity and a better understanding of our task. It's a long slow process...

How are we getting on? Well, I invite you to consider the size and the scale of the project – it's not just a matter of getting a copy of Faith & Practice, cutting it into bits, rewriting some of them, and juggling the order a little bit! We are spending a lot of time discerning our way forward – what needs to be in the book; what's not currently in Qfp; the importance of explaining WHY we do things as well as HOW we do them; how we do that explaining; how to be inclusive; and how everything fits together.

I am slowly learning that the weekends tend to take a particular shape: the Friday night is good as we come together again, find out how we've been getting on, and prepare for the work ahead. The Saturday becomes increasingly difficult and demanding, and I usually end up wondering what on earth is going on, feeling that everything is very muddled – and then on the Sunday morning the clerks present a draft minute summarising our work of the previous day, and everything seems clear again and we can see how to move on. [I remember having a similar experience at Yearly Meeting, listening to everyone's ministry and trying to work out what it all means/ where we are trying to go – and then Minute 36 makes sense of everything.]

The key messages from this weekend's meeting are:

- *We feel daunted and excited by the size and importance of our task. We continued to seek ways to make it more manageable to approach. We are thinking about how to make our book of discipline more inclusive. We are also working out what is central to explaining the Quaker way.*
- *What passages of Quaker faith & practice are significant to you? We talked about parts that are personally meaningful to us, and will invite everyone to do the same during YMG.*
- *Keeping in touch with Quakers is very important to us. Many thanks to those who helped us by attending the Woodbrooke conference in November. We will be active at YMG and hope to accept other invitations to engage with Friends. Our current communications channels are Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. BYM reports on our work through Quaker News and other BYM channels.*

As well as working on the 'homework' tasks we are set to do for the next committee meeting, I have been working very hard as convenor of the planning group for our committee's engagement with Friends at Yearly Meeting Gathering in Bath. The planning group was appointed in December and immediately was faced with Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee's imminent deadlines – what did we want to do at YMG? What spaces would we need? How would we describe what we want to do? A small group of us have been working very hard for the last three months: we currently have a breathing space but will need to pick up the task again at our April committee meeting, when we work out who does what and when in Bath in August.

If you're coming to Yearly Meeting Gathering and want to know more about our work, look out for our special interest groups – *Boldly revising Quaker faith & practice*, *Prayerfully revising Quaker faith & practice*, and *Joyfully revising Quaker faith & practice*. We hope you will contribute to our week-long project *Our Book – Bath 2020: a creative BDRC community art and podcast project*.

Once again, please uphold us all as we do this complex task on your behalf – we can't do it without you. ■



Love in a Cup

**Book of Discipline Revision Committee Meeting 24-25 April 2020.
Mary Woodward.**

Our committee planned to meet at Warwick University during the last weekend in April, but the coronavirus lockdown meant we had to cancel that and work out another way to hold our meeting. As so many Meetings have found, zoom was our friend: three sessions were arranged, one for the Friday evening, and two for the Saturday.

It was really heart-warming to see so many familiar faces on the Friday evening, most of which was spent hearing how each of us is coping with the current situation – some finding it very easy, others finding it very challenging in different ways. Like so many other people, we were all extremely grateful for the technology which allowed us to see and hear each other, and know we were all holding each other in love even though we were geographically far apart.

Saturday morning dealt with business which could easily be done remotely, with the assistance of draft minutes and the many reports that had been submitted in advance. We talked about the things we had learned from our most recent piece of ‘homework’, but felt that discernment of the next steps forward should be left for a later date. The planning group for this year’s [cancelled] YMG was laid down, and we spoke hopefully of using its work for the 2021 Gathering.

Saturday afternoon had us dividing into four groups for the next piece of ‘homework’. I had thought that I was appointed to this committee to write, but despite there being two writing groups on offer I felt very strongly drawn to another topic – *Engaging with Friends*. In view of the current proliferation of meetings via zoom, skype, etc, it seems particularly appropriate that we should start thinking how we as a committee can use already

established networks to communicate with Friends all round the country to inform and involve them in the revision process.

Due to the wonders of zoom, we were able to have four breakout groups to discuss our particular topic. Even better, zoom firmly bounced us back to the main meeting when our allotted time was up, ensuring that we dealt with our business timeously and didn't indulge in idle chat!! Six of us are in 'my' group: the other five are much younger than I and well-acquainted with all the current ways of engaging electronically, while I'm there to uphold the value of face to face meetings, and speak up for people who are less comfortable with computers, or indeed refuse to have anything to do with them...

Our group will meet next month to discuss all the ideas that were put forward in our brief session, and we hope to spring swiftly into action– so watch out for information and invitations to take part in discussions coming your way soon.

Our next meeting as a committee was to have been at Yearly Meeting Gathering in Bath: we now hope to meet again in October, either at Warwick University or electronically. As ever, we value your prayerful support and involvement in this work. ■

*True silence...is to the spirit what sleep is
to the body, nourishment and
refreshment.*

William Penn, 1699. QF&P 2.13

**Flowers for Mohandas.
Robert Thompson, Dundee-East.**

I rarely if ever manage to sleep away from home
But had actually drifted off when through my hotel
Window came the sound of loud cheering and singing.
I did not need to look at my watch-11pm 31st January.
I knew that back home people would be gathering in
Cities and towns for candlelit vigils,
The light from which would one day guide us back to
Our friends.

I do not usually feel lonely in London but I did then.
The next morning as I walk to Friends House
I take a few minutes to stand at the Gandhi statue
In Tavistock Square.

Someone has placed four bunches of flowers.
My mood lifts as I see that in the midst of the cheering
And chanting, the divisions and toxic flag waving
Someone has brought flowers for Mohandas. Later in Meeting
someone quotes from Jo Cox.
" There is more that unites us than divides us" I hope so.
I hope so



Mental Welfare in Community. Addiction.

Robert Wilson Orkney North.

So where does addiction - and more particularly alcoholism fall into mental welfare. Well, I believe that addiction is a type of personality disorder or mental condition, in my case anyhow, caused in childhood and evolving during adolescence. And the link is there with community because I see the family as community and more importantly in my case, an isolated community. Our family didn't associate with the local community and my brothers and I didn't play with other kids in the area where I lived in North London when I was growing up.

My childhood was pretty unhappy, just when things were looking up something would happen to pull the carpet away - changing school or changing church. My brothers got the attention and additional tuition and I was left to my own devices. Father wanted a musician and the music lessons weren't going to be for me. And father was a disciplinarian and his word was law enforced by a leather strap. Looking back I understand this as rejection, even abandonment. Strangely enough, I remember my father saying to me in answer to my "what about me?", "you'll sort yourself out, there's nothing we need to give to you" was his retort. And so there it was, at the time it was a real ego boost, a young lad being told he was good enough and didn't need to be given anything extra. Strangely these words would come back to haunt me in AA when we're told alcoholics are 'egomaniacs with a low self esteem'.

The change of schooling was when my brothers and I were taken out of the state education system and sent to private schools, my father believing we'd have a better start in life. Trouble was it was a catholic school and we were anglicans. I can tell you persecution does happen in England and it was ignored by the staff at my school. In frequent violent confrontations with other kids I always fared badly, I was outnumbered, which led to my abhor-

rence of violence all my life. Looking back this was another episode of complete rejection and isolation at a critical time of development, the school community failed me and this had been caused by my parents. Just when I needed affection and love because I was frightened and anxious I was without knowledge of which way to turn. Children have no way of knowing what is normal and acceptable if they've never experienced anything different. I had a miserable education and couldn't wait to leave even without almost any qualifications. Fortunately, the police cadet service accepted me - just as the military today accepts the least educated and society's disillusioned misfits - and I joined up and left home.

I'm not saying that all addiction comes about because of poor upbringing or dysfunctional families, I've know many alcoholics who stated they've had very happy childhoods but I know that families, local communities, schools and churches can have a big impact on children's development and their mental condition which affects them for the rest of their lives, sometimes with disastrous consequences.

I joined the police cadets in London two months after leaving school, and joined my next community - the start of my institutionalization. I lacked confidence, worth and esteem and was filled with self-loathing - I didn't particularly like life, it was a burden to be borne with very little pleasure and I soon found relief in drink. In fact it wasn't long before I was dividing up my wages into daily allowances to spend on beer. Most of us cadets it seemed did like a drink but I always seemed to need that bit extra or the "carry out", as they say in Scotland.

I don't think the police community encourages drinking as such but it certainly didn't discourage it or advise against it's consequences, it could all be different now however. Staff knew cadets used pubs and that they were underage but it was never forbidden. Besides it was a very macho male environment and that's what men did. Later, when I became an police officer it was the

normal thing to do at the end of shift, especially for the single guys. Drinking for a couple of hours after night duty helped one sleep, and one officer who found sleeping difficult during summer days was 'prescribed' a few strong drinks by his GP.

I got married when I was 28 to a young lass who then became an air stewardess. It was a very hedonistic partying life style and drink played a big part - we were young and financially comfortable and life was good with no real cares. Flying the world was common practice and so was drinking - duty free. Again I had joined a community where drinking was the norm.

My first marriage ended - we drifted apart inevitably I suppose. Life alone in a house with a mortgage was difficult and boring. It wasn't long before a new lady entered my life and she moved in, occasionally with her younger daughter staying over. Drinking didn't really affect my work then - I was a controlled drinker - I would always ensure I was 'sober' for work, although there were occasions when I miscalculated and ended up in a hell of a state but nothing was ever said at work and the police colleagues could always be relied on to cover for you, which could really make things worse. For twenty years I was a firearms officer, carrying firearms overtly on a daily basis at Heathrow. Many days I'm sure I was more a liability than an asset but nothing was said - they needed the canon fodder and it was an easy job because you didn't get involved in mundane police work. And I was lazy, only concerned with getting off duty and getting a drink or three.

I retired in 1999 and was almost immediately reemployed by the police doing resources and property management. Without the discipline and shift work and 'warrant of police office' my drinking gradually increased and with it my bouts of anxiety and depression. I was off work for periods with 'dépression' and interviewed on returning to work but no questions were asked about symptoms and causes. Although I enjoyed much of my challenging work it was changing. The drinking at lunch time started and

the secret tippling during the afternoon. The anxiety and shakes became very difficult, as did my temper. Stockpiling drink at home became an obsession and I dreaded any occasion when I may be away from my stash for a few hours or worse still - overnight. The thought of going to bed without enough booze to keep me asleep till dawn was terrifying and could literally cause a cold sweat and tremors of fear.

In 2003 I collapsed one night in the garden after a long session - I was on my own. Fortunately my step daughter arrived home and found me and helped me in to the house. I deteriorated quickly and an ambulance was called and I was rushed to hospital where I suffered two alcoholic seizures. My heart and breathing ceased and I had to be resuscitated twice but I knew none of this until a week later in ICU. After a very long recovery when it was thought I may die I stopped drinking for three and a half manic years. I had no support or therapy and on returning to work although I was interviewed by the police chief medical officer, there was no support, counselling or monitoring offered. Perhaps the police didn't want to accept they have staff with addiction problems, perhaps medical notes on their files to that effect would reveal more than the police are able to accept. All I do know is the I will never forget that night in 2003 and looking back I know my step daughter saved my life, if it hadn't been for her I wouldn't be here now. Yes, I do believe in miracles and this wouldn't be my last.

As sure as eggs are eggs I started drinking again. I had no defence against the first drink or my 'condition', so I now know I was doomed to fail. This time my alcoholic deterioration was rapid. Within months I was drinking as much if not more than I had been when I had my seizures and I was too proud and stupid to ask for help although I knew the drink would kill me this time.

Why I went to the doctor that morning in October 2008 I've no idea but I was beaten and a complete gibbering wreck. I was pre-

scribed Diazepam and went through the most horrendous ‘cold turkey’ imaginable for many days. And after a week I went to my first AA meeting and joined a community which was to save my life. Having true friends who know exactly what you’re going through but who have no sympathy turned out to be the tough love I needed. To start with I’d go to three or four meetings a day, travelling far and wide. AA became my addiction and as my doctor pointed out “You’ve just swapped one addiction for another”. “Yes” I said “but one may keep me alive - the other will kill me.”

My recovery, spiritual awakening and self-realization led me to my next community - Quakers. An AA friend in Ulverston was a Quaker working at Swarthmoor Hall. We’d speak together late into the night after AA meetings and gradually the occasional Quaker meeting became regular. Quakers became my family and I no longer felt like a stranger in this family - my community. I could speak my truth and nobody would mock me, criticize or judge me, in fact mutual identification was quite common. I went through early retirements from work - a hell of a fight - I learnt about co-dependency - left my martial home of 25 years and went through a second divorce, ALL without picking up a drink. I gained the self confidence I always bluffed I had, and self-worth and self-esteem. I learnt to love myself the way I was, not perfect but the way I was created. Most of all I learnt to forgive my father and forgive myself. Not everybody likes me but that’s okay now, that’s their problem but I love them all regardless. I’ve been in the gutter looking up, nobody’s beneath me and nobody’s better or above me, I respect everybody. I live one day at a time to the full because it may be my last. My life’s full of gratitude, blessings and love for all humanity and all creation. I have no expectations but great faith which gives me the contentment and serenity that fills me just for this moment. ■

Sent in by Oriole Hall Inverness LM.

I would like to share with you a Caim or circle prayer which I find particularly helpful at times like this. Caim prayers originated from Celtic Spirituality, *caim* being Gaelic for encircling or protecting.

Circle me Lord, Keep protection near, and danger afar.

Circle me Lord, Keep light near, and darkness afar.

Circle me Lord, Keep peace within. Keep evil out.

Circle me Lord, Keep hope within. Keep doubt without.

May you be a bright flame before me.

May you be a guiding star above me.

May you be a smooth path below me.

And a loving Guide behind me.

Today, tonight, and forever.

Amen

The Gathered Meeting

Robin Davis, Dunblane Meeting. WSAM

At the time of writing, meeting together for worship in a single room in our meeting houses (or other rented spaces) is not allowed because of government restrictions imposed during the coronavirus pandemic. We have been encouraged to meet simultaneously in multiple rooms - our homes - with or without the use of technology. Meetings throughout Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) have adopted this approach.

What are the advantages and disadvantages? Is it possible to feel gathered in the Quaker sense of that term when we are not in one room together? It is only very recently that we have had the possibility of using online video technology. Does its use emphasise the “digital divide” in our meetings? How do we help those who are unable or feel nervous about using such tools? Does this enrich our worship and if so, how? Is worshipping alone but knowing you are doing so at the same time as the rest of your own Quaker community as deep an experience as being in the one room? Are we being inclusive, in the widest sense of that term?

One of the complications of discussing this is that using online worship has up to now been confined to use by Woodbrooke and the Quaker Council for European Affairs as a means of keeping in touch with, and providing worship opportunity, for those living remotely or without a local meeting. In Dunblane we have found that Friends outwith the local area, including those living abroad, have been regularly attending the Zoom meetings. We will need to assess, once the immediate crisis has passed, whether this should be a standard way of providing meeting, or at least a recognised form of supplementing the usual forms of meeting.

However, we need to probe a little deeper and discern what it is that is special about Friends' forms of worship that we need to preserve and foster. I believe it may throw a light on how straightforward it is in BYM to maintain our discipline at a time when we can no longer assume we all have a similar understanding of our faith. As so often, it can take a crisis to make us examine things we so easily take for granted. Zoom, I suggest, is zooming in on some very basic questions.

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18: 20, authorised version) We gather certainly, in the sense of coming together, but what impels us to do this regularly? Are we still in unity with Query no. 8?

"Worship is our response to an awareness of God. We can worship alone, but when we join with others in expectant waiting we may discover a deeper sense of God's presence. We seek a gathered stillness in our meetings for worship so that all may feel the power of God's love drawing us together and leading us."

There is the picture by the Irish painter J Doyle Penrose, which used to be widely seen in meeting houses, of a meeting with a ghostly apparition standing as the "Presence in the Midst". Do we nowadays ever have this feeling of a presence? Are we still conscious of a mystery, a sense of God, of the Divine? If we feel driven to give vocal ministry, is it because we "quake" or feel some extra influence or power at work? Are Friends mystics or charismatic and prophetic? In these so-called secular times, these may seem recondite questions, if not irrelevant, but I suggest that they remain fundamental.

George Gorman describes "the amazing fact of Quaker worship" when he "discovered the way to the interior side of my life, at the deep centre of which I knew that I was not alone, but was held by a love that passes all understanding. This love was mediated to me in the first place by those with whom I worshipped. For my

journey was not solitary...” (Quaker Faith and Practice 2.03) Friends have called this a form of Communion. (See Robert Davis, QF&P 2.09) Or as it says at QF&P 2.11, “this individual experience is not sufficient, and in a Meeting held in the Spirit, there is a giving and receiving between its members, helping one another with or without words. So there comes a wider vision and a deeper experience.”

Of course we can be distracted - by a background noise in the Meeting House, a car outside, another person’s shuffling in her seat. At home, someone may come to the door, the telephone will ring, the neighbour may start mowing the lawn. In Zoom meetings, the pictures on the screen are not static, the order in which faces are displayed can vary, an individual’s movements may be just as distracting as at the Meeting House. Is it up to me to find Penn’s “true silence”?

For early Friends such as Edward Burrough or Robert Barclay, meeting was where “tongues could be loosened and our mouths opened”, very much harking back to a primitive form of Christianity where the Holy Spirit inspired ministry. This is the charismatic church, one with which most British Friends nowadays would sit uneasily. Fox had no respect for the church, which he saw as an organisation hindering access to the true religion. Nor was he bound by the modern convention that meetings last only one hour, no more and no less. The hour glass - as was the practice in some Scottish presbyterian services - would have been turned more than once! If we really believe that in meeting it is the Spirit (the Divine, an extraordinary power, God...) that inspires vocal ministry, rather than (prepared?) accounts of “what I did during the week that I found inspiring” then we really must remember Advice 12 about having to look for the deep meaning behind words which may sometimes be poorly articulated. It is our individual spiritual experience, which will be different for each of us, that gives rise to this sharing of insights. Elders need to look out for, and have a sense of, ministry that

may be about to be given. They should feel able to allow the meeting to continue if that is clearly the sense of the meeting. (Friends need to be aware that elders have this responsibility.) Can such awareness and sense of being impelled be present whatever the form of the meeting for worship? Does worshipping from home with or without IT make this more challenging to achieve?

We may be uncomfortable about ‘quaking’. We should be equally ill at ease about some forms of meditation. Our Friend Tom Bodine put this well . “A gathered meeting is something more than a number of individuals sitting down but meditating individually. So long as each sits in meditation in the way one does when worshipping by oneself, the worship will seldom reach the greater depth which which a Quaker meeting at its best achieves....As a meeting gathers, as each individual ‘centres down’, there gradually develops a sense of belonging to a group who are together seeking a sense of the Presence. The ‘I’ in us becomes to feel like ‘we’... At some point we suddenly feel a sense of unity, a sense of togetherness with one another and with something outside ourselves that we call God.” (QF&P 2.47)

Or as Thomas Kelly would put it : “what is the ground and foundation of the gathered meeting? In the last analysis, it is, I am convinced, the Real Presence of God”. (Qf&P 2.40) We need to foster this understanding of the gathered meeting if we are to find the new forms of worship fulfilling.

And what about our business meetings? All too often our “meetings for worship for church affairs” turn out to be a period of silent worship followed by discussion with only intermittent moments of worship and depth, rather than a whole meeting with worshipful contributions arising out of the silence. Here in West Scotland we have for some years now been using technology, initially the telephone and now Zoom, to link our members across the large area we cover. There is much goodwill to make it all “work” and some success in permitting those on the periphery

feel linked to the centre. How do we best enable our Area Meeting to be gathered? Using a telephone the clerk cannot see Friends to judge or sense when best to call someone, or to present a draft minute. Are our online video meetings any different? The clerk may not be able to see all Friends at any one time, has to keep one eye on a screen with the agenda and the draft minutes, and another on whom to call to minister. The assistant clerk acts as a second eye and the elders can ask Friends to hold the discipline if they become too excited! None of this is impossible but I suggest that what we are now practising, using new ways of keeping in touch, is strengthening the need to maintain the gathered meeting. That requires all of us to be stewards of what early Friends left as their legacy. Our meetings for worship are, when we observe proper discipline, true vehicles for spiritual development.

How then do we reconcile those unique spiritual experiences each of us may encounter with our various beliefs? In the seventeenth century and indeed well into the twentieth, Friends could assume Christianity as the common basis of their meetings for worship. The idea of a Presence in the Midst had a powerful resonance. It may no longer have this in our Yearly Meeting but I trust that for most who attend our meetings there remains a belief that when together we are somehow better able to realise what God (or whatever term you use) wishes for us. We may need to work harder at it and for many it will be a struggle. What Zoom demands of us is no different in essence from meeting for worship in our meeting houses. It asks that we act as true stewards of our discipline.

“Friends, meet together and know one another in that which is eternal, which was before the world was.” (George Fox, 1657: QF&P 2.35) ■

Concerns about the Government Response to Coronavirus. Anne Macarthur. Castle Douglas

When I first read about people standing outside their front doors to clap the NHS at 8.00 pm, I felt a sense of unease that I couldn't have explained at the time. Now I understand a little better what was bothering me about that. There's nothing wrong with showing appreciation, but it can only be spontaneous once and then it becomes a 'thing'. What I mean is that politicians and celebrities jump on the bandwagon and use the publicity for their own ends. If politicians are seen to be applauding the NHS it becomes harder to criticise their policies regarding health care. It also seems hypocritical to be clapping while at the same time implementing policies that mean that nurses are poorly paid and along with other hospital staff are being asked to do a dangerous job without the proper protective equipment (just as some soldiers were during the Gulf war). Of course I recognise that a lot of people are very genuine in their goodwill and that's a good thing.

I see it as my responsibility to look behind what's going on, ask questions and be aware that there is always a hidden agenda. Of course we are in a dangerous situation and it's necessary to put measures in place to protect ourselves and others from this frightening virus. However I feel rather shocked at how quickly we have all fallen into line to obey the rules of lockdown. I'm concerned about the spread of fear, it's convenient if we're all afraid because then we will do as we are told without question. The narrative from the government of 'you are in danger and we will keep you safe' is a danger in itself. Some little children are afraid to leave their homes. According to the Guardian (11 April) as many as one in five primary age children are afraid to leave home and are worried there will not be enough food to eat during the course of the outbreak.

I think it's important to look at what's happening in a wider political context. E.g. the rise of the extreme right in Europe. Orban in Hungary has passed new laws with no time limit which allow him to rule by decree and jail anyone who spreads misinformation. What this means is that a journalist (in Hungary) reporting on the pandemic is at risk of arrest if the line he/she takes is not in line with what the government is saying.

I'm also concerned about rights being eroded as normal procedures are being slackened during 'distancing' E.g. in our local paper there was an article about planning applications going unchallenged because community councils cannot meet in person. I can't see any reason why meetings could not take place by zoom. It makes me wonder if the situation is being exploited to the detriment of justice, allowing things to 'slip through' while we're all looking in another direction. Another thing I've been aware of is the tendency for us to blame one another for not adhering to the rules strictly enough. When people feel threatened, they may blame their neighbours and others in their community. I heard a discussion on Radio Scotland about whether we should report people who were 'breaking the rules'. It sounds very similar to the rhetoric around welfare benefits. The government were encouraging us to report benefit fraud. It puts the blame on someone else for the problems in the country and as a consequence shields the government from scrutiny. When I watch something on ITV Hub, I'm bombarded with an advert (the same one at every break) about lockdown and staying at home. It begins with flashing lights and ambulance sirens and includes an image of a patient struggling to breathe. It's accompanied by the instructions of how we should behave. These ads amount to a kind of brainwashing to ensure that we all remain afraid. It's unnecessary for them to be so constant and 'fear-provoking' as I believe everyone in the country now has the information they need to act responsibly during lockdown. ■

PHOTO GALLERY



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Strathconon



Pictures from the Past



Picnic at Whin Park



Goodbye Sam!

There will come a day
Alastair Simmons

There will come a day
When that blue returns to the sky
The lark rises and sings again
Above now snowless hillsides
Spring warmth tingles with my skin
The pain of loss finally falls
Into a mountain stream
To begin
The long journey
To the sea

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