



Feb 24

Scottish Friend



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1 GM affairs

1.1 Calling for General Meeting for Scotland Michael Hutchinson, GM Clerk

Saturday, 9th March 2024

Dear Friends,

Greetings to you all!

Our next General Meeting will be on the 9th March, in Edinburgh and online through Zoom. This is the first meeting scheduled for this year, and it will be a 'blended' or 'hybrid' meeting, with some Friends present in the **Edinburgh Meeting House at 7 Victoria Terrace, EH1 2JL**, and others joining by Zoom. The agenda and papers will go out at the end of February.



After preliminary refreshment from 10:30 am, we will start with open worship at 11.00, break for lunch from 1.00 pm to 2.00 pm, and our afternoon session will finish by about 4.00 pm, following which there will be tea.

PLEASE USE this registration link for November GM, however you attend: <http://tinyurl.com/yms46w7z>. *Please note that you will receive Zoom log in details even if you have registered to attend face to face– this is a default setting of the registration set up. Registering for the meeting assists in planning for the number of people expecting to come.*

Please do join us! All are welcome. South East Scotland AM Friends will be providing refreshments beforehand and afterward, for those coming to the meeting house. They are also likely to serve soup and bread and cheese for lunch, but this will be confirmed in the agenda mailing. If you need anything more for lunch, please bring it yourself. .

This is an opportunity to meet together with Friends from across Scotland. In a spirit of worship we attend to our church affairs, and matters concerning the spiritual life and witness of Quakers in Scotland.

Part of *Quaker faith & practice* 13.01 reminds us that “It is part of our commitment as members of the Religious Society of Friends that we try to live our lives under the guidance of the Spirit. Whatever the service to which we are called, whether it be great or small, our meeting can uphold us in prayer and other ways”.

At this General Meeting, our business will include looking at aspects of the wide variety of our General Meeting responsibilities and activities.

Because of the extra time required for discerning the future moves towards a single Scottish Quaker charitable body and the associated implications, we propose to hold an extra General Meeting online only on Saturday 6th April 10 am – 1 pm for this purpose only. The March 9th agenda will not include this item so we can deal with our other responsibilities.

On March 9th, in the morning we have a variety of business, including the GM Trustees annual report to us, the Families Weekend planned for 3–5th May, the dates and venues for our meetings in 2025/6, the Meeting for Sufferings report and a return to considering Ecocide and Racial Justice. In the afternoon we have a speaker, Lucy le Roux from Christian Aid Scotland to help us with the connections with our ecumenical and interfaith work, the reports on which we take at the first meeting of the year. The Parliamentary Engagement Working Group works closely with Christian Aid and Lucy will tell us a bit more of Christian Aid’s Loss and Damage work in Ethiopia funded by the Scottish Government. We will have a paper from the clerks on the criteria for signing public statements in your name. We’ll also receive a nominations committee report and deal with other business to keep Friends’ work and witness in Scotland going. .

A second mailing a few days before GM will include draft minutes and any additional papers. If you do not receive them, please ask our Administrator, Jane Booth, for a copy (scotfriends@gmail.com). If you have any questions, please contact me, your clerk, by email scotfriendsclerk@gmail.com or telephone 0141 770 7865.

The following General Meeting, after 6th April, will be blended again on 8th June, physically in Glasgow and online.

Michael Hutchinson, Clerk
Susan Mitchell, Assistant Clerk.
General Meeting for Scotland.

1.2 Report of the GM for Scotland in November Pam Apted, East Scotland AM

It was a bright day as I boarded the train in Montrose, with clear views of the Angus hills and the sound of geese on the move. It was however with troubled hearts that seventy Friends gathered for General Meeting, both at the AK Bell library in Perth and online. Our thoughts were with all those caught up in the conflict in the Middle East. In ministry we heard how Sharyn Lock, an attender from Argyll meeting, had held a five-day fasting vigil outside the Scottish Parliament. Sharyn, a midwife, who had previously volunteered in Palestine, was calling for an immediate ceasefire. We were inspired by her courage and heartened to hear that she was upheld and supported.

Our worship strengthened us, reminding us that across the world there are good people doing good things. We reflected that by allowing space for worship, we are moved to greater things. It was a day of hope, inspiration and looking forwards.

We were gladdened to hear of the activities of our children and young people and the inter-generational joy of family events. We heard how all were moved by the brilliant performance of ‘Wangari’s Trees of Peace’, by Glasgow school children at the Scottish Parliament, wonderfully created by Mary Troup. With its core theme of ‘Never give up’ it was the perfect way to lay the foundation for our Peace at the Heart of Scottish Schools exhibition. The exhibition attracted a good level of support and interest among MSPs and twenty one went on to sign a Parliamentary Motion calling for more support for peace education in Scottish schools.



We welcomed our new Parliamentary Engagement Worker, Sarah Komashko and caught up with the group’s impressive work, including a submission to the Scottish Government’s consultation ahead of its Human Rights Bill, working with Stop Climate Chaos Scotland and liaising with the Quaker Truth and Integrity Group. We are encouraged to engage with our MSPs, and were reminded of the importance of putting ourselves in their shoes, they are human too!

The Quakers in Scotland Coordinating Group are hard at work. The group have drawn up a draft Governing Document for the new single charity with consultations sessions to be held in November. Our local development worker, Zoe Prosser will continue to add her support to this group as part of her proposed priorities for the year ahead. Zoe is supporting us in many and varied ways, her positive energy is just what is needed as we navigate our way forward.

We heard an update from the Scottish Quaker Community Justice Working Group. The group seeks small openings to help bring about a more just and compassionate society. Their work has included arranging a retreat for Scottish prison chaplains which received positive feedback. The Group is working to bring us consideration of prison abolition in November 2024.

It was a full and stimulating day aided by the efficient, wise and at times humorous guidance of our clerks. ‘Arise and be doing’ was the theme.



Photograph 1: Aberlady Bay local nature reserve.

2 Ecumenical Matters

2.1 The future of ecumenism in Scotland - an update Mary Woodward, SE Scotland AM

Finally, we have progress! You may well remember that for a number of years there have been discussions about the future of ACTS (Action of Churches Together in Scotland) and of a proposal that this should morph into a new body, called the Scottish Christian Forum (SCF). ACTS comprised a number of the ‘traditional’ Christian denominations in Scotland, but the ecumenical landscape has widened to include other denominations, and it was felt that a new body, to which all could subscribe, was the way forward.

You may also recall my reports on a meeting in January last year in which all interested parties – representatives from the various denominations, ACTS, and Christian Aid – came together with a view to working out how to move on from the stasis which arose at the start of lockdown. The Ecumenical Officers Forum (EOF), of which I’m a member, was asked to bring proposals for the way forward to a meeting in the autumn.

At the meeting in Edinburgh Meeting House last October, there was general agreement on the proposal that the Scottish Christian Forum would be an umbrella organisation under which the Scottish Church Leaders Forum (SCLF), the EOF, the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office and ACTS would shelter. The EOF was charged with drawing up more detailed proposals for how this would work, to be brought to a meeting early in 2024.

The EOF met in December and worked out more detailed proposals, on which we were preparing to work further in January. Unfortunately, in the interim one denomination’s leaders met and issued a statement in the course of which they said they would not agree to some of our proposals.

This necessitated a rapid change of plan – illustrating the challenges of trying to work ecumenically: something which one [or many] denominations find perfectly acceptable can be a sticking point for others. It is frustrating, but can’t be ignored: if progress is to be made, it has to take place at a pace that everyone can cope with.

Back at the Meeting House on 6 February this year, various members of the EOF introduced and explained the new proposals, referring briefly to the reasons for the changes. The SCF would comprise the already existing Church Leaders Forum and the EOF itself, with the latter acting as an administrative service for the former – a sort of ‘civil service’. Basically, this acknowledges

the current situation, with which all present could agree. It also, most importantly, leaves open the possibility of future developments and possible expansion of the SCF.

Questions and comments were then invited. There were tactful replies to those wanting to know more about the reasons behind the changes. Questions about the future of ACTS arose – but ACTS is its own body, which has to comply with the law, and the present proposals were for a more informal body, completely separate from it. Perhaps the EOF should be re-named the Ecumenical Representatives Forum, since not every EOF member was in fact an officer of their denomination?

There was general agreement that the SCF would be an informal arrangement which could – and must – change, grow, and adapt. How would this informal body interact with more formal bodies – Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), Churches Together in England (CTE) and the Welsh equivalent, Câtun? Nicola from CTBI said there wouldn't be any problems.

We were advised that we should note the questions that were being asked, but not try to answer them all now. We should advance at the rate of the slowest. Structures might make things feel safer, but they can also constrict and shackle! Some of us are more accustomed to 'living on the edge' than others...

Without such formal structures, energy will be released for moving forward. Organic growth will enable co-operation as well as communication between diverse groups from all over Scotland.

What now? Those present at the meeting were in general agreement that the proposals were the way forward, but this meeting was not intended as one where they could be formally accepted. Each denomination will consider the proposals in their particular way – for example, bringing them to their Synod or Assembly for approval. I look forward to attending this year's Synods and Assemblies and finding out how the members of the various denominations react!

Ecumenism in Scotland was agreed currently to be very healthy – relationships are flourishing, and these are the foundations on which co-operative efforts can be built. Hallelujah!

3 Book of Discipline Revision Committee Mary Woodward, SE Scotland AM

On-line committee meeting held in January 2024

Your committee meets on line in January – no travel issues, and no risk of catching germs while travelling – a very real concern for some of our members, not all of whom enjoy robust health. It's a sadness that we aren't together in person, but a very real joy to see each other's faces again, and spend time together. We ensured that we had 'unscripted' time together in which to share what was on our minds and hearts, getting to know each other better and join in others' joys and sorrows – an essential part of growing our community and enabling us to work well together.

Our meeting on the Wednesday evening dealt with the 'easy' stuff – nominations, appointing buddies for those prevented, and receiving reports from the many groups working on individual topics. Some groups had completed their work, the documents 'banked' and the group laid down: others were progressing at varying rates. Some groups need extra personnel because Friends had needed to step back from that work for personal reasons or because their time of service to the committee had come to an end. Several groups were being paused – for example, Membership needs to wait until Yearly Meeting is clearer about the topic.

Our fourth **report to Meeting for Sufferings** was presented to MfS at their December meeting. It was well received, and can be read on the BYM website. We are upheld in our work.

Yearly Meeting 2024 is a long weekend in London in July. There will be special interest group sessions during this time, but the BDRC will not be able to take part in these. Instead, we will need to consider when and what to offer - two or three sessions during the on-line preparation sessions 5-10 July – a job for the Communicating with Friends group.

Saturday's work began with the questions posed by group looking at **the structure of the whole Book**. What did we think of their two proposed 'tree' or 'forest' groupings? Our overall preference seemed to be for the tree, with everything growing organically from the roots and branching out in various directions. The printed and on-line versions of the book may 'work' differently, but will be essentially the same publication. Cross-referencing between topics needs to be considered – how we do it will become clearer as we work, and Friends House staff will be able to help.



Photograph 2: A winter morning on An Caisteal with Ben More at a distance.

Towards the end of last year, a ‘Big Cake Slicing Meeting’ saw members of several topic groups met to consider **how best to avoid overlap between topics**. The meeting’s minute was considered by the whole committee. We need to keep in mind the overall structure of the new Book – in focusing on discrete topics we can lose sight of the whole. We also need to provide clear pathways for Friends to navigate through the text and find what they are looking for: this could be easy in an electronic version, but will need careful thought for the printed version. Our group looking at the overall structure of the Book will add these considerations to their work, while all topic groups will continue their search for appropriate anthology material.

At our last committee meeting, Rhiannon Grant was asked to produce a paper investigating what **a section on Quaker theology** might look like and bring it to this meeting. It was an excellent piece, demonstrating both the richness of Quaker theology both past and present and our capacity to grow and change as we find and are open to new Light. Once again, there is the potential for connection and overlap with other sections, particularly the one

on Spiritual Experience. Rhiannon will work with two ‘readers’ from the committee and bring the resulting work back to a future committee meeting.

A small group had been considering **how to include the voices of children and young people in the new Book** – how could this be done ethically, and where do these voices need to be heard. We were asked to consider whether there should be a separate dedicated section or whether their contributions should be included in relevant sections throughout the Book? It was pointed out that children and young people’s voices are exactly equal in weight to anyone else’s: they should not be discounted simply because of the age of the contributor. Young people are still in “a state of being cared for”, but their journeys are of equal importance. Our Book is for everyone, regardless of their age. “Age-appropriate material” can be seen as ‘dumbing down’ or condescending. The group will continue gathering material, and ‘see where this goes’.

The group working on **Individual Spiritual Experience** described how it had begun its work – making a list of headings and assembling extracts that illustrate them. They had many questions for us – the “voice of the book” introducing the various sections is minimal at present: should there be more? When we write about “we”, to whom are we referring – it isn’t consistent at present. Some explanation of who contributors are, or the context surrounding their contribution[s] could be helpful. There need to be more extracts from the last fifteen years.

A wider-ranging discussion emerged – what about **pictures**? To start each section of the Book? What do we



want images to do – break up chunks of text? Illustrate a point? Do we commission pictures? We don't want simply to put in pictures for the sake of it. The online *Open to new Light* project has some good images on it. Do we need a separate group to source non-text content?

Cross-referencing is a complex matter – do we wait for advice from BYM publications staff? We need to ensure that we include as much information as possible when we use quotations or pictures, to make it easier for the staff who have to seek copyright permissions.

We were joined by Bea from Friends House publications department who helped us look at **the challenges of getting our work ready for publication**. It would be very helpful for members of that department to join future committee meetings. In the meantime, would it be helpful for BYM staff to work with the committee on some portions of our existing work and see how they might look in a 'finished' version of the text? What do we do about **numbering**? *Quaker faith and practice*'s numbering makes it easy to find extracts: do we want numbers in the new Book? What alternatives might there be? What do we do about **explaining words and meanings** in older extracts? Do we need a glossary, and how do we go about compiling that/writing the explanations? A small group was set up to look at some of these questions. It will work closely with the group looking at the structure of the new Book.

On Sunday we looked at the latest version of the spreadsheet showing **our timeline**. We have made great progress, but there is still much to be done. We also need to be mindful of all the things we have agreed to "return to later", so that nothing gets lost. **Reviewing our text is separate from publishing it**: we need to start reviewing our written text well in advance of completing it. Advices and Queries, introductions to sections, and the introduction to the whole Book, will be written last, when we see the shape of the final text.

New topic groups were set up, looking at Yearly Meeting structures, Stewardship and Resources, and Preparing for Publication. New people were appointed to existing groups where they had been asked for. Some groups will be joined by new committee members when their appointments have been confirmed by Meeting for Sufferings.

I'm continuing to work on Funerals, Death and Dying, and am now part of the Close Relationships group, which means I get to work with Nuala Watt from Glasgow and Ben Pink Dandelion – about which I'm very excited! It's particularly pleasing that I can easily go through to Glasgow to work with

Nuala: efficient and effective as working together on line may be, it's so helpful to be together in person!

We expressed our appreciation of the incredible amount of work our secretary Michael Booth and Friends House staff do for us. We closed with worship, preparing to meet again in person in Leeds at the end of April.

Key messages from this committee meeting:

- *Our 4th report to MfS was well received.*
- *We are developing the structure of our new Book. Church government will be embedded throughout the text.*
- *There will be a section in the new Book on Quaker theology, our personal collective experience, which grows with new Light and reflects our varied experience.*
- *Children and young people's voices will be integrated throughout our text.*
- *We draw our experience from art and music as well as from the written word.*
- *The publications team at BYM will explore possible ways of presenting material.*

Please continue to uphold us in our work on your behalf!

4 Parliamentary Engagement Working Group

4.1 Reflections on Democracy and the Work of the Parliamentary Engagement Working Group

Martin Mansell, West Scotland AM

'Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others.'
Winston Churchill

The Scottish Parliamentary Engagement Working Group was set up some 9 years ago to raise Quaker concerns about political issues with MSPs and civil servants and also to encourage political engagement among Quakers in Scotland. Stepping down after 7 years on the group, I am tempted to reflect on how well it works and in general how well democracy works in Scotland.

Whenever I look at the political machinations in Westminster, I am thankful for a system in Scotland which, for all its faults, is much more open, accessible and democratic. It is easier to get involved in politics in Scotland than down south and being part of PEWG has provided additional opportunities. I have been several times to Holyrood have met several MSPs including ministers. (I have never visited the Houses of Parliament and have met only one MP - my local MP). The overwhelming impression I have of MSPs of all parties is of ordinary human beings generally trying to do a very difficult job. Politics in Scotland is less polarised than in Westminster and this is reflected in the shape of the chamber and the system of proportional representation which gives you a choice of MSPs representing you. I think there is



much the UK parliament could learn from Scotland. Certainly I think our Parliamentary Engagement Officer, Sarah Komashko, finds it easier to work here than her counterpart does in Westminster.

The work of the PEWG is not about lobbying but rather raising issues which are of concern to us. Success is not about changing government policy but rather about making parliamentarians aware of our concerns. One issue where we did have some success was in relation to military visits to schools. The PEWG, together with Forces Watch, submitted a petition to the Scottish Parliament which called for such visits to be monitored and recorded and for parents to be given the right to withdraw their children from such visits. The petition resulted in several hearings in front of the Petitions Committee which called representatives from MOD etc as well as PEWG. Although the Committee ultimately felt that they had gone as far with it as they could, it achieved its aim of raising public awareness of this issue. More recently PEWG organised an exhibition in the Parliament about peace education in schools which led to considerable interest among MSPs.

The areas which PEWG works on are discerned by General Meeting for Scotland and generally follow well established Quaker concerns such as Climate Justice, Peace and Economic Justice. Some areas require less attention than others, either because the Scottish Government is already quite sympathetic, or because it is a matter reserved to Westminster (nuclear weapons is an example of both cases). For some issues it has been difficult to discern a unified Quaker position. I was personally sad that, despite a lot of discussion, we were not able to discern enough support among Quakers in Scotland for Universal Basic Income, something that I personally feel very strongly about.

Democracy, as Churchill indicated, sounds fine in theory but does have drawbacks. People tend to vote for trivial, biased and often random reasons and are overly influenced by opinion polls. Ideally, aggregating large numbers of votes should smooth these factors but somehow, they seem to be multiplied. Also, many sectors of society are greatly underrepresented in elections. Democracy relies not only on participation but also on a level of openness and understanding about the issues facing us, which seems to be declining. One area where real democracy might flourish is in Citizens Assemblies. These are groups of usually 100 people, carefully and scientifically chosen to represent all sections of society, and who are informed by relevant experts. The Climate Assembly very successfully held the Scottish Government to account about its lack of progress on the climate emergency until the Government got rather irritated and wound it up. I would like to see the use of Citizens Assemblies

built into our democratic system.

Finally, several months ago the PEWG was reminded that Quakers could put themselves forward for a 'Time for Reflection' slot in the chamber at the start of each parliamentary week on Tuesday. This is a short (4 min, 400 word) reflection which anyone can offer, as long as it is sponsored by your MSP. Lesley Morrison gave one several months ago and I drafted a reflection on 'What is Peace?' which I delivered in November. I copy it below as an example and hope that other Quakers might take up the challenge. Contact Richard Raggett of PEWG (richardjraggett@gmail.com) if you are interested. (They are actively looking for more diversity than white middle-aged contributors, but don't let that stop you.)



Photograph 3: Winter evening on Ben Challum.

What is peace?

Mahatma Gandhi was once asked what he thought of ‘Western civilisation’. He is said to have replied “I think it would be a good idea”. Looking at the Ukraine war and the Middle East conflict, many people think of peace in the same way, as a ‘good idea’ but not just now.

Quakers have long been associated with pacifism and acknowledge the dilemmas it presents. Some Quakers believe that violence can be justified in extreme situations, such as the Second World War and some even joined the armed forces. Others see pacifism as absolute nonviolence.

But pacifism is more than just refusing to fight; it is about what happens before and after a war. Quakers try to understand the underlying causes of violence and work towards reducing them. Behind the young man with a knife, for example, there is often fear, poverty and a childhood of everyday violence. So we work with groups such as the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP), who help people to understand where violence comes from in their lives and what they can do about it. We also work on an international level through our UN offices in Geneva and New York to try to diffuse conflict, for example by arranging informal, off the record meetings between diplomats.

While accepting the reality of evil and conflict, our pacifism is rooted in our belief that there is something of God in every human being. We are reluctant to divide people into good and bad in the way our criminal justice system often does. I remember a social worker in Glasgow saying: “If two young men go out for an evening with knives, one is likely to end up in hospital and one in a police cell and it is a 50:50 chance who ends up where”.

Pacifists are often challenged to show how nonviolence can deal with an aggressive dictator or an armed gunman. We are not naïve enough to believe that appealing to something of God in a ruthless individual will be ‘successful’. Gandhi himself was assassinated and Jesus, perhaps the ultimate ‘pacifist’, was also killed. But we maintain they did not fail: their legacy of nonviolence has been an inspiration to millions, in contrast to the hatred and devastation that always follows violence and war.

Ultimately, Peace starts with each of us. We should all examine our lives for seeds of conflict and try to heal them.

5 Community Matters

5.1 A Quaker Ecology, Meditation on the future of Friends Margaret Roy, West Scotland AM

This is a Woodbrooke course I have been studying with author Cherice Bock. Cherice is a ‘recorded Quaker minister’ who served as one of the founding clerks of Sierra Cascades Yearly Meeting, in USA, from 2017 to 2020. That Cherise is from USA may account for the slightly different perspective she gives which is based on the Bible. It is a worthwhile challenge to anyone reading the book.

Her basic principle is that we should move from EGO to ECO learning where we humans fit into our ecosystem.

The shift in world view required by the Eco-Reformation can be visualised



Photograph 4: River Ayr near Auchincruive.

in this helpful graphic that shows the difference between an ‘ego’ and an ‘eco’ perspective. The ‘ego’ perspective is based on the western worldview, where

there is a hierarchy, a Great Chain of Being, that extends from God to (male) human beings to other human beings in a rigid hierarchy to animals that are similar to humans, to other animals, to plants and so forth. In this schema the land is seen as a set of commodities, as ‘objects’ to be used for the sake of human beings, important for their utility to us, and able to be quantified by their market value. On the other hand: In the ‘eco’ perspective, humanity is part of the whole. Rather than hierarchical, this model is relational. Each individual, species, and landscape element holds a unique and vital place in a web of relations. The web breaks down the illusion of hierarchy and individuality: human beings cannot exist without the plants and animals that nourish them, without the land that tethers them in place through gravity, without water and sunlight, without the microscopic gut flora that digest our food and make up our microbiome – some estimate that half of our cells are bacteria., Even in our own bodies we are a community of life, and we rely on the interconnected web of our global community in order to live in this planet.

To Cherise God is relational and participatory. She refers to the Gospel of John as destroying the hierarchical dualism that underlies our Western interpretation of Christianity. As a theologian, she leads us to a different understanding of the Bible which she uses to explain a Quaker perspective on ecology. And therein lies the problem with many modern Quaker in Britain.

Whilst we can agree intellectually, how does Spirit come through to the feeling zone where we can embody it? Well, Cherice has an answer in how we interpret the Inward Light and Community.

Community is easy. Its meaning is lost in interpretation. The original Greek of the New Testament has two words for this. *Cosmos* is the world in the sense of politics and economics, what we might call the mundane or the social structure we find ourselves part of and which Jesus rails against as Man’s world. Another word, *oikumene*, from which we get our word *ecumenical*, links us into the whole creation in which today we struggle to find our place. The Greek world against which Jesus rails is one of duality that splits the evil material from the elusive spirit. One result: worship is for Sundays.

She goes to the core of the Quaker relationship with Creation when she speaks on the Inward Light as an individual experience to many. As well as splitting off the spirit, it also fosters hierarchy in that some are better at ‘expressing’ the Light than others.

The alternative she offers is that the Light is in all around us and we are part of it all. It is not merely pantheism. It is more than seeing that is God in

everyone. It is more like Ubuntu. I find it difficult to get my head around Ubuntu but Cherice helps by adding that word participatory. To see that of God in you, how do I participate, and relate. Then, how do I extend that to Creation? What is the Creation of which I am part? Cherice interprets the Bible, our underlying Western ethos, in challenging ways that bring our Spirit into the Real world.

She goes on to apply her perspective to modern concerns of race and ecology, not missing our misogyny. In all, this is an important book to link, or reunite, us with the Spirit in our modern world. It reorientates , much of our thinking on climate justice. It divorce us from the old Christian God who was anthropomorphised as the poser over all who might in the end rescue us or take us to a better place. As co-creators, we have responsibilities. My African women theologians are averse to our modern economic model of development and growth calling it patriarchal and neo-colonialism. Cherie adds the adjective, white which shocked me. This is where I saw her American perspective coming in and started to realise where we are stuck in British Quakerism. We are so individual and intellectual. Where is the interface with our neighbour?

I was left with the challenge, how can we move from ego to eco. Part of that answer may be a move from a culture of want to one of need, to simplicity but ... is simplicity a backward step?



Photograph 5: Winter afternoon in Mugdock Country Park.

5.2 Thank you! John Wigham Trust Kate Arnot, South East Scotland AM

A computer

I would like to thank the Trustees of the John Wigham Trust for considering and accepting the application to the fund and especial thanks to the friend who submitted an application on my behalf.

Well, the award from the Trust has made quite the difference in my life. As a visually impaired person it did not seem worthwhile to potentially waste money on technological solutions that might not work and as an autistic person, the concept of making changes was not appealing.

The award made quite the difference. It gave me a cushion of money that made the process possible. From it I was able to get two large hard drives, a case for them, a suitable monitor (very large and no high definition), a raspberry pi and a reconditioned iPad.

This has allowed me to make an improved media system to amuse the resident parrots and to allow me access to the internet for the first time in six years. Both of these have proved to be a delight for all. Having improved parrot media systems improve further the lives of the dear birds, which pleases me no end. They are very intelligent birds and require as much diversion as possible. An unexpected benefit is that the enlarged monitor is a very popular perch.

Speaking for myself, I have been pleasantly surprised at how useful it is to be able to have internet access at home. I am fortunate in that I am content in my own company, but the award, coming as it did during lockdown enables faster and further communication, as well as allowing me to spread my parrot propaganda through social media, which has cheered many of my friends.

On the subject of friends, I imagine that they are very grateful that I can now do my own online shopping (mostly!) and not have to pester them. The convenience of being able to order things from books to vital parrot supplies is both pleasing and empowering. It gives me a sense of further independence, although the ability to order any book is something of a two edged sword.

Irrespective of that, the award from the Trust has improved the lives of all twelve of us here.

A shed

The shed was due to arrive on the 18th of October, but came early (surely the first time in history that that has happened!)

My friend and I had made plans to visit the recipient and help her erect the shed but lo and behold, she rang to say that she had done it herself. We were most impressed as we had envisioned the three of us wrestling with the instructions for at least an afternoon!

She is really pleased with the shed and rightly proud of her handiwork. She is now able to store her bike, tools and lawnmower safely and she extends her thanks to you.



Photograph 6: Daffodils in Chatelherault Country Park.

A weekend break

I spent the grant on train fares and accommodation to stay at the Bamford Community Bamford Community. . . I elected to stay in one of the “huts” at the bottom of the land: an extremely simple building with no hot water nor electricity. It was absolute bliss. I cooked for myself, read my book and took a day-trip into Sheffield. Just writing about it, brings back the sense of peace and utter joy I experienced at Bamford. I know that I will go back. Thank you so much.

A group visit to Iona: Gal Gael Trust

This was the 6th Gal Gael Trust to Iona and was a four day experience in April. 15 people attended with the theme being “how we recognise and support one another in carrying life’s difficulties”. This is particularly apt with the (long-term) effects on individuals and communities after COVID.

Comments on the time on Iona included

- To get out and get to know everybody. If you’ve got problems so has every body else
- What got me yesterday was the amount of humour and love for each other
- I don’t regard myself as a spiritual guy but there’s something about going to that island - we each take something away from it

Happenstance brought several reflections on the journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus where the travellers finally realised that the stranger walking with them is Christ, the living presence of God amongst us. The wells of our Celtic Christianity have run dry too long. It is time to reclaim that spiritual heritage of social justice, creation as a pathway to God, a ready acceptance of women within the life of the Church, even as leaders, and the call to pilgrimage.

Iona can enable transformation and can be a time of profound enjoyment. Gal Gael thanks all those who contribute to this. This is a very brief summary of a much longer and wider report by Alastair McIntosh.

5.3 Peace studies with young people. Learning from those who have served in the armed forces. Neil Crabtree, North Scotland AM

Recently the defence secretary, Grant Shapps, described how, “Britain’s enemies are gathering around us” and that the country is entering a “pre-war phase”. He added that, “the era of the peace dividend is over”. This echoes the recent words of Admiral Rob Bauer, the chair of NATO’s military committee who said, “If you want Peace, prepare for war”. Also, Sweden and Estonia have already warned their prospective nations of large - scale war on the horizon. To top these comments, last week the government announced that 22000 British troops were to be deployed in Europe alongside NATO troops as part of ‘Exercise steadfast defender 24’.

Despite the macho swaggering “Let’s just get the job Done” (Rishi Sunak referring to Ukraine) commentators have warned of the danger of separate wars merging into a Global war, much as they did prior to WW2. This will not be news to Friends.

What concerns me, as the father of a young son, is the prospects of him marching to war, maybe due to conscription, and it needs to be understood how stretched our armed forces are after years of cut - backs. To give an idea of this, a friend of mine joined the Territorial Army to obtain his Heavy Goods licence, only to find himself stationed in Iraq during the war in that country. In other words, in order to meet its obligations alongside America and others, Britain had to draw on its reservists to fight with a third world country.

The prospects of Britain involving itself in a major conflagration doesn’t bare thinking about, but when the time comes, many young working - class males in particular, will even volunteer, much as they did at the start of WW1. This will be for reasons of being heroic in a country which offers no chance to be heroic; being subject to sophisticated pro war propaganda, and peer pressure -being afraid to look cowardly. However, unlike those who have fought in war, or witnessed it, they do not know what they are letting themselves in for. Yet while stories of blood and gore, which many youngsters are electronically saturated with, might fall on deaf ears, Friends might need to use a more subtle and personal approach which speaks to the condition of young people.

To give an idea of these stories I will refer to my own experiences as a working - class man who has witnessed the plight of many men who have joined the armed services. I am seventy now and I will take you back to my teenage years to a time when I failed the 11 plus and went to a secondary modern

school in a fishing village, Brixham, in Devon. We learnt very little, but I had a great time hanging about with four male friends: exploring cliffs for seagulls' eggs, swimming in the sea, sailing and catching mackerel to sell to the tourist. In the winter we were absorbed by playing rugby. We knew nothing about books or life outside of Brixham, and our conversations were limited to gossip, sport and girls. We were very happy.

However, a frequent visitor to the school were speakers from the armed forces and, as a consequence of this input, one of our group joined the army another the Royal Navy. I noticed the difference in them instantly. One of them was posted to Northern Ireland and all this once peaceful character could talk about was beating up and killing "paddies." The sailor delighted in describing how he and three members of his crew had docked in an American port and, on shore leave, had picked up a gay man and gang raped him before trashing his flat.

I noticed that both young men were distracted, nervous and not being genuine, and I do not know what became of them. However, since then I have met other ex-forces personnel with their own stories: the helicopter mechanic in the RAF whose wife deserted him when he left the forces and took up menial work. She could not take the loss of status and income. He as devastated and took to drink; the military policeman in the RAF who was caught sleeping while on duty and could not get good references, leading to homelessness; a poacher who became a sniper and whose bombast could not hide his misgivings. He drowned his memories with whisky; the army veteran who, so distraught about what he had experienced in Iraq, tried to kill himself and was street homeless for five years; and, probably the saddest in many ways, the ex-army man who could only find a job in a supermarket wearing a ridiculous "military" uniform, including a wide white rimmed cap, as a deterrent to shoplifters on the alcohol section.

I once worked in the largest homeless project in the country, ironically a converted army barracks, and many of the residents were ex-forces. Most were lonely and desired the company of a woman but obviously a homeless person with mental health issues, and often an alcohol problem, is not an attractive proposition, especially if some-one suffers from post-traumatic shock syndrome, which some ex-combatants did. The problem is compounded by the fact that military skills are often not transferable to civilian life, limiting job prospects. This is enhanced by recent MOD research which describes how 50% of people joining the army at non-officer level have a reading age at or below that of an average eleven-year-old.

While I do not pretend be an expert in this field, I am of the opinion that, as

the global situation worsens, the government, MOD and arms companies are going to use increasingly sophisticated imagery and dialogue to seduce young people into the armed forces. And as one ex-combatant said to me, history has shown that Russian governments, dating back to the Tsars, have always fallen back on their biggest resource: manpower. In other words this war, and battles in other areas, will not be fought only with distant missiles and bombs, it will require many foot soldiers.

I believe that now is the time to start pulling some of these stories together and presenting them as part of peace work in schools. This could involve inviting ex-servicemen and women to talk in schools and other youth settings. And these people should be paid a decent hourly rate plus expenses. There are many articulate and intelligent men and women out there who would be willing to share their experiences and give young people food for thought.



Photograph 7: Peffer burn.

6 Poetry corner

6.1 Putting the Fire Out a Teaspoon at a Time

Laura McMurtrie, West Scotland AM.

This poem is the fourth in a series of poems about the latest conflict in the disputed lands of the Israeli/Palestinian peoples. The ferocity and longevity of the current eruption is the deadliest and most brutal we have witnessed since the establishment of Israel. For people of Faith like ourselves our responses to this are shaped not only by political realities but our view of the nature of humanity, our place in the universe, and for me the nature and character of God, and our individual and collective relationship to God.

We do what we can in practical terms to help the deep distress and the ravages of war, but it seems like very little. We pray for peace, and we Hold the Situation in the Light and we know that this changes situations in ways that are deeply embedded in the fabric of the universe. But since we don't see the impact in the ever-mounting bloodshed and deaths and utter physical carnage of bombs and weapons of war it is hard to continue to look this full in the face. However, we are not powerless. The Light is the Light of the whole of Eternal Reality and that Light will prevail. Looking the Horror full in the face whilst Holding in the Light is to affirm that The Light will prevail and to take part in and uphold these realities.

Another Friend sent me something incredibly poignant this week about how to deal 'with the conflagration, the agony of Israel and Palestine'. This is from the great Israeli writer Amos Oz: 'You can run away and save yourself or you can take a bucket and pour it on the flames and if you don't have a bucket use a cup and if you don't have a cup bring a teaspoon. The teaspoon is small, but everyone has a teaspoon' (As referenced by Simon Sharma November 10, 2023).

This poem attempts to reflect some of these realities.

The Eye of the Storm

Laura McMurtrie, West Scotland AM

And I sat in the eye of the storm.
And I looked down at the chaos,
I looked around at the chaos,
And I looked up at the chaos,
And I sat in the eye of the storm.

And it was safe.
Surreal is overwrought these days,
It was overwrought surrealism,
But Surreal is now reality.
Dystopian reality,
Is knocking at the door,
Far, far, worse than surrealism,
And being in the eye of the storm,
Is the only place to be, and be safe,
But I can't reside here until this abates,
Doing nothing except surviving.

I must risk my heart being shredded,
My sleep disrupted, my emotions in tumult,
My mind being invaded,
My very soul's engagement, in this Thing,
To do the only thing I can do with this Horror,
And Hold in the Light,
The Terror of my brothers and sisters,
The Hunger and Thirst of my brothers and sisters,
The only too imaginable Grief and Loss,
Of Death of Loved Ones,
And The Dearly Cherished Tiny Ones,
And cry out against the Destruction of Hope.
Against the bombing of Humanity,
In refugee camps, ambulances and hospitals,
And raise my voice for an End to this Madness,
Which has gripped so tightly,
In its modern savagery,
That only more blood is deemed sufficient.

How much more till it stops?
The drenched blood is reaching round the globe,
And we are all engulfed in it,
And we can either look away,
Or engage however we can,
Paltry as it seems,
To stop the Madness.

6.2 One Hundred and First Sunday of War Lysana Robinson, North Scotland AM.

Another howling wind in the chimney
greeted me as I awoke this morning.

I see the strong gusts picking up
the last few remaining autumn leaves,
swirling them care-free up and around
kissing the Snowdrops as they fly by.

Would that humanity were free,
free from being tied to fixed beliefs
like summer leaves on a tree.
Would that they could let go, leaping
and dancing as one human family
in life's joyful Peace Garden.



6.3 One Hundred and Second Sunday of War Lysana Robinson, North Scotland AM.

We're just passed Imbolc,
clumps of snowdrops in full flower,
taller than usual daffodils
showing swelling flower buds early,
there's no snow on the mountains,
spring birdsong fills the air.

Signs of Spring bring hope
of new growth and new life
to replace the old and the past.
Beyond my view the old order
is frantically fighting for control.
That too shall surely pass.





Photograph 8: Deer in North Deer Park, near Queensferry.



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