

West Scotland Quaker newsletter

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Clerk's Letter

Clerk's Letter September 2019

The evening news showed the blue flags with the gold stars were being waved aloft outside Downing Street, accompanied by a lot of noise. The demonstrators were challenging the Prime Minister over moves towards a no-deal Brexit. I was struck by this. Had they missed a trick? Polarisation is an increasing burden on the future of our society. Might those perturbed by constitutional shenanigans and who voted Leave see this as confirming the 'elite' is only pressing for Remain at any opportunity rather than holding the government to account for all?

I have a personal distaste, even witness, against projecting symbols. I won't wear badges or ribbons or wave flags or banners. This is for me, not everyone else, and stems from a past horror of being labelled and standing out. But I've come to continue this trait as I am increasingly wary of tribalism. Others come to different conclusions and see the need for public witness, and that too is very right, but we don't all have to be the same. In fact we mustn't be all the same. The recent realisation of the privilege many of us carry means that I know that however many badges I don't wear my whole self is one – middle class, older white male, and judgments and assumptions will be made by others on those characters.

How do we work against polarisation and tribalism whilst maintaining the needed witness for social and environmental justice? Friends early experience was to maintain truth, and be public in standing for what was right – and facing the consequences of arrest and imprisonment peacefully. One passage in Quaker faith & practice I often refer to, to remind me of a way forward, is by Mary Lou Leavitt, once a colleague at Friends House and who made a great impression on me. Read 20.71, as she expresses it much better than me.

Michael Hutchinson, Glasgow Meeting.

Conflict happens, and will continue to happen, even in the most peaceful of worlds. And that's good – a world where we all agreed with one another would be incredibly boring. Our differences help us to learn. Through conflict handled creatively we can change and grow; and I am not sure real change – either political or personal – can happen without it. We'll each handle conflict differently and find healing and reconciliation by different paths. I want nonetheless to offer three keys, three skills or qualities which I've found helpful from my own experience.

The first skill is *naming*: being clear and honest about the problem as I see it, stating what I see and how I feel about it. What is important about these statements is that I own them: 'I see', 'I feel' (not 'surely it is obvious that ...', 'any right thinking person should...'). This ability to name what seems to be going on, is crucial to getting the conflict out into the open, where we can begin to understand and try to deal with it.

Such a skill is dangerous. It can feel – indeed, it can be – confrontational. It feels like stirring up trouble where there wasn't any problem. It needs to be done carefully, caringly, with love, in language we hope others can hear. We need to seek tactfully the best time to do it. But it needs to be done.

The second skill is the skill of *listening*: listening not just to the words, but to the feelings and needs behind the words. It takes a great deal of time and energy to listen well. It's a kind of weaving: reflecting back, asking for clarification, asking for time in turn to be listened to, being truly open to what we're hearing (even if it hurts), being open to the possibility that we might ourselves be changed by what we hear.

The third skill is the skill of *letting go*: I don't mean that in the sense of giving up, lying down and inviting people to walk all over us, but acknowledging the possibility that there may be other solutions to this conflict than the ones we've thought of yet; letting the imagination in – making room for the Spirit. We need to let go of our own will – not so as to surrender to another's, but so as to look together for God's solution. It's a question of finding ways to let go of our commitment to opposition and separation, of letting ourselves be opened to our connectedness as human beings.

If we are to do any of these things well – naming, listening, letting go – we need to have learned to trust that of God in ourselves and that of God in those trapped on all sides of the conflict with us. And to do that well, I find I need to be centred, rooted, practised in waiting on God. That rootedness is both a gift and a discipline, something we can cultivate and build on by acknowledging it every day.

Mary Lou Leavitt, 1986

Report of Area Meeting, 10th June 2019

By Telephone Conference

Area Meeting by Telephone Conference is not my favourite as I, like many Friends, prefer to meet in person for our group worship. However, I do recognise that our large geographical spread of West Scotland Friends makes it a good alternative to long distance travel to engage with our business matters. Meeting began with 2.69 of Quaker Faith & Practice which reminded us of the power and grace in our approach to the ministry of others. This quote proved to be very apt as we settled down to the multitude of matters that required our attention. It simply amazes me how our Clerk, Michael, deals with the multitude of items that are brought forward and how he deals with them with grace, humility and patience on our telephone offerings.

Although Friends do try and live simple and truthful lives, life does not let us have an easy ride. I am thinking of the agenda for this Area Meeting for Worship. To give a flavour....in business, we dealt with Media Technology, Death of older Friends, Transfers of Membership, General Meeting for Scotland, Act of Witness, Nominations Matters, Yearly Meeting, Glasgow Meeting House, Dates for the future &c. &c. By chance later in the week I attended an Area Meeting Clerk's Day in Glasgow which was also a full and worthwhile session but also dealt with a wide range of matters, all of which need much discernment and time given by Friends to keep our way of life refreshed and going forward. In 2019 we are facing great change in the world and in the future of the Religious Society of Friends. Listening to others with grace and being mindful of our Quaker history will guide us; I am sure, to a positive influence on those around us. I am constantly inspired by the time, energy, wisdom and grace which Friends offer to keep our way of life safe and secure for generations to come.

Ian Macdonald, Wigtown

Report of Area Meeting, Lochgilphead, 24th August

Some 30 Friends and attenders gathered in a new venue in Lochgilphead for Area Meeting in August. The church hall at the top of the main street is comfortable and spacious venue, with plenty of room for serving coffee, lunch and tea, and of course Lochgilphead is that wee bit less of a journey for those coming from the central belt and Mull (though further for Islay, Arran and Cowal Friends, and for anyone who has cycled over Cowal to get there, as one Friend had).

We had a long agenda, and it was slightly alarming to find that we were only half-way through the planned morning items by lunchtime. But our ever-skilful clerk re-jigged things, prioritising the items which were likely to require the most time, and what one might have expected to be a crowded and rushed Meeting turned out to be full of opportunities for deep silence, reflection, questioning and perceptive responses.

Our Friend Sarah Bibb read the Epistle from Junior Yearly Meeting during our opening worship. In the past I might have said “our *young* Friend.” But in the ministry which followed Sarah's report on JYM we were reminded of the danger of labelling Friends and attenders who have grown up in the Society as “Young Friends”. It was pointed out that being labelled as “young” can be trying, especially when you are now in your late twenties and only “young” in comparison with the otherwise ubiquitous grey heads. It can also lead to “othering” - being recognised as a young person rather than as the holder of a role such as assistant clerk of one's LM.

Issues of inclusivity were in the forefront of our minds too when we heard of a Friend's resignation owing to comments that were perceived as racist. Great sadness was expressed about this resignation, and Elders and Overseers have been asked to consider the issue of casual racism within the Society, and especially within our Area Meeting. On a happier note however, we welcomed Maureen Anderson into West Scotland AM and Glasgow Meeting, after her many years in South East Scotland.

The two items which perhaps took the most time and attention were the concern on Violence against Women, and Climate Justice and Action. We agreed in 2018 to support the former concern, and to pay from legacy funds the costs of the Friends taking action on this concern. The issue before us on this occasion was how to further the concern within the context of Area Meeting. All who spoke felt that any special event needed to be planned and presented extremely carefully. Whilst the concern is specifically about violence against women, we need to remember our opposition to all violence, and not to fall into the trap of appearing to be “anti-man”. We also need to be sensitive, and remember that in any gathering there will be those who have personal experience of such violence.

In our afternoon session we spent some time in worship-sharing, hearing each other's experience of and thoughts about climate justice and our associated action and endeavours. We heard a little of an Argyll attender's experience of arrest and conviction following Extinction Rebellion action in London and we upheld him in his concern. Our minute will be forwarded to Meeting for Sufferings. We also asked a small group to put together proposals which might encourage QPSW to base one of their co-ordinators, who will work with local groups towards zero-carbon emissions, in Scotland.

In other items we received the Treasurer's report on income and expenditure to the end of June, we agreed to send Friends, attenders and staff to courses and conferences, and we agreed the dates and venues for our meetings in 2020. We were asked to encourage attenders and newcomers to attend the Enquirers' Day which will be held in Stirling on 12 October. More information will be coming out shortly, and Area Meeting can help with costs.

Finally we thanked Argyll Friends and helpers from other LMs for their generous and efficient hospitality, which I'm sure included an excellent tea, but sadly your correspondent had to leave in good time for the Islay boat!

Bronwen Currie, Islay & Jura

CORRECTION the Report on Area Meeting by telephone in the last issue was written by Angela Stather not Susan Campbell as stated. Sincere apologies to Angela and many thanks for a succinct report that yet gave us a flavour of the gathering on the island. We can picture you all and appreciate the efforts some go to to share Area Meeting.

Meeting for Sufferings 6th July report for Tayside Quaker

New ways of working

Court and Prison Register

In 1997, we decided to include the original purpose of Meeting for Sufferings in 1676, which was to consider the sufferings experienced by Quakers for their faith. We now keep a register of those before the courts or imprisoned for matters of conscience. Since our last meeting in April, thirteen Friends have been arrested and charged while protesting with Extinction Rebellion, six of them from Scotland. At each meeting I attend the list grows longer. On 3rd September we will be protesting against the Arms Fair – the list will continue to grow.

Yearly Meeting

We spent some time reflecting on Yearly Meeting. There was a feeling that considering Diversity and Sustainability in one meeting was too much, but also that it was well-planned and full of information that we need in order to take these things forward. We need to consider our privilege and find ways to use resources to further our work. We need to be aware that we use labels without thinking, that sometimes the way we conduct ourselves can affect those with less confidence who need to be empowered to speak. But we were also encouraged not to suffer from too much guilt because it limits us – we must take positive action out of love not shame. Area meetings are asked to plan to take forward the work locally.

Gender diversity

We are asked to work together to explore the issues raised by Young Friends in the General Meeting minute and to contribute to the work done by Quaker Life Central Committee. Be aware that we need to listen to those people affected by discrimination of any sort – to listen deeply, lovingly and with open hearts. We asked ourselves what specific contribution Quakers can make. Perhaps we do not need to change our structures, but just welcome a group of vulnerable and marginalised people. Quaker Life wishes to receive comments, general and personal at gender@quaker.org.uk. They do not want anonymous comments but only a group of four people will read them and they will be treated as confidential.

Sustainability

This item will be discussed at our October meeting, but again Friends are encouraged to stop using a stick to make us feel guilty but use our energy in a positive way to find a positive future. We were inspired by the words of a minute from a Meeting for Worship held on Easter Sunday at the Marble Arch Extinction Rebellion camp. Here is part of it.

We are called here in a spirit of Peace, Love and Truth to bear witness to the pain of our planet. We must take heed of the warning of science, which is clear. Those children being born into the world today face a world of catastrophe, social collapse and mass extinction. This is a Truth we can discern ourselves: we see floods and wildfires, we see famines and wars and the displacement of peoples, we see the loss of glaciers and ice caps. We grieve at the loss of so many species and habitats. We uphold the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, who are at the forefront of the struggle for Climate Justice. All over the world, the poorest are bearing the brunt, but all of us will suffer. The next generation may be the last.

Expansion of the ‘Vibrancy in Meetings’ project.

Trustees of Britain Yearly Meeting and Woodbrooke met together to make recommendations about employing more local development workers – Caroline Nursery the Clerk of Trustees asked – “Is it right to spend some of our reserves on ourselves?” The aim is to create a community of staff not based in one place. At present only one in six staff are not based at Friends House so we must uphold our staff and Trustees as they grapple with difficult decisions.

There were five Friends from Scotland at the meeting – our representative from the north flew from Shetland and our General Meeting representative came from Mull by ferry and sleeper. The three from Tarbert, Edinburgh and Pitlochry had an easy journey in comparison, although yet again I was asked what time I would get home by people unaware that it is not possible to reach most of Scotland after a meeting in London that finishes at 4.00pm. This is important to the Vibrancy Project and the plan to have a local development worker WITHIN REACH of every meeting in Britain within 5 years. We must invest in computer technology to achieve this.

Young People's Participation

This item came to us as a result of the advice sent to area meetings for completing the tabular statement, which defines an attender as “one who, not being a member, frequently attends a specific meeting for worship”. We acknowledge that people of all ages are not always connected to the Society primarily through regular attendance at a specific local meeting but it is particularly true of young people. They are involved in other ways and we need to find out about their worshipping path and spiritual life and think about the right relationship for us to have with young people. For example, all-age worship is rarely all age – it is usually children and grandparents. A youth worker found that young people meet in groups and are often unaware of their meeting and the meeting of them. If we are planning a project, we should be thinking about young people's identity not counting them. Our current practice is to offer to give them Quaker Faith and Practice or another book of their choice when they reach 16. In fact, it's often when they go into secondary school that they stop attending their local meeting and we might consider offering them a book when they are younger. We offer bursaries to allow them to attend Quaker events, but do ask them to report back to us so that they know we value their participation. We should stop expecting them to fit in with us, but give them the opportunity to explore what it is to be Quaker and learn from them.

Alyson Buchan, Perth

Book of Discipline Revision Committee update – July 2019

The Committee's second weekend took place 12-14 July at Cober Hill, a residential centre just outside Scarborough – a delightful venue to which I'd like to return, as we were working so hard there wasn't a lot of time to explore the lovely gardens, and definitely not enough time to walk down to the nearby beach!

It was good to meet up as a group again, and I was particularly delighted to see Alice Southern, the representative from South Wales, who wasn't able to be with us in London. She came with her wife Kate and baby Idris who, like Norma, is approximately the same age as the committee – I was at Pendle Hill in America with Alice in 2004, so it was good to catch up with her.

We appointed Elders for the weekend, and buddies to update those who were prevented from being with us. We heard from the Revision Preparation Group about the need to communicate and LISTEN – both to deepen our mutual trust and ability to work together as a committee and also better to engage with Yearly Meeting and encourage Friends' involvement and build on the understanding gained from the two-year Reading Quaker Faith & Practice project. We shared our experiences of working on the tasks we'd chosen to do for this our second

meeting – focusing on what we as individuals had learned from doing the task and what we as a committee could learn about how we work as individuals and together.

Rhiannon Grant led us in a session in which we shared and explained the words we would use for God when talking to everyone, those we would only use to certain individuals or groups but not to everyone, and words we would never use. This encouraged us to explore different ways of talking and thinking about “God”, giving us a safe way to explore our differences and begin to understand others’ viewpoints, helping us to avoid future conflicts arising from imperfect understanding or misinterpretation of someone else’s words. In a threshing session to consider what we do next, and how we might do it, we identified three tasks on which we can work individually or in small groups and bring to our next meeting.

Saturday evening’s more light-hearted sharing session and our meals together gave us time to get to know each other better: I feel that I now have a much clearer idea of people as individuals rather than a list of names, and I’m looking forward to discovering more about each one as we work together.

The committee agreed three key messages:

We are thankful for the work of the Revision Preparation Group and previous/ongoing input from Friends. We look forward to opportunities to work with central and standing committees, and Friends across our Yearly Meeting, on aspects of our task. We welcome the approaches we have had and will respond to them when we are ready.

At this stage we are exploring some potential approaches to our task within the committee. We are not yet producing any definitive proposals, but are making progress in finding ways to be creative in exploring different ideas, in order to learn from the process about how best to plan and organise our work on the revision.

We see it as core to our work that we take the opportunity to build community as a committee in order to speak authentically to each other. In this way we are seeking to model a willingness to be open with each other about our spiritual experiences and understandings. Such openness is vital to building a healthy community within the Yearly Meeting, which we see as both essential to and a desired outcome of the revision process.

Our next committee meeting is in Edinburgh in October [4-6]. We will work in the Meeting House, and look forward to joining Friends’ worship on the Sunday morning.

Woodbrooke weekend 8-10 November – “Why have a book of discipline?”

Nuala Watt and I are part of the planning group. It's going to be a great weekend, offering Friends the opportunity to consider what they use the current Book for, and what they would like to see in the new one. Area Meetings are invited to send a representative, and there will be spaces for interested individuals as well – so if you want to go, speak to your AM Clerk and/ or contact Woodbrooke about attending. We look forward to seeing you there!

Mary Woodward, Portobello & Musselburgh

Junior Yearly Meeting, JYM, 2019

In April, I attended the 2019 JYM, which is a weekend discussing a theme and doing activities to develop spirituality for 15 to 18 year olds.

This year the theme of JYM was “Diversity and Inclusivity: how can we use our ideals to change our reality?”. This reflects the theme of Yearly Meeting this year, who have said: At Yearly Meeting 2019 we will examine our privilege (and assumptions of privilege). Privilege – whether we recognise it or not – fundamentally impacts our ability to act on our urgent Quaker concerns regarding climate justice and sustainability, and inclusion and diversity. Over the weekend we were discussing a variety of obstacles which stand in the way of us building a more diverse and inclusive community. One activity we took part in was particularly powerful in making us confront the privileges we experience. We were asked questions on what privileges we had experienced during our lives, and had to take a bead if one had applied to us. The colour of the bead depended on what gave us the privilege, for example our race, gender or religion. By the end of the activity we each had a collection of multi-coloured beads. We then combined all of our beads to see the privileges we share as a community. The amount of race and class coloured beads made it very clear that we as Quakers on the majority share one viewpoint, that of a white middle class British citizen. Something anyone who's had to write about privilege (including me) has discovered is that it's harder to spell privilege than you think! One of the clerks described tackling privilege as being the same. You may get it wrong again and again, but each time you get a bit better, and eventually, you will get it right.

Another thing which comes in the way of inclusivity is tolerance of things which are in contradiction to our testimony of equality. As a principle Quaker meetings don't allow groups in our meeting houses who don't follow our testimonies, however there are meetings which continue to host groups who don't recognise transgender people and wish to limit their rights. We at JYM feel that this moves beyond being open-minded and into harmful, as it sends the message that Quakers support these messages, or at least don't disagree with them enough not to host these groups. We felt that we can't in good conscience say that we welcome minority groups while also welcoming the groups that persecute them. If we continue tolerating hateful people we'll only distance ourselves from groups we wish to include. Many young people felt that they couldn't fully associate themselves with Quakers because they don't feel fully welcome. An

important lesson taught at JYM is that taking a stand will always result in someone disagreeing with us, but it is necessary to make everyone feel welcome within our community, something we claim to do.

Throughout the weekend it also became apparent that young people can feel out of place or less welcome at their local meetings, which can contribute to them not attending as often. There are a variety of reasons for this, maybe that the meetings are never at a time they can attend as they may have a more restrictive timetable than a group of retired people, or that they move more regularly so they can't take long-lasting roles in the meeting, or that they don't feel the older Quakers engage them in the same way as they do each other. Particularly, that we are often asked "how's school?" and many young Quakers want to talk about other things than school sometimes!

I attended a session run by Matt Alton which tackled this issue by thinking about what older Quakers could do to make us feel more welcome, and what young Quakers could do to make themselves more included, for example starting interesting conversations with older Quakers themselves, and trying to find roles which they can do on a short-term basis. I feel that it was really constructive to consider this issue as a two-way street, as we both have areas that we could improve in order to make sure young Quakers feel equally as included.

As well as in local meeting, another issue we discussed was that most committees seem to us to consist only of older middle class white Quakers, which means that there are so many viewpoints and struggles which can't be properly included. This is a tricky cycle, as to make minority groups feel more included, they must feel represented for example on committees, but for them to be represented they must be included. However, it was inspiring to hear that there are 2 under 18s on the committee to revise the Book of Discipline, Anya Nanning Ramamurthy and James Weir. This is really important, as it will be the book which we will have for most of our lives! So I'm really glad to see this is something which has been considered.

One thing I particularly enjoy about JYM is that young people are given roles of leadership, and contribute to planning to the weekend, and all the business meetings are in fact clerked by young people attending the weekend. This is important to me as I feel it makes it feel like everyone is on an even playing field, that the clerks are the same age as you. Another thing I appreciated about JYM is that when it came to writing the minute we would submit to be read at Yearly Meeting, of course contributions were made during the business meeting, but we were also given other opportunities to give our opinions in various sessions such as writing, group discussion or music. I thought this was an excellent example of putting our goal of being inclusive into action, as it allows people like me who sometimes find ministering difficult to be heard equally, by playing to everyone's strengths.

Another thing I enjoyed were the base groups, which were a group run by two young people where we played games, discussed the theme and sessions and had smaller meetings for worship. I found these really good because it really helped to build a sense

of community, since you would see these people multiple times a day so by the end of the weekend I felt really close with them.

JYM has been very useful to me in bridging the gap between events aimed at children like Shindig and events for adults like YFGM, as it feels more mature than the former but a bit more familiar than the latter. I feel really lucky to have been given the chance to attend, as I always feel that my connection to Quakerism and my understanding of our ideals is made stronger every time I'm able to be at a Quaker event. I also find being around young Quaker very inspiring, because they're all motivated and compassionate people with active ideas on how to make the world a better place. I would like to thank the Area Meeting for giving me this opportunity again!

Sarah Bibb, Glasgow

Violence against Women Concern Update August 2019

Where have we got to?

Last year for the United Nations, UN 16 days of action on Violence against Women, we held more vigils in Glasgow of Thursdays in Black (a World Council of Churches initiative) drawing in some members of (Women's) Guild and (Women's) World Day of Peace Scottish Committee and two women from the local Sikh Gurdwara *but we still did not reach double figures*. We successfully collected a black bag full of knickers and bras for the Smalls for All charity that sends them to Africa as women wearing them are seen as respectable and thus not likely to be raped! We did check that one out. We offered a workshop on the Alternatives to Violence Project AVP – no one came. Are we hitting the right note? The year before our theme was 'informing'; this year it was 'more action'.

Since then, through the year, our group has been very active representing Quakers at various events and on several committees. Side-by-Side (for gender justice) took us to Holyrood for a meeting of the Cross Party Group on Development. This was looking at the role of 'faith leaders' and the effect of poverty amongst women affecting development. During the UN 16 days, Side-by-Side also undertook the morning service on BBC4 with Ann Muir from Glasgow University Chapel whilst the Christian Aid representative on Side-by-Side was on Radio 4 later that day.

One of our members attended a presentation given by Terri Robinson from WCC on Thursdays in Black. This was given at the HQ of the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh. Mention was made at this of our vigils and also our rewriting the leaflet to be more appropriate to Scotland, i.e. detailing the crime statistics for violence against women in Scotland and incorporating ideas from the White Ribbon Campaign as to how to counteract such violent behaviour.

Through Inter Faith Group on Domestic Abuse (Ifgoda), one of our group attended a reception at Glasgow City Chambers on domestic violence. This was addressed

by the Inter Faith Group on Domestic Abuse and by the Moslem group Amina. The Interfaith group have a wonderful exhibition of shoes asking people to look at who walks in those shoes.

We have a series of articles published in Quaker media including a review by Helena Kennedy, *Shaming Eve*, on how British Justice is unjust to women.

General Meeting's representative on Ifgoda continues to fulfil that role whilst the representative on (Women's) World Day of Prayer Scottish Committee continues to work with this group on the preparations of the service and materials for the nation-wide service on first Friday in March drawing attention to women's lives in other parts of the world. She is involved in bringing the International WDP to Edinburgh in 2022. This involves women from 180 countries and will showcase Scotland's work on women's issues.

We have been slow to involve Quakers in our work despite the core theme that throughout the world women in general suffer routine violence, are especially susceptible to the effects of poverty and war, that misogyny is wide-spread leading to injustice and inequality that filters down to their children. There are so many groups and charities working in the field here and abroad that it is difficult to see what Quakers might offer that is special, and many Quakers are already involved individually, and then secondly it appears to be on a list of one more action so we can't spread ourselves so far! It has not been easy to articulate that the underlying principles relate to the Quaker ethos of seeing that of God in everyone, that misogyny is more than an issue but a way of life. We are beginning to break through and hope to hold a 'seminar' to look at what has been described as Ecofeminism, theology that looks at how we relate and build communities. This also brings in sustainability and our relationship to nature, looking for an economic structure to society that does not exploit. A very relevant topic for today's Quakers.

During the UN 16 days of action this year we hope to hold more vigils and to target these at the student population, i.e. to leaflet outside the universities. **To this end we are appealing to Area Meeting to fund the printing of more leaflets of Thursdays in Black and that of the White Ribbon Campaign.** Whilst we will be in black, we don't want to be seen to pontificate so will be dressed as *Raging Grannies!!! More anon.*

We will collect bra and panties again, offer another AVP workshop, after more actively publicising it.

We are also. And we are contemplating an exhibition of the paintings of Ruth Goodheir with poetry of women's journeys.

Margaret Roy

The music is not in the notes, but in the silence between. Mozart 1756-1791

RE world leaders who attended the G7 summit, it is not too late to tackle them.

Send a postcard asking world leaders to make real progress on gender equality ? It's 2019 and still 1 in 5 girls are married off as children, half a billion women worldwide can't read or write, and about a billion women don't have a bank account.

While women's rights are under attack around the globe, world leaders are met in Biarritz, France in what could have been a game-changing summit for women and girls in the poorest countries and worldwide.

World leaders can turn the tide on gender inequality.

Mary Kennedy, Glasgow

The Climate Emergency and Decentralisation: a personal account of the July Meeting of MfS, Friends House, London

Arrestees and their witness

The Meeting began with the Court and Prison Register. A list of thirteen Quakers – one of whom was arrested on four separate occasions – were arrested during the Extinction Rebellion actions in London and Edinburgh in April of this year. One of them was my son Peter. There will be others to be added in due course. Nearly half of those listed were from Scotland.

I have been to many Meetings over the past few years, and never have I heard of so many being arrested for their conscience. I found the reading out of the list very powerful and moving and thought of the role of this Meeting over the centuries of its existence, how it was once called “The Great Book of Sufferings”, with the purpose of upholding those who suffered for their faith.

Today, the whole human race faces a number of interlocking environmental crises, including the threat of Climate Breakdown and what is now being termed the “Sixth Great Extinction”. Those whose names were read out had felt impelled to share their knowledge with the rest of humanity. By carrying out actions such as blocking traffic routes they were able to talk to members of the public and express their concerns to the media.

Inevitably, there was a lot of other business for the Meeting to attend to: important issues such as Gender Diversity, Privilege, the Sanctuary Everywhere programme, plans to decentralise the Society of Friends and how we can better support young people in our Meetings. We also needed to reflect on the recent Yearly Meeting.

As the Meeting progressed, it felt to me that the people whose names had been read out at the beginning were bearing a kind of silent witness. It was as if they were reminding me of the most important issue of all facing not just us as Quakers, but humanity as a whole.

One of the roles of the Meeting is to receive minutes from Area Meetings. Three had sent a minute concerning support for Extinction Rebellion and action needed to address Climate Breakdown, including a minute from a Meeting for Worship held on Easter Sunday at the Marble Arch Extinction Rebellion camp. Here is part of it. See Alyson Buchan report: *We are called here in the spirit of Peace, Love and truth*

After these minutes were put before us a Friend stood up and spoke of the offering that we as Quakers can make as the crisis looms: a positive vision of the future, one that rejoices in simplicity and “real”, deep forms of communication both with each other and with the rest of the natural world. I felt that he had begun to sketch out what our response as Quakers might be to the despair that many are now be feeling.

Decentralisation

When I reported on the April Meeting I spoke of moves within Friends House to decentralise. At the Meeting on Saturday we heard of a BYM trustees Meeting held in June at Woodbrooke. I reproduce some of this in full.

“We can see that both BYM and Woodbrooke need to change to ensure that Quaker communities receive the support that they need. We want to do more than just manage decline and to build a Society that is attractive to new people and fulfils its purpose to the world. In a world facing climate breakdown, we must reduce our carbon footprint and strengthen local resilience.

We are thus committed as BYM and Woodbrooke Trustees to changing radically the ways that we operate and to working together, as two organisations serving the same community, to support Friends in building the thriving Meetings that they want. We share the aspiration to:

- a) extend and expand the current model of Locally Based Development workers so that there is a local development worker within reach of every Meeting in Britain within 5 years.
- b) work rapidly towards more local support for Meetings and begin to experiment with new regional bases, hubs or clusters.

Change is both exciting and frightening. As Trustees we must think both as local Quakers and as BYM-wide Friends. We will work through our Quaker structures and communities to respond flexibly to their needs. We see the need to move quickly yet there are risks that we must recognise, mitigate and manage for each

organisation, and for the Yearly Meeting as a whole. The pattern of staffing in both BYM and Woodbrooke will change and that may affect people who have given much to Quakers.

Some work that is close to our hearts may have to be laid down to fund the investment in meeting-centred support. And, we must get the balance right in retaining skills BYM- wide as well as providing support as near communities as possible.”

Connection between Sustainability and Decentralisation

I see a connection between our Sustainability testimony and the move to decentralise. Decentralisation will aid the necessary restructuring of society in the face of the Climate Emergency. Citizen's assemblies (a key demand of Extinction Rebellion) is another.

Another way of describing decentralisation is “localisation”. Creating thriving local economies is recognised as a key aim in building a new, more participative and egalitarian Economy.

If we are to restore our ecosystems – a great way of sequestering carbon as well as helping create resilience in the face of increasingly destabilising climate change – we urgently need to reconnect with those systems that are local to us, and play an active part in their restoration. This can only happen if national governments are willing to adopt a more regional approach and tackle such thorny issues as land reform.

Schumacher recognised this a long time ago, coming up with “Small is Beautiful” and “Think Global, Act Local.”

Ed Tyler, Argyll

‘I never saw a discontented tree. They grip the ground as though they liked it, and though fast rooted they travel about as far as we do’. John Muir.

Extinction Rebellion- My experiences so far. Mary Kennedy

I am glad I responded to the email I got from Glasgow Meeting a few months ago about an introductory meeting to gather support for Extinction Rebellion.

This introductory talk left me in no doubt about the seriousness of the climate crisis and the intention of Extinction Rebellion to turn a spotlight onto the issues so that attention would be focused on finding ways to end it.

We were told about the organisation’s principles and encouraged to seek more information online.

From Extinction Rebellion Glasgow Facebook page:

'The Scottish Parliament and Glasgow City Council have both declared a state of climate emergency; however other than this symbolic gesture we have yet to see any real action taken to combat the climate breakdown.

In the Scottish Parliament Climate Bill, it was agreed that the target for net zero emissions in Scotland is 2045; however this is too late. The IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a UN body) report warns us of irreversible climate catastrophe should the earth experience a maximum of 1.5°C warming, and at the current rate we are well on our way to reaching this.'

Since my introduction to XR (Extinction Rebellion) the growth of XR Glasgow has continued. I have been impressed by the formation of this growing community pointed in a single non-violent direction.

People are gathering to join us from all walks of life and in all stages of their lives from worried and energetic school children to elderly life-seasoned pensioners, men and women working in all sectors of our economy as well as students, and the unemployed. We are a rainbow alliance striving for action on the big issues threatening the existence of our own and other species.

We are a talented and energetic bunch and support each other to use our talents, knowledge and skills productively. Good communication and the careful induction of new people to the culture, values and boundaries of the organisation are important features of all our meetings.

I was keen to use my skills to help in any way I could without risking arrest. Once I had been to my initial briefing and had got to see the bigger picture a little, I joined our local wellbeing group and began to prepare with new XR buddies for our first action which was to be on North Bridge in Edinburgh.

On the day I took supplies of bananas, nuts etc with me and left on the 900 bus.

In Edinburgh we were well briefed as a big group, questions were answered and there was time to get to know each other a little better. We left the building to be met by police who were friendly, as we had anticipated. They had their job to do too.

I got involved with giving out leaflets on North Bridge, talking with the passers by and explaining what we were trying to do and why. I had positive responses, was ignored by some but never felt attacked or threatened by the public.

For most of the day my role was in making sure that our XR people on the bridge were kept well supported with food, drinks and information about what was happening or about to happen. There were speeches, singing and dancing and a generally happy atmosphere.

I was interviewed by a Guardian Journalist about why I was taking part and I spoke about my concerns.

All went well until quite late on when large numbers of police arrived and the atmosphere changed. Our protest was contained in a smaller area and we were questioned by police as we went to and from the bridge. At this stage the rain came, people were tired, some people feeling dispirited by the arrival of the extra police. Thankfully our own reinforcements arrived in the shape of a band who lifted our spirits with their music. There was dancing, speeches were made and more tea, coffee and biscuits to be had, which helped.

Some of us had agreed to help with arrestee support. I was not one of those people so was able to leave as the blockade was nearing an end.

I felt relieved to head home knowing that those who had been arrested would have a more challenging night but would be supported by volunteers who had been able to sign up to help them and ensure that they got home safely.

Now I keep in contact with XR through attending meetings and events as and when I am able.

My next event as a Regeneration volunteer was a half day at the Holyrood Rebel Camp.

I was also at the blockade on Argyle Street where there were no arrests.

I am happy to speak to anyone who is interested in joining XR. I regularly encourage people I meet to consider getting involved in some way, to have a look at Extinction Rebellion online, on social media platforms etc and to join to receive local updates.

We are going to be around for as long as it takes, encouraging politicians, global corporations and individuals to halt the Climate chaos we are already experiencing and prevent mass extinction.

The Amazon is burning—devastated by demand for cheap beef and soy.

Fires are being intentionally ignited across the Amazon—and it's putting our very survival at stake. Already this year, there have been 75,000 fires in the Amazon. **A football pitch is lost there every single minute.** You can even see the smoke from space.

And the EU is about to make things worse by closing in on a deal to import more products grown from the Amazon's ashes. And the EU is on the verge of closing **a trade deal with Brazil that will stoke the flames even more. The so-called Mercosur deal could be a death warrant for the Amazon.** France and Ireland have threatened to veto it.

Seeking to know one another in the things which are eternal

Jesus or Christ

If you have missed any of the series of interviews, there are two booklets still available which pull the interviews together – contact me if you want a copy. You will see that the prompt questions used as a basis of these interviews are also included, to encourage you, or your meeting, to consider experiences, thoughts and feelings about Jesus/Christ. The next topic is The Quaker Way followed by Peace. As I've said before, I hope you will consider whether you are a Friend who would wish to contribute to this.

Thanks to these five Friends who've shared their experiences so openly.

Sheila Semple, Glasgow

Prompt questions on Jesus/Christ

- Do these two words mean the same to you? Is there one you prefer to use, and why?
- How important are the teachings of Jesus to you? If important, how have you tried to follow them in your life?
- Traditional Christians focus greatly on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. What does this mean to you as a Quaker?
- Has your perception of Jesus/Christ changed over time?
- Would you call yourself Christian?
- How important a part of being a Quaker for you is having an understanding of Jesus/Christ?
- Early Friends seem to have spoken more of the inward Christ than they did of Jesus. What does the inward Christ mean to you?
- How does a concept or experience of Jesus/Christ relate to what you do in worship, in the community of Friends, in your service in the world?

Any other thoughts

Jesus or Christ by Alastair McIver

I've never given any thought to when I use one or the other, but Christ conveys the power, and Jesus suggests my closeness, personally. Jesus is your friend, and Christ is God, of course.

I would absolutely call myself a Christian, always have been. I was raised a Catholic and there came a time when that form of Christianity was not right for me, it wasn't an angry decision. When John Paul II died, the process to pick his successor seemed very human-driven and political in a way that didn't strike me as

Godly, we were expected to believe the Holy Spirit was guiding this, but I couldn't reconcile it. I looked for a Christian denomination with a world view I could live with, but I never stopped being a Christian. I researched a few denominations, and Quakers was the only one I actually showed up for. I had heard the name associated with peace and that seemed a good starting point for what I believe God wants from me.

I struggled with what I found: I wanted to be part of a Christian religion, but I ended up with one that seems to say 'Whatever works for you.' I think I've made peace with it now, but I found it difficult to understand that I was sitting and worshipping not necessarily the same thing as others. I think I've come to terms with it, it's a paradox, we're all worshipping as one, but doing different things. After all, I grew up a Catholic, and that's full of paradoxes!

The teachings of Jesus are *very* important to me. He was an inspirational activist. I remember in my community education course the tutor asked 'What is social activism? Who is the earliest one?' It threw him when I said, 'Jesus'. He *was* a social activist, a community educator, someone who stood up to injustice, always on the side of the marginalised like lepers and prostitutes. He was executed for civil disobedience – whether you believe the end of it or not. Very few people are willing to do that, not sure I'm one of them, but it's what I can aspire to. Ultimately He forgave everyone but again *we're* not necessarily able to do it.

Jesus the rebel was certainly not emphasised in a Catholic school, such behaviour was not encouraged! He was the *least* obedient, crucified *because* of His disobedience! I've got a more complex understanding of Jesus as I've matured, I can see how Christian teaching can be skewed.

Thinking about how I follow His teachings, in everyday life I try to be kind, helpful, to treat other people as I'd wish to be treated – not always living up to it. I've been arrested a couple of times at Faslane. I'm working with Refuweegees, a really good organisation; though it may not be at the forefront of my mind while doing it I'm aware that Jesus was a refugee. The teachings of Jesus are a *very* important part of being a Quaker, the example set by Jesus is at the root of what Quakers set out to practise. This link is less direct for many Quakers, but for me it's a direct, important link.

The resurrection is the ultimate triumph, the idea of 'Even if you kill Me you'll never stop Me'. Even if it's not literally true it's a very powerful image, it's a sobering thought. I *do* believe He rose from the dead. I continue to believe in that closeness with Jesus, a feeling that's there when I need Him, like a friend you can speak to, day or night. I do pray, I tend to address God the Father, but the lines are blurry in Catholicism, Jesus is God but also human.

I'd use 'that of God in everyone' rather than 'the Inward Christ', trying to seek a sense of God, in everyone, no matter what I feel about them, but especially in myself when I'm not feeling good about myself. I don't entirely believe there's a distinction, but in worship I tend to focus on God rather than Jesus.

I've never understood the notion of Jesus suffering on a cross as taking our punishment, not quite sure what the word 'saviour' is driving at, it's very evangelical, sin-heavy. I'm uncomfortable with trying to romanticise or glorify His death, the reasons why Jesus was crucified were actually quite local and highly political, not spiritual.

Jesus or Christ by Catherine Brown

I see Jesus as the boy, youth and young adult, his talents nurtured by his teacher. When it's time for him to move on he finds the Essenes, a secret, mystical, all-male order of 'rebels against the temple and the priesthood' who live in the desert. Staying with them for some time, he takes part in long periods of fasting and praying. Leaving them, he starts moving about the country, preaching in parables to the poor, the oppressed and the sick.

I find it more meaningful to think of him at this stage in his life as Jesus the preacher and healer when he describes himself as a 'son of man'. 'Christ the son of God' came later after his death. I would focus more on his life and teachings, his skill at telling unforgettable stories and parables to illustrate his message. He captured people's imagination. Christianity claims he performed 'miracles'. Perhaps he did, he certainly healed the sick and died on the cross. But the truth of his so-called 'resurrection' is open to question.

Growing up in an extended Quaker family I absorbed Quaker principles, based on Christian teaching, from both my parents and other Quaker relatives and family friends. No creeds or dogmas, but a lot of stories about their own lives and those of early Quakers who followed the teachings of Jesus. Although I attended Quaker Sunday School, there was little explicit teaching about Jesus or the Bible; instead, stories of Quakers such as John Woolman and Elizabeth Fry showed Quaker Christianity in action. We were encouraged to work it out for ourselves, to be seekers, to find our own truth. Also, I was very involved with Young Friends and came into contact with very experienced and grounded Quakers and through them, again, saw Christian principles through Quakerism.

For me, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount' and the Beatitudes, with messages of love and humility, are an important guide to life's challenges. At the most basic level, I've tried to follow the teaching of Christ in my everyday interactions with people, showing kindness and patience, helping people to see the best in themselves when they need encouragement.

I learned so much from being thrown in at the deep end, straight from teacher training into a small Quaker boarding school whose Quaker ‘father figure’ was Kenneth Barnes. He wrote ‘***He and She***’ (1958), an important sex guide for young people. All the children had lessons on sex from him using his book as a guide. I was housemistress in charge of 40 girls as well as teaching. This was a very important part of my development, through teaching and dealing with adolescents.

I would say I am a Christian, it’s central to being a Quaker, though not exclusively so. I’ve learned a lot from my contacts with other faiths. In 1973 I joined a course designed to help isolated immigrant women, mainly from Pakistan, learn English. This work was consolidated when the Church of Scotland purchased the International Flat in Glasgow; all the faiths shared their festivals and explained the significance of their religious beliefs and customs. It became the meeting place for the ‘Sharing of (nine) Faiths Group’. I kept in touch with some of these women afterwards.

During a visit to my daughter living in Boudhanath in Nepal my father died. The Buddhist monks asked if we had a photo of him which they would put in the temple. He would be included in their daily prayers while he was in the wilderness before his spirit would be resurrected. It was a very supportive gesture which we valued.

I find John Greenleaf Whittier’s poem ***First-Day Thoughts*** is a good starting point when centring down in Meeting for Worship:

*In calm and cool and silence, once again
I find my old accustomed place among
My brethren, where, perchance, no human tongue
Shall utter words; where never hymn is sung
Nor deep-toned organ blown, nor censer swung,
Nor dim light falling through the pictured pane!
There, syllabled by silence, let me hear
The still small voice which reached the prophet’s ear.....*

Jesus or Christ by Ruth Clements McQuaid

I don’t ever really use these words, I live now in an incredibly secular work environment, in some contexts these words can be loaded and people make assumptions. But for me internally it’s very important.

Jesus was absolutely a human being, this is the most significant bit. In times of my life I have got myself into a complete muddle about what I believe – and I’ve

grown to understand that you have to use discernment, make a decision. I have decided that Jesus is very important; the life he lived, especially the parables he taught I've chosen to believe as authentic. I have a more ambivalent relationship with Christ. Friends talked about the Inward Christ; for me I wonder what Christ really is, is it God?

I like the idea of the Trinity, the different facets of God – the parent, the child, the breath, and this puts Jesus in the context of an internal community. The teachings of Jesus have absolutely shaped my life. It's about how you live your life, about the use of money, about justice for the poor. I don't overtly think about the teachings but I can see my whole life shaped by them. I use these stories in my life, for example, the story of the Prodigal Son for when I feel a bit mean or jealous to help me grapple with the feelings. Jesus' teaching makes me think that the way I live matters.

For me his teachings are about society more than the individual. We don't go to heaven or hell as individuals, we travel together, it depends on how our community works, how we deal with shame, money, family relationships. There's the idea that Jesus is a template. He's not in essence different from me; we can all access the divinity within, people can step up and be changed, and be agents of change. There are other Jesuses, like Romero, it's not unattainable. The quiet radicalism of Jesus is highly structurally challenging. Where is he now? Who's the human embodiment now? What are the tables we should be turning over as Jesus did with the moneylenders in the temple?

I once saw someone take two sets of gospels, one had every reference to sex and sexuality cut out, the other had references to money and the poor cut out. The second completely fell apart, the other remained intact - telling us what we should really be talking about.

Being changed in this way is a kind of resurrection. I find the Resurrection challenging. On the one hand, it's a complete mystery; on the other hand, like the word Christ, it's a construct, haggled over and debated theologically by men with power – it's a doctrine rather than a truth.

The problem is that, if I *do* accept Jesus as a template it can feel that *I* am God, a heavy responsibility that weighed on me at one time. But I saw that spring came after winter without me doing anything: infinity, the mystery are so much bigger than me. I am not the centre, thank God.

Christianity is definitely the tradition of Quakers; I needed to grapple with this rather than go off to Buddhism or whatever. If it wasn't for the Jesus element I would just go to the Green Party rather than meeting. If you took Jesus and his teachings away, what would Quakerism be about, what is going on in Meeting, what are the stories you're drawing on? On the one hand I don't really think it

matters which religion you do... but on the other hand it sits within a cultural tradition. Quakers have a heritage of stories, but if ongoing revelation from them is to happen, we need to tell them, speak of them, work on them. It's the business of any church to be a vehicle for these stories. I don't think Quaker meeting does a very good job at joining up the Jesus stories with what we're doing, we're not even trying.

I really don't think Jesus and Christ are the same, I really don't. Jesus is human, I'm not sure what Christ is. But the mystery of resurrection is where the very human Jesus is connected with the cosmos. It's the moment of kairos, moments that are eternal, a turning around, just as in every year spring happens.

Jesus or Christ by Barbara Robinson

Do these two words mean the same to you? Is there one you prefer to use, and why?

I seldom use the name Jesus. But the word Christ describes for me the heart and essence of the spiritual quest.

How important are the teachings of Jesus to you? If important, how have you tried to follow them in your life?

I am more familiar with the gospels than I am with Acts, and in them Jesus is a mysterious figure, a traditional Jew who has been transformed by accepting his role as the Divine translator of the Word. His message, then translated by Greek interpreters amongst others, inevitably includes the biases that these languages carry, which then defines His vocal ministry. And yet the power, truth and beauty conveyed by each of these four profound texts speak to me as vividly as I imagine His spoken word did for those lucky enough to hear Him. I have found many of the gospels discovered at Nag Hammadi have shone a light on other aspects of His teaching that completes the message more fully for me.

Traditional Christians focus greatly on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. What does that mean to you as a Quaker?

I miss the annual procession of the Christian story as a Quaker, I sometimes feel that the lack of celebration of the birth, life, death and resurrection removes me from the deeper connection. But what I gain from our Meeting for Worship is a sense of the miraculous, the miracle of meeting ourselves, each other and that greater Something I'm reluctant to name.

Has your perception of Jesus/Christ changed over time?

My perception of Jesus/Christ changes all the time! It is never static and paradoxically it remains a constant lodestar.

Would you call yourself a Christian?

In all state questionnaires, yes!

In my inner being, only in those times I feel an alive relationship to this fugitive Something... If I was to call myself anything then it would be a believer in Panentheism which is the belief that the divine pervades and interpenetrates every part of the universe and also extends beyond space and time. God exists inside of everything, but is at the same time, transcendent of everything.

How important a part of being a Quaker for you is having an understanding of Jesus/Christ?

I'd say that what is important to me is to have a relationship with this Something..

Early Friends seem to have spoken more of an Inward Christ than they did of Jesus. What does the Inward Christ mean to you?

For me it rests in the acceptance that there has to be a living relationship, an active responding, trusting and a reaching. But it's not a comfortable, stable place and there are times when I can feel distant and lost. Although Jesus is the embodiment of love in everything He did and said I can easily fall out of love with myself and then it's a challenge to feel the Christ connection. For me, the symbol of the cross is a demonstration in the vertical plane to the connection through love of the earth to God, as the horizontal plane stretches in love to embrace the whole of creation.

How does a concept or experience of Jesus/Christ relate to what you do in worship, in the community of Friends, and in your service to the world?

In Meeting for Worship my focus is towards Something unknown, an inner surrender to a Something I wouldn't identify as Christ or Jesus but a hidden presence. With Friends there is an unspoken understanding that we are all in this together, separate individuals who choose to make the space in our lives for this contact. Without this connection I'd be less useful, a less open and engaged member of the world.

Jesus or Christ by Janette Walkinshaw

I don't see 'Jesus' and 'Christ' as the same thing. The dictionary definition of Christ is the anointed one, the Messiah, and I have difficulty believing that the man Jesus was such a thing. When I talk about the man I therefore prefer to use his name 'Jesus'.

My parents were not religious but we were sent to Sunday School and later to church. Their generation and indeed the generations before them were all brought up with the Christian ethos and obviously this was consciously or otherwise passed on to us. I think I was not alone in rebelling against the idea that we should be meek and mild like the baby Jesus. Meek was never my style. The ethical and moral teaching we absorb as children stays with us, but I am aware that there is similar teaching in most of the world's religions including Islam and Judaism.

I'm interested in why people need religion. I've been studying the history of the Christian church and am aware of how it developed from the early disciples,

through the church fathers, to Augustine and Bede and later to Aquinas and then the Reformation. My view has become more entrenched that the whole edifice has been built up on one Hebrew prophet, Jesus, but not by him. He was one of a long line of Hebrew prophets warning the Jewish people what would happen if they neglected the worship of their god. Soon after he died the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and I suspect that people looking back saw a connection. When we read the gospels, when we should read any history, we should bear in mind the times in which they were written as well as the times they were writing about.

It's worth also bearing in mind that Hebrew writers in particular loved writing in allegory. We only have to look at the Old Testament to see this, e.g. the tower of Babel, Jonah in the belly of the big fish. Much of the New Testament can be read as allegory, and not taken at face value.

I see the nativity story and the resurrection story as just that – stories which can be traced back to earlier myths. They were the way the followers of Jesus, thinking him the Messiah, made sense of the beliefs they were struggling towards. It is in the nature of human beings to tell ourselves stories to understand ourselves and the world around us.

The belief in Christ the Redeemer is a powerful idea. I cannot accept it for myself, partly because the idea of original sin is a Christian construct created after the life of the man Jesus. There is no concept of original sin in Judaism.

So, you might say, what am I doing in a Quaker meeting? There's God for a start. The moral teaching I absorbed as a child has been reinforced in Quakers. I am comfortable with the testimonies but clearly there has to be more than that. The 'more' is the search for God.

In Wigtown where I live there is an ecumenical event lasting five or ten minutes every Monday at noon, led in turn by someone from each of the churches. This takes the form of a bible reading, followed by readings of our choice not necessarily from the bible, and ending with a short prayer. When it is my turn to lead this on behalf of the Quaker meeting I tend always to take as my theme 'The search for God'. Whatever God is, and whatever it means to each of us, I think that is what we are doing at this ecumenical event, and what I am doing each Sunday in meeting. I have no difficulty at all in sharing this privately or publicly with those who are avowed Christians, or uncertain.

I deeply respect the Christian background of Quakers. It has come from a time when the whole of society was imbued with Christianity and they could not be otherwise. The followers of Jesus as Christ, are worshipping the same God, if such exists. So too of course are Muslims and Jews.

We're all connected.

Bone-fires

A bone-fire is what the ancient Celts built from animal bones to ward off evil spirits, today we call such structures bonfires. The ancient Celts had an excuse for their fear-driven practices – they knew no better! Later in history some Christians (both Catholic and Protestant) built ‘bone fires’ to punish ‘sinners’. The Flames of Hell were not entirely sufficient it seems to punish those who had offended God by their waywardness.

At the end of WW2 the adults in my street built a great bonfire. As a child of seven I watched the flames and sparks soar up to the heavens in celebration of the ‘victory’ over Nazi Germany. The following morning there was a large circle of melted tar where once the great fire had been, but there were no animal or human remains to be found amongst the ashes - thank God.

Outside the General Assembly buildings in Edinburgh there is a statue of John Knox, a Scottish preacher of hellfire and damnation who was apparently quite comfortable with ‘bone-fires’. Knox clearly was not a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, (a spiritual healer and teacher) Knox was a follower of John Calvin and both of these men saw God as The Great Cosmic Policeman who had a fiery place reserved for those who failed to pay him due homage. Christian bone-fires were apparently a pre-cursor to the fires of Hell, although it is difficult to ascertain what was left to burn once a ‘sinner’ had been reduced to ashes whilst still on earth!

John Calvin, and his associates, built a great bone-fire in Geneva in 1533, and they chained the unfortunate Michael Servetus to a post amidst the flames. Michael Servetus was burned to death for merely questioning the Doctrine of The Trinity. There is a statue in Paris marking this event, and it reminds visitors what happens when preachers forget to ‘Love thy neighbour as thyself’ and revert to Old Testament thinking; ‘New Wine’ and old wineskins clearly not understood.

Yet there is still hope for the human race. The Calvinists themselves finally came to their senses in 1859 when one of their number, Henry Dunant, came across the battlefield of Solferino in Italy. Dunant was so moved by the suffering he found there that he stopped what he was doing (he was a thread merchant on a business trip) to tend to the wounded and dying soldiers on the battlefield. Dunant later went on to establish the Red Cross, and his work eventually inspired the

Geneva Convention. Perhaps the unfortunate Michael Servetus did not die in vain in Switzerland after all ? God moves in mysterious ways.

Henry Dunant clearly understood the compassionate injunctions of the Christ-figure who was himself tortured to death with the compliance of the religious

authorities of his day. The preachers, Calvin and Knox, clearly did not understand that ‘The Light’ had entered the world, and that ‘The Light’ did not carry a box of matches about his person. The hideous death of Yeshua of Nazareth did not extinguish the Light, it merely revealed the cruelty and ignorance of violent men.

Some of today’s contemporary theologians, such as Don Cupitt and Richard Holloway, have published their reservations regarding the Doctrine of The Trinity, and whilst this might upset some of their fellow Churchmen, few today are suggesting that Cupitt and Holloway be consigned to the flames! We each formulate our own regimes of spiritual discipline but the building of bonfires was never, ever, part of the plan for the redemption of the human race!

It is an observable fact that the human mind is such that it can generate both positive and negative thoughts. It seems to me therefore that our spiritual development is determined by our willingness to take personal responsibility for our lives. It has to be recognised that some pretty awful deeds have been carried out in God’s name, and this continues to happen because some of us have quite clearly failed to understand our very own Holy Books, both Bible and Koran. The technical development of our modern weaponry now only serves to compound the problem, which is why the Testimony to Peace is so vitally important. “Live by the sword.....”

Bill Bingham, Glasgow



“The Light has entered the world, but The Darkness has comprehended it not” - Gospel of John.

**Whitefellas and Blackfellas - The Backhouse Lecture 2000:
To Learn a New Song, A contribution towards Real Reconciliation with
the Earth and its Peoples**

The Backhouse lectures are the Australian equivalent of the Swarthmoor Lectures. In this one Australian Friends are tackling the ‘problem’ of the Aborigines. The historical and current treatment of ‘Aborigines’ is horrendous. Currently many young commit suicide. Alcoholism is rife. Modern agriculture as white settlement has taken so much land that criss crosses the old tracks and even ‘sacred sites’ – in Aboriginal ‘theology’ all land is one and sacred. Reconciliation means nothing because there was no previous relationship to reconcile! What to do?

The modern world is totally incompatible with the Aborigine culture. Indeed, as well as calling us Whitefellas, the indigenous Australians see us as lost souls, alienated and lost from the Earth.

This lecture has a powerful message for today in that our separation from Nature is a separation from Reality.

It criticises modern Quaker indulgence in individual spiritual seeking and the absurdity of seeking within when surrounded and part of the whole of Nature. There is a lot to learn from the Aborigine culture.

p.52 As increasing urbanisation distances us Friends from the ability offered by the Earth to discern the eternal essence of Life, Western materialistic culture pressures us to accept its own limited concept of reality. It is a reality which has largely outlawed the presence of the Spirit in all but carefully demarcated areas. It is possible, then, that our beliefs about ‘that of God in everything’ are based less on actual experiences of Nature, and perhaps even of the Spirit, than on intellectualised, ‘spiritually correct’ concepts about each.

In the shift from Fox’s *inward light* to the *inner light* we may have lost the goal.

p.53 In recent years, the original experience of the Inward Light, perhaps under the influence of psychological philosophy, has become more familiar as the concept of the Inner Light. The transformation may be significant for, while the first acknowledges and names something we share that does the spiritual work within us under direct guidance of the Spirit, the second term seems to invite us consciously to journey into ourselves towards spiritual individualism. Such a search for an ever deepening spiritual specialness, which sometimes seems the purpose of Quaker activities, may hinder a greater understanding of how to live in community among diverse others.

Much more poignant is our inability to hear the Spirit! How can we test our leading or discern our concerns? The thorny question of Quaker language barriers between different 'types' of Friend is questioned.

I find the Backhouse Lectures very challenging. I'll close with two further quotes:

p.50 In ways still too deep for us to comprehend, still too complex for us to glimpse more than fleetingly, Aboriginal cultures have been spiritually and economically one with all creation in its minutiae for at least 60 millenium. . . .

But since the Whitefellas have arrived so many species have become extinct! . . . *With humanity welded in such intimate kinship with every aspect of Life, whether on the land or in the sea or in the sky, the whole of Creation becomes a classroom.*

Margaret Roy

The Rainbow Serpent

She swoops out of the sea her rainbow scales dazzling. Down the Great Glen she flows, Where is Nessie? Gambolling down the west coast in and out of the islands, she loves the Corryveckan. Over high mountains and ancient rocks, this is her element. Through the Celtic rainforest: all those colours in the tree and flowers, and the little bunnies, all those birds, and so many insects. Down into the lowlands. . . . But what here?

Little things dart about. They are not of her. And the people, her people, they do not see her. They do not feel her Life.

There will be prizes for any child/children who write a story about her!



This is a board game about disarming war planes. Would you like to play?

[DISARMING WAR PLANES]

As many Friends know, two years ago Sam Walton (then managing the peace and disarmament programme for BYM) was arrested for breaking in to a military base to try to disarm war planes bound for Yemen. He and his co-defendant Daniel Woodhouse were later acquitted. I was also working for BYM at the time (I used to be the parliamentary engagement manager) and was struck by how this direct action could be made into a board game.

Well, we're now in the process of creating "Disarm the Base". It's a cooperative board game for up to four players. (You might have seen the recent article in The Friend about how this project was part of normalising direct action for peace.) We need at least 150 people to pledge to buy it in order for it to get made. Anyone who is interested can pledge to buy a copy at <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/dissentgames/disarm-the-base> or can find out about the whole project at www.disarmthebase.com.

Each copy of the game costs £29 plus postage. All profits are going to be donated to Campaign Against Arms Trade. If anyone would like to buy a copy but is nervous of using Kickstarter, then they could email dissentgames@gmail.com.

At the moment it is still being tested, and last tweaks will be happening over the summer. It will then be produced, and hopefully will be ready to send out in time for Christmas. Perhaps your meeting would like one for the library, or perhaps you have a young adult group who would like to play it?

Please do spread the word in whatever way you feel able to!

In Friendship

Jess — Jessica Metherringham Dissent Games Follow
@DissentGames on Twitter and Instagram Disarm the Base is on Kickstarter at www.kickstarter.com/projects/dissentgames/disarm-the-base Follow our progress at www.disarmthebase.com

When asked about being a Third World person, Venezuelan film maker Aimara Reques mentioned the Fourth World, left overs of Capitalism. The white people in this country, the most painful poverty I have experienced is here in western communities in Europe especially Scotland. People who have lost everything, who have nothing left, not even their spirit.

A Friendly Introduction to Quakers in Scotland

12 October 2019—Call for Participation

1. What's this about?

You may have been coming to Quaker Meeting for a couple of weeks or a couple of years. Sometimes it's difficult to find time after Meeting to have the further discussions about Quakerism you would like: this day is a chance to have deeper discussions and ask questions. You might be looking for a chance to discuss what happens for you in Meeting for Worship and whether it's the same as for other people, or you might want to chat about putting faith into action. You might be interested in how your experience of Quakerism so far fits in with Quakerism across the country or across the world or how over 400 years of Quaker history has got us to where British Quakers are today. You may be interested to find out more about how Quakers organise and make decisions. We aim to answer your questions and to create a safe space to have these discussions. We hope that by the end of the event you will feel more confident calling yourself a Quaker, or at least have a broader understanding of the breadth of beliefs and practices within Quakers today.

All of the above is happening on Saturday 12 October in Stirling. If you live near enough, or can manage to stay somewhere nearby, please also consider joining us for Meeting for Worship at Dunblane Meeting on Sunday morning, followed by an opportunity to discuss our experiences over a simple lunch courtesy of Dunblane Friends.

2. Who is it for?

Anyone who has been attending a Quaker Meeting for Worship who is interested in finding out more about Quakers.

3. Where and when, exactly?

The main event is on Saturday 12 October in Stirling, from 1030 to 1730.

We're meeting in the McCallum Room at Stirling Baptist Church, 67 Murray Place, Stirling, FK8 1AU. Stirling rail and bus stations are very close. Meeting for Worship in Dunblane is at 1030 on Sunday 13 October at the Braeport Centre, Braeport, Dunblane, FK15 0AT. The Braeport Centre is a short walk from Dunblane rail station.

4. Will it cost money?

Yes, but you don't necessarily have to pay this yourself. The cost of the day will be £25 including lunch and refreshments. You can talk to an elder or overseer at your Local Meeting or your Area Meeting about bursary help to cover the cost if you require financial support (including travel costs). Or if you don't feel comfortable to do this, or don't know who to talk to, let us know in the registration form. We don't want cost to be a barrier to anyone attending.

Glasgow Quaker Meeting - How are we letting our lives speak?

Peace and Social Witness “Fair” , Sunday 25th August

Part of the expressed Vision of Glasgow Quakers is to get to know each other better and find ways to live our values and testimonies .

So we arranged a “fair” and invited all F/friends to come and present and share their individual or collective involvements in concerns of social justice and peace. Wow, what a brilliant afternoon, when we discovered an amazing and wonderful variety of work which is currently undertaken by F/friends. We know of more, who could not make it on the date and fully expect that there are many more which we don’t yet know

16 people shared their thoughts and the practicalities of initiatives and voluntary work by talking and demonstrating with excellent visual aids. Some are involved in very hands-on ways and others more in governance, advocacy and lobbying. We found that there is need for all talents, faithful commitment and imagination as well as the rewards of fun and fulfilment. Everywhere there is room for interested people to join in and become activists.

To whet your appetite and put you in touch ,here is just a brief taste of organisations and initiatives we heard about:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Refuweeges; welcoming refugees to Glasgow | Alistair McIvor |
| 2 Fairtrade goods campaign | Liz Cotton |
| 3 Interfaith Glasgow, especially work with LGBT groups | Derek Read |
| 4 Quaker concern for the Abolition of Torture | Michael Hutchinson |
| 5 Making Eco bricks using un-recyclable plastic | Barbara Robinson |
| 6 Cooking for the Glasgow Nightshelter, which gives accommodation to the most destitute asylum seekers. | Lilo Boergmann |
| 7 Volunteering for Marie Curie, shops etc | Aileen Robertson |
| 8 Friends of the Duncruin St gardens in Maryhill | Steph Koepplinger |
| 9 “getgoteams.com”, activity in parks and playing fields | Steph Koepplinger |
| 10 De-cluttering, “Clutter chat”, helping people to know their inner light | Zem Moffat |
| 11 Quaker Gender and Sexual Diversity Group | Zem Moffat |
| 12 Providing lay justice as a Justice of the Peace | Neil McKechnie |
| 13 Foodbank worker, campaigner and trustee | Ruth Wilkinson |
| 14 Glasgow Friends Against Homelessness, provide hot drinks and simple foods in the street on rotation with other organisations | Mary Cox and Sarah Brown |
| 15 “Clean Sweep”, litter pickers initiative based in Milngavie, see also “”Litter Pick Plus Toolkit” for further ideas | Tam Spaeth |

- 16 “Violence against Women” campaign and “Thursdays in Black”, Churches’ Advocacy against Sexual, Gender-based Violence Margaret Roy
- 17 16 days of Activism against gender based violence in November Margaret Roy
- 18 Nuclear Disarmament ((maintaining witness with MfW at Faslane) Daphne Wassermann
- 19 Climate impact food labelling campaign ,sign it! Daphne Wassermann
<https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/climate-impact-food-labelling>
- 20 Supporting children of prisoners, with “The Playstation” in the visits room in HMP Barlinnie and making representations at the Council of Europe for better rules. Kate Philbrick

These are just some of the ways Glasgow Quakers seek to live out **Advice 27:**
“Live adventurously. When choices arise, do you take the way that offers the fullest opportunity for the use of your gifts in the service of God and the community? Let your life speak”

So what now?

- *Speak with the Friends concerned
- *Consider whether you might like to join into something
- **We are planning to publish a more detailed compilation of all the projects and add the ones we have not yet heard about, illustrated by the visual record Mark made.
- *Hold another “fair” in a year’s time

Challenge Poverty Week 2019

Challenge Poverty Week (7-13th October 2019) is an opportunity to raise your voice against poverty and show what needs to be done to tackle poverty across Scotland. **Interfaith Glasgow**

Deepening the Silence

Some of us need space to discuss and share more deeply our spiritual journey. We thought to meet once a month and possibly use The Language of the Inner Landscape by Brian Drayton and William P. Tabor. This book encourages us to articulate our experiences. Glenthorne has already done a weekend course on it. If you are interested in exploring more deeply get in touch with Alastair Reid or Margaret Roy and we will get going.

Experiment with Light after our successful one day meeting in the summer, we hope to have another in Argyll this side of Christmas. Interested? Get in touch with Pete Clarke p.a.clarke@open.ac.uk or Margaret Roy margaret.roy@btinternet.com

DUMFRIES

Dumfries meets monthly to read and discuss a text. Here is an extract from their newsletter. The reading for September was chosen by Margaret Dobie.

More news of Meetings

John MacMurray (1891-1976) was a Scottish philosopher. He grew up in a very religious Scottish Calvinist family, but after the 1st World War, lost faith in the institutional church. This protest became part of his witness to true Christian faith, but it was not till after his retirement from his professorship at Edinburgh University that he joined the Society of Friends whose pacifism and lack of doctrinal rigidity deeply attracted him.

‘ John Macmurray in a Nutshell’ by David Ferguson

MacMurray claims that there are two emotional attitudes which radically determine human life. These are love and fear. Fear is a negative emotion which inhibits spontaneity and generates selfishness. The real antithesis of love is not hate but fear. Many false forms of religion are responses to the ultimate fear of death. True religion, by contrast, liberates us from false fears by enabling us to love life and other people. It does this not by promising some illusory escape from the harsh realities of our existence but by teaching us to meet them without fear. This was a lesson that Macmurray learned from the carnage of the Somme’.

Glasgow East End Meeting

The East End Meeting was laid down earlier this year due to decreased attendance and the personal circumstances of regular attenders at the meeting. There were also concerns about the ill-lit entrance to the building (Reidvale Neighbourhood Centre)- particularly in winter – and the perhaps suitability of the night and time of the meeting(7pm on the 3rd Monday of the month) .

For the past few months I have been investigating possible suitable premises and building up a relationship with staff at a shop/ café at 200 Gallowgate – Creative East End.

Residential Pilgrimage at Swarthmoor Hall, Cumbria 13-17 October 2019

Up to 3 Places still available.

The Learning Group and Glasgow Elders have arranged a residential Pilgrimage to the ‘cradle of Quakerism’ at Swarthmoor Hall in Cumbria.

Please contact Michael Hutchinson on 0141 770 7865 or mjhriddrie@btinternet.com

This trip would be as a retreat/pilgrimage. The aim would be to strengthen bonds within the meeting and provide opportunity to learn more and experience the beginnings of Quakerism in the 1652 country. It can be a life changing experience and many feel closer to their faith and experience on visiting the sites.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

12 th October	Area Meeting in Dunblane 11am – 4pm
16 th November	GENERAL MEETING Perth
2 nd December	Area Meeting by telephone 7 – 9pm
11 th January 2020	Area Meeting in Glasgow 11am – 4pm
7 th March	GENERAL MEETING SE AM
9 th March	Area Meeting by telephone/video 7 -9pm
18 th April	Area Meeting at Castle Douglas 11.30 – 4pm
8 th June	Area Meeting by telephone/video 7 -9pm
13 th June	GENERAL MEETING Elgin
22 nd August	Area Meeting at Lochgilphead, Argyll 11.30 – 4pm
12 th September	GENERAL MEETING Dundee
10 th October	Area Meeting in Ayr 11.30 – 4pm
14 th November	GENERAL MEETING Glasgow
7 th December	Area Meeting by telephone/video 7 -9pm
16 th January 2021	Area Meeting in Glasgow 11.30 – 4pm
6 th March 2021	GENERAL MEETING North Scotland

Hold in the light

Bill Bingham whose sister is terminally ill.

Joyce Minnis, back home after a bout in hospital .

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The deadline for contributions for the next issue of WSQN is 15th November

Copy should be send in Word format to the editors Alastair McIver or Margaret Roy