

CIRcular

For Friends involved in local ecumenical and interfaith work



Issue 34

Yearly Meeting 2016

From the clerks

The religious landscape of the UK is changing rapidly. Pentecostal and charismatic churches are playing an increasingly large part in the church scene, especially in England. Creating closer relations with Muslims and Jews now has to be done against the background of world events and of hostile media reporting, whether of the situation in Israel/Palestine or outrages on the streets of Paris, Brussels, Istanbul and elsewhere. Meanwhile, for the first time over 50 per cent of the UK population now defines itself as 'non-religious'.

Against this background the Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations (QCCIR) is making a major effort this year to review both its activities and its resources. We have tried to imagine how we hope Friends may be working with churches and faith communities in five years' time, and have identified three 'lenses' through which to see our future work: visibility – ensuring that Quakers are visible and making a distinctive contribution; engagement – providing opportunities for participation in worship, working together and learning about each other's theology and experiences; and communication – working with other committees and groups to reflect and articulate a discerned Quaker position back to Yearly Meeting.

QCCIR has a small budget and limited staff support; committee members expect to undertake a lot of the work themselves. In light of our review, we think aspects of this way of working may have to be revisited. We are looking forward to working with trustees and staff on this over the next year.



Watford's Interfaith Pilgrimage in March included a silent vigil.

Interfaith Pilgrimage in Watford

For the first National Interfaith Week in 2009 Watford Interfaith Association (WIFA) organised an Interfaith Pilgrimage, visiting five places of worship on a Sunday afternoon. At each place we had a short talk about the building and the beliefs of that group, followed by a chance to look around and ask questions. The event has been repeated each year since, mostly visiting the same locations, though different ones in some years. In 2015 the pilgrimage started at the meeting house. We had a finger food lunch followed by short introductory talks from a Quaker and a Unitarian (the Unitarians use our building). Then we proceeded with tea and kosher cakes at the synagogue, a talk from the rabbi and a formal welcome from the chair of WIFA. Then to the ancient parish church, the purpose-built mosque (more food), the beautiful Catholic church and the gurdwara, where the tour was followed by a meal.

This year we also included a two-minute silent vigil at the town's bandstand in memory of those who died in Paris and in other terrorist attacks across the world, and well over 100 people attended.

Stephanie Grant, QCCIR

Visit My Mosque Day, 7 February 2016

Bessie White of QCCIR attended the nation-wide launch at London Central Mosque in Regents Park. Dr Shuja Shafi, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), referred to the impromptu initiative arranged in 2015 after the Charlie Hebdo incident. This year over 80 mosques participated.

Penny and Alan Vernon of Wirral & Chester Area Meeting visited a local mosque. Penny wrote:

“If you visit the Abdullah Quilliam Mosque in Liverpool you will find a slightly shabby Victorian house just off the West Derby Road, the site of the first mosque in England, established in 1889 by Abdullah Quilliam, an English convert to Islam... When we entered the mosque we heard the call to prayer. Our questions were willingly answered and we learned a little of the shared concepts of Islam, Christianity and Judaism – one God and the prophets, including Jesus.”

Gervais Frykman and a colleague from Wooldale Local Meeting visited Madina Masjid in Batley, where they observed the mid-afternoon prayers and were shown the adjacent Madrasah Islamiyah, a large day school for more than 800 pupils. Gervais summarises:

“I saw no oppressed women. Even if I have questions in my mind, there was a fervour about the place which made it refreshing to be in, and which made my visit more than interesting – it was a blessing.”

Gervais also visited the Hanfia Masjid in Huddersfield on a Kirklees Faiths Forum event. He said:

“Muslims’ contribution to the economic life of the country is obvious. Now I see a little of their inestimable contribution to its spiritual wellbeing.”

A fuller report of Visit My Mosque nationally can be found online at www.mcb.org.uk/thousands-of-britons-take-part-in-visit-my-mosque-initiative. We hope it will become an annual event.

Bessie White, QCCIR



Jane Clements and Mashuda Shaikh at the Interfaith Peacebuilding Conference in September 2015. Photo: Heather Martin

Conferences

Interfaith peacebuilding – Friends House, London, 26 September 2015

This was a day conference to share experiences of working with Jewish and Muslim communities. Around 60 Friends from all parts of Britain Yearly Meeting attended.

Jane Clements, Director of the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ), gave much useful background to current Jewish thinking. Jews are still bemused by the concern of some Christians with Israel. There is a great need to properly hear the other and to recognise deep fears.

Mashuda Shaikh also highlighted listening. Her work as Community Heritage Officer for Kirklees Council had led to her involvement with the Northern Friends Peace Board (NFPB). She talked of her own concern for isolated women, the disaffection of Muslim youth and their distrust of their religious leaders, and her work on the Six Million Buttons art project to commemorate the Holocaust. Mashuda spoke of interfaith dialogue as affecting our own individual spiritual journeys.

In the final worship we were inspired to be both radical activists and steady hands; both prophets and reconcilers.

Understanding Islam, Challenging Islamophobia – Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, 26–28 February 2016

This proved to be a challenging course, with much to learn about Islam and the opportunity to hear from a variety of speakers about their



Friends in discussion at the Interfaith Peacebuilding Conference in September 2015. Photo: Heather Martin

experiences of Islamophobia. While realising that Islamophobia is a very serious problem, we came away encouraged that even small actions on our part could help make a difference.

Bessie White, QCCIR

Finding the Spirit in the melting pot – Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, 11–13 March 2016

Can our internal theological diversity be a source of strength in an increasingly conflicted world? Can Quakers today accept theist and non-theist ideas in one Religious Society of Friends? Do we need to be sure of what we are as a religious body, in the melting pot of our cities, which are becoming so diverse, where there is so much deprivation? Have we the language to respond to this new landscape? The whole world in one city. We struggled, we were discomfited.

We are a unique community, where the living spirit is at the heart of what we do. We witness against evil. Our tradition is to challenge authority. We adapt our language, we are used to living on shifting sands, we can cope with being discomfited by discomfort.

We reflect the whole universe in each of us.

Ann Bettys, Huddersfield Local Meeting

Laudato Si: On care for our common home – a review of Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter

'Laudato Si' means 'Praise be to You'. Three main constantly recurring themes spoke to me: the interconnectedness of all God's creation,

the dignity and respect due to the poor, and the love of God for his good creation.

On almost every page there is a sentence that Quakers would agree with. Examples include:

"God created the world for everyone."

"Human ecology is inseparable from the notion of common good."

Laudato Si is filled with biblical quotes, the majority it seemed to me from the Hebrew scriptures, and it made me think of how little Jesus spoke of creation, nature and the land.

Some thoughts I will take away:

"War always does grave harm to the environment and to the cultural riches of peoples..."

"The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity... The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good."

Kate Arnot, QCCIR

A Spirit-led church

A new document produced by QCCIR is being widely circulated among Friends, having been adopted by Meeting for Sufferings last autumn; its title is *A Spirit-led church*.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has been attempting for some time to bring together a text that would underpin a common vision for the Church. They have been consulting worldwide and Friends became convinced that it was right to respond. Their reasons were:

- Friends often play a vital role, which has been appreciated by other churches.
- The essence of our Quaker belief includes the importance of diversity.
- It is possible to remain faithful to a tradition while still reaching out to others with compassion.

The language of the WCC authors allows for those with stricter adherence to orthodoxy to sit alongside looser interpretations of biblical texts, other writings and ways of worship. We have preferred to emphasise the Spirit – Friends place hope in a Spirit-led church that

seeks the Spirit's guidance in an uncertain world. We know that other churches welcome our response – the search for forms of words that can bring us together is genuine.

Quakers' nearest family members lie in the World Council of Churches. A response to the WCC was vital. More distant cousins in other faiths need to be able to recognise that Christianity is open to dialogue; they often feel more comfortable speaking to Friends first.

Nick Clifford, Central Manchester Local Meeting



QCCIR members gathered at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, Birmingham, in January 2016. Photo: Mike Glover

QCCIR 2016

As can be seen from the short descriptions in this newsletter, the work of QCCIR continues to inform other parts of the yearly meeting and beyond, articulating carefully in religious language why Quakers are active in the way we are. Spirit-led peace and service work in

the world can so easily be misunderstood. It is vital that Friends are represented beyond our own small faith community in the wider interfaith and interchurch world to be visible, engage and communicate. The work of QCCIR continues to enable Quakers to do this.

Marigold Bentley, April 2016

The Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations (QCCIR; *Quaker faith & practice* 9.13) keeps Quakers informed of movements towards cooperation within the Christian Church and opportunities for interfaith dialogue, and it responds on their behalf to other Churches and faith communities.

The Secretary is Marigold Bentley: marigoldb@quaker.org.uk, 020 7663 1060.

Current members	Area Quaker Meeting	Serving until end
Mike Glover	Brighouse West Yorkshire	04/2016
Jennifer Hodgkin (Clerk)	Mid-Essex	04/2016
Kate Arnot	South East Scotland	04/2017
Nicola Hoskin-Stone	Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire	04/2017
Douglas Butterfield	Chilterns	04/2017
Hannah Brock	Young Friends General Meeting	10/2017
Stephen Clement	Young Friends General Meeting	10/2017
Gethin Evans	Mid-Wales	04/2018
Stephanie Grant	Luton & Leighton	04/2018
Bessie White	London West	04/2018
Peter Rivers	Southern Marches	04/2018
Mark Lilley	Lincolnshire	04/2018
Eoin Stephenson	IYM / Surrey & Hampshire Border	05/2018
Ben Wood	Leeds	04/2019
Rowena Lovrance (Asst Clerk)	London West	04/2019
Chris Wilson	Dorset & South Wiltshire	04/2019
Marisa Johnson	FWCC EMES Secretary	

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The opinions expressed are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the committee.