

CIRcular

For Friends involved in inter-church and interfaith work



Issue 36

Yearly Meeting 2018

Welcome to this issue of *CIRcular*, in which we again show something of the breadth of Quaker work with other churches and faiths. There are reports of contact with Jewish and Muslim communities, and examples of Quaker witness on homelessness, remembrance and refugees. Do keep these stories coming in. They show how Quakers are active in the world, making themselves known and their values understood through working collaboratively with other churches and faiths, making a difference.

Bessie White and Lynda Williams, QCCIR

Quaker-Jewish contacts

Quakers in Britain continue to manage the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) on behalf of Churches Together in Britain & Ireland and other partner organisations. EAPPI is an initiative of the World Council of Churches. Sue Beardon has first-hand experience as an ecumenical accompanier (EA) and writes:

“Since 2002 over 1,500 volunteers from 22 countries have served as EAs in the occupied West Bank. One UN official recently said: ‘With the continuing impunity for the perpetrators of violence against children and attacks on schools, EAPPI is considered one of the cornerstone responses in supporting highly vulnerable communities.’

“EAs witness life under occupation. They are on the ground 24/7 monitoring and reporting human rights violations and bringing eyewitness accounts to the world’s attention. Their very presence protects vulnerable communities. It deters the Israeli military and armed settler groups from violating the human rights of civilians and makes local communities feel safer.

“More recently, EAs have also spent valuable time in Haifa with ordinary Jewish Israelis, attending their synagogue, visiting their homes and learning about their perspectives. EAPPI UK & Ireland stresses that it does not take sides in this conflict, but it is not neutral. Its stance is one of ‘principled



Sughra Ahmed was one of four ecumenical guests to speak at Yearly Meeting Gathering 2017. Photo: Mike Pinches for BYM

impartiality’ in the service of a just and peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on equality, human rights and international law.”

Invest in Peace

Churches Together in Britain & Ireland and the Board of Deputies of British Jews have been collaborating on a series of events to promote understanding called Invest in Peace. Sue Beardon and Lynda Williams, QCCIR members, attended an event in Leeds in November 2017. Here is an edited version of Sue’s report:

“The event featured the Bereaved Families Forum, a group of bereaved parents from both Israel and Palestine. Their mission is that no more parents should be bereaved.

“To a mixed audience – Jews, Muslims, Christians, young and old – Palestinian Bassam Aramin told how one Israeli soldier had killed his daughter, but 100 ex-servicemen from Israel helped to build a memorial garden to her memory. Unless there is a reconciliation process alongside the political peace process, we were told, there will only ever be a ceasefire, not peace. Robi Damelin lost her son and is now one of a few Israelis who regularly visits the West Bank. She said that until more Israelis and Jews meet Palestinians living under the occupation, negative stereotypes will persist.”

Sue concludes with the message from the event that everyone needs to be listened to and to be able to tell their stories. In the end, Israelis and Palestinians, given the opportunity to dialogue as equals, will find the solution and a just peace, but they need all of our love and support and advocacy to help get them to that point. She feels we should not be afraid of airing our differing perspectives publicly and congratulates the Board of Deputies for helping to begin this process through this series of meetings.

Quaker-Muslim contacts

In Devizes, Wiltshire, the Muslim community invited local churches and other local people to join them for their Eid celebrations. Jacky Thomas writes: "It was a very enjoyable event attended by a wide section of the local community and included our MP, Claire Perry. Addresses were given by the mayor Nigel Carter, the MP, the Catholic priest Father Benny, and a visiting Imam. We enjoyed a meal provided by local restaurateurs and a chance to meet each other. We have a small multifaith group that is seeking ways to increase understanding and cooperation between those of different faiths, and the Muslim community uses the meeting house for Friday prayers. It is a slow process but we can at least recognise each other around the town and begin to make progress."

Bath Quakers recently hosted a talk for Bath Interfaith Group given by Rashid Azami, Imam and former director of Bath Islamic Society. He spoke about peace and justice from a theological point of view. He said the present upheavals in the wider Muslim world were the result of political dysfunction, not of Islamic teaching. "Islam's primary goal is to serve humanity and foster its development. The Islam I studied was one of compassion: merciful, fair and logical."

Sheikh Azami explained something of the background to the tensions between different Islamic traditions. While Muslims might feel some hostility in Bath, it was generally a welcoming society, he felt, and the annual interfaith gathering creates a bond. "People do have strong views," he said, "but not to the point that they will be violent, unless they are radicalised by other means. Living with other people is just part of life. My only concern is there should be more engagement."

William Heath, editor of Bath Quaker News.

Go to <https://bathquakers.files.wordpress.com/2017/10/bqn-nov-2017.pdf> to read the full report.



In October 2017 Bath Quakers hosted a talk for Bath Interfaith Group given by Rashid Azami. Photo: *Bath Quaker News*

Collaborating with other churches and faiths

A number of individual Quakers and meetings work jointly with other churches and faiths.

Mount Street Meeting in Manchester is involved in a night shelter for destitute asylum seekers from October until May, organised by the Boaz Trust. It is now the reception centre from 6pm to 9pm because of its good central position. Other churches send a vehicle to take the guests to where they will stay that night.

Quakers from a number of meetings are involved with churches and interfaith groups that welcome Syrian refugees arriving under the government's Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. The involvement of Brentford & Isleworth Friends in Hounslow and Forest Hill in Lewisham, for example, arose from the friendships made over time with other faiths and churches individually and through local interfaith groups. Forest Hill felt blessed joining with other local groups in welcoming them, making a collection of household items. For details on becoming a Sanctuary Meeting see www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/social-justice/migration.

David L Saunders of Norfolk & Waveney Area Meeting reports that a North Norfolk Churches Together away-day, 'Who is my neighbour? Welcoming the stranger', was attended by more than 30 people. It included a biblical background, a vivid presentation by Christian Aid and – probably the hit of the day – Sam Donaldson, a young Quaker from Hull who had been on an ecumenical project at Lampedusa in Sicily. It is hoped that this day will bear fruit through Churches Together offering some hospitality holidays to refugees in Norwich.

David is enthusiastic about working with other churches:



In July 2017 Forest Hill Quakers welcomed Syrian refugees to their meeting house. Photo: Thecla Geraghty

“Our Churches Together is ‘brill’. Though we are only 2,500 in population, I think small communities punch above their weight, and that applies to our Churches Together. We hold a sleep-out in tents in December on the town green to draw attention to homelessness – last year we raised £2,500. Perhaps the most important external witness is our excellent prison chaplain programme. As a result of their ministry, three prisoners have been admitted into membership and over 20 attend regular weekly worship in one of our prisons.”

Evelyn Shire, of Craven & Keighley Area Meeting, writes: “In these ‘turbulent times’, with negative attitudes to ‘the other’, Friends often wonder what we can do as individuals, as small groups living in our own towns, to make connections.

“We have a network called Women in Keighley, bringing together women from different backgrounds (see www.google.co.uk/search?q=Keighley+State+of+Mind). There is a large South Asian community – mostly Pakistani with a smaller number of Bangladeshi heritage. A majority of them were born in the UK and have been British all their lives. They can’t ‘go home’. They are ‘home’. Yet those instantly visible as different, through ethnicity or apparel, are at particular risk of being picked on as ‘the other’.

“I also volunteer with Roshni Ghar (www.roshnigar.org.uk), a mental health project working mostly with South Asian women. Most of the time I’m the only non-Muslim. Among all the ordinary chat, we occasionally share faith experiences. Sometimes interfaith relationships progress further through doing together rather than attempting to set up ‘talking together’ without a suitable context.”

Kate Arnot from South East Scotland Area Meeting tells of her experiences with the ‘Women of Faith’ group in Glasgow:

“The group began out of a women’s event at a mosque. Usually there are around 15 to 20 of us, currently from five faiths. What we are doing this year: visiting Hidden Gardens (a community peace garden); being creative during Inter Faith Week – Arabic calligraphy, origami, massage, painting stones, embroidery, henna hand painting; discussion of reusable menstrual materials; creating a decoration; storytelling; basic principles of mediation as a means of dispute resolution; faith schools; visit to a synagogue; and plans for the year ahead.

“There are many reasons why busy women come to the group: to make friends, share cultures and stories, and reduce fear and misunderstanding. We enjoy and learn, participate and share.”

The Inter Faith Network (IFN) for the UK runs periodic day events for anyone active in interfaith. Nicky Hoskin Stone of Chesterfield Meeting attended one in Manchester in October 2017. It was chaired by Jatinder Singh Birdi, IFN Co-chair, who also visited Yearly Meeting Gathering at Warwick earlier in the year. Participants shared experiences, news and issues of common interest and concern. Rabbi Warren Elf from Manchester talked of people of faith standing in solidarity after terrorist attacks. Nicky chose two workshops: ‘Liverpool Community Spirit’ on engaging with schools learning about faiths and ‘Women and Inter Faith Engagement’ sharing ideas to encourage participation in community initiatives. This included East meets West in Lancaster and STEPS in Kirklees. For news of the next IFN day, contact your local interfaith group or see www.interfaith.org.uk.

From the clerks

As well as supporting Friends’ work with other churches and faiths, the Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations (QCCIR) provides opportunities for like-minded Friends to meet and hear inspiring faith stories. We were delighted to bring four particularly articulate ecumenical guests to Yearly Meeting Gathering in 2017: we heard from a Catholic archbishop on receptive ecumenism, a Sikh faith leader on his local and national responsibilities, a Muslim on her travels in the US Bible Belt, and a Zoroastrian on a personal introduction to her faith. They have set the bar high for our two guests at Yearly Meeting 2018, Baptist and charity leader Steve Chalke and Bharti Tailor, former Secretary-General of the Hindu Forum of Britain. In return, QCCIR has represented Friends at a wider than

usual variety of events during the year, organised by, among others, the Ahmadiyya Muslims, Baha'is, Zoroastrians, Cherubim and Seraphim Unification Church, and Lutheran Council of Great Britain.

In these exchanges QCCIR wants to ensure that it is keeping Britain Yearly Meeting in touch with the widest range of spirituality in the UK, especially its new expressions. Our research project, 'The changing face of faith in Britain: how should Quakers respond?', delivered its findings during 2017, and Friends had their first chance to discuss these at a Woodbrooke weekend in March. QCCIR clearly has more work to do to explore areas of common interest that Friends may have with particular groups. If you have experience of making contact with 'new spirituality' groups, we would be very glad to hear from you.

Rowena Loverance, QCCIR



The Board of Deputies' Phil Rosenberg and Anthony Silkoff (third and fifth from left) with the clerks at a QCCIR meeting in October 2017. Photo: Lynda Williams

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
Rowena Loverance (Clerk)	London West	04/2019
Kate Arnot	South East Scotland	04/2020
Kim Ashcroft	Sussex East	04/2020
Sue Beardon	Sheffield & Balby	04/2019
Freya Blyth	Nominated by Young Friends General Meeting	10/2020
Catherine Brewer	Northumbria	04/2021
Douglas Butterfield	Chilterns	04/2020
Gillian Court	Northamptonshire	04/2019
Gethin Evans	Nominated by Meeting of Friends in Wales	04/2018
Stephanie Grant	Luton & Leighton	04/2021
Nicola Hoskin-Stone	Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire	04/2020
Mark Lilley (Asst Clerk)	Lincolnshire	04/2021
Rachel Muers	Leeds (co-opted)	
Evelyn Shire	Craven & Keighley	04/2019
Eoin Stephenson (Asst Clerk)	(Nominated by IYM) Surrey & Hampshire Border	04/2021
Bessie White	London West	04/2018
Lynda Williams	Southern Marches	04/2020
Ben Wood	Leeds	04/2019
Marisa Johnson	FWCC EMES Secretary (ex officio)	

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Contributions are welcome for future issues.

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