

SOLIDARITY IN SOCIAL JUSTICE



**HOW DO WE ACT IN SOLIDARITY
AND FRIENDSHIP ACROSS
SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS?**

INTRODUCTION

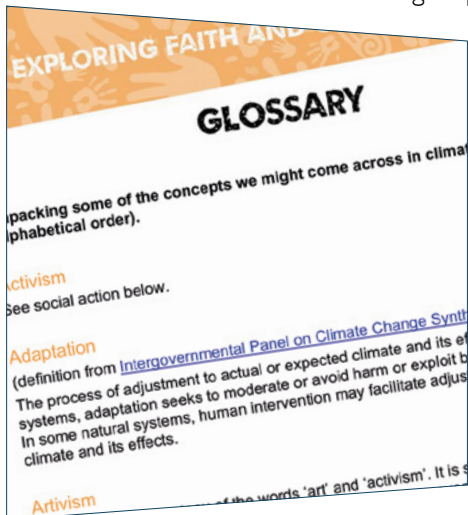
This is the sixth and final booklet in a series designed by Quakers in Britain to explore one analysis of climate breakdown and how we might respond, known as climate justice. It's a term that is increasingly used in the UK, but not one that is well understood. It challenges our status quo and imagines a different world – a world in which we recognise and address the inequalities and power imbalances that have led us here; in which we repair the harm we have done to one another and to the planet, and build a more sustainable, loving system of organising ourselves.

We have tried to make these booklets as accessible in language and content as possible, while offering plenty of links to other resources for those who wish to explore topics further. We welcome ignorance: for us, what's important is a curiosity to learn. While we will try to explore the topic of climate justice as comprehensively as we can, we will never be able to cover it fully. We hope these booklets will serve as a launchpad for you to begin your own journey of exploration into what taking action for climate justice might mean to you.

There will be six booklets in total, and each will consist of three main sections: analysis, practical examples and queries. The analysis section is intended to provide some basic content for consideration, along with lots of further avenues to explore. The practical examples section shares information about grassroots

groups and campaigns in the UK and globally that you can draw inspiration from or support. Finally, the queries section offers some questions for reflection or discussion, individually or in groups, as a tool to process and integrate your thoughts about the booklet and its topic.

As a companion to the booklets, we have put together a glossary of key terms, which you can find www.quaker.org.uk/documents/climate-justice-glossary. Any terms followed in the booklet text by '[G]' appear in the glossary.



For Quakers working through these booklets, we recommend taking a look at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre's [Responding to Ecological Crisis](#) resource. This has been designed to support Quakers to explore the spiritual underpinnings of the Quaker commitment to sustainability. It will tend to the 'personal' aspect of your journey through these booklets and complement the resources and promptings they contain.

As in the days of early Friends, we sense this is a time of prophecy and want to uphold the prophets in our midst and in the wider world. We must heed the Spirit's call to urgent action. Prophets are visionaries, calling out those in power, and reconcilers stand in the middle of conflict: in this both run great risk.

From the Epistle, Yearly Meeting Gathering 2021

As we embark on this journey, we are demanding courage of each other, looking to support each other, and, especially, seeking to hear and see prophetic voices and examples. We extend an invitation to all to embrace discomfort. Learning to see the wrong in our lives and in our society, and experiencing that inwardly, is the moment we become truly engaged in transforming our lives.

ANALYSIS

For those of us who are indigenous, working class, black, brown, queer, trans or disabled, the experience of structural violence became part of our birthright. Greta Thunberg calls world leaders to act by reminding them that 'Our house is on fire'. For many of us, the house has been on fire for a long time: whenever the tide of ecological violence rises, our communities, especially in the Global South, are always first hit. We are the first to face poor air quality, hunger, public health crises, drought, floods and displacement.

[The Wretched of the Earth: An open letter to Extinction Rebellion, 2019](#)

1. Introduction

The '[Framing Climate Justice](#)' project, run by the New Economy Organisers Network (NEON), the Public Interest Research Centre (PIRC) and 350.org, found that while most people in the UK agree that climate change is happening, is serious and is caused by humans, most saw it as separate from social justice issues and didn't see a connection to economic and political systems. Most said there was no impact on existing inequalities.

Yet, as we have seen throughout this series, the climate crisis is being driven by our unjust economic system; and the evidence is clear that **climate impacts are more severe for marginalised groups and people on low incomes**. Poorer people are more likely to live in areas vulnerable to extreme weather, with fewer resources to protect themselves, leave, or adapt. They are more likely to have existing health conditions, leaving them vulnerable when extreme weather events knock out electricity or other key health infrastructure. People marginalised by language or citizenship status are also disadvantaged when disaster strikes: when wildfires strike in California, as they do with increasing frequency, the large population of undocumented immigrants are not eligible for government assistance, and information is often available only in English.

A lot has happened since the Framing Climate Justice research was carried out in 2019–20. The Covid-19 pandemic, the rise of Black Lives Matter and the focus on climate around COP26 have contributed to a shift in how we think about the climate crisis and its relationship to inequality. But it's clear that advocates for climate justice have a lot of work to do.

So, how do we build an effective mass movement of people for climate justice, and win a future where all of us can survive and thrive? No one has all the answers. As a species, we've never done anything quite like this before. But we do have a rich history of movements for social change that we can learn from. And for many of us, our experience as Quakers and/or activists has taught us that we are stronger when we build alliances – and that love, friendship and solidarity must be the foundation of our work.

2. Drawing strength from our past

Our story is crafted by many people. It starts in one of the most deprived areas of Glasgow, where the GalGael grew from an environmental campaign. We lost the campaign but learned many things about how to make community in a difficult space; how to take responsibility, articulate our concerns and find common purpose.

GalGael Trust

Sometimes our fights face setbacks. Not all campaigns are successful. But the work involved in coming together can light a fire in us and connect struggles. This interconnection across movements and people is invaluable, helping us to build a better future for all, no matter the result of individual campaigns.

So many of the things we now take for granted were hard won by those who came before us. Many times throughout history, ordinary people have come together to support and stand with one another. We hope their stories might offer inspiration for us today.

Standing alongside our neighbours – the Bristol Bus Boycott

You may well have heard of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955. But we have stories of antiracist resistance and solidarity closer to home too. In 1963, a group of younger Black men decided to challenge the Bristol Omnibus Company's policy of not hiring people of colour, despite a labour shortage on the buses. They launched a boycott of Bristol buses and called on the city's African-Caribbean community and other supporters to join them.

Responding to their call, thousands of Bristolians joined the boycott, choosing to walk or cycle instead. Bristol University students also organised a protest on May Day in support of their neighbours' fight for their rights. Although there were months of negotiations, it was a mass meeting of bus workers agreeing among themselves to end the policy that brought the dispute to an end.

The ripples of the boycott went far beyond ending the 'colour bar' policy. It is thought to have helped lay the groundwork for the Race Relations Acts in 1965 and 1968, as well as inspiring Britain's **Black Power movement** that fought for racial equality for Black communities in Britain in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Nurturing the spirit of solidarity – Glasgow's rich history of resistance

In 1990s Glasgow, locals and environmentalists from further afield united to resist the development of a motorway that would cut through woodlands bequeathed to the people of Glasgow by Sir John Stirling Maxwell. The M77 would not only destroy woodlands, but also separate residents from access to Pollok Park.



Photo: Wikimedia commons

Although the campaign did not ultimately succeed in stopping the development of the M77, the protests lasted for almost two years and saw occupations, school strikes, marches and the establishment of a free state – the Pollok Free State. The campsite became a place to come together through food, music, activism, heritage and conversation. And when the protests drew to a close, the Pollok Free State created the **GalGael Trust** community project to continue its work.

The Pollok Free State campaign is just one of a series of stories of radical resistance in Glasgow. The city's spirit of solidarity continues to burn strong – in 2021 (the year the city hosted the UN climate talks COP26), **1000 Glaswegians took to the streets in solidarity with their neighbours in Pollokshields to resist a Home Office raid**. The 8-hour blockade resulted in the men's release back into their communities and was a testament to years of organising and community-building that preceded it.

Further exploration:



Working Class History – E67–68: The Grunwick strike (44 and 47 mins)



International Center on Nonviolent Conflict – A Force More Powerful (approx. 30 mins each)



Given to the People – the story of the Pollok Free State (36 mins)

3. Storytelling for climate justice

In **Module 4**, we briefly explored ideas around hope, realism and 'doomism'. Whatever future scenarios we might personally consider most likely, we cannot build what we cannot imagine. Unfortunately, our imaginations have been constrained by four decades of a political and economic system that tells us there is no alternative. This is a very convenient narrative for people who benefit from the status quo. Remembering actions like those shared above helps us to counter narratives that seek to disempower us by downplaying the role of social movements.

Storytelling isn't just about individual anecdote, though that can be a powerful way to connect with people. 'Stories' are also the way we make sense of the world – the underlying beliefs and assumptions that inform how we interpret new information. These stories are powerful: as PIRC's projects have explored, using different stories or 'frames' to present information leads people to respond differently and support different policies.

A high proportion of communication around climate change has focused on science, but on their own, scientific facts and data are not very effective at spurring most people to action. We are more likely to take action when our peers are doing so, and when it aligns with our moral values and how we see ourselves. There is also some evidence that **a justice framework can prompt young people to take action on the climate crisis.**

Participating in art and storytelling can activate our sense of agency by transforming spectators into actors. This is the aim of Augusto Boal's **Theatre of the Oppressed**, a set of dramatic techniques intended to highlight systemic exploitation and oppression within common situations and transform monologue (domination) into dialogue. Theatre of the Oppressed has been used in many contexts of conflict and oppression, including **in Israel-Palestine** and with Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement, whom we met in **Module 5**.



Photo: Wikimedia commons

In the UK, projects like **Moral Imaginations** and Rob Hopkins' **Field Recordings From the Future** are harnessing the power of imagination to build connections and collectively imagine a more beautiful future.

Further exploration:



Amy Westervelt – Telling people to ‘follow the science’ won’t save the planet. But they will fight for justice



Words to Win By – Passing the Messaging Stick: Changing the narrative about First Nations (32 mins)



The Intercept – A Message from the Future (8 mins)

4. What solidarity across social justice movements looks like

In her youth she ... took part in work on behalf of the poor and unfortunate. You drove to that work in a carriage and when the work was done you drove back to a beautiful house... Mary Hughes was never a one for condemning the way in which other people lived their lives; she was too busy with the way in which she chose to lead her own. If she had ever consciously wondered why this way, which she saw in her youth, was not satisfactory to her, she could have found the answer ... in those words when the work was done. It became clear to her that what she had to do could never be done, not even for an hour. Her life itself must be her work, but it could be her work only if it were lived in the appropriate circumstances. She didn't want to visit the poor. She wanted to be with the poor and to be poor herself..

Howard Spring remembering Mary Hughes, 1949
Quaker faith & practice 18.13

When the cotton supply to Britain dried up in 1861 due to the blockade of southern ports in the USA during the civil war, mill workers in Lancashire were left on the brink of starvation. With little work and no social security, they might easily have called for Britain to back the Confederacy and smash the blockade – as the Confederacy was betting on, and as many mill owners did. Instead, knowing that the cotton was picked by enslaved people and that those people's freedom



Photo: Cable Street mural – Alan Denney via Flickr

was at stake, **they voted to support the blockade and boycott any cotton** arriving from the American South. In 1865, slavery was abolished throughout the United States and the Confederacy surrendered.

What does this story have to do with climate justice? It shows that determined, organised communities can change the course of history; and that ordinary people can be moved to stand up for the lives and freedom of strangers thousands of miles away.

True solidarity can ripple through the centuries. In 2020, members of the Navajo Nation were puzzled to find that their Crowdfunder for people struggling with Covid-19 – which has devastated Native American communities because of high poverty rates and lack of access to healthcare – was receiving **hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations from Ireland**. It turned out to be the result of a social media campaign in recognition of Native American donations to the Irish during the famine in 1847. The Choctaw nation had heard about the famine and how Irish people, like them, were suffering under British colonial rule.

We are probably all familiar with the tropes used by powerful people who seek to divide us in order to maintain the status quo. Poor British people are told that 'migrants' are to blame for their poverty. Protestors putting their liberty and livelihoods on the line to protect us all are denounced as a separate category from 'taxpayers' or 'the British people'. When we are wise to this ploy, we can see instead why our different struggles are all necessary – as the group **Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners** famously did during the miners' strike of 1984–85.

We can see examples of solidarity emerging in the UK climate movement today. During the COP26 climate talks, young climate activists joined striking Glasgow







Photo: Choctaw Memorial - County Cork, Eire - Wikimedia commons



Photo: Simon Murphy via Flickr

street cleaners on the picket line. Later the same week, some of the striking workers provided security for high-profile young demonstrators on the youth march to protect them from the media scrum. Go to a trade union demonstration in a UK city now, and likely as not, you'll spot Extinction Rebellion flags.

Further exploration:

-  [Journey to Justice – Cable Street \(5 mins\)](#)
-  [Working Class History – Green bans \(51 mins\)](#)
-  [Power, People and Planet – Intersectionality: The Missing Link for Justice \(69 mins\)](#)
-  [The Young'uns – Cable Street \(5 mins\)](#)

5. Alliances across difference

The universe is participatory; there are no bystanders.

Closing minute (part), Living Witness gathering 2022

As we have explored in previous modules, our global economic and political system and our history have shaped the conditions of our lives, leaving some of us with far more opportunity, freedom and material comfort than others. Of course, other factors in our individual lives also shape us.

In recent years, more of us have become familiar with the concept of 'privilege' – not as a one-off opportunity ('it was a privilege') but as part of the everyday reality of people whose identity conforms to an expected and socially dominant norm. 'White privilege', for example, is experienced by people who are not disadvantaged by virtue of how their race is perceived. Because the world's dominant structures and institutions have largely been created by white people, they can go through life never noticing their 'whiteness' – whereas a Black person



Photo: Steven Jones for Interfaith Glasgow

is continually made aware of their 'blackness' through various forms of discrimination and stereotyping. 'White privilege' does not mean that all white people have easy lives, or that every white person is better off than every person of colour.

Becoming aware of privilege we hold can help us understand other people's lives and make fewer assumptions. It can also help us to notice when we might be able to support or amplify the work of someone who has less privilege, rather than taking centre stage ourselves.



Photo: Michael Preston for Quakers in Britain

This is a useful process of reflection. However, public conversations around this, while they have contributed to long-overdue awareness in various sectors, arguably have the downside that they tend to emphasise our differences. It's good to become more conscious of our different positions and experiences, but at the heart of the Quaker faith is the experience that the Light, or God, is within all of us. In that fundamental sense, we are also all the same. Perhaps we should be wary of absorbing so much abstract language about privilege that we become frightened of talking to anyone different from us! Theory has an important place, but we also need to go out into the world and be together.

We have explored the importance of solidarity. So how do we go about building the alliances we need? One approach, which is increasingly discussed in UK activist circles, is 'organising' – bringing people together to build and exercise power in pursuit of a shared goal. The key to organising is building your 'base' of activists by having conversations with people who are not yet part of your movement. The emphasis on relationship-building means it is slow, long-term work – in contrast to 'mobilising', which involves bringing people together for a specific moment like a protest march. While mobilising is important for visibility and creating a sense of shared purpose, by itself it will not be enough to build a movement.

Any community can 'organise': in the UK the term is most commonly used in the context of trade unions. We have unions to thank for the major improvements in working conditions over the last century or so, including **holidays**, the **Equal Pay Act** and **health and safety at work**. Unionised workers in the UK **earn around 5% more than non-unionised workers**.

Further exploration:



Jolly Quaker – Advice and Query 6: Learning to disagree well



Naomi Klein – Stop Trying to Save the World All By Yourself



A World to Win – Grassroots Organising 101 (34 mins)

6. The power of friendship

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

John 15:12–15 (New International Version)

These verses from the Gospel of John are the origin of the Quaker practice of calling one another 'Friends'. Quakers tend to avoid using titles or forms of address that denote hierarchy: we speak to one another as equals, as Friends.

Often, when we are working for social change, we slip into seeing people as audiences, or targets, or perhaps even heroes, victims or villains. What would our activism look like if we thought of it primarily as a walking alongside, not a pulling or pushing?

We were emotionally shattered; we needed a break. We sought out some quiet together as a company, hidden away in a small derelict room on the top floor of a college building away from the constant attention of our new friends. Our meeting was charged with emotion; we cried, we laughed, we ministered, we healed. Every person (Quaker or not) ministered and together we re-forged our shattered emotions. That meeting was momentous in my spiritual development, and always reassuring when I am low.

Roger Davies, 1994
Quaker faith & practice 21.05

As we come to the end of this part of our climate justice journey together, the time has come to gather our thoughts and be attentive to the leadings of the Spirit. We've learned about the inequalities that are both cause and consequence of the climate crisis. We've shone a light on our histories, interrogating dominant

narratives and celebrating untold stories. And we've explored why justice needs to be at the heart of our actions.

With all this in mind, what friendship can you offer to the social justice movements striving to build a better future? What direction is your journey taking you in? Who will you walk alongside?



Photo: © 2023 Mike Finches for BYM

If we are successful in what we set out to do, we will need to be accountable to one another, but we will also need to be tender with one another, and to support one another through the grief and fear that radical change will provoke.

Minute 36, Yearly Meeting 2011




We are not the first generations to struggle against oppression and injustice and work to build a better world; and we will not be the last. We can build on the legacy of those who came before us, and continue a project that will long outlive us. We need friendship and solidarity to lift us up, to help us find joy in our work, and to keep bringing us back to the beauty of the world and the love we have for one another.

Utopia is on the horizon. When I walk two steps, it takes two steps back. I walk ten steps and it is ten steps further away. What is utopia for? It is for this, for walking.

Attributed to Fernando Birri

Let us walk together, Friends.

Further exploration:

-  [History Workshop – Radical Friendship](#)
-  [The On Being Project – Befriending Radical Disagreement \(52 mins\)](#)
-  [Mark Vernon – On friendship \(6 mins\)](#)

PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

In this section, we highlight examples of grassroots groups and campaigns that you might draw inspiration from or support. We have divided them into 'local' and 'global', but this can be an arbitrary distinction as both are interlinked. We use the terms here to help describe actions that are primarily focused on life in the UK (local) and actions that are primarily focused on life outside the UK (global).

Local

Reclaim the Power is a UK-based direct action network fighting for social, environmental and economic justice. It has supported communities fighting fracking, new coal, airport expansion and the UK's 'hostile environment' towards migrants.

Citizens UK uses a community organising approach to build diverse alliances of local communities which can take action across a range of issues. Charities, faith groups, schools and unions can join their local chapter to receive leadership training, build relationships and become part of local campaigns.

Lesbians and Gays Support the Migrants is a queer activist group that creatively challenges the prevailing narratives around migration and rejects all attempts to pit queer people against migrants.

Anti-Raids Network is a loose network of groups and individuals working to build the resistance to immigration raids since 2012 by producing and sharing information and materials.

The **Greener Jobs Alliance** is a trade union-backed coalition of organisations that promotes skills training and job creation to grow low-carbon sectors and green the whole economy.

Global

Rethinking Security is a network of UK-based organisations, academics and activists. We work for a just and peaceful world, based on approaches that address the underlying causes of conflict and insecurity.

Public Interest Research Centre (PIRC) supports movements for social, economic and climate justice to map, develop and strengthen compelling narratives that transform culture and policy.

StopEACOP is a campaign to stop the construction of a massive East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP). Over 260 civil society organisations are supporting the campaign with public mobilisations, legal actions, research, shareholder activism, and media advocacy.

ForRefugees provides small-scale grants and basic charity services to local partners across Europe helping refugees meet their immediate daily needs.

The **Global Alliance for a Green New Deal** is an alliance of lawmakers from around the world who support the Green New Deal.

QUERIES

In this section, we have put together some suggested queries for reflection or discussion, individually or in groups. You might like to use one of the resources we have shared in this booklet as a prompt for reflection and discussion. You are also welcome to find your own resources to use as a prompt!

We are conscious that the Covid-19 pandemic has made our already busy, stressful lives even busier and more stressful. We believe that social action should be energising and sustaining, so throughout these booklets, we will try to weave moments of joyfulness (for example, craftivism) into the queries section. If you are gathering in a group to consider the queries, we also recommend incorporating food, and building in time to check in with one another.

- Have you had a memorable experience of solidarity, or do you know a story that demonstrates it like the examples above?
- Is there an injustice affecting any community you are connected to that you would like to change? How might you start bringing people together to change it?
- What role does friendship play in your life and your climate action? Or, what role would you like it to play?

Craft activities to explore:

- **Make a people paper chain** as a group: write your hopes for the future on as many chain segments as you need!
- Make a communal record of your leadings: choose a personal concern to

draw/stitch/describe in words – weave these together to create a poster/blanket/banner/bunting/other record.

- Make symbols of friendship: reflect on what friendship means to you and how you might express it through craft to share with one another ([some craftivist ideas for inspiration](#)).

Thank you for joining us on this journey – and we hope it is just the start! Quakers in Britain has a small ‘faith in action’ team who can help with strategy, facilitation, thinking through your ideas, and connecting you with others.

Get in touch at faithinaction@quaker.org.uk.

WHERE NEXT?

Exploring Faith and Climate Justice runs from July 2022 to July 2023.
Over the year we will explore the following areas:

1. What is climate justice?

July – August 2022

2. Loss and damage: exploring historical responsibility and reparations

September – October 2022

3. Climate justice and the new economy

November – December 2022

4. What happens if we don't focus on justice?

January – March 2023

5. Living in right relationship with the earth

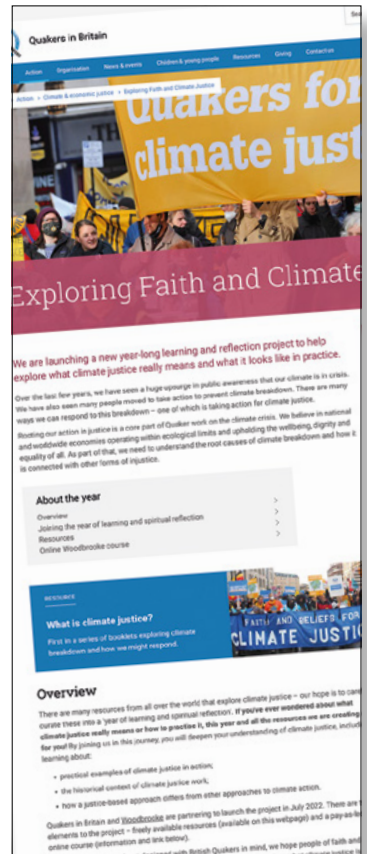
March – May 2023

6. Solidarity in social justice

May – July 2023

Text in this dark blue colour indicates a link to further information or resources.

To access the further information or resources in this booklet, please go to the online version which you can find on this webpage:
www.quaker.org.uk/efcj



Join **Quakers in Britain** and **Woodbrooke** on our year of learning and spiritual reflection about climate justice.

You can sign up on your own, or as part of a group or meeting at www.woodbrooke.org.uk/efcj.

For more information and resources visit www.quaker.org.uk/efcj.

Get in touch at climatejustice@quaker.org.uk.

This booklet was developed with support from colleagues at Quakers in Britain, and in turn informed by a number of Quakers who helped to shape the project. We are grateful for the time and feedback they generously shared.

Did you find this resource useful? To let us know your thoughts, to share a story of witness or to request support from Quakers in Britain, please email climatejustice@quaker.org.uk or call 020 7663 1046.

For other accessible versions of this document please email publications@quaker.org.uk or call 020 7663 1162.

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