

Quaker Life Representative Council October 9th – 11th 2015

Each of the three Wales Area Meetings were represented at this Quaker Life Rep Council, so this report will be in addition to the feedback that each AM will receive. There is much that will be common to all three, but because Rep Council meetings are structured as “Home Groups” of around 10 participants, (this time there were 8 Home Groups) who share news of their Meetings, both Local and Area, and report back to plenary sessions and each of our Wales reps are always in different home groups, each of us will have some different experiences to share. I shall try to touch on just some of the highlights, and leave each AM to receive and discuss the detail as appropriate to them.

The overall theme of this Rep Council was “**What is the ground and foundation of a gathered meeting?**”. We were asked to use “worship sharing” to share our own experience of what lies at the core of our Quaker life, first in home groups and then in plenary sessions. We heard of a wide variety of experience, highlighting the wide variety of local meetings. For some it was simply the silence, in which all present share and all are valued and nurtured, accessing something intangible which is impossible to define but nevertheless real. For others the action leading from this was also part of the foundations. Some said they would have preferred a free discussion to “worship sharing”. Others felt that worship sharing was appropriate for this topic. A good example of how different we all are and of the sensitivity that is needed if everyone is to feel nurtured.

We also had a session on the **work of Quaker Life Central Committee**, and a plenary exploring how Quaker Life can best support Friends in their Meetings. This is the function of Quaker Life along with making BYM more inclusive and Quakers better known in the UK. To this end, Quaker Life provides a wealth of study and outreach materials, runs the Quaker Bookshop, offers support for clerks and for elders and overseers, and support for deepening the spiritual life of meetings. In addition to some paid staff at Friends House, the Central Committee comprises of 12 representatives from all over Britain who meet 4 times a year for a weekend and set the strategic direction for their work and also take an overview of the work of the staff in Friends House. Rep Council serves as a channel of communication between Central staff and Area and Local Meetings. Two notable recent publications are “**With a Tender Hand**” for elders and overseers and “**Being Friends Together**” study materials for Meetings. The latter is an amazing online resource with a huge variety of materials which Meetings are urged to make use of. There seems to be something there for everyone in the four main pathways of world, spirit, community, tradition, and plenty of help is available, if needed in the form of visits, if requested. Leaflets with details are available.

We also heard about the work of the **Book of Discipline Revision Preparation Group**. This group has been set up to prepare for a likely revision of **Quaker Faith and Practice** at some time in the future. To this end they have produced a suggested programme for reading of QF&P from October 2015 to April 2017 designed for study groups or for personal use, which they hope can be followed by as many Friends as possible so that when the time comes to make changes all Friends are familiar with what is or is not in need of change!

We were asked whether we, and our local Meetings, saw our Area Meeting as “them” or “us”, and to consider the implications of this. In Wales, we should perhaps add MFW also. Many Quakers do not go beyond their local Meeting, and have difficulty in seeing themselves as part of something much bigger. Some Area Meetings have, however made some innovative changes to time and format of Meetings which have resulted in impressively high numbers attending. Further ideas and information can be obtained from Quaker Life.

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