

Quaker Life Representative Council April 2020

Report for North Wales Area Meeting and Meeting of Friends in Wales

Due to the special circumstances we now live under the meeting was held on April 25th as an online Zoom meeting. Approximately 77 representatives and facilitators took part. In these strange times that meant 4 screens of faces: quite an experience.

After worship a paragraph from Living our Beliefs, a quote from the Epistle of Junior Yearly Meeting, 1991, was read out:

'Through our discussions we recognised our anxieties and fears. We realised that we are individuals and that we are alone, but, as part of a loving community, to be alone does not necessarily mean to be lonely. We discovered that it is acceptable to have confused feelings, to be different, to do things our own way. We should not feel guilty when we are wrong, and we appreciate that there must be room for mistakes. There are people who want us to be exactly as we are.'

The questions for the Council to reflect on were:

What is at the heart of Quakerism?

What would strengthen us as a Quaker community?

Gill Sewell of London West Area Meeting was the speaker. She spoke of her own reflections on these questions. A brief summary of Gill's reflections are given by one of the Council's convenors at the end of this report.

I was glad to be reminded by Gill that George Fox wrote *'Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.'*

while rotting away in Launceston prison. It gives perspective to most Friends easier isolation of today. It also reminded me of the men and women rotting away in our prisons during this 21st century plague and of the, mostly, women and children imprisoned in their own homes with their abuser.

Fox, of course, wrote this nine years before the Great Plague of 1665 & 66 and probably witnessed fellow prisoners dying of gaol fever too. And now the circle comes around and, like Fox, in our isolation we are reflecting on what is the heart of our faith.

Gill welcomed how the online worship so many Friends are joining, is bringing us closer together as a world community and how the Zoom 'chat' facility means that Friends, not given to vocal ministry, can give the gift of written ministry.

She also posed the important question – how can we explain Quakerism to non-Friends, when we don't talk about the nature of our own faith with each other?

As a Friend in Wales, with our history of persecution leading to the predominance of small meetings, I couldn't help being amused by Gill noting larger meetings in the London area, i.e. more than 24 Friends, perceived that smaller meetings i.e. less than 23 Friends, could have less vibrancy and more issues. If this doesn't show us how Wales is different to BYM I don't know what does.

After Gill's talk we split into eight home groups and reflected further on the two main questions. Much of what was said, however, was about our present situation and how it is changing our worship.

Many noted how Friends who are not usually seen in worship due to various difficulties are now joining the online meetings and how these Friends are deepening the worship.

Others noted, with delight, how Friends worldwide were joining them or they themselves were joining other meetings. The world is Friends' oyster; unless, of course, you have no internet so are not experiencing this new wave of spiritual nurture.

Many meetings were welcoming non-quakers to worship and the question was asked 'Are we ready for this? Can we find the right words so that these welcome visitors will return again and again?'

This is why we need, as individuals, to reflect on the two questions:

What is at the heart of Quakerism?

What would strengthen us as a Quaker community?

So what is in your heart Friend when you say 'I am a Quaker'. What is at the heart of your Quakerism?

Is it going to be a lasting legacy of this 2019-20 plague that it strengthened us as a Quaker community?

What do you think Friend?

Ruth Moore Williams
Deputy Quaker Life Representative for North Wales Area Meeting

April 29th 2020

Zoom QLRC 25 April 2020 Co-convenors' reflections

I don't know what I expected today to be like, but the reality has been wonderful... so many people coming together with a willingness to make it work.

We heard from Gill about the rich mix of Quaker inspiration that nourishes her. Our practices, our testimonies, and the direct experience of the divine which first drew her and then kept her in Quakers. She spoke about how in a sense we welcome each other into our homes when we meet online. And she spoke about our history, the children who kept meeting for Worship going when their parents were in prison.

When we went into Home Groups, I realised that our conversations were as full and deep as they are when we meet together at Woodbrooke.

Today we spoke of the importance of community; of truth and equality, and of sharing our beliefs and differences openly. We also talked about the importance of diversity and of being explicitly inclusive. If people are not told, how can they know that we welcome them? We need to be aware of who we are not including, who may be feeling out on a limb, and those of us who are going through very painful experiences.

And we spoke about going forward stronger, or 'building back better', taking forward with us everything we have learned about building stronger communities - keeping in contact with each other, knowing each other better and connecting more deeply within ourselves, with Spirit, and with Friends in Britain and beyond.

Lynden Easterbrook

What has struck me today is our strength as a community, and also the need to acknowledge our weaknesses. In this difficult time, we have found new ways to connect with one another, but also need to recognize how hard this experience is for ourselves and for others. Gill's talk highlighted the need for us to connect with each other at a deeper level and accept the diverse experiences of Quakers, which brings both challenges and gifts.

One expression that came up in my home group I found particularly impactful - being a Quaker is not about finding the 'right words', but accepting that our answers to questions about faith are always changing and supporting one another through our spiritual journeys.

Juliette Chandler