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Stafford Meeting House

Staffordshire

Spring edition
March 2008

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Journeying With a Concern **The Quaker Disability Equality Group**

Friends from all over the country met on Saturday 8th December in Friends House to set the new Quaker Disability Equality Group (QDEG) onto a firm footing. To those of us who brought the concern, it felt like the birth of a new baby.

The baby was conceived in 2004 when a concern was brought to West Scotland Monthly Meeting about the lack of provision for disabled Friends within Britain Yearly Meeting, and a minute was sent to Meeting for Sufferings saying in part "This is a neglected area of our testimony to equality. Do we hold people with disabilities in the light and do we recognise the gifts they can bring?"

After a time, when managing the concern was obviously getting too much for the small West Scotland group alone, it was decided to involve the whole country by holding a day meeting at Friends House on December 8th 2007, to be attended by any Friend interested in enabling disabled Friends to play a full part in the life of Britain Yearly Meeting.

Arrangements went ahead and on the day some 38 Friends gathered in Room 2 of Friends House - many with some form of recognised disability, and some with less obvious problems or none. Our main aim at this stage was to appoint a committee and to get some idea of the way forward.

Introductions all round saying why we had come, followed by a brief history of the concern to date, gave a starting point. Many people naturally voiced difficulties of one sort and another, but looking forward was the order of the day.

Breaking into smaller groups gave Friends the opportunity to voice ideas about what needed to happen to enable disabled Friends to take part more fully in the life of the Society. In other words, we were not there to explore the difficulties faced in general by disabled people, but specifically to advise BYM and each other on the situation within the Religious Society of Friends.

Ideas and observations were many, of course, but were aptly summed up by one group as In-reach of QDEG into itself, to continue to meet and flourish; Outreach into the rest of the Society, raising awareness of needs and gifts; Provision of enough resources to enable disabled Friends to exercise their talents.

The groups then came together to appoint a committee (which was achieved surprisingly easily!), to decide whether to start a printed newsletter (not yet) and to be told about BYM's position on financing.

Several Friends wondered whether the Disability Discrimination Act was being fully complied with in some Meetings. Someone suggested that it would be useful to have a database of skills and experience that Friends and Meetings could draw on, and a Friend volunteered to collect information to get one started.

Other ideas flew around the room, and suddenly it was time for a final cup of tea and cake. I sat back and thought, with a feeling of wonder, relief and achievement, "We did it!". Years of work, sometimes frustrating but mostly with incredible support and help, had resulted in birth of the fully developed Quaker Disability Equality Group.



Disability Sport UK

Now hopefully the group will grow in strength and confidence to bring about understanding throughout Britain Yearly Meeting of how much disabled Friends have to offer. The Society needs them and they are as willing and able as anyone else to be of service.

Mary Latham

Mary Latham is a member (and Assistant Clerk) of West Scotland Area Meeting and is one of the group of four Friends who form the West Scotland Disability Equality Group.

Hospital Chaplaincy

Last spring Area Meeting invited me to serve as Quaker Chaplain to the Wolverhampton hospitals. My local meeting wrote to the Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals and the lengthy process started. I have no complaints about the process. From the hospital's point of view I had to be interviewed by the hospital manager, submit to a police check and undergo a lengthy induction process which culminated in a one day course in hospital procedure and protocol (this day course is repeated annually).

All of this is proper and appropriate. It is first and foremost for the protection of patients, but also for the protection of staff and the volunteers themselves.

Once the hospital had accepted me I was officially the Quaker Chaplain. But it was suggested to me that while some chaplains to the smaller religious groups are simply placed on a list in the chaplain's office and are called as needed, it was possible to be more fully involved in the life and work of the chaplaincy by being a 'ward visitor'.

This involved an even longer period of training working under the guidance of the senior Chaplain, who by law must be an Anglican priest.

I enjoyed the discussions we had. The chaplaincy team at New Cross are from a number of denominations, but are mainly Anglican, Roman Catholic and Methodist, but (of necessity) they are very religiously broad minded. That is not to say that their individual religious convictions are watered down: each have their own services, and the two RC chaplains regularly pray the office (morning prayer) together. Also they are careful to be aware of members of their own communion in hospital. But there are a number of inter-faith services in which the various ethnic religions are fully involved with the main team in preparation and presentation. And we are all sensitive to the needs of patients with specific religious needs.

I have been readily accepted by the team. As far as I am aware no-one has a problem working with a Quaker. It perhaps helps that I trained for the Baptist ministry, so I am familiar with Christian liturgical forms and traditions, but it was readily accepted that Quakers have their own forms and traditions.

The work of ward visitor is not for the faint-hearted. One has to be prepared to see sights which are unpleasant, and frequently hear stories which are heart-breaking. I confess that in my first few weeks I ended up back in the chaplaincy office broken into pieces by the things I had heard, but the support from the team is second to none and I quickly learned to deal with the situation. Of necessity we must take peoples' anger and fear, but also we get to share their joy. And certainly one of the great joys for me has been sharing people's lives, hearing their hopes, dreams, fears and, so frequently, memories of times (and loved ones) long gone.

The staff are wonderful. I have never had any problems whatsoever with the doctors and nurses on the wards, and the domestic staff are endlessly helpful and encouraging; cleaners will often direct me to someone with specific needs. I go into their wards at awkward times: doctors are doing rounds, nurses are medicating patients; cleaners are at work, yet they have the patience to welcome me into their little kingdoms and allow me full access except where barrier nursing is taking place.

Frequently nurses will ask me to go speak to a particular patient and mention a special need: highlighting, incidentally, the need for absolute confidentiality.

I have also to some extent become involved in the life of the chapel. It is certainly true that for those of an even nominally Christian belief, chapel worship is a great help to them at a difficult time. I have seen at first hand the power of mind/body. There is certainly a case for treating the whole person (the holistic approach). So, where appropriate, I mention the Sunday service and that the chapel is available for personal quiet times. Also that if they would like a minister of their own faith to visit, perhaps to take communion.

About one Sunday a month I am on chapel duty, which involves either walking with patients from their wards or, more usually, wheeling them down in wheelchairs.

I feel really privileged being able to be alongside people at such a difficult time in their lives. It can make demands on one's time. While officially I only work two mornings a week, I have to be prepared to go back at 'off-duty' times to follow up on someone. I am occasionally asked to speak to relatives and friends or let someone know that a friend is in hospital. Also all hospital volunteers have regular training days.

My philosophy in this work is, 'I can walk away, they can't'. When I first started as ward visitor a Friend said that if he could speak from the experience of being in the hospital bed, what he looked for in any visitor was to have his spirits lifted. 'Be cheerful', he said. This I try to do. In fact cleaners have said to me that they know I am on a ward if they hear someone laughing. Usually when I go off duty I go for a long walk and think about the people I to whom I have spoken. I am blessed with a degree of health that allows me to live a full life and come and go when I please. The people I visit are, usually through no fault of their own, tied to a bed or a ward. If I can bring some light into a difficult time in their lives, I am content.

Keith Wood

Enslavement in a Free Society

This was the title of a talk given by David McLoughlin at the National Memorial Arboretum on November 27th. It was organized by C.L.A.S.P. (Churches Linked Across Staffordshire and the Potteries) and was judged to be very worth while, though the number attending was rather small.

The next event organized by C.L.A.S.P. will be held on Thursday evening 19th June 2008 in Newcastle-under-Lyme when the topic will be Care of the Elderly. Further details can be obtained from the secretary, Mike Topliss, 01922 475932

Harold Yardley

Quakers and the Environment – What is God asking of us?

Meeting for Sufferings included time to consider this topic on 1 December 2007. This is the minute:

In 1988 London Yearly Meeting minuted “As the Religious Society of Friends we see the stewardship of God’s creation as a major concern. The environmental crisis is at root a spiritual and religious crisis. We are called again to look at the real purpose of being on this earth which is to till it, and to keep it so as to reveal the glory of God for generations to come.” (London Yearly Meeting 1988).

We have heard about the careful discernment over a long period which has led to Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee’s project on Human Security and the Environment and to their conversations with friends across the world. We have heard, too, how the Living Witness Project is involving local Friends across the Yearly Meeting. This has brought together the local and central work, which helps us to have a fuller picture of this concern, and which we celebrate.

Testimony should spring from a place of love. The ultimate test is whether we live it. Community is important in strengthening, challenging, nourishing and supporting a variety of witness. As Quakers the special gifts we can offer the world include living our values, the Quaker approach to community, and our way of working which encourages everyone’s voice to be heard.

We have spent time in groups worship sharing and considering: How do we respond in feelings and in thoughts to this issue, and: How do we develop a collective will to change? What would enable this transformation? Together we then shared our reflections on Quakers and the Environment and considered: **what is God asking of us?**

We need to approach sustainability through love not fear. It is an holistic, pressing and urgent matter for our Quaker witness, and is now integral to Meeting for Sufferings, to our local meetings, and to us as individual Quakers. This is rooted in our Quaker testimony. We are beginning to gather as a community with power, but have a long way to go. We may find that God can be pushy, and does not make it easy. Can we Turn the Tide together?

We need to develop our connectedness, building on our experience of being a crucible, and share our experiences locally and centrally, between Quakers and outside the Society. It is in connectedness that the world is transformed.

We can all work on this

- through individual environmental audits;
- through considering our individual responsibility for involvement in local or central politics;
- by going as far as we can go, and saying “Here I stand. I can go no other.”;
- by becoming patterns and examples in our own lives.

We need clarity about a central focus of responsibility for the Yearly Meeting – how can this be carried forward

We send this minute to the Long Term Framework Group, to our Trustees, and to Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee for consideration of ‘our spiritual response to the environment’ as a theme for a future Yearly Meeting.

Robert Hortern

Presentation and Discussion on Climate Change during Staffordshire Area Meeting, 8 December 2007

The workshop opened with a short period of silent worship.

In the light of the evidence that there is more than a 90% probability that the human race's burning of fossil fuels is causing **climate change** (see Staffordshire Quaker, July 2007, p6), we (the 20+ people present) privately categorised **our reactions** from six choices given:

1. Climate change is not happening.
2. Climate change is happening – the human race is not responsible.
3. Climate change is happening – we are responsible. It is our role in evolutionary terms to return the carbon to the atmosphere (and make ourselves extinct in the process. The Earth will re-adjust in time and get on better without us.)
4. Climate change is happening – it is too difficult to face up to. I do not know what to do; I feel powerless to act.
5. Climate change is happening. As the human race is responsible, we need to do all we can to return to 'one planet' living as quickly as possible.
6. I live in environmental bliss – a carbon-neutral (or even -negative) home, self-sufficient in water, food (organic), power and heat (from renewable sources), and human waste recycling (compost toilets or reed bed). All other waste (not much) is reused or recycled. Travel is by walking, cycling, bus, train (or personal levitation – I wish!).

We answered **three questions** (the same as those asked of Edinburgh Central Meeting by Janet Saunders [see The Friend, 29 June 2007, pp 10-11]) in group discussion:

Q1: What is your personal concern about climate change?

Some of the answers given:

The state of the world our grandchildren will live in and have stewardship of as they become decision-makers.

The plight of the world's poor becoming even worse. (The current conflict in Darfur is over access to water.)

The impact of war (one reason for QPSW's Human Security and the Environment project).

Consumerism, its globalisation and attendant transport.

The nature, size and speed (slowness) of the response so far to the threats faced.

Politics not working.

Q2: How do you feel about this concern?

Some of the answers given:

Overwhelmed, powerless, guilty, only a little we can do.

Q3: In the face of this concern, what positive value do you want to uphold?

Some of the answers given:

Enjoyment of the challenges.

The ability of the human race to change attitudes and behaviour. Our ability to learn to live in tune with Nature, rather than try to dominate and exploit it. (We cannot, as we are now finding out.)

Hope – the ban on smoking in public has generally been accepted.

Hope – the ozone layer is gradually repairing, since we stopped emitting CFCs.

We looked at **personal and local actions** we could take, for example:

Walking, cycling, using buses and trains, sharing lifts.

Buy from local (independent) suppliers.

Reduce, reuse, recycle our waste.

Build local communities to care for one another (baby sitting, care of ill or frail group members) and share resources (cars, washing machines, lawnmowers [leave at least some of your grass longer], bedrooms for guests, garden space for growing fruit and vegetables).

Transition villages, towns and cities (preparing for when the demand for oil exceeds supply [some people think this has already happened – it is difficult to tell quickly as there is a two year wait for the data]).

Some ideas of **larger responses** that would or might need government facilitation were:

Pay for the real (including environmental) cost of transport at the point of use.

Localise production and distribution.

Market (sell) the idea of attitude and behaviour changes. Banning advertising might help. In time, hopefully, consumerism would end.

Economics needs to become the servant of people and planet, not our master. Economic growth and even so called sustainable development based on fossil fuel use is not sustainable.

We need to aim for sustainable living, that is living within the resources of one planet – the one we are on.

It was agreed to reproduce the Sufferings minute on ‘Quakers and the Environment – What is God asking of us?’ in Staffordshire Quaker. (See above.)

It was agreed that we should look into the possibility of promoting the idea for the political parties to co-operate on policies to combat climate change.

The workshop closed with a reading from ‘The earth and environment’ section of ‘The Quaker Testimonies’ (a booklet published by Quaker Books in March 2003) followed by about fifteen minutes of silent worship.

Afterthoughts

Politicians at local and national level are currently not taking climate change seriously enough. It will only be as they see individuals and groups in increasing numbers making the radical lifestyle changes necessary that they will realise they can take stronger and quicker acting measures. Joining the Green Party, even if you do not become active in it, also sends the other parties a message.

‘Walk Cheerfully, Step Lightly’ is a booklet crammed full of tips and contacts to help us reduce our personal and household carbon footprints. Published by Quaker Green Action/Living Witness Project, it is available from me for £1 inc p & p (the next batch will cost a little more). There is a carbon calculator in the booklet to help us get to grips with our carbon dioxide emissions. This calculator is also available to download free from www.livingwitness.org.uk

‘Carrying out an Environmental Audit in Your Meeting’ is a booklet which helps us assess the impact of our activities and meeting houses on the environment. It is just as relevant to meetings without meeting houses as those with and is available to download from www.livingwitness.org.uk or contact me for a paper version.

Stafford Meeting has embarked on an environmental audit process and a review of meeting house usage in conjunction with discussing ‘what community means to us’.

I would be pleased to lead workshops around the topic of Climate Change and our response to it. If you would like me to facilitate something for your meeting, a public gathering or a group of neighbours or to help you to do it yourself, please ask. (I am leading a workshop open to the public in Leek Meeting House on Thursday 20 March at 8.00pm, following the monthly midweek Meeting for Worship at 7.30pm.)

Robert Horton

Quakers and Charles Morgan

For some reason, not best known to me, a number of years ago I became interested in the works of Charles Morgan. After a while I picked up a copy of his edited letters and found out about some of his connections with Quakers.



Morgan (1894-1958) was a novelist, playwright, essayist and critic. He was famous particularly in the 1930s and 1940s, had his books translated into 17 languages and was awarded many honours, though he did turn down the offer of a knighthood. Having learned that he had published about 30 poems during his lifetime, I have collected them into one (slim) volume to commemorate the 50th anniversary of his death. Also included is an introduction to his life and work, the first major bibliography in English of his writings and a foreword contributed by his son.

The editor of the letters, Eiluned Lewis, makes clear in her introductory memoir that Morgan had many Quaker friends. His son, Roger, was sent to The Downs, a Quaker preparatory school. For part of the Second World War his wife, the novelist Hilda Vaughan, and their two children stayed with an American Quaker, Patrick Malin. Eiluned Lewis herself attended Jordans Meeting and accompanied Elizabeth Cadbury in 1936 on her extensive visit to India.

Of the thousands of letters that Morgan wrote, just 160 are included in the selection; the only ones to Quakers are two to Patrick Malin and seven to a Lilius Mennell.

After attending naval schools Morgan served in the navy as a midshipman for several years. He did, however, then persuade his father to buy him out from the navy as he was convinced that he wished to be a writer. Before he could go to Oxford to continue his studies the First World War started. He enlisted in the RNVR, was captured in October 1914 and then spent most of the war either in prison camp or on parole in a cottage in the grounds of a stately home in the Netherlands. His letters must therefore be read in that context.

Lilius was the wife of Robert Mennell; they were active as Quaker pacifists in the First World War, as were Rosa and Stephen Hobhouse to whom Morgan also refers in his letters. The first two letters date from November, 1917 (Morgan having been released on health grounds and returned to England).

"I have returned to an island which undoubtedly bears the name of England. Certainly it is not now what once I thought it to be.....what are we fighting for? Not for freedom surely, not for peace..... Now it's revenge, and a little money, and a little territory, and a little spitting into the face of Christ..... now to Englishmen Christ is neither hateful nor wrong—he is merely a poseur... (My sister) cannot come to the District Court Martial (when Robert Mennell was sentenced to a further term of imprisonment-PH) and I will not come in uniform—which I am bound to wear. ... 1
do at present hold a commission under the law of the state and cannot consistently identify myself with those who resist it."

"Many thanks for your two letters and for the trouble you have taken about the Hobhouse case... ..There appear to be two logical courses open to a member of a pacifist group... the spiritual method of complete withdrawal from politics... or entering into competition with politicians... ..The first method seems the more consistent."

After the Armistice Morgan wrote "May I tell you quite simply how glad I am that now... you and your husband and the people who stood in with you have won through to your own victory without arms..... I hope the Government releases the COs at once..... Doesn't England see that the Cos are in prison for expressing in one way just what we who volunteered set out to express in another—the end of tyranny, the freedom of the spirit?"

Quaker Concern for Animals

At the suggestion of our Friend Fiona Owen, of Holyhead Meeting, Quaker Concern for Animals presents ***Extending the Circle***, a day to promote our group at Bangor Meeting House on Saturday, April 5 2008. This will be our first regional QCA day.

There will be worship, a Bring-and-Share (vegetarian) lunch and two interesting speakers – Alison Leonard, the writer, from Wirral & Chester Area Meeting, talking about our spiritual connection with animals and how we might develop it - and Lesley Tarleton, Director of Freshfields (Caernarfon) Animal Sanctuary, who will tell us about her thirty years in the animal welfare movement.

We shall be having discussions and enjoying the animal-inspired work of Fiona Owen, a published poet who will also be leading us in a writing workshop.

There will be an outline of the American **Best Friends Animals & Religion** initiative, to which QCA contributed a Quaker perspective.

You are very welcome to come and meet us, find out about our concern for our fellow animals and what we are doing to try to protect them.

Entry £5, no charge for children.

To book, please contact mhussenbux@btinternet.com or 0151-677-7680.
www.quaker-animals.org.uk

Marian Hussenbux,

Marian is Clerk of Quaker Concern for Animals and member of Birkenhead Meeting.

Discourses of Jalal al-Din Rumi

Discourse 71

The difference between birds on the wing, and lovers of God, is that birds always fly in a certain direction, while lovers of God fly on the wings of their desire away from all directions.

Every horse has its stable, every beast its pen, every bird its nest. And God knows best.

Report - Outreach in Burton.

We chose not to hold our Outreach event in National Quaker Week, because we wished to make this an inter-faith effort, so it was thought best to avoid Ramadan and Eid. We therefore planned our event for Saturday, October 27th, to be followed-up with a "taster" Meeting for Worship on Sunday, October 28th.



St. Thomas' Methodist Church rooms were hired for the event (this is where Burton Quakers hold a Meeting every fourth Sunday). There is easy parking nearby, and it is on a bus route. Invitations and leaflets were sent out to all the churches and faith groups and secondary schools, advertising a "Meet and Eat" get-together on the lines of a Quaker shared meal, in a relaxed atmosphere where we hoped people would feel able to eat and chat and learn a bit about each others' beliefs and customs. About mid-day, when all was ready, we crossed our fingers and hoped that somebody would come.

And they did! The Mayor and Mayoress came - and stayed a long time. There were Catholics and Baptists, and Moslems, and some of no particular faith. We got up to thirty and stopped counting; and everyone mingled in a really friendly fashion. Our Muslim friends had taken no notice of the bit about "bring enough for yourself and share it with others" - they came prepared to feed the five thousand. And talk, over the food, led into some deep questioning and discussion about faith matters. We were most grateful to the Friends from Uttoxeter and Lichfield who had come to support us. About four o'clock people were dispersing and going home; we felt drained, and a bit tired, but elated. At the very least, after today, a lot more people in Burton would know something about the Quakers.

We had no idea whether anyone would attend our Meeting for Worship on the following day, but we had planned that if they did, we would make it a short meeting, and explain what might happen, and why.



In the event we had eight visitors. So the usual form of a Meeting for Worship was explained, and then after a fairly short silence, Advice Number 7 was read. Some time later there was further ministry, and the meeting was closed after just over half an hour; this was appreciated by at least one person, who said he had 'enjoyed' the silence but was just beginning to find his attention wandering. There was further talk over cups of tea and coffee.

QF&P 10.02

We know the power of God's Spirit at work in the lives of people within the community of our meetings. These people may have been drawn into the community by a sudden conviction, a long period of seeking, or have grown up within it from childhood. We also know that we are engaged in a life-long growth into faith, and experience a continuing irruption of grace into our lives which demands and sustains a commitment to a life of discipleship. We recognise this power at work in people of all ages, races and creeds: a transforming power which can issue in lives of joy, humility and service.

From the Editor

I must start by saying that we have had a rather serious family illness this winter, I hate to use this as an excuse, but please, if you have submitted work and I have not printed it - then I have lost it! I would ask you to get in touch and I promise to do better in future!

I am, as always, grateful to all of our contributors. If you haven't had an article in the SQ so far, would you consider sending me something? I am always short of artwork, photos, poems and 'fillers'. And if you do send an article, always consider if there is a picture which would go with it.

Deadline for July edition is June 15.
As always all formats accepted, either by email
or by post

Area Meetings:

March	9	Wolverhampton	Sunday
April	12	Leek	Saturday
May	8	Stafford	Thursday
June	14	Lichfield	Saturday
July	10	Uttoxeter	Thursday
September	13	Wolverhampton	Saturday
October	12	Stone	Sunday
November	8	Stoke	Saturday
December	13	Stafford	Saturday

***Staffordshire Quaker is the Newsletter of
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