

Minutes of Central England Area Quaker Meeting held by Video Conferencing on 16th January 2021

Clerk: Alison Ironside
Assisting: Vic Grainger
Assisting: Stella Roberts

Elders on duty: Wendy Burnett, John Kimberley.

2021.001 Opening Minute

We record that we are meeting yet again by video conferencing. While Meetings for Worship are permitted, we are encouraged to stay at home and we are unable to meet face to face at Bull Street Quaker Meeting House.

Our Meeting began with a period of silent worship during which § 3.06 of Quaker Faith & Practice was read to us:

The unity we seek depends on the willingness of us all to seek the truth in each other's utterances; on our being open to persuasion; and in the last resort on a willingness to recognise and accept the sense of the meeting as recorded in the minute, knowing that our dissenting views have been heard and considered. We do not vote in our meetings, because we believe that this would emphasise the divisions between differing views and inhibit the process of seeking to know the will of God. We must recognise, however, that a minority view may well continue to exist. When we unite with a minute offered by our clerk, we express, not a sudden agreement of everyone present with the prevailing view, but rather a confidence in our tried and tested way of seeking to recognise God's will. We act as a community, whose members love and trust each other. We should be reluctant to prevent the acceptance of a minute which the general body of Friends present feels to be right.

2021.002 Representatives

The following meetings were represented here today:

B&R; BOU; BUL; COT; COV; HAL; KIN; SEL; SOL; STO; SUT; WAL; WAR.

The clerks have given permission for the following attenders to join us today: Sarah Jones (COT)

We welcome Sara Hagel, the director of our Peace Education Project, which is known as Peacemakers.

2021.003 Membership matters

a) Deaths

We record the death of Sheila Wilde (SOL) who died on 23 October 2020 aged 90 years.

b) Application for Membership:

We have received an application from Sarah Jones, an attender at Cotteridge LM. We ask nominations committee to find names of visitors.

2021.004 Memorial Minutes

a) We have received a memorial minute from Sutton Coldfield Meeting for Stanley Mapp and have had parts of it read to us.

b) We have received a memorial minute from Walsall Meeting for Ruth Rowley and had parts of it read to us.

c) We have received a memorial minute from Hall Green Meeting for Eunice Woodhead and had parts of it read to us.

We forward these minutes to Elders / Overseers Support Group for their consideration.

2021.005 Peacemakers Report

We are pleased to have had Sara Hagel with us to inform and update us on how Peacemakers has coped with a difficult year.

In 2020 there was about 2 months of regular work, then with lockdown and schools closing most of the work ceased. The furlough scheme, with a top up from CEQ, enabled all the team to be retained on full salary while Sara continued to work as normal. After July the flexible furlough helped as well.

In the autumn term with schools open again some work, such as the Peacemakers 10 week course, was able to take place.

A collaborative strand of restorative work, RESTORE – standing for: Recognition, Empathy, Safety, Trauma, Opportunity, Relationships, Engagement - took place over the summer. Two resources were produced, one for primary and one for secondary schools. This is available online and has been downloaded 50,000 times, by (schools in) many different countries.

The work can be seen on www.restoreourschools.com

The Heart of England Community Foundation gave a £15,000 grant, which enabled Peacemakers to adapt their work under the heading 'Doing Things Differently'.

Online courses have helped and they have piloted some one-to-one work.

In all 2020 has financially been better than expected. We heard that Anna Gregory left the project at the end of December.

They are hoping to get back into schools this summer term, but at present all the staff are on flexible furlough.

We thank Sara for reporting to us and thank the Peacemaker team and the management committee for their work on our behalf.

2021.006 Tabular Statement

We receive the tabular statement and note that it has been sent into the Recording Clerk of Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM).

A summary has been circulated which shows that our numbers increased by 3 on the membership list and by one in the number of attenders. The total membership is 456 Friends spread unevenly over 15 Local Meetings.

We thank Dave Rawcliffe and David Brayley-Willmetts for their work on compiling the statement.

2021.007 Minutes Received

a) We have received the following minute from **Barnt Green & Redditch LM**

Since reporting to Area Meeting earlier this year on the state of Barnt Green and Redditch LM, our situation has changed dramatically. Our numbers have decreased to the extent that we can no longer fill the roles necessary to administer the finances and manage the premises of our Local Meeting.

We are very grateful for the discussion and guidance already offered us by the Elders and Overseers Support Group, in helping us to acknowledge the reality of our situation. The four signatories to this minute, three of whom are over 80 years old, are the only members available to fill the roles necessary for the fruitful running of a Local Meeting and we therefore feel our only recourse is to ask Area Meeting to "lay our meeting down" for the time being as a formally constituted Local Meeting, to take over the administration of the finances and care of the premises and to support us as we concentrate on rebuilding our life as a worshipping community.

Christine Johnson, Mary Webb, John West, Judith Chapman

December 20th 2020

b) We have received the following minute from **Kings Heath LM**

2020/41

Discussed the future of KHLM. We now consider the maintenance of the building and organisation of the lettings too much of a burden for a small group to continue. David Gough would like to reduce his commitment to this and he has shouldered the majority of the tasks involved since the warden left. RL come to the end of her triennium as clerk at the end of December and wishes to stand down. In the absence of others willing to step up our ability to function as a full MfW is severely compromised. Agreed for RL to contact Bob Morris as Link Trustee in the first instance to highlight both issues KHLM

is facing and request support in discerning a way forward. Ideally, we would like to be released from all issues regarding the upkeep of the building and administration of lettings but be able to have access to the building as a worship group. However, we appreciate that there are many considerations and would like to work towards the best solution with assistance from CEQ.

c) We have also received the following minute from **CEQ Trustees**

T2021.01 Strategic priorities (7 January)

Trustees spent some time considering the query:

How can we work with area meeting to consider the future and our shared priorities?

It has arisen during the COVID19 pandemic when all of our local meetings have been affected by lockdowns and restrictions. The issues raised are not new but have been accentuated in recent months. Trustees are aware that area meeting asked local meetings to consider how they are able to work together to support each other and, because of the restrictions, has not been able to consider the responses from local meetings. We hope this will happen in 2021. It may be that help will be needed with this and trustees will be there to support any plans.

During our meeting trustees shared some of their concerns and raised issues not only as trustees but as Friends in area meeting and local meetings.

At the centre of area meeting and local meetings is our worshipping community; it is from here that the spirit works through us in our witness to the world.

We suggest area meeting considers the query:

What is the relationship between worship and witness in the world and our finance and properties?

Area meeting will be moving into a post pandemic world and needs to take into account the changes this will bring with it. We will need to make a health check and discern how we are faring after the experience of lockdowns, restrictions, Zoom meetings and not being able to meet in person for so many months.

In our discernment we have raised the following issues to be considered.

- 1. Use of our buildings: we know that our visual presence in the community is part of our witness and that our buildings are used by local groups. However, they do need to be cared for and looked after making demands on local Friends. Do we need to downsize?*
- 2. Worshipping groups meeting in the buildings want to meet for spiritual nourishment in worship and community support but find the responsibilities for the local meeting are often too great and some local meetings have asked to be laid down. But they do want to continue as a worshipping group.*
- 3. This leads to the consideration of simpler meetings and Britain Yearly Meeting is encouraging area meetings to think about how we structure our local meetings as well as area meeting. Perhaps we can centralise management of our property and finance. It may also need a review of the committees, roles and responsibilities in both local and area meetings.*
- 4. Quaker witness is vital as we share in the work of the spirit in the world. We need to work with other organisations and local groups in our work on climate change, sanctuary meetings, peace education and other concerns. We noted that the work of QPEP and Peace Hub are vital parts of this witness.*

We ask the clerk to send this minute to the area meeting clerk.

Both the LM minutes refer to the difficulties experienced by the Friends of those Meetings, who are feeling overburdened by trying to be a Local Meeting and who would like to become worshipping groups.

We recognize Barnt Green & Redditch LM and Kings Heath LM's requests to become worshipping groups. We wish to offer our loving support and concern to the Friends in those Meetings. We ask both LMs to liaise with their trustee link and property link Friends with a view to determining whether trustees assume responsibility for managing the property and the LMs assets at a future date. We will return to this at our next Area Meeting.

We think it is worth exploring the concept of simpler meetings and ask our clerk and the Clerks Advisory Committee to consider how we may take this forward.

We are aware that we have visited issues like this before and remind Friends of our minute from Elders & Overseers Support Group in 2019:

1. Minute received from Elders and Overseers Support Group, 8.10.2019

2019.30 - E&OSG are aware that many of our small Meetings across the area are struggling. We feel that a review is due; we ask AM to look at imaginative ways of using our Meeting Houses differently and working together more collaboratively.

Do we have too many Local Meetings?

We will return to this at a future date. We ask our LMs to look at the simpler meetings information on the BYM website.

<https://quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/support-for-meetings/simpler-meetings>

2021.008 Meeting for Sufferings Report

Cathy Khurana attended the last Meeting for Sufferings meeting on December 5th 2020 held in conjunction with the Young People's Participation Day.

The report has been circulated in advance and we hope the representatives will encourage Friends to read it. We note that Britain Yearly Meeting will be an online week in 2021.

We thank Cathy for her report, which is filed.

2021.009 Triennial Appointment of Elders & Overseers Process

In May 2020 we deferred the process to appoint Elders and Overseers by minute 2020.029. This is to record that we expect the process to restart next time we meet.

2021.010 Clerking Arrangements for 2021

In 2015, Area Meeting agreed by minute 2015.041 Area Meeting Clerking Arrangements, to accept the recommendations of the Clerking Review Group and have 3 co-clerks.

Since then, this has been the arrangement; but our nominations committee have failed to find additional Friends to serve for part of 2020 and for the current year.

However, two Friends are willing to be considered as assistant clerks to support the clerk.

We agree to an arrangement of a clerk and 2 assistant clerks for the rest of this year.

Nominations committee therefore suggest that Vic Grainger (SEL) and Stella Roberts (COV) serve as assistant clerks until the end of December 2021.

These names being acceptable we appoint them accordingly.

2021.011 Nominations

Nominations committee have the following suggestions for service:

- Visitors for Gavin Regnart on his Journey into Membership: David Sargeant (BUL) and Michael Eccles (COT).
- To serve on Trustees Finance Committee from January 2021 to end of December 2023: Anne Ullathorne (COT)
- To serve as a Safeguarding Coordinator from January 2021 to end of December 2023: Marina Manessei (STO)
- To serve on Quaker Life Rep Council from January 2021 to end of December 2023: Ruth Livemore (KIN)

We approve these names and appoint them accordingly

Release from Service

Sarah Fishpool has asked to be released from her role as Area Meeting Safeguarding Officer.

We agree to this request and thank her for her service.

2020.012 Interim Triennial Elders and Overseers' Nominations

The clerk of Triennial Elders & Overseers Nominations Committee brings forward the names of: Gyllian Brown (COV) and James Stacey (COV) for appointment as elder/overseers to serve for the remainder of this extended triennium till Dec 2021.

We agree to appoint these Friends to serve until the end of December 2021.

2021.013 Thanks and next meeting

We thank Bull Street LM for providing Elders. We meet again, nominally at Bournville QMH on March 6th from 2.00 – 5.00pm.

Alison Ironside

Clerk

Attached to these minutes are:

A) an update circulated in July 2020 detailing our minute 2019.106 when we received the E&OSG minute referred to by minute 2021.007 together with minutes received which related.

B) A paper by Hilary Johnson who spoke to this matter at our Area Meeting in November 2019.

Appendix A

The Life of our Area Meeting - an update from the AM Clerks

This paper is provided to keep Friends up-to-date with developments and to provide further background for the consideration of a possible new area meeting staff post. Whilst we are not taking this as a stand-alone item in July, we think it may be helpful to be aware of responses received so far. If any other meetings are in a position to contribute we will be happy to receive their responses in due course. The prohibition on meeting in person is serving to intensify issues in some quarters as well as giving us new experiences and eliciting creative responses.

At area meeting in November 2019, we made the following minute:

2019.106 Minutes Received

We have received minutes from two of our Area Meeting committees asking for a renewed consideration of our Local Meetings, as several are small and struggle to continue, particularly finding it difficult to appoint Friends to roles and responsibilities:

1. Minute received from Elders and Overseers Support Group, 8.10.201

2019.30 - E&OSG are aware that many of our small Meetings across the area are struggling. We feel that a review is due; we ask AM to look at imaginative ways of using our Meeting Houses differently and working together more collaboratively.

2. Minute received from Clerks Advisory Committee

CAC2019/16 Minute from AM elders & overseers support group
We have heard minute 2019/30 from the E&O support group about smaller meetings in our AM. We also note the invitation from Britain YM to all area meetings to put in an expression of interest for a local development (formerly vibrancy) worker in our area who could provide meeting centred support.

We have heard that several meetings in our AM are struggling with low numbers, and in particular Edgbaston.

As an area meeting we may have enough funds to contribute towards our own local development worker.

We recommend that this goes on to the November agenda. We ask the clerk to send this minute to the clerk of trustees [Judith Jenner] and clerk of AM trustees finance committee [Robert Morris].

Hilary Johnson from Elders and Overseers Support Group has spoken to this matter and raised some inter-related issues of nurturing and growing Quakerism through our meetings and associated buildings. We are conscious that the matter of smaller or struggling meetings is a recurring concern in our Area Meeting.

We ask all our Local Meetings to consider some of the ideas raised today: getting together in a different way, for example holding semi-programmed Meetings for Worship; holding Meeting for Worship at different times or on different days; local Meetings might identify and advertise their prime concern.

We want to hear from every Local Meeting and will return to this matter; we ask our Local Meetings to send a minute to the AM clerks by the end of March.

We ask the clerks to submit an expression of interest to BYM for a Local Development Worker for the Area Meeting.

We had expected to return to this matter in March, but that meeting was cancelled due to the national lockdown in response to the Covid-19 virus. It has not seemed right to put a matter requiring this depth and quality of discernment back on the agenda while we were getting used to holding virtual Area Meetings.

Meanwhile, five Local Meetings and our Trustee body managed to send in minutes, and these are attached at the end of this document.

An application was made for a Vibrancy Worker to be attached to our area. The scheme has a five-year time scale, aiming to have a worker available in every area meeting by the end of that time. We have been informed that we will not have a worker assigned to our AM until later in the project, as priority is being given to meetings at greater distance from the existing Quaker 'centres of gravity' of Friends House and Woodbrooke.

Minutes received from LMs

Cotteridge LM

2020/12 Cotteridge Meeting response to Area Meeting's minute 2019.106:

".... We ask all our Local Meetings to consider some of the ideas raised today: getting together in a different way...; holding Meeting for Worship at different times or on different days; Local Meeting might identify and advertise their prime concern."

Cotteridge Meeting has spent time as individuals and collectively considering our response to this minute from Area Meeting. A threshing meeting was held in early February which was an all age event, widely advertised so as to encourage as many as possible to give their views. We have been grateful to have had this chance to think about how Cotteridge Meeting meets together as well as how we can link up with other meetings locally. Notes and individual responses to this have been filed with these minutes.

We heard from our children about their enjoyment of the 'Age 10+' events held monthly around the different meetings in our Area Meeting. We would be keen for older Friends in the Area Meeting to get together in different ways and we shared ideas such as social events, sharing time together in worship, opportunities for learning and charity events which would be widely advertised to other meetings.

We had many ideas for how worship could be held differently: could we provide opportunities to worship together on a weekday afternoon, this could be a chance to introduce our silent worship to a wider community, possibly with the opportunity to join together for food afterwards. We appreciate other elements in our own worship such as singing, all age or programmed worship.

We are aware that we are one of the larger meeting communities in our Area Meeting. We would be willing to work together with other local meetings to think more creatively about how we complete some of our practical roles such as book-keeping, children & youth work and safeguarding. We could also consider using our funds to pay people to support this work.

We are aware that we need to be more outward facing. Our process of engaging with this issue has brought up a number of additional issues:

- We believe that our regular Children's Meeting is part of how we maintain our vibrancy. How can we ensure we are able to welcome children and their parents to become part of the meeting community?
- How can we support attenders to find out more about Quakers? Can this be a role for local meetings to join together?
- How can we engage more fully with our local community? What local initiatives should the Quaker voice be part of? Should this be at a Cotteridge Meeting level or together with other local meetings?

Throughout our thinking we are aware of our own limitations. We should work within what is possible. We are aware of many of our own subgroups and committees struggling to fulfil commitments and some have vacancies. Members and Attenders are already stretched, and we should be realistic about what we can manage and who will organise it.

We look forward to further conversations with our neighbouring meetings and within the Area Meeting more widely.

Hall Green LM

2020/11 Discussion of paper prepared by Hilary Johnson

Following minute 2020/03, the paper produced by Hilary Johnson has been circulated to members and attenders and been made available after MfW. Elders have discussed this paper and have produced the following minute.

'Suggestions from Hilary Johnson re working together. We have read and discussed these interesting suggestions. However, we feel that we should be able to clearly articulate our Meeting for Worship (and

what it means to us) and also have a clearer understanding of our Quaker identity before deciding which outreach option to pursue. We see a distinction between raising awareness of Quakers among other faiths and seeking to bring more people into the Religious Society of Friends'.

After the discussion at Business Meeting today, we feel that our Meeting House is a valuable community resource which is clearly identified as Quaker. We realise that both the Meeting and ourselves have particular gifts which we could develop. We recognise that most people who come to a Quaker Meeting for Worship particularly value the silence which is almost unique to Quakers but outside the Meeting for Worship and in the wider world we need to be more audible.

We would welcome the possibility that the Area Meeting employs a 'vibrancy' worker and we will encourage our members to support the 'Drop-in Anytime' events if organised at Edgbaston Meeting.

We will share this minute with members and attenders who were not present and also ask the Co- Clerk to send it to the Area Meeting Clerks.

Bob Morris,
Co-Clerk Hall Green LM

Selly Oak LM

SEL2019/61 Small Meetings / South Birmingham Meetings

We record this as a holding Minute and look forward to returning to it at February Local Business Meeting. We have experimented with holding semi-programmed Meetings for Worship, holding Meeting for Worship at different times on a Sunday this year and have found them to be very positive and helpful for a wide range of Friends and Attenders in our Meeting. We are planning to continue to experiment and use these alternative formats in 2020.

As a first step towards working more closely together with other South Birmingham Meetings we plan to approach Bournville Meeting around having a single joint Events Diary. We hope that this will lead to further steps towards the other local Meetings.

SEL 2020/06 Small Meetings/South Birmingham Meetings/Collaboration and Experiment. (SEL2019/61) (CEAQM2019.106)

We ask Elder/Overseers to arrange some small group discussions during Feb and March which will hopefully feed into our response to the AM request for the AM in April. This will be an agenda item in our March Local Meeting for Business. *(This was not taken due to lockdown.)*

Stourbridge LM

19/20 Concern for smaller Meetings.

Area Meeting asks us to respond following concerns raised by the Elders & Overseers Support Group and Clerks Advisory Group about smaller meetings in our AM. Several meetings in our AM are struggling with low numbers, particularly in finding Friends to fill Quaker roles. Should Area Meeting take up the invitation from Britain YM for area meetings to put in an expression of interest for a local development worker in our area who could provide meeting-centred support? As an Area Meeting we may have enough funds to contribute towards our own local development worker.

Area Meeting would like to hear from every Local Meeting before it returns to this matter; it asks them to consider some of the ideas raised in November: getting together in a different way, for example holding semi-programmed Meetings for Worship; holding Meeting for Worship at different times or on different days; local Meetings might identify and advertise concerns and activities which give their Meeting its special character. It asks all the Local Meetings to send a minute to the AM clerks by the end of March.

Stourbridge Meeting is not in a good position geographically to give direct support to the smaller meetings in Area Meeting, apart from Woodlands Meeting for Worship and possibly Walsall. We will share our outreach programme with neighbouring meetings in the hope it will be useful to them.

We note the suggestions for doing Meeting for Worship in different ways, but are not minded to take them further for ourselves at present.

We encourage Area Meeting to express an interest in having a Local Development Worker and hope it will offer to contribute to the costs of Britain Yearly Meeting.

We will send this minute to Area Meeting.

Warwick LM

Minute 20/07 Concern re South Birmingham Meetings

We have received a minute from Area Meeting, asking us to send a minute by the end of March, regarding a concern that several smaller meetings in our Area Meeting, especially in South Birmingham, are struggling to keep going. We have also received a document from Hilary Johnson, of Cotteridge Meeting, outlining her ideas for support and regeneration for these meetings and also from Ruth Gaston, of Warwick Meeting. We applaud the energy and enthusiasm of both these Friends.

- We are also asked to respond to the idea of applying for a local development worker in our area.
- This matter created considerable discussion.

We heard from Jane Holt, a member of the Elders' and Overseers' Support Group, that we are encouraged to work collaboratively with meetings local to us, as could South Birmingham meetings, in order to become more of what we already are and to support one another practically.

We agree that this is a matter of concern and support the idea of applying for a local development worker who might work to support smaller meetings that are struggling in particular, but not excluding other meetings. Our Friend, Ruth Gaston, is particularly impassioned to support the South Birmingham Meetings. We very much recommend her to Area Meeting as a Friend of passion and vision who has tested and carried her vision for five years and who is completely open to help and support the South Birmingham Meetings in whatever way she can.

We therefore suggest that a group is formed comprising Hilary Johnson, Ruth Gaston and other Friends. This is the time to move forward.

We ask our Clerk to forward this minute to Area Meeting

AM trustees meeting on 5 March 2020

T2020. H Working more collaboratively between local meetings

In November Area Meeting received minutes from the Elders & Overseers Support Group and the Clerks Advisory Committee expressing concern for struggling Local Meetings. AM minute 2019.106 asked that local meetings should consider this and send their minutes to AM before the end of March. Link trustees are in contact with local meetings and trustees considered the question of working together more collaboratively from this perspective. We suggest:

- Sharing staff between local meetings who are responsible for bookings/caretaking/cleaning,
- Advice on premises matters
- A Vibrancy Worker
- Having a line manager to manage a number of employees at different local meetings
- Joint study groups and events with other local meetings.

We will send this minute to the Area Meeting co-clerks.

Area Meeting Clerks
30.6.2020

Appendix B

Suggestions from Hilary Johnson to AM re working together

Introduction & Review of all Meetings

E&OSG sent Minute 2019.30 to November AM: E&OSG are aware that many of our small Meetings across the area are struggling. We feel that a review is due; we ask AM to look at imaginative ways of using our Meeting Houses differently and working together more collaboratively. I elaborated on some of our concerns at AM and was asked to circulate some of my ideas.

I do stress that in no way am I critical of the huge amount of work that is already being done by very committed Friends and know that some of my ideas will overlap current work. I'd like to thank Edgbaston Friends who are already setting in motion a couple new ideas of their own. I'm sure you also have lots of your own ideas. I do believe that Quakerism, with our liberal thinking, has a lot to offer and I am simply trying to think of ways to draw in new people who don't fit in to mainstream churches yet may be looking for alternatives. How may we better engage with the public?

Several years ago a review of all meetings in the area was carried out and various proposals put forward for our consideration. Nothing has happened since; to my knowledge no actions were taken to reduce the burden of our many meeting houses.

Many Friends like to attend only their own meeting, mixing predominantly with their own congregation. We all hold our Meetings for Worship on Sunday mornings, starting at either 10.30 or 11.00 am for one hour, with the exception of Selly Oak and Sutton Coldfield who hold an afternoon MfW on one Sunday each month. There are other midweek MfWs in addition to those on Sunday mornings. All MfWs follow the same format.

The wider perspective

May we establish a first principle, from which all other operations follow? I suggest that the ***primary purpose of our meeting houses is to nurture and grow Quakerism.***

Of secondary importance is lettings, otherwise we are wearing ourselves out becoming glorified, unpaid property tycoons. We should note that although we tell ourselves that we are providing a community service, hirers often hire our premises because they are reasonably priced and convenient. Very few hirers join us.

I presume that our current theme from BYM of inclusion and diversity is intended to help us to consider how to attract more people to us. The two words are often grouped together. I would like to suggest distinctions between them and ask us to look at how these relate to our own meetings as they stand today:

Inclusion

Those currently included in the Religious Society of Friends are:

- The host group: come regularly to meeting; are committed to Quakerism; take on local roles, are involved in wider Quaker work (as is reasonable given other responsibilities) and want to be here.
- Those who are sympathetic to our ways; come fairly regularly to meeting, want to be with us, may be willing to take on some roles and may be considering membership.
- Those who are dipping their toes in the water, the experimenters who may be unsure of what we stand for and the meaning of our worship

Diversity

- **Visible diversity:** obvious or known about: in terms of colour, gender and sexual orientation, social background, educational background, physical disability, mental health problems and other faith traditions
- **Invisible diversity** is widely recognized and debated in the pages of the Friend. Wide ranging beliefs including atheism, non-theism, Christianity (radical and evangelical), paganism, Buddhism and other faith backgrounds

Some of my Ideas

Particular meetings with particular gifts

It's unrealistic and far too demanding to expect all meetings to put into practice all ideas. Some meetings have particular gifts and histories, e.g. Cotteridge and sustainability, Bournville and music. Would it be a good idea for each meeting to become better known for its own character and emphasis?

Semi-Programmed meetings for Worship

- When? Saturday 5.30pm?
- Why? A kind of half-way for people who know little about us and are daunted by our full hour of silence/stillness. Also allows families who may have other commitments on Sunday to incorporate worship into their week
- To include: Readings (Bible / poetry etc) / Short address / Hymns – any pianists & musicians / Silence/Stillness / Topical presentations e.g. Christmas, Easter etc. I looked up Christmas and Easter in Qf&P and found only one reference.

Drop-In Meeting for Worship

This idea originally arose at Edgbaston because, although we intend to conform to an established one hour long MfW, this does not actually happen. Some Ffriends arrive about half way through, occasionally at the end; others cannot cope with a full hour and become distressed part way through; some leave the meeting before elders conclude. Do we have other Ffriends who, because of age or disability cannot manage the full hour? Why not make a virtue out of our disrupted Sunday MfW and hold a 'Drop-In MfW'?

Drop-In Anyway

Almost three years ago, following an exhibition at Edgbaston during Quaker week, we suggested holding a mid-week lunch time drop-in event to attract the local community of mainly office workers. We couldn't put this into effect because there weren't enough of us. Although this may not grow this meeting, as office workers go home at the weekends, it just might grow Quakerism. Perhaps we may attract university students, again a transient population. We could also open this drop-in to refugees who live not far from here. It could be informal with people bringing their lunch and/or we could offer tea/ coffee, cup-a-soup etc. We would need a rota of 10 – 12 Ffriends, asking for help from other meetings in the area. There would always need to be at least two people (one experienced Friend and one other) in the building each time. The logistics need detailed thought. How do Ffriends in the AM respond to this idea? It could be linked to:

Stillness in the Suburbs / Circle of Silence

- Weekly so that people get into the habit of noticing us or fortnightly interspersed with lunchtime semi-programmed meeting?
- Time: between 12 & 2?
- Which day?
- 6 months trial period to see what happens
- Minimum 2 Friends each time
- Advertising

Permanent Displays

- Use of Quaker Tapestry Panels
- Quakers in Birmingham
- Quaker Testimonies
- Extracts from Qf&p
- Thought for the week

Children

- Children's displays and events to attract other children from outside our meetings, e.g. something akin to 'Messy Church'
- Could we include a simple meal, especially for families who struggle to make ends meet?

Spiritual Practices

Many of us have completed Equipping for Ministry and other courses that have introduced us to ideas such as Lectio Divina / Visio Divina / Journalling /Processes of discernment / Applesseed that may be used with other groups. What about spiritual guidance online or on our newsfeed?

Sharing Roles

Vic Grainger asked if it were possible for meetings in close proximity to share roles, such as clerk, treasurer, elders and overseers.

Conclusion

I hope Friends will find some of my ideas helpful.

I stress once again my appreciation of the work that is already being done.

In Friendship,
Hilary Johnson
December 2019