

Quaker News



An update on Quaker work in the care of Britain Yearly Meeting



Taking action on the housing crisis

No. 94 – Winter/spring 2016

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Cover: Victorian Houses, Nottingham. Photo: Natesh Ramasamy / Flickr CC BY 2.0

Editorial

“Live adventurously. When choices arise, do you take the way that offers the fullest opportunity for the use of your gifts in the service of God and the community? Let your life speak.”

Advices & queries 27

Let your life speak! Advice 27 throws down a real challenge to us all: not just to live, but to live faithfully and adventurously. Not just in our inward lives, but outwardly, to be pushed into using our gifts in the world. This is, for me, the basis of our Quaker witness.

The pages of Quaker News 94 are rich in tales of how Quakers and meetings have let their lives speak. The stories (page 3) of men who claimed the right not to kill as conscientious objectors resonate, despite the century since World War I. Young Quaker peaceworkers (page 5) find opportunities for their lives to speak peace; and the lives of African peacebuilders in the travelling exhibition *This Light that Pushes Me* (page 10) speak powerfully to prisoners in the UK.

We can each be inspired by the articles here: could I, could we, get involved in witness like this? Could our lives speak love and accountability to a released sex offender (page 11)? Could taking part in a demonstration against the renewal of Trident (page 12) speak

of our commitment to peace? Could our property (page 6) speak of our commitment to equality and social justice? We're collecting stories of Quaker witness on our new website (see page 12) – add yours, be inspired, and be inspiring!

Our lives can also speak through the meeting communities we support. A new programme, *Vibrancy in Meetings* (page 14), will explore ways of strengthening meetings' life and witness; and a new directory of services (page 13) will help Quakers and meetings to access support they need from Britain Yearly Meeting.

Helping Quakers' lives speak, in all the ways set out here and more, is part of the purpose of Britain Yearly Meeting. This work can only happen with practical and financial support from the Quaker community. We need people like Roger Wilson (back page) to serve on committees and groups; and to continue our work we have to raise at least £2m each year in contributions from individuals and meetings. Have you given what you can to support the work of Britain Yearly Meeting? How does your life speak?

Paul Parker
Recording Clerk

Quaker News

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Britain Yearly Meeting works on behalf of Quakers in Britain, supporting the Quaker faith and putting Quaker values to work in the world. It is a registered charity, number 1127633.

Quakers try to live simply and sustainably, promoting peace, equality and truth. Putting faith into action is central to their way of life and they gather weekly for quiet worship, usually on a Sunday, in around 480 locations across Britain.

You are welcome to any Quaker meeting for worship. Find your local meeting, and more information about us, at www.quaker.org.uk.

Also available in large print

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How will you mark White Feather Day?

Reflecting on what conscientious objection meant for Quakers during World War I and what it means for us today.

Elizabeth Payne, Advocacy & Public Relationships Administrator

Quakers are called to work for peace. Yet how do we respond when the nation is at war – especially when that war is seen by many as entirely justifiable?

There are no easy answers. A hundred years ago Quakers were faced with this same question. They responded in different ways. Some felt called to join the armed forces, others provided relief from suffering in the war zone. When conscription came in 1916 many Quakers were amongst the 16,000 people who refused to answer the call to arms on the grounds of conscience.

The Military Service Act 1916 introduced conscription for the first time in modern British history, but it also recognised in law the right of individuals to conscientiously object to killing. We hope meetings will take part in a ‘White Feather Day’ on 2 March 2016, the centenary of the act coming into force. You could mark the day by:

- reflecting in your meeting on what conscientious objection means for you today
- holding a public meeting for worship at a place associated with conscientious objectors
- discussing Conscience’s Taxes for Peace Bill in your meeting – proposed legislation to allow for conscientious objection to funding the military through taxes
- inviting neighbours and others to join you in discussing conscientious objection
- inviting a speaker to your meeting on ‘Objections to war: A Quaker approach’ – contact Helen Bradford at helenb@quaker.org.uk

- sharing news and photos of what you get up to on social media (use the hashtag #100yearsofconscience) or submitting them at www.quaker.org.uk/stories-witness.

As the nation prepares to mark the centenaries of conscription and the Battle of the Somme, in which more than a million men were wounded or killed, it is just as important that we tell the stories of those who refused to kill.

In March we will be posting diary entries by Quakers who followed their conscience during WWI online, and in August Friends House in London hosts ‘Echo chamber: Voices of conscience’, a Quaker Arts Network exhibition.

It was not easy to be a conscientious objector during WWI. Many joined the army as part of the Non-Combatant Corps, serving in support roles though not carrying weapons. Those who rejected military discipline entirely were

arrested, court-martialled and sent to prison or labour camps. There they endured hardships that took a serious toll on their physical and mental health. Some were sent to the front and sentenced to death by firing squad for refusing to obey orders, although their sentences were later commuted to ten years’ hard labour.

We hope Quakers will reflect on this legacy during the centenary of WWI and consider where their conscience might lead them today. The right to conscientious objection to military service is now internationally recognised. But in Britain what does it mean to conscientiously object when we are not physically conscripted into the armed forces? How do we interpret this right – and responsibility – to conscience today?

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Around 1,200 conscientious objectors served with the Friends Ambulance Unit, set up by Quakers in 1914 so that pacifists could help those suffering in the war.

Geneva Summer School

4

A chance to experience international relations and see how Quakers at the UN are pushing for a more peaceful world.

Thais De Oliveira, Quaker Life Support Officer

Each year Quakers offer a group of young adults a unique opportunity to visit the United Nations and witness international decision-making processes in action. Over 12 days, participants of the Geneva Summer School are exposed to the work of the UN and other international organisations, and see first-hand how Quakers are involved at this level.

The summer school is organised by Britain Yearly Meeting in partnership with the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) in Geneva. QUNO, which also has an office in New York, is a Quaker presence at the UN. It represents Quaker concerns in areas such as peace and disarmament, human impacts of climate change, human rights and refugees, and food and sustainability. QUNO's work involves delivering statements at the UN, researching and publishing reports and planning events, as well as providing space for off-the-record discussions, where informal but crucial talks can take place.

I attended the 2015 summer

school, which brought together young people from Australia, Brazil, Ireland, Nepal, Palestine, Pakistan, Sweden, Uganda, the UK and USA. Amongst us were law students, national and international politics students, environmentalists, psychologists, a biomedical scientist, a historian, a pharmacist, business and management professionals, and more.

The programme was well planned, thought-provoking and intellectually stimulating. It involved lectures and group discussions on subjects as diverse as human rights, intellectual property, post-conflict politics, and the role of developing countries in the international community.

We visited organisation headquarters including the World Trade Organization and the International Committee of the Red Cross. We met with the heads of the programmes at QUNO Geneva, as well as civil society representatives, diplomats and a range of inspiring experts whose roles affect lives on a daily basis.

Take part in 2016

The Geneva Summer School is aimed at young adults aged between 20 and 26. This year's summer school will take place from 3 to 15 July.

For more info or to apply please visit www.quaker.org.uk/events/quaker-un-summer-school-2016 or contact Helen Bradford at helenb@quaker.org.uk or on 020 7663 1071. The closing date for applications is 7 March 2016.

We took part in exercises that gave us a flavour of how negotiations of declarations and binding agreements happen in the UN General Assembly, how resolutions pass in the Security Council, how these are implemented at national level and what happens if they are ignored.

At the end of the programme we all had a wider understanding of international politics and economics and of the issues and dynamics that shape this work. Although politics and bureaucracy at the UN can be disheartening, the knowledge we gained was inspiring. Perhaps the most important things I learnt were that every little thing we do is part of a bigger picture without which change can never happen, and how important and encouraging it is to learn from each other's experience.

The Geneva Summer School gave us the opportunity to understand how Quakers and Quaker values can play an important role in pushing international organisations to make changes for a more peaceful world.



Participants at the 2015 Geneva Summer School. Photo: Mihan Borhani

A great way to start a career

Assessing the impact of European work placements supported by Quakers in Britain.

Haifa Rashed, West London Area Meeting

Work placements supported by Quakers in Britain have had a positive impact on the spiritual and professional lives of many young people, according to research I carried out over the summer.

My findings were based on survey responses from more than 60 people who had undertaken year-long work placements at the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) in Geneva, the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) in Brussels and at various peace organisations via the Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) peaceworker scheme over the last 25 years. The results show that:

- 100% of QPSW peaceworkers and QUNO programme assistants surveyed would recommend the schemes
- 92% of respondents have been involved with peace or social justice work or activism after their placement
- 89% said that their placement helped them to understand Quaker beliefs, practices and processes
- 81% still engage with Quakers in some way.

The main reason people applied for a Quaker placement was to gain work experience in fields such as peace, social justice and human rights. It was very important that the placements were paid – for many this was crucial to enabling them to take part.

The results suggest that on the whole these work placements are not isolated events in the lives of those who undertake them, but rather are a part of a long-term commitment to peace and social

justice work. As one respondent put it, “It was the thing that got me into peace work – simple as that.” Former peaceworkers can now be found working in politics and at a broad range of charitable and non-governmental organisations including Britain Yearly Meeting, ForcesWatch, Greenpeace, Leap Confronting Conflict, Medact, Oxfam, QUNO Geneva and War Resisters’ International.

The QPSW peaceworker scheme aims to strengthen the peace movement by building a network of peaceworkers. My research shows that 84% of respondents are still in touch with people from their placement year, suggesting that the personal and professional connections made are enduring. Former peaceworkers describe the scheme as “a great way to start a career”, “a vital stepping stone”, and “a unique opportunity to get crucial and eye-opening experience working for peace”.

The results also show that these schemes are effective ways to share Quaker ideas, values and practices, as well as offering people a valuable chance to put

Quaker work placements

QPSW peaceworkers are paid an entry-level salary and placed with peace organisations in the UK or overseas. Find out more at www.quaker.org.uk.

QUNO Geneva programme assistants are provided with accommodation, a travel pass and a monthly stipend. Find out more at www.quno.org.

QCEA Brussels programme assistants are provided with accommodation and a monthly stipend. Find out more at www.qcea.org.

their faith into action.

I was able to do this research thanks to an Eva Koch scholarship from Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre. You can read my report in full on Woodbrooke’s website: www.woodbrooke.org.uk.

Haifa Rashed is a member of West London Area Meeting and a former QUNO programme assistant.



Haifa Rashed (2nd right) with fellow peaceworkers in 2012. Photo: Michael Preston

Taking action on the housing crisis

6

How we are following up on our concern for housing and what we can do to make a difference.

Lis Burch, Oxford & Swindon Area Meeting

What happens to subjects after they have been on the agenda at Yearly Meeting? I had a chance to find out when I was invited to clerk a weekend event exploring how we can take forward our concern for housing provision in Britain.

Yearly Meeting 2015 included a session looking at Quaker work on housing as an example of how we test and act on our concerns. Quakers in Britain first adopted housing and homelessness as a corporate concern back in the 1960s, and we are again at a point of crisis in housing – through welfare cuts, loss of social housing and soaring house prices, among other reasons. There was a real buzz around the session and a clear appetite for taking action.

Each year there is a follow-up event after Yearly Meeting. It's a chance to review one of the themes raised and consider what to do next. And so, four months after Yearly Meeting, 17 Quakers came together at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre to spend a weekend thinking about how to take forward our concern for housing.

The weekend was organised by

Quaker Housing Trust – the yearly meeting's own housing charity, set up in 1967 to offer advice, support, loans and grants to social housing projects. It was a real eye-opener: people with different perspectives and expertise sharing their insights, scrutinising government initiatives and cuts and setting out what more principled, ethical approaches to housing and homelessness could look like. We ranged over many ideas, and reaffirmed the links between our work on housing and the Quaker testimonies to equality, simplicity and sustainability.

We identified two key areas in which Quakers could make a real difference. Firstly, positive investment in sustainable housing. This could involve donating or lending money to Quaker Housing Trust, funding local housing projects or choosing investment options linked with sustainable housing. The more we invest in these ways, and publicise them, the more we can accomplish.

Secondly, ethical landlordism. People in Britain are increasingly dependent on private landlords. Quakers could form an ethical

Quaker concerns

For Quakers, a 'concern' is more than just something to be worried about. Concerns in the Quaker sense start when individual Quakers feel strongly that they are being led by the Spirit to take action on a particular issue. These individual concerns can be 'tested' by a Quaker meeting and may be 'adopted' if the meeting decides the concern is a true leading from God.

Some concerns are taken up by the yearly meeting as a whole and can become part of our national work.

landlords' association, developing and trialling good practice, and modelling good regulation. Two Quakers, acting under concern, are taking this forward. We could also work with bodies like Housing Justice to support tenants' rights.

Other approaches we talked about included recycling wealth earned through house-price inflation (by releasing some of the value locked up in property and reinvesting it in social housing), and sharing space more effectively by linking those with complementary needs (for instance, an elderly homeowner and a key worker needing accommodation).

We are at a point of crisis in housing, but there are things we can do.

For a copy of the minute from the weekend, including a full list of suggested actions, contact Paula Harvey on 020 7663 1036 or email involve@qht.org.uk.



Photo: Natesh Ramasamy / Flickr CC BY 2.0

Young Quakers connect with history

Twenty young Quakers followed in the footsteps of early Quakers when they went on a pilgrimage to '1652 Country'. They travelled around north-west England visiting sites significant to Quakers such as Firbank Fell, where George Fox preached to a large crowd at the very start of the Quaker movement.

The 12- to 15-year-olds deepened their understanding of Quaker history and reflected on their own spiritual lives and journeys. Here are some of their thoughts about the experience:

- "I have learnt a lot about how Quakers started, I had been wanting to learn about the history so found this really helpful."
- "I feel I now understand more about Quakers. The Pilgrimage helped me to understand who I am and where my limits are and how to make them wider. I have made many new friends."
- "Because I know more about Quakers... I feel I can connect with them better."
- "I have gained in how I think about certain aspects of my life and how I function as a Quaker and how I view the world because of it."
- "I benefited by taking time for things. I will now take care of myself spiritually and not hold back."
- "I feel I have spiritually grown through this event."

In 2016 there will be opportunities for children and young people to explore Quaker worship at Woodbrooke (8- to 11-year-olds, July), consider what it means to be a Quaker (12- to 15-year-olds, October) and to meet alongside our national representative body, Meeting for Sufferings (14- to 18-year-olds, December).

To find out more and to make bookings visit www.quaker.org.uk/cyp-events.



Photos: Lucy Sam, Howard Nurden

Five years of success in Kenya

8

Quaker approach to nonviolent campaigning helps people across the country challenge corruption and injustice.

Laura Shipler Chico, Programme Manager: East Africa

It was raining and surprisingly cold as the first of the nonviolent activists arrived. Over the day, and deep into the night, they kept coming – 77 in all – to a modest conference centre in Kisumu, Kenya. They were there to mark the fifth anniversary of the Turning the Tide programme in Kenya.

From four Kenyan regions – Nairobi, Western, North Rift and Nyanza – trainers and community change agents attended Kenya’s first ever Turning the Tide national gathering to share their successes and their challenges and to begin to chart a course for the future.

For every person present, there was another who wanted to be there but couldn’t be due to a limited budget. When a small kernel of an idea was first developed in 2009, it was impossible to imagine that it would grow so fast in such a short period of time, or that it would have a fraction of the impact it has had.

After the post-election violence in 2008, peacebuilders in Kenya were

looking for ways to help people speak out loudly against injustice and poor governance, but without using violence. Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) and a few Quakers in Kenya wondered: could Turning the Tide – an approach to active nonviolence developed by Quakers in Britain – be adapted to fill a critical gap in Kenya? Would it work?

“Turning the Tide changed my life, it gave me courage, it built me, and gave me hope.”

Grace Chirchir

QPSW forged a partnership with Kenyan organisation Change Agents for Peace International. A pilot project experimenting with adapting Turning the Tide’s approach to the Kenyan context led to a fully fledged programme that is locally driven and relies largely on community-based volunteers and trainers.

Now, five years after that first pilot, the hall was buzzing with anticipation. “We are here,” said Benard Agona, coordinator of the programme, “to see and hear what nonviolence power has been able to do in a small way in our little villages, in our regions, in our counties, in our beloved country Kenya... Indeed, it has been a journey of excitement.”

And so began the storytelling – in formal panels, in small groups, over cups of milky tea and mandazi donuts. Everywhere one turned and asked, “What is your Turning the Tide story?” the examples of personal transformation and social change tumbled out.

While the focus of the gathering was on community campaigns, it soon became apparent that the programme had first transformed people’s ways of thinking and living. Grace Chirchir got married straight after high school and when her husband went to Japan to study, he left her and their child in his parents’ home. She was viewed as a servant and mistreated by her in-laws. Finally she left, struggling to survive on her own.

“Before I joined Turning the Tide I was just like anybody else. I just took life the way people take it. But, shortly, life changed. I joined this training... and I realised that however much life has been challenging it is now high time I should change also the way of my thinking and face life now, positively. I learned about the principle of Turning the Tide... remember also the opponent. That really touched me. However much those people neglected me, mistreated me, I have to consider them also as human beings.”



Activists from across Kenya gathered at a conference centre in Kisumu to celebrate five years of nonviolent campaigning success. Photo: Laura Shipler Chico

The year after the training, Grace travelled to see her in-laws so that her son could claim his rightful place in the family.

“Because of the courage now I had attained from Turning the Tide I went there as strong, relaxed and a changed person... It changed my life, it gave me courage, it built me, and gave me hope and it caused me to go there and claim that inheritance.”

While Grace found a power within that stemmed from empathy with her abusers, for Aziza Yahya the message of nonviolence was what changed her: “Before I knew about Turning the Tide, I used to go for what I want. I won’t care who I hurt on the way, provided I get what I want. But Turning the Tide has turned me. So even if that thing is mine, rightfully mine, I have to look for a way to get it without hurting anybody on the way.”

Aziza worked with others to get a toilet installed in her neighbourhood of the sprawling Kibera slum in Nairobi. She had to go up against both powerful interests and resistance stemming from petty personal conflicts. “What’s next?” she asks, “Now we need water!”

Many campaigns involve challenging the corruption that sabotages large investments – from road construction to agricultural loans to healthcare provision. By supporting these campaigns, QPSW’s Kenya programme can use its limited resources to help create sustainable livelihoods far more effectively than by investing directly in development initiatives.



Sharing stories during a coffee break.
Photo: Victor Kiptoo



Justin Okee talks about a campaign he supported in Nairobi to improve conditions for market workers. Photo: Victor Kiptoo

Patrice Lubumba took on corruption very close to home. A water project funded by the UN and implemented by a large Kenya-based international non-governmental organisation had been stalled for seven years. The aim of the project had been to install public taps with running water in Patrice’s village. The borehole had been dug on public land. But then money ‘ran out’ or had been diverted into the pockets of local leaders.

When Patrice took this on, he began receiving threatening text messages. He lost his business. Even his parents put pressure on him to drop the case. “I felt lonely in my heart,” Patrice remembers. But he continued on, shifting power by building alliances with community members and with political aspirants who had failed in the previous election. Today, there are taps and the water is running.

Other campaigns have focused on women’s and children’s rights. Mothers recently marched to a courthouse to demand that a long-delayed case be heard against a man accused of raping a four-year-old girl. The judge (suspected of accepting bribes from the accused) was taken off the case and a court date set.

Running through every story I heard at the gathering was one resounding theme – that we each

have the power and the potential within us to make a change. And together the possibilities grow. Agona, paraphrasing Nelson Mandela as he stood before a gathering that was difficult to imagine just a few years ago, reminded us, “It is always impossible, until we do it.”

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New nonviolence projects in Rwanda and Burundi

Drawing on our successful work in Kenya, QPSW has started active nonviolence pilot projects in Rwanda and Burundi. We are funding teams of Kenyan trainers to work with community change agents, providing intensive residential training and accompanying them for several months as they practise their new approach.

The newly trained community change agents have already identified potential campaigns – to protect the rights of orphans being exploited by their foster carers and to help market women who are being harassed by police.

Peacebuilders' stories told in prison

10

Quaker exhibition leads to deep exchange about forgiveness, trauma, and hope.

Laura Shipler Chico, Programme Manager: East Africa

This Light that Pushes Me is an exhibition that tells the personal stories of Quaker peacebuilders from sub-Saharan Africa who are committed to reconciliation and trauma recovery. The exhibition visited a range of venues in 2015 – from churches and Quaker meeting houses to universities around Britain and even a theatre in Washington DC. Among these settings were three prisons – HMP Long Lartin and the male and female prisons at HMP Peterborough.

Undaunted by the logistical challenges of taking an exhibition into a prison, Peterborough's Quaker Prison Chaplain Mick Langford was the first to have the idea. He wanted to do something that would "celebrate the depth of spiritual experience" that he saw both in the exhibition's stories and in some of the people he worked with in prison. Mick offered programmed meetings for worship at the male and female prisons, weaving in testimonies from the exhibition. In his address he said:

"The exhibition shown here today tells the stories of a number of African people who have suffered in war, as a result of political oppression and domestic abuse. They have been hurt and humiliated. Yet they have turned their lives around... How have they done this? Some talk of the healing process and others of the forgiveness necessary to free them from the burden of their terrible experiences. And one way or other they talk of the need to see that of God even in those who have sought to destroy them."

Towards the end of each meeting, the 60 women and 20 men were invited to sit in silence. "By preparing their hearts and minds for the silence, the silence was incredibly deep," Mick reflected.

Inspired by the events at HMP Peterborough, Quaker chaplains Judy Roles and Sarah Lane brought the exhibition to Long Lartin. The exhibition was shown in the prison chapel throughout August, and again incorporated into two Quaker-led worship

sessions. Afterwards, people were invited to take the stories away with them. Six men came back with postcards they had written to the African peacebuilders.

The experience was "hugely satisfying," said Judy Roles. "To channel something like that and to see the response is just amazing... It's wonderful to have such engaging material to work with... [the men in prison] have been harmed and they have harmed and [the exhibition] gives them inspiration to see how they can begin repairing harm in their lives."

This Light that Pushes Me is available to borrow from Quaker Peace & Social Witness – see contact details below. A book of the exhibition is available to buy from the Quaker Centre Bookshop – phone 020 7663 1030 or visit www.quaker.org.uk/bookshop.

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Cécile Nyiramana. Photo: Nigel Downes

Dear Cécile,

Having read your story and looked at your photograph, I am almost at a loss for words. Forgiveness is such a powerful thing, perhaps the greatest gift one person can give another. As you say, healing comes first, then forgiveness and then love.

I recently read a passage from *Quaker faith & practice* 23.57 and this struck at the very heart of me: "...for where love stops, power begins and intimidation and violence follow." It strikes me that your words and belief have the power to reverse the polemic that has led to hatred and conflict. The light shines through your words; may they bring hope to those still struggling with conflict and suffering around the world. You are in our thoughts and prayers. May the light give you strength and keep you safe.

Postcard from an inmate at HMP Long Lartin

No more victims

How Quakers launched two thriving charities that help released sex offenders to rejoin society without reoffending.

Helen Drewery, General Secretary: Quaker Peace & Social Witness

Seven years on from its launch, the charity Circles UK is thriving. So is Circles South East, which started life as Thames Valley Circles of Support and Accountability. Both were set up by Quakers in Britain. It was exciting to attend the AGM of Circles UK recently and hear about new funding, new areas of Britain being covered and new interest in many European countries.

‘Circles of Support and Accountability’ is a way of holding sex offenders to account after they leave prison, reducing the risk that they will reoffend and helping them to fit back into society. One of the remarkable things about the scheme is that the main work is done by ordinary members of the community, unpaid. Another is that it works. Research has shown, both here and in Canada where the idea was first developed, that the risk of a person reoffending is dramatically reduced when they are in a ‘circle’.

A circle is usually made up of five volunteers and one offender. It will meet at least weekly and may last for 12 to 18 months. Volunteers are trained and supported by paid staff who work for a local project.

We could never have imagined the recent developments back in 1999, when we first heard about how Circles of Support was taking off in Canada. There, it emerged as a spontaneous response to the well-publicised release of a sex offender called Charlie. The prospect of his release caused fear in the local community and in Charlie himself. The very first circle successfully ‘held’ Charlie, keeping both him and the community safe, until his death several years later. As the idea spread and became more formalised, the Mennonite

Church took a leading role.

Quakers in Britain felt led to approach the Home Office about the idea. In June 2000 five Canadians came to Friends House, invited jointly by the Home Office and Quakers, to describe the scheme to key professionals and representatives of churches and charities. Following a continuing sense of spiritual leading, Quakers soon set up a pilot project in the Thames Valley, adjusting the Canadian model to fit the British criminal justice system.

Various other bodies set up further projects across Britain, often with local Quakers involved as volunteers and committee members. It became apparent that a national body was needed to ensure all the work went on being of a high quality and to speak on behalf of this new way of tackling a serious problem. Circles UK began, as Thames Valley Circles had, under the care of Quaker Peace & Social Witness. Both became independent charities in 2008.

Now, as I heard at the AGM,

Circles UK is planning to make sure there is a local project in every part of England (there are already projects in Wales and Scotland). Over the next four years projects will be set up in Derbyshire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, London, Merseyside, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire. Quakers in these areas may want to help the projects with their time or by offering their meeting houses for circles to meet.

I also heard about a conference held in Barcelona, with participants from 22 European countries.

Circles projects are already up and running in Holland, Belgium, Latvia, Bulgaria and Catalonia, with more being developed in Ireland, France and Hungary. It is deeply satisfying to feel that Quakers in Britain have helped to establish something that is now so successful. What was at first seen as risky and radical is now widely accepted as a key way to move towards the primary aim of Circles UK – no more victims.

See www.circles-uk.org.uk for more information.



News in brief

12

Fly kites not drones

A new resource pack from Quaker Peace & Social Witness and partners aims to help children understand the lives of others and inspire them to think about how they can stand up for peace.

Fly kites not drones offers enriching workshops and assemblies that encourage critical thinking about the impact of armed drones on children living in countries such as Afghanistan.

Military drones represent a worrying new frontier in warfare and raise a number of concerns: civilian casualties, extra-judicial killings, kill decisions made half the world away and even the possibility of drones one day killing without human involvement. Kite-flying is a well-loved Afghan pursuit that represents freedom, but many children in Afghanistan no longer want to fly kites or play under the bright blue skies because of the threat from drones.

Please encourage your children's meeting and local schools to use the pack and fly a kite for peace on 21 March – the first day of the Persian New Year. Visit www.flykitesnotdrones.org to download *Fly kites not drones* for free or to buy paper copies.



Inspire and be inspired with stories of witness

Quakers around Britain express their faith through action in many ways. These stories of 'witnessing' on issues like peace, sustainability and social justice are showcased on the 'Our stories' section of the Quakers in Britain website.

Visit www.quaker.org.uk/stories-witness to be inspired by stories of Quakers demonstrating for peace amid the celebrations of Armed Forces Day, adapting old meeting houses for solar power or campaigning for fair wages. Reading these stories is a great way to get ideas and find connections with other meetings.

You can also share your own story on the website. It could be about something as simple as raising awareness locally on issues such as refugee rights, or it could be about an event that was months in the planning. Perhaps you know someone from your meeting with a great story that could be captured and shared more widely. By posting your story online you spread your witness to the wider world.

Principles for a new economy

In January Quaker Peace & Social Witness ran a webinar (web-based seminar) to introduce its New Economy project and its visionary *Principles for a new economy* document.

The project is one of the ways the department is responding to Quakers' commitment to work for an economic system that works for both people and planet. The project will support Quakers to discern what a better economic system might look like.

Principles for a new economy draws on input from Quakers across Britain to outline the key principles and features of an economic system that would be compatible with Quaker values.

You can watch the webinar at <http://bit.ly/ESP-economy>.



Join us to protest against UK's nuclear weapons

Quakers and thousands of others will gather in London in February to protest against Britain's nuclear weapons system, Trident. Parliament will be voting this year on plans to renew the system at a cost of over £100bn – so now is the time to take a stand.

This national demonstration, organised by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, will take place from 12pm on Saturday 27 February. There will be a brief interfaith service, incorporating some Quaker silent worship plus music and readings from other faiths, at Hinde Street Methodist Church at 11am. For the latest info visit www.quaker.org.uk/events/stop-trident-national-demo or phone Tim Wallis on 020 7663 1067.

Living Wage campaign

Quaker Peace & Social Witness has been supporting Quakers in Lancaster to launch a national Quaker Living Wage campaign.

Lancaster Quakers have been busy working on a local Living Wage campaign for nearly a year, holding street vigils, writing to businesses and gaining accreditation as a Living Wage employer from the Living Wage Foundation.

They are now inviting Quakers across the country to join their campaign, and have produced a campaign resource pack to help your meeting get started.

The pack includes suggestions for taking action and three posters you can use to help raise awareness in your community. You can order a free pack from ellier@quaker.org.uk.

Many other meetings are already running their own campaigns and have become Living Wage employers. If you'd like to share what you're doing and work with others calling for a fair wage, get in touch with Lancaster Quaker Living Wage Group at livingwage@lancsquakers.org.uk.

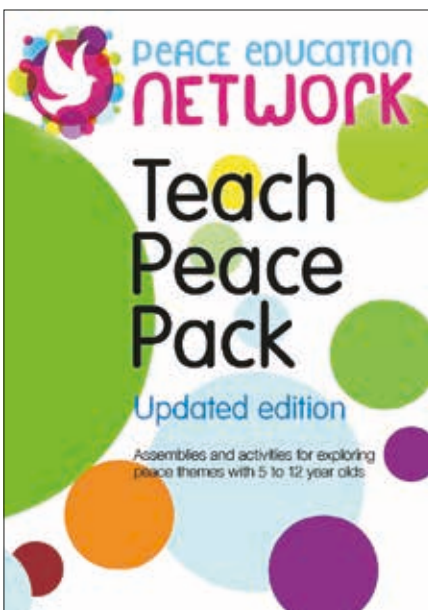
Popular peace education resource gets an update

A revised edition of the popular *Teach Peace Pack* is out now, featuring new resources for assemblies and activities with children aged 5 to 12.

You can buy a copy from the Quaker Centre Bookshop (020 7663 1030) for £5 plus p&p or download it for free at www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/peace/peace-education.

Teach Peace Pack was originally published in 2013 by Quaker Peace & Social Witness in partnership with the Peace Education Network. The pack is designed to help anyone who wants to explore peace themes in a primary school setting, and has received excellent feedback.

Quakers across the country helped to make the first edition successful by promoting it in their own communities. You can promote the updated *Teach Peace Pack* by sending copies to your local schools and youth groups or by sharing the link above. You can also use the activities in the pack for your children's meeting.



New guide makes it easier to get help and support

Every local and area Quaker meeting in Britain will soon receive a 'directory of services' listing all the resources, support, training and regular events available to individuals and meetings as part of Britain Yearly Meeting's centrally managed work.

The directory is made up of 18 booklets themed by roles (e.g. clerks) or work areas (e.g. outreach). Free copies will be sent to meetings via clerks. We hope they will be made easily accessible to all in the meeting as a 'go to' reference point. Extra copies will be sold by the Quaker Centre Bookshop. The content of the directory will also be available at www.quaker.org.uk.

Richard Summers, General Secretary of Quaker Life, is delighted to see the project coming to fruition: "We want to make sure that every meeting knows how to access help with a problem or get ideas for taking forward a new area of work. We think the *Directory of services* is going to make a big difference for those who aren't so familiar with our central staff and structures."

Exploring issues around dying and death

Over time, most Quaker meetings will deal with a range of issues around dying and death. In response to requests from meetings Quaker Life has set up a working group on the subject and made end-of-life issues the focus of the April meeting of Quaker Life Representative Council.

After the meeting, representatives will be encouraging Quakers in their local and area meetings to have conversations about end-of-life issues. Some meetings will have already done a lot of exploration of their own, but for others this will be a new and potentially sensitive subject.

Please be prepared for any discussions that take place in your meeting. If you have any concerns you can contact Michael Booth, Support for Meetings Officer, on 020 7663 1023 or at michaelsb@quaker.org.uk.

Living our beliefs

In April Paul Parker, Recording Clerk for Quakers in Britain, will be at Junior Yearly Meeting to launch *Living our beliefs*.

This book is the outcome of Quaker Life's work on a young people's version of *Quaker faith & practice*. Compiled and edited by Graham Ralph in partnership with young Quakers, it covers topics such as what Quakers believe, why we do what we do and young people's experiences of belonging.

Accompanying online content will explore young Quakers' understandings, experiences and feelings through video, word and music.

Free copies will be given to 11- to 18-year-olds attending events organised by the Children & Young People's Staff Team this year. It will also be available to download from www.yqspace.org.uk and to buy from the Quaker Centre Bookshop (020 7663 1030), priced at £6.



Photo: © Mike Pinches

Eldership and oversight conferences

A weekend conference for Quaker elders and overseers will take place at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, Birmingham, on 4–6 March. The same event will be repeated on 8–10 April. These conferences, jointly organised by Quaker Life and Woodbrooke, offer a chance for those with responsibility for eldership and oversight to come together, exchange experiences and ideas and find support and inspiration that they can share in their meetings.

Limited places are available on a first come, first served basis. Book online at www.woodbrooke.org.uk/courses.php or contact Gill Pennington on 0121 415 6783 or at gill.pennington@woodbrooke.org.uk to find out more.

Can local workers help our meetings to thrive?



Photo: © Mike Pinches 2012

Barchester Quaker Meeting (not its real name) is trying to establish a children’s meeting for three new families who’ve started attending. They’re worried about how to find and train volunteers. They want to be able to welcome Quakers of all ages to their meeting, but don’t know where to start.

Members of Hogsmeade Local Meeting, though few in number, are excited by the possibility of moving to a purpose-built meeting house on a new housing development in their village. Their current meeting house is cold, draughty and has poor access for disabled people. The developers might buy them out in exchange for a plot of land on the new estate. But what about planning permission, choosing an architect, and how to take such important decisions without upsetting longstanding Friends in the meeting?

Kelrigg Elms Local Meeting wants to learn more about Quaker history. They’ve got lots of new people, and some Friends with long memories are getting a bit elderly. They want to organise a residential weekend together, where they can hear each other’s Quaker stories, and get input from someone who can help

them understand Quaker traditions. But where should they go, who will book it, and how will they find a tutor who can help them?

Do you recognise any of these meetings? Is your meeting facing similar challenges? Thanks to the generosity of legacy funding, from spring 2016 meetings in selected pilot regions will be able to get help from a locally based worker as part of the Vibrancy in Meetings programme. The worker might put them in touch with existing support from Britain Yearly Meeting or Woodbrooke, help them connect with nearby meetings in a similar position, or take on some of the work needed to get things moving in the direction the meeting would like. And because this is a pilot, staff will evaluate and share what they learn, so that everyone can understand whether this is the right way to help Quakers.

Do you want to know more? Could you help champion the Vibrancy programme locally? Are you interested in local worker job opportunities? Then please contact Sarah Griffith on 020 7663 1141 or at vibrancy@quaker.org.uk or go to www.woodbrooke.org.uk/pages/vibrancy_in_meetings.html.

Get involved with Quaker work

Serve on a Quaker committee: phone 020 7663 1121, email nominations@quaker.org.uk or visit www.quaker.org.uk/service.

Join the Quaker Life Network: phone 020 7663 1007, email qlnetwork@quaker.org.uk or visit www.quaker.org.uk/qlnetwork.

Subscribe to Quaker News

Subscribe to Quaker News by email, access electronic back issues or read online at www.quaker.org.uk/qn.

Subscribe to Quaker News by post, make changes to your subscription or request paper back issues by contacting Leslie Bell on 020 7663 1019 or at qn@quaker.org.uk.

Connect with Quakers in Britain

Phone us on 020 7663 1000, email enquiries@quaker.org.uk or write to Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ.

Enter your postcode at www.quaker.org.uk/meetings to search for a Quaker meeting near you.

Find us on Facebook and Twitter: click the icons at www.quaker.org.uk or search for ‘Quakers in Britain’.



Britain Yearly Meeting

Britain Yearly Meeting works with and on behalf of all Quakers in Britain – supporting the Quaker community, speaking out in the world and acting to promote peace, justice, equality and sustainability.

Sustaining our church and faith

We support Quaker decision-making bodies to follow the leadings of the Spirit. In 2015 we worked to bring about a successful Yearly Meeting, at which Quakers in Britain were called to challenge inequality and injustice in today's society.

We act on Quaker concerns in Britain and abroad. Our work with Kenyan partners gives people nonviolent ways to challenge injustice. Success stories have spread and we are now setting up projects in Rwanda and Burundi, as well as offering the same approaches to activists back home.

We work to build public awareness and understanding of who Quakers are and of the things that matter to us. Our library holds collections dating back to the 17th century and is open to everyone interested in learning more about us.

Putting our faith into action

How you can contribute

You can give to Britain Yearly Meeting directly or through your local or area meeting – look out for 'Contribution 2016' leaflets arriving soon. To give online or find out about other ways of giving directly visit www.quaker.org.uk/give. You can also phone Maisa Monteiro on 020 7663 1015 for help with giving.

Supporting meetings

We offer advice, resources and training to meet the needs of Quaker meetings. This year we will send every local meeting a 'directory of services', letting them know exactly what support is available and how to access it.

Promoting our faith and work

Quakers: committed to caring for peace and planet

Quakers share a way of life, not a set of beliefs. Their unity is based on shared understanding and a shared practice of silent worship, where they seek a communal stillness.

Quakers seek to experience God directly, within themselves and in their relationships with others and the world around them. They meet together for worship in local meetings, which are open to all who wish to attend.

Quakers try to live with honesty and integrity. This means speaking truth to all, including people in positions of power.

The Quaker commitment to peace arises from the conviction that love is at the heart of existence and that all human beings are unique and equal.

This leads Quakers to put their faith into action by working locally and globally to change the systems that cause injustice and violent conflict.

Quakers try to live simply. They are concerned about the excesses and unfairness of our consumer society and the unsustainable use of natural resources.

Visit www.quaker.org.uk to find out more about the Quaker way or request a free information pack using the form below.

Request a free information pack:

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Email _____

Please send completed form to:
Quaker Outreach (QN)
FREEPOST QUAKERS

FREEPHONE: 0808 109 1651

E: outreach@quaker.org.uk

Meet Roger Wilson



Roger Wilson is a member of West Weald Area Meeting. He has just completed service as a member of Grants Group, which administers grants and bursaries on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting.

As Quakers we are not asked to sign up to a fixed set of beliefs. But if we can't point to a creed, what defines us as a group? It's living: it's what we do. Statements are just words, and words don't in general change very much. Far better to get on with it and waste as little time as possible on words.

So thought I, and so I had mixed feelings when I was asked to serve for three years on the Central Committee of Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW), one of 15 ordinary Friends who take responsibility for QPSW's work. Would it be a talking-shop? But, reflecting that this was one of the many ways that Friends actually do things, I said yes.

I'm very glad I did. The time went very quickly, because it is of course a real privilege to be able to see exactly how Quakerism makes a difference in the world.

QPSW is concerned with practicalities in the UK and abroad: training ecumenical groups for work in Israel and Palestine, supporting peace work in India and Africa, working for economic justice and equality in the world wherever the opportunity arises.

Nothing happens just for the

wishing of it. Everything needs planning, hoping, persuading, helping. The work is joy. The hardest part is having to decide between two very desirable actions when the resources exist only for one.

Through my service on QPSW Central Committee I came to join the Grants Group. This very small group facilitates the work of Quaker individuals and meetings when the addition of just a little cash will ease the wheels. It's all about practicalities. Concerns begin in meetings, and Grants Group exists to support them with modest cash and perhaps a little shared advice. In Quaker News each year you can see what this means. It's not about words, it's about action, about growth and about adventurous living; support for the quiet processes that can help to change the world.

If you would like to find out more about serving on a national Quaker committee, please phone 020 7663 1121, email nominations@quaker.org.uk or visit www.quaker.org.uk/service. For more about the grants we make, visit www.quaker.org.uk/grant-making.