



Yearly Meeting of the
Religious Society of
Friends in Britain

Epistle from Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering, held at the University of Kent at Canterbury, 30 July – 6 August 2011

We send our loving greetings to all Friends everywhere.

Friends from Britain, together with Friends from other countries, gathered in Canterbury, a city with a special place in the Christian history of our islands, to reflect on “Growing in the Spirit: changing the way we live to sustain the world we live in”.

We can no longer ignore the fact that our planet is finite. We have not only inherited the earth from our ancestors: we have borrowed it from our children and from their children.

We see the connection between changing the way we live and growing in the Spirit. What is God calling us as Quakers to be and to do? Early Quakers were seen as radical religious extremists, living beyond the ordinary in their simplicity and their direct engagement with the divine. Are we, on the other hand, sliding into ordinariness? Can we reconnect with our roots, to live a religious life and proclaim a message the world needs to hear?

With joy, our Yearly Meeting has made a commitment to becoming a low carbon sustainable community. The time to act is now. We need to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide we produce. We are called to challenge the values of consumer capitalism. Between us we have already made changes with which we are comfortable: now is the time to make uncomfortable changes. Yet through transformative action we have much to gain: a simpler life can be a richer life.

Individual action is not enough. Corporate action is needed too. It was good to hear what some of our Quaker departments and charities are doing for economic and environmental justice, and helping empower the poorest people and affirm their dignity. We must try to uphold all the people who will be working hard, individually

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and collectively, to take forward the commitment we have made this week. We have been encouraged to promote more publicly, Quaker work and values, and celebrate them in every way we can. We also need to contribute more money to support this and other centrally managed work of our Society.

We value the community of our local and area meetings, as well as of Britain Yearly Meeting and Friends world-wide. Acting together, and with others who share our concern, we can make a real difference, promoting simplicity, peace, equality, truth, and care for the environment. Some practical ways to do this are set out in the book of our inspiring Swarthmore Lecture 2011 – *Costing not less than everything: sustainability and spirituality in challenging times*.

This week has been an opportunity to practise living as a community of all ages. Sometimes all 1,500 of us gathered together, but mostly we met in smaller groups: in the Children and Young People's programmes, Junior Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting sessions, and a wide range of other events. We have eaten together and prayed together; explored and created; worked and played – and tried to do it more sustainably than we have done before. This hasn't always been easy, but it has often been fun and exhilarating.

We have held Friends around the world in our hearts, especially those who have faced hardship, oppression and loss in the last year. We are glad that some of our number will be taking messages and love from us, to Friends at the World Conference in Kenya in 2012.

The task we have set ourselves has the potential to renew our Quaker community in Britain.

Signed in and on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting



Lis Burch
Clerk