

## **Reflections on the Weekend from the Clerks**

Friends, I'd like to start by reflecting once again with William Charles Braithwaite writing in 1905 and recorded in Christian Faith and Practice Section 317:

*"Fellowship in a common faith has often brought a religious society into being before it was in any way organised into an institution. It was so with the primitive church and with the Society of Friends. Organisation is a good servant but a bad master; the living fellowship within the Church must remain free to mould organisation into the fresh forms demanded by its own growth and the changing needs of the time. Where there is not this freedom the Church has its life cramped by ill-assorted clothes, and its service for the world becomes dwarfed or paralysed."*

At our Councils in 2017 we looked at and tested ourselves as Quakers and considered – to a degree - whether our organisations and frameworks supported what we believe ourselves to be.

The aim of this Council weekend has been to provide you, personally, with quiet, with space for worship and reflection. To take stock of yourself perhaps, and Friends in your local and Area Meeting and how you all organise your lives as Quakers and as Quaker communities. It has been important to have this time for worship and silence. Councils can often seem busy, hectic even. We determined to offer a slower more measured pace. The other aim has been to offer a learning space in the workshops and Home Groups, to equip you as best we can in a short space of time, with some tools to take back home with you and with which you might simplify and enhance the experience of your Meetings in being Quaker, doing Quaker.

Our initial briefings of Home Group Elders Facilitators and Mentors set our whole weekend on a productive pathway to mining a rich seam of experience, expertise of both personal stories and Meetings' stories. Our welcome for seventeen Friends new to Council this time provided an unexpected opportunity to see ourselves as others see us. Rep Council through innocent eyes. Their commentaries will inform the Planning Group for future gatherings.

Our plenary worship sessions and our Council overall has been supported by our weekend Elders, **Jocelyn Burnell** and **Roy Stephenson** from Quaker Life Central Committee. Jocelyn and Roy met with Home group Elders and this gathering was very much appreciated by all concerned. We think this has set an invaluable pattern for our future Council gatherings. Our Elders offered ministry after our plenary worship sharing following our first Workshop session, expressing their deep appreciation of our discipline in a group of more than ninety Friends and linking our maturity with our discipleship as Quakers.

So what do we take away from this Council weekend?

Time in our Home Groups has been an integral part of the offer at this Council. Relying on your Facilitator, Elder and Mentor to ensure that you are in a zone of comfort in exploring your experience of Friends and the potential for change in your Meetings.

We learned from **Lizzie Rosewood** from Quaker Life Central Committee how our weekend fits with the planning that Central Committee undertakes to support and gently direct Friends House colleagues in carrying out the work that our Yearly Meeting values.

We are indebted to colleagues from Quaker Life staff from Friends House in preparing such a rich menu of very tempting workshops, so rich it has been difficult to choose just two workshops from

eight which you could take part in. We trusted you to choose the two which you discerned would be of the best benefit to your Area Meeting. To, hopefully, learn skills - or to pick up simple ideas for supporting your Meetings in its challenges with busyness, or conflict, or mental health, or outreach, or just how different we can be in how we offer refreshments after Meetings for Worship, Some Meetings offer cake, some don't!

We wish to name check these generous colleagues who have been with us this weekend,

- **Mark Russ**, Woodrooke's Nurturing Friends and Meetings Tutor
- **Alison Mitchell** is the Mental Health Development Officer, employed by the Retreat Benevolent Fund,
- **Alistair Fuller**, Head of Ministry and Outreach at Quaker Life.
- **Libby Adams**, Head of Library and Archives at Friends House.
- **Gill Sewell**, Ministry and Outreach Officer in Quaker Life.
- **Elizabeth Payne** BYM Communications Coordinator.
- **Helen Drewery**, Head of Witness and Worship at Friends House.
- **Pip Harris and Wendy Hampton**, two of the local workers within the 'Vibrancy in Meetings Pilot Programme'.

*The full list of workshops is attached as an Appendix to this review.*

And of course **Marleen Schepers** and **Andrew McVicar** our unfailingly helpful colleagues from Quaker Life who really do oil the smooth running engine that is Quaker Life Rep Council.

Friends, your dedicated and disciplined participation in Workshops led by Quaker Life staff and the expressive paper records of your ideas and reflections from plenary worship sharing, and from your Home Groups, has left the Planning Group us with a huge resource of material which we will have transcribed and reproduced to share with you as soon as we can after this weekend. I can only offer a teasing flavour of some of what was recorded and this is not in any rational order:

- The variation in how Local Meetings handle their work inspires hope that it is possible to re-imagine how we do things.
- Worship in a large group which was deep and powerful in ministry spoke to my condition. This experience enabled me to be engaged and open to the rest of the day's activities. It enabled me to be more present. It felt spacious in time.
- Mental health "snakes and ladders" with more emphasis on the ladders.
- Break the rules – like young Quakers do.
- Bring in expert help when needed.
- Simpler Meetings: model policies; model contracts; standardised accounts; paying for professional service; what do we ACTUALLY need to run our Meetings?
- We can engage with a wider range of people through social media. Use Facebook to promote our experience and activities.
- Balance of the eternal and the now.
- Concern for self care.
- Children and young people need to be fully considered as part of the worshipping community.
- Conversations and communication within Meetings: food; walks; sharing stories and listening.
- **M4W**
- **JOY, JOY, JOY!**
- **Social media TRY IT!**
- Can we release ourselves from our structures and discover what structures are essential?
- Exploring the relationship of the parts to the whole.
- Having a willingness to adventure in the spirit together.

- Relinquish Right Ordering. We are trapped by it.
- Adopting “snakes and ladders for 10 to 12 year olds to explore lots of issues.
- I’m reminded to nurture myself. I’m going to!
- To remember that service IS an end in itself.

Friends I could have used this whole time to read from our flip charts. You will have that opportunity as soon as we can deliver it.

## CONCLUSION

So, once again Friends, we find ourselves near to the closing of Quaker Life Representative Council. Once again we have a full house. Ninety-seven Friends have come to Woodbrooke. We have welcomed seventeen Friends who have experienced Representative Council for the first time, some of whom have experienced Woodbrooke for the first time.

The Clerks and Planning Group are indebted to our Home Group facilitators, elders and mentors. From the heart, without you Council gatherings would be really, really hard. Please, Friends, continue to over service in this way. It is truly much valued.

As ever we hope you can return to your Meetings with a good report of Quaker Life Representative Council and with a confidence that our Council is well regarded by central committees. Your reports help convince Are Meetings to support Quaker Life and Quaker Life Representative Council.

Do experiment Friends. Live adventurously. Therein lies joy.

Before moving back to our Home Groups for the final session I’d like to close this worship session by thanking our Planning Group and in particular the Assistant Clerk, Sarah, for her support throughout the weekend. Sarah Fox keeps me in very good order and brings her well-honed experience in skills development to ensuring we make effective preparation for Home Groups and in analysing how we might use of your own outputs from the Home Groups.

And finally I’d like to ask Sarah to read a poem by a dear Friend of Representative Council – and former Assistant Clerk - **Rosie Bailey**. Her poem was published in The Friend on 1<sup>st</sup> February this year.

**Michael Long, Clerk**

**Sarah Fox, Assistant Clerk**

# Why am I a Quaker?

1 Feb 2018 | by R V Bailey

'Why am I a Quaker?' by R V Bailey

Is it because of all those abstract nouns –  
Integrity, Simplicity, *et cetera*? I've never

Been keen on abstract nouns myself, but  
Weary of all those quarrels *in re* God

I come home to them now. I reckon God's  
Is the hand on the shoulder that means

*It's OK, I'm right behind you*; or the voice  
In the ear, whispering *This is the way*;

*Walk in it*. Sometimes it's in the pit  
Of the stomach (in rather tight-lipped tones),

*Just DO it*.

Or else the conversation's philosophical: *There's  
More than this life. If there hadn't been*

*(Of course, you fool) I'd have TOLD you*. Greedy,  
Cowardly, idle: I haven't what you'd call

A very convincing moral CV. These voices  
(when I'm listening) help. And what helps too

Are other people (God in them, perhaps);  
Brave hearts in dowdy clothes – Fox, and Fry,

And Naylor. And some you meet in the Co-op, or  
The street. Or even on Sundays at Meeting. They hear

Voices, too.

QUAKER LIFE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> April, 2018

## List of Workshops

*Each workshop is run twice. List below in alphabetical order. Representatives were able to choose one workshop in each session.*

- **Discovering *Being Friends Together*: tools for Quaker learning**

*Being Friends Together* is an extensive library of free learning resources to support and nurture your meeting. In this workshop you'll discover how your meeting can access and benefit from this library, as well as receive a selection of learning resources to take away with you.

**Mark Russ** is Woodbrooke's Nurturing Friends and Meetings Tutor. He is a teacher, musician and theologian, with particular interests in the Bible and Christianity, experimental worship, intentional community and apocalyptic spirituality.

- **Mental health – for ourselves, our Meetings and across Quakers.**

A chance to reflect on our own well-being, to consider some of the issues around mental health in our Meetings and to hear about some of the exciting things happening across BYM. The session will involve playing games and sharing – but nothing too scary! You will join in activities that could be repeated in your Meeting and gather information about resources that will be helpful to all Friends.

**Alison Mitchell** is the Mental Health Development Officer, employed by the Retreat Benevolent Fund with a brief to "give Friends the information and the inspiration to discern our response to issues around mental health".

- **Nourishing ourselves; nurturing our meetings**

At the heart of our life together as Quakers is the deepening and nourishing of our spiritual lives, both individually and as communities. In this workshop, we will share our own experiences of what nourishes and nurtures us and explore how we might share this in the lives of our meetings. It will be a time to tell something of our own stories and to reflect on the people, practices and experiences that help us to feel grounded, connected and whole.

**Alistair Fuller** is Head of Ministry and Outreach; his work is particularly concerned with deepening and enriching the life of Quaker communities, helping them to be open, lively, loving and welcoming. He believes deeply in the importance of kindness, the power of stories and the value of delight.

- **Resources for events and exhibitions in our meetings**

The Library at Friends House is a source of information and support when meetings decide to develop exhibitions or hold events. This session will be an opportunity to find out more about what information the Library holds in its collections and to help shape the ways in which the Library collections can support events and outreach activities in meetings. We will spend time exploring the types of events and exhibitions meetings have held in the past and hopes or plans you may have for activities in the future.

**Libby Adams** is Head of Library and Archives. She has responsibility for developing, preserving and making available the wide and varied collections in the Library at Friends House. This involves providing facilities for people to access the collections on site in the Library, but the work of the Library is also increasingly focussed on providing a wide range of ways in which people can engage with the collections, including online.

- **Room for more**

The Outreach themed workshop conversation will cover the Quaker Week 2018 theme 'Room for more - You've often wondered what Quakers do, and believe. Why not take a moment to find out why you will always be welcome at our table?' and how meetings might reach out to the wider community. We will explore planning events for enquirers and new attenders - small steps looking at a simple framework for what a day might include, ideas for sessions and guidance on how to use the space you have. We will also ponder the call to examine our own diversity (Minute 38 YMG 2017) and how we can remove barriers and actively seek wider participation in the full life of our meetings. How might we embrace diverse newcomers? How can we make big change happen?

***Gill Sewell** has been a Ministry and Outreach Officer in Quaker Life since March 2016. Her responsibilities cover outreach (particularly festivals and Quaker Week), advising meetings on safeguarding matters and managing the facilitators cluster. Gill has been an active Quaker for more than 30 years and is currently Clerk to her Area Meeting Trustees and involved in strategic property reviews.*

- **Sharing Quaker community: Quaker Communications**

This session explores how Quaker communities can better communicate. It will explore the basics of online communication, detail the support available to meetings and you will go away with a draft outreach campaign for something you could run in your meeting.

***Elizabeth Payne** is the BYM Communications Coordinator. She works with digital communications tools to support Quaker action and help Quakers become well known and widely understood.*

- **Simpler Meetings – a new project**

Previous Rep Council workshops have helped to test the need for work on simplifying the way we run our meetings, locally and at area meeting level. Now we are launching a new three-year project to do just that. Come and hear about the project and feed in your thoughts about where the potential lies for making the most difference. And there's no need to wait until the new staff member starts. What can we learn from each other here and now about better ways to do things? And what Quaker energy could be unlocked if Friends who are now burdened with admin were freed to do more outreach, community-building, spiritual nurture and witness in the world?

***Helen Drewery** is Head of Witness and Worship, working across both Quaker Life and Quaker Peace & Social Witness departments and supporting the Central Committees of both. She is a lifelong Friend, a member of South London Area Meeting and (in her 'spare' time) serves as its Clerk of AM Trustees, so she knows what Quaker admin looks like!*

- **"What do we do NOW? An alternative first response to meeting difficulty"**

Playing with analogy, this workshop is a gallop through a 'first-aid' process to identify and treat common meeting ailments with a little help from our friends - no previous medical experience required! The session is designed to develop ideas and skills for Friends considering where a meeting might find itself and ways of helping.

***Pip Harris and Wendy Hampton** are two of the local workers within the 'Vibrancy in Meetings Pilot Programme', based in the South West and North West of England respectively. As part of this programme the team have been exploring ways of helping meetings to feel more confident about their meetings and ministry. Over a year and a half Pip and Wendy have worked with the nine Area Meetings they cover between them, and have journeyed alongside many Local Meetings. They are developing tools which are interesting, easy and effective for meetings to use. This is 'one in the pipeline'.*