



Yearly Meeting of the
Religious Society of
Friends in Britain

Epistle from Britain Yearly Meeting held at University of Bath 2-9 August 2014

To all Friends everywhere,

We send our loving greetings from Yearly Meeting Gathering. Over 2,000 of us have come together as a community of all ages, “to see one another’s faces and open our hearts one to another”.

Our theme of ‘Commitment and Belonging’ was the culmination of a three-year process of exploring what it means to be a Quaker today. It led us to look inwards at the meaning of membership and outwards to our service in the world.

Coming into membership of the Religious Society of Friends is not simply arrival at a comfortable place; it is also a point of departure: a commitment to the Quaker community and to a life-long process of learning, together with others. What matters most in this community is the quality of our relationships.

When we are faithful to our discipline and trust in the Spirit, we may be led in unexpected ways. In his Swarthmore Lecture Ben Pink Dandelion urged us to be open to the possibility of transformation – to “seeing and feeling the world in a new way.” He reminded us that our core insights, of encounter with the divine, discernment, worship and testimony, are all inherently collective. We should rekindle a strong sense of our Quaker identity, our clarity about who we are, and we should reclaim the spiritual. Our ‘love in action’ is not an alternative to the spiritual life; we need to be both Martha and Mary.

Through the week we followed ‘Journeys’, of faith, witness, governance, and much more. In particular we have expressed our outrage at the deep hurts inflicted by economic injustice, and our passionate concern that we should uphold the most vulnerable and those supporting them. What would our world look like if we truly lived out our testimonies?

An inspiring report and film from our Trustees celebrated our centrally managed work. We have welcomed the outcome of the work on same-sex marriage begun at YMG in 2009. Our divestment from the fossil fuel industry arose from the commitment to sustainability made at Canterbury in 2011. While many share our

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concerns about the future of our planet, and all its inhabitants, there are things that we, as Quakers, are called to do. The Canterbury Commitment is about all our testimonies, and we can do most as a community working together. We are enjoined to pray, talk, think, share and act. Whatever you are called to do, be faithful to your calling. God has no hands but ours.

In an all-age, reflective commemoration of the outbreak of World War1, we reclaimed the white feather as a symbol of peace and created with our feathers a dove of peace. In our epilogue vigil the lights around the circle were extinguished in mourning, and re-lit in hope. But one hundred years after the 'war to end all wars' we are anguished at continuing wars, particularly in Israel/Palestine. We support the work being done on our behalf by Quaker Peace & Social Witness and the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel and have endorsed the public statement from Quaker Peace & Social Witness to be issued shortly.

Our community has included almost 300 children and young people. Their joyful sense of belonging here has been rooted in their exploration of the Yearly Meeting themes, through playing, sharing, working and worshipping, as part of the whole Gathering. The Young People have thought about commitment and belonging and the diversity of Quakers in the world. Junior Yearly Meeting affirms the spiritual basis of 'being Quaker' but for them 'community' may be more important than 'membership'. We are reminded that children and young people are an equal part of our Quaker community and should be treated as such. Further thought will be given to how we support children and families in our Meetings.

In the face of our distress at the darkening of the world, we are renewed in the hope and love that is also part of our faith, and this Gathering has been an occasion of joy. We have seen on film the faces of local Friends, telling us their stories of how they live out their ministry, and Friends from around the world telling us of their beliefs. In all-age worship we have looked into our neighbours' faces and seen love. This week has given us time and space for worship, ministry, decision, creativity, art expression and chance encounter - 'doing different things together'. We leave to the university a Legacy Garden, created during the week as a tangible expression of our hope for future generations.

The more we listen carefully to one another the closer we come to an intimate connection with the greater whole. We are challenged to become beacons for change in the world and to have the courage to 'hope beyond imagination'.

Signed in and on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Skidmore". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Chris Skidmore
Clerk