

Meeting for Sufferings

6th February 2015

Carol Holding

Due to rail repairs entailing bus detour via Billericay to Liverpool St and all the circle and metropolitan lines being closed, I was late for Meeting for Worship at the beginning of the day. I gather that it had been very deep and sad due to the very sudden death of the son of one our members and the imminent death of the son of another. Both without warning and causing us all to consider this precious but fragile gift of life that we are given.

The business of the day began with the clerk of Yearly Meeting giving a preliminary talk about Yearly Meeting which will take place from 1-4th May in the large Meeting House. Junior Yearly Meeting will take place alongside and there will be more worship time to help with election related stress! There is a spiritual Preparation Document available and we are encouraged to think and pray about YM even if we are not going.

David Day spoke on Quaker values in Education and Ann Watson spoke of the pressures on Teachers and pupils in the state System which is often driven by opinion rather than truth and in which equality of provision is not ensured and where there is increasing militarisation. Our concern is that schools should create places of cooperation and safety.

We are reminded that these problems however are not universal or insoluble and Friends can take supportive action in their own areas. Michael Phipps felt we should place emphasis on the positive points and that there was a growing sense of shared values and good relationships in some schools, and we can counteract the downgrading of religious education and the growing mantra that becoming an Academy school will solve all problems. The capabilities of the current group working on this are limited geographically and need our support.

Paul Parker on What it means to be a Quaker and reflecting on the minute from YM at Bath as always took his inspiration from QFP, in particular Chaps 10 & 11, He said we tend to look at this from one position and asks that, as membership is a commitment in many ways, could this be met by non geographic membership for example, and is it right to assume that what is right for us is right for all, and he quoted Isaac Pennington "Are there not different places..." One particular suggestion being there should be a Friend in each AM who could make it their job to contact young people and others away from the meeting who feel part of the meeting although their physical presence is not there. We need to be more aware of the people who are precluded from joining for various reasons.

The afternoon brought a report from QCCIR by Rowena Loverance who spoke of our core identity being our diversity and the Quaker idea of God being the positive view rather than Theist or non theist—a sharing of our treasure chest but not concentrating on the detail or the differences.

Suggestions were that we should have feedback from A.M.s to the questions and have a Quaker version of the World Council of Churches language because we, in our non-creedal stance, are listened to. And could we have input to this document from the Groups Fair at Yearly Meeting. It was felt that the language for this WCC briefing paper "Towards a Common Vision" is right but the online response needs to be in Quaker-speak so it could be a basis for a study pack.

Further concerns were few. Jennifer Barraclough clerk of Trustees spoke of an employment dispute on zero hours, a detailed explanation of which is on the website. Trustees had met with Quaker Life the previous weekend with face to face communication and at Woodbrooke the week after, which helped a lot.

Our finances are OK.

Catherine James on the Revision of our book of discipline said that since 1994 Chapter 16 had been revised many times, so reorganising but not rewriting was needed. But not just extracting or adding bits. We were asked about 16:16 where the addition “where this is permitted by law” makes it clearer and more functional and responded “Yes” to the question “do the rewritten paragraphs reflect our decisions?”