

"Becoming the Change we want to see" A Report from Eliza Jones on the Quaker Life
Representative Council 14 - 16 October 2016 at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, Birmingham

Despite the best of intentions I set off to Woodbrooke feeling under prepared as my area meeting news report was put together very much at the last minute. I was very pleasantly surprised to find that my piece about our area meeting's work with refugees was seized up on as a good example of social sustainability work in our first home group session.

I found Alex Wildwood's introduction to the weekend in the plenary on Saturday truly inspiring. Entitled "A vision to Sustainability" he made it clear from the outset that sustainability was a lot more than energy saving measures to reduce our carbon footprint, suggesting that as Quakers a spiritual basis for sustainability, "treating the earth as if we mean to stay" (a definition coined by diplomat/environmentalist Crispin Tickell) was critical. "Now is the time to hear within us the sound of the earth crying" (Thich Nhat Hanh)

He referred to a conscious evolution, evolving by choice not chance, making the shift from thinking about the planet to thinking as the planet, a kind of collective spiritual awakening. A fundamental sense of connection to all that is. All existence is one and interdependent and how we behave as a result of that awareness. We are called to become co-creators with that power or as Rumi has put it "You are the universe in ecstatic motion". He ended his talk giving us some questions to think about:

- What might be the Quaker contribution to the evolutionary shift of consciousness that many prophetic voices believe we are called to in this time?
- What gifts/skills and talents can I personally bring to a transition to a just and sustainable for all beings

Later in the weekend he facilitated a workshop on Self Actualisation, Life Purpose and the Evolutional Shift which enabled us to come up with our life purpose statements!

Bryony Rowntree spoke of the challenges of living the testimony of integrity while Rachel Harrison spoke personally about deep listening - stretching the muscle of presence, listening to the earth and developing a deeper connection to what is happening around us.

Ideas that resonated with me over the weekend include

- our Quaker contribution to sustainability - the collective is important
- tapping into the collective consciousness - that of God within
- making the link with our life purpose
- ongoing challenges of living with integrity - our use of cars /planes and fossil fuel
- Our local meeting can help us make the link between connection and activism

At a gathering of Friends to explore how our faith relates to ecology and sustainability that took place in Woodbrooke earlier in the year, three main themes were distilled - communion and community, telling our stories, action/change agency. People find different ways into eco-spirituality, some start with connection, some with vision or narrative, some with action. As the diagram illustrates these are inseparable and mutually entwined paths with distinctive Quaker approaches to each. So we can tell our stories, we can consider how sustainability is central to the spiritual life of our meeting and we can set up and nurture small groups to take action.