## **Churches Together in England**

A call for Quaker Denominational Ecumenical Officers

[Denominational Ecumenical Officer](https://linkprotect.cudasvc.com/url?a=https%3a%2f%2fcte.churchinsight.com%2fGroups%2f234722%2fHome%2fGroup%2fAbout%2fEcumenical_Officers%2fDenominational%2fDenominational.aspx&c=E,1,nCJYcRoBqldhkktxxMvsKuIt2_i12xFbY4nslOpeQ55fUABq7Ho4sPo8gW2Hqu8D6pmEBTsA_M0-ogH-XYjkWASc3l4arH5f2xi-cw1UydS1&typo=1) (DEO) is a voluntary role. DEOs are people appointed by their Churches to offer advice, resources and practical help with ecumenism in their locality. DEOs from different denominations, including Quakers, operate as a team within a particular county (or large city) body. They support the County Ecumenical Officer (CEO), who is appointed by the relevant Churches Together body. A CEO is usually a paid position.

Some Area Meetings appoint a Friend to serve in this way, using whatever equivalent role description suits them (e.g. coordinator). Churches Together in England (CTE) offers training for DEOs or equivalent, usually in January or February. The next course is 6-7 February 2024 at High Leigh conference centre, Hertfordshire. The course is also useful as a refresher for people who have been in the role for some time. <https://cte.org.uk/working-together/national/ecumenical-officers/training/overview-the-training-process/>

Ian Marshall, of Lancashire Central & North Area Meeting, is the Quaker DEO for Lancashire Churches Together. He shares an example of what you might be able to help happen in your area as a DEO:

“I have just spent a weekend helping to run a Churches Together tent at the Royal Lancashire Show, where we offered a friendly welcome, free tea and coffee, seats, conversation, prayer, children's activities and a platform for a range of charities (Hope for Justice, Age UK, Mind, Christian Aid, ARocha, Fair Trade). We had morning and evening ecumenical worship each day and afternoon worship on Sunday, led by the Salvation Army and their band. Kate Bottley and the BBC Songs of Praise team visited and filmed some segments for the show. The ministry of welcome, comfort, hospitality and fellowship was acknowledged and welcomed by thousands who walked past and used by hundreds who came in. Taking the Love from the tent and finding it reflected almost everywhere I went outside the tent, was a wonderful uplifting and affirming experience.

“The one downer was the tiny group of ‘Christian’ fundamentalists on the other side of the show site - who insisted on a rather one-sided dialogue of hate towards various outgroups (gay people, Muslims, women, etc.). The flip side of this was hearing that every ecumenical colleague - including the evangelical street pastors - had had the same experience. In Churches Together we are all brothers and sisters in faith, in the same God. Some of us prayed together that the fundamentalists would find Love and Joy in their faith, and that any who had need would find refuge. I really enjoyed the whole experience of ‘being Quaker’ in the world, in fellowship with others from other churches. I cannot believe I am the only one who would.”

The following role description is not prescriptive, but may help area meeting nominations committees in discerning the right person for the role. A good Quaker DEO will be:

1. Confident in their Quaker faith and happy to speak about it to others.
2. Willing and able to engage in worship and fellowship with Christians from any/all of the Christian traditions represented in CTE, which is an umbrella organisation of 52 member churches. A Friend who considers themselves a disciple of Jesus may fit well in this role.
3. Willing and able to represent the Quaker way at ecumenical acts of worship.
4. Expected to facilitate Quaker input to the ecumenical life of the county/region, as led, and to be a channel for Friends in their area to learn of ecumenical opportunities outside their local meeting. This may be as simple as attending DEO meetings and forwarding e-mails to their area meeting clerk.
5. Aware of areas of disagreement and sensitivity in different Christian churches over some issues, notably of human gender, and be prepared to live alongside one another in discomfort. This is a dialogue and fellowship role, not a campaigning one.

If bonds between churches are strong at local level, it is often easier to work on issues of concern later. For example, many Churches Together groups joined the pilgrimages for climate justice in the lead up to COP26. On issues around sexuality and human relationships, the Quaker stand on equal marriage has tested our ecumenical relationships but it has also deepened churches’ understanding of how to live better with our differences.

This work can be very rewarding. We encourage area meetings to consider whether they would like to have a Quaker DEO, and Friends to consider it carefully if nominated.