



Quaker Peace
& Social Witness

Meeting for Learning series: Building back better

Handout

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What do we mean by ‘building back better’?

In June 2020, [Quakers in Britain joined with over 80 organisations to launch the Build Back Better campaign](#). The campaign brings together teachers, healthcare workers, students and organisations who are campaigning for change. It is based on five key principles:

- **Securing the health and needs of everyone in the UK now and into the future**, irrespective of employment or nationality.
- **Protecting and investing in public services.**
- **Rebuilding society with a transformative Green New Deal** – a plan to decarbonise the economy in a way that tackles inequality and enhances people's lives.
- **Investing in people** – restructuring public and private finance so it supports sectors that nourish society and safeguard the future.
- **Building solidarity and community across borders** – promoting changes that end global power inequalities.

But ‘building back better’ is not just about an individual campaign. For Quakers in Britain, it is about the spirit of the moment.



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[The Build Back Better campaign](#) has provided a useful starting point, but Quaker work to build a better world pre-dates the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue long after.

This distinction is particularly important because the phrase 'build back better' has been co-opted by the UK government for its own agenda. See for example, [the website for the G7 Summit](#) that will take place in Cornwall in June 2021. On the one hand, this speaks to the success of the Build Back Better campaign in responding to a deep desire across our communities not to return to 'normal' after the COVID-19 pandemic. But it also creates challenges in communicating what exactly we mean by building back better.

So although we have called this Meeting for Learning series: Building back better, we want to make clear that it is not just about the Build Back Better campaign. It is about our work as Quakers to build Heaven on earth. And this work will carry on whatever happens to the Build Back Better campaign!

What will the Meeting for Learning series involve?

The Meeting for Learning series includes three meetings of 90 minutes. They can be held on Zoom or in person and there is a session plan available for whoever leads each session.

Each meeting centres on three key questions for reflection and discussion. We have also shared a number of resources to accompany each meeting. These resources have been shared to help people prepare for each meeting and to embed any learnings or reflections that flow from it.

Preparation for each meeting should take no longer than 15 minutes, although you are welcome to spend longer preparing of course! 'Homework' after each meeting invites you to spend a little longer reflecting. There is no set time for this, but you may find it helpful to write down your reflections or to share them with a friend or family member.



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MEETING 1: GROUNDING AND REFLECTING

We begin with a 90 minute session to introduce the Meeting for Learning series and to allow everyone to settle into the space (online or in person) together. The focus of this session will be to reflect on our experience of the COVID-19 pandemic and what we have learned. We will then step into a space of bold imagining to vision the better world we would like to build.

Preparatory materials

Before the meeting, please watch this 9 minute video [Message from the Future II: The Years of Repair](#). It explores lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and imagines a future world radically better than our own. The video was made by a Canadian organisation called [The Leap](#) that writer, filmmaker and activist Naomi Klein co-founded. The video is accompanied by an article by Naomi Klein that explains how the video came about.

Questions for discussion during the meeting:

- **How has the pandemic impacted you/ your family/ your community?**
- **What have you learned during the pandemic?**
(Try to think in particular about how you have felt supported during the pandemic and about who hasn't been supported during the pandemic)
- **What do we want to change after the pandemic?**

Homework

After the meeting, take a look at this diagram from [Movement Generation on a Just Transition](#). We have chosen to share this diagram because of the holistic approach it takes to system change and because of its relevance to Quaker testimony.

In the meeting, you may have reflected on smaller more concrete changes you want to see, e.g. higher pay for nurses and carers; equal access to vaccines around the world; or a basic universal income. These are important, however, in order to make these changes, we need to dive deeper to uncover the invisible systems and structures



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that uphold the status quo. Understanding the bigger picture of the dominant systems and structures we live in helps us to see what we need to change to successfully transform our world. What we like about this diagram is that it helps us zoom out to see some of these invisible systems and structures.

We also chose this diagram because it focuses on a just transition from an extractive economy to a living economy. Quakers have long understood the dangers of the extractive economy and the need to build an economy that works for people and planet. Over a decade ago, Yearly Meeting Gathering noted that '*the global economic system is posited on continued expansion and growth, and in its pursuit of growth it is often unjust, violent and destructive.*' (2011)

This diagram captures the invisible systems and structures that underpin an extractive economy. It also offers a vision of what we might transition to – a living economy. Or perhaps, in light of what the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed, we might call this a care and repair economy (CARE)¹.

Take some time to write down your reflections on the diagram. Or, if you prefer to process your thoughts verbally, invite a friend or family member to explore the diagram with you.

Questions you might like to consider:

1. How does the diagram fit with what I want to change after the pandemic?
 - a. What did I want to change?
 - b. Is any of that reflected in this diagram?
 - c. What does the diagram include that I didn't think about?
2. What resonates in the diagram?
3. Is there anything I would add or change about the diagram?
 - a. Why?

Note: Anyone interested in digging deeper into Quaker work to build a new economy can also take a look at the [Quakers in Britain new economy reading booklets](#).

¹ This framing was first articulated to us by Neil Gibbons, an Attender at Chester Local Meeting, whose thoughts you will explore further below.



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MEETING 2: HOW MIGHT QUAKER FAITH GUIDE US?

We continue with a 90 minute session that will allow us to reflect on our faith and Quaker testimonies. As Quakers, our social action is rooted in our faith. Sometimes this is framed as what love requires of us. It is a powerful source of strength and can sustain us as we work to build a better world.

Preparatory materials

Before the meeting, please take a look at the following documents. Two are offerings from an Attender at Chester Local Meeting, Neil Gibbons.

The first document is titled [‘Why we offer what we offer to Build Back Better’](#) and contains Neil’s reflections on the Quaker testimonies and how they might form the basis for our work to build a better world after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The second document is an excerpt from the new [Quaker Peace and Social Witness strategy 2021-2025](#). Take a look at section 3.1 on page 3 titled ‘How we work: Our Quaker experience’. This section explores the meaning of peace in Quaker experience and what this might look like in practice.

The final document is titled [‘Building back better after times of crisis’](#) and shares Neil’s research into how Quakers have built back better after previous crises. The research was commissioned to focus on Quaker work during and after the first and second world wars. We chose these periods because of the wide scale upheavals in social order that occurred during the world wars and their parallel with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our social order today.

Questions for discussion during the meeting:

- **Did Neil’s account of the testimonies and the excerpt from the QPSW strategy speak to your experience? What does your faith ask of you?**
- **Which Quaker testimony/ies do you feel most drawn to? Why?**
- **How have Quakers been working to build a better social order (towards Heaven on earth)?**



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Homework

After the meeting, take a look at the Quakers in Britain 2 minute [Build back better: joining the dots video](#). This video provides an overview of the different strands of work that Quakers in Britain carries out on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting.

When you have watched the video, take some time to read the reflections of some of the staff who carry out this work. Staff wrote the blogs below to explore the links between this moment we are living in and Quaker work to build a better world.

- [Economic \(tax\) justice](#)
- [Peace education](#)
- [Migrant justice](#)
- [Crime, community & justice](#)
- [Peace & disarmament](#)

Take some time to write down your reflections on the video and blogs. Or, if you prefer to process your thoughts verbally, invite a friend or family member to explore the video and blogs with you.

Questions you might like to consider:

1. During the second activity in the meeting you were asked to reflect on which Quaker testimony/ies you feel most drawn to. Which did you focus on?
 - a. Why?
2. How does this fit with current Quaker work that was outlined in the video and blogs?
3. Which Quaker testimony/ies do you feel called to act on?
 - a. Why?



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MEETING 3: HOW CAN WE PUT OUR FAITH INTO ACTION?

We conclude the Meeting for Learning series with a 90 minute session that explores how we move from our testimonies into action or ‘witness’. The final session invites us to reflect on whose work we might build upon and what strengths we might offer. In doing so, we explore how we fit within a wider web of communities and struggles.

This is important because the changes we want to see are global systemic problems and they are daunting. But by rooting ourselves in our faith, in social action throughout history and in the networks that surround us, we can support each other to make deep and lasting change.

Preparatory materials

Before the meeting, please take a look at [this tool](#) created by Deepa Iyer to help us explore what roles we can play within the web or ‘ecosystem’ around us.

In our lives and as part of movements and organizations, many of us play different roles in pursuit of equity, shared liberation, inclusion, and justice. And yet, we often get lost and confused, or we are newcomers to ongoing social change efforts and don't know where to start, or we are catalyzed into action in the midst of a crisis in our community.

This is a framework that can help individuals, networks, and organizations align and get in right relationship with social change values, individual roles, and the broader ecosystem.

Deepa Iyer

Have a think about which roles you play and when so you can share your reflections in the meeting. If you want to delve deeper before or after the meeting, you can also work through the ‘Reflection guide’ which Deepa has created to accompany the tool.



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Questions for discussion during the meeting:

- **For the Quaker testimony/ies you feel called to act on, who is working on this already or has worked on it in the past?**
- **What do you see as your role (as an individual/ group/ Quaker community) in this work?**
- **What are your strengths & assets? How can you use these to support this work?**

Homework

After the meeting, take a moment to note down your reflections on the Meeting for Learning series. Or, if you prefer to process your thoughts verbally, invite another member of the meetings for learning to share reflections with you.

Questions you might like to consider:

1. What struck you?
2. What will you take away?
3. How will you support yourself as you put your faith into action?

As you think about how you might support yourself, we'd like to leave you with this [Our Stories blog](#) written by two members of Bolton Local Meeting about their 'Making a difference' group.

We first heard about the group in late 2020 and were really excited to learn about the ways members of the group support one another even though they may have different callings. Might there be others in your meetings for learning who would value a space like this? Would you like to find out more about the Making a difference group? If so, you can contact Philip Austin on 01204 382330 or at nfpb@gn.apc.org to find out more.



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YOUR BUILD BACK BETTER TOOLKIT

Below we outline some resources that can support you as you start to develop the specifics of your faith in action. They draw upon the work and resources created by Quakers in Britain and the Build Back Better campaign coalition.

- For an introduction or refresher on taking social action, have a look at sections 2 and 3 of our new resource [‘Taking action for climate justice’](#). These explore how we might take social action and provide a framework for that action – the ‘social action journey’.
- If you would like to get involved with ongoing work by Quakers in Britain for Britain Yearly Meeting, take a look at our [Build Back Better briefing](#) and get in touch with Rebecca Woo on 020 7663 1107 or at rebeccaw@quaker.org.uk to be connected with the relevant staff.
- For anyone who wants to focus on the Build Back Better campaign, there is significant campaign support available for the third key principle: ‘Rebuilding society with a transformative Green New Deal’. This support is offered by an organisation called Green New Deal UK. Sign up for their [email list](#) and take a look at the [Build Back Better campaign resources](#).
- If you want to focus on the Build Back Better campaign but are more interested in one of the other key principles, have a look at the list of organisations in the [Build Back Better coalition](#). See if any of them are already campaigning on an issue you want to work on and take a look at their website to find out how you can get involved.
- Whatever work you have decided to embark upon, if you would like some tools to help you strategise, take a look at the [Turning the Tide toolkit](#). The [Pillars of power tool](#) and [Social speedometer tool](#) are particularly useful to help you ensure the actions you take are effective and gather momentum.

Did you find the Building back better Meetings for Learning series useful? To let us know your thoughts, to share a story of witness or to request support from Quakers in Britain, please email climatejustice@quaker.org.uk or call 020 7663 1046.

The Meeting for Learning series was developed with support from Neil Gibbons, Christine Habgood-Coote and colleagues across Quakers in Britain. We are grateful for the time and feedback they generously shared.