

# CIRcular

For Friends involved in inter-church and interfaith work



Issue 37

Yearly Meeting 2019

## Introduction

The Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations (QCCIR) is the standing committee responsible for keeping Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) informed about the inter-church and interfaith scene in Britain. The committee has a challenging but exciting role representing Friends to other churches and faiths and bringing the views and experiences of other faith communities into the life of BYM. Many of BYM's priorities are shared with other faiths and churches. The sense of urgency around the issues of sustainability and climate justice is shaping cooperation and common action across religious differences.

As Britain's religious landscape changes, it is the work and experiences of local Friends that form the bedrock of Quaker involvement in inter-church and interfaith relationships. As QCCIR develops the project 'The changing face of faith in Britain: How should Quakers respond?' to identify new groups with which Quakers might work, we are always interested in the ways local Friends are exploring and understanding how cooperation with other churches and faiths is working in practice. These experiences are central to understanding the fuller picture.

In this edition of *CIRcular* we share news about the diverse work of Friends locally and nationally. There are many resources available to support interchurch/faith work and we hope that these are of use in developing the rich relationships Quakers have with our many friends and partners, as well as in exploring new connections.

## Faiths working for a low-carbon future

On Sunday 17 February 45 people from different faiths and none gathered at Birmingham Central Mosque for an afternoon of conversation and presentations organised by Birmingham Council of Faiths' Footsteps – Faiths for a Low Carbon Future ([www.footstepsbcf.org.uk](http://www.footstepsbcf.org.uk)), the BAHU Trust



Birmingham Central Mosque. Photo: Naseem Akram.  
Courtesy of the Cadbury Centre ([www.religionresources.org.uk](http://www.religionresources.org.uk))

([www.bahustrust.org.uk](http://www.bahustrust.org.uk)) and Central England Quakers' Low Carbon Commitment Forum. We learned how the teachings of all the major world faiths involve care for the environment.

Rebecca Hawkins from the Climate Coalition began the afternoon by telling us about the Coalition's work, explaining the importance of the recent IPCC report and that global warming must be kept below 1.5 per cent to avert a climate catastrophe.

Kamran Fazil of the BAHU Trust spoke to us about his work on equipping faith leaders to speak in a clear and distinct way about caring for our planet as an act of worship. "In fact," he said "we can all be faith leaders influencing others as well as ourselves towards living a sustainable lifestyle. If we love God, we must love his creation."

Maurizio Silva, a Roman Catholic community worker and Columban, and Father Dominic Innamorati, spoke to us about Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* and the 'Theology of Interconnectedness'. We are instructed that we must radically reshape our relationships with ourselves, with our neighbours, and with the earth. Such a profound change in lifestyles means we need to be "born again" to a fresh lifestyle and consider unborn generations as our neighbours.

As Central England Quakers' Ecumenical and Interfaith Coordinator, I concluded the afternoon with readings from faith resources created especially for this year's #ShowTheLove campaign, choosing readings from the Bible and Quaker *Advices & queries* 41.

The event was part of the Climate Coalition's annual #ShowTheLove campaign (visit [www.theclimatecoalition.org](http://www.theclimatecoalition.org)).

*Claire Bowman, Central England Quakers*

## Church and Peace

Church and Peace is the European ecumenical peace church network that provides support to members of traditional Christian Churches who look to the historic peace churches for leadings on peacebuilding and nonviolence. In both plenary and workshop sessions at the Church and Peace AGM and international conference in 2018, Quakers were referenced as providing examples of historic peacebuilding work and were presented as established models of "theology and practice".

Members of other Churches attend Church and Peace to gain strength from the ecumenical sharing. Friends can take encouragement that this European ecumenical group of people and organisations is passionate in its Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. It offers opportunities for shared information, support and peace activism, which Friends can engage with at a local and national level.

Resources can be found at [www.church-and-peace.org/en](http://www.church-and-peace.org/en).

*Lynda Williams, QCCIR*

## Local Churches Together constitutions – new conversations

The process of writing constitutions for local Churches Together groups is shaped by dialogue, difference, conflict, and joy. Friends will find different situations challenging, and the discernment within a Quaker meeting can lead to diverse types of engagement.

In recent years the membership of Churches Together in Lincoln & District (CTLD) has increased in numbers and diversified in terms of church structure and beliefs as evangelical and Pentecostal communities have joined.

Lincoln Friends have had a long involvement with CTLD, and the non-credal position of Quakers was incorporated into the old constitution. With the



Eoin Stephenson and Evelyn Shire tend the QCCIR stand at Ireland Yearly Meeting in July 2018. Photo: Eoin Stephenson

changing profile of the church scene, there were now new partners with whom we needed to have a dialogue about our position on formal creeds. They had questions they wanted to explore with me as the Quaker representative in a spirit of friendship and curiosity.

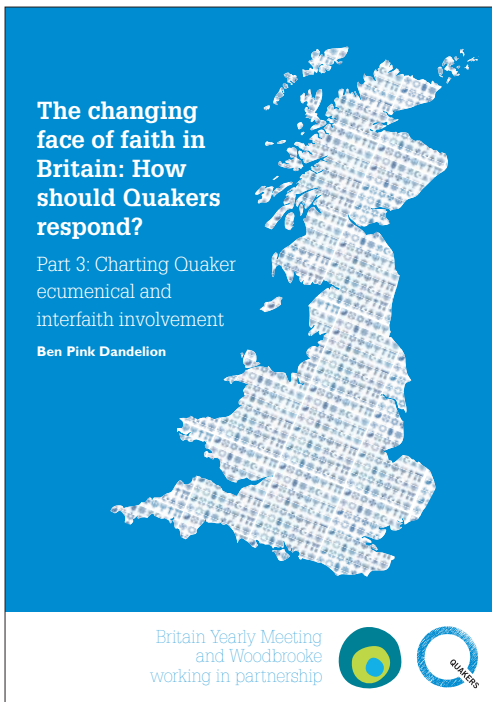
The revision work was led by a steering group made up of members appointed by Churches Together. Working through what text we needed to have in a constitution, we were led to make our aims and work simpler and clearer. At each stage we used our diverse worshipping traditions to inspire us. We had periods of Quaker silence, spontaneous prayer and organised prayers to see us through the re-drafting process. This united us to discern God's guidance for our community.

What was clear in the revision was the importance of understanding one another's church language, reflecting the experience of Quakers with our internal dialogue on *God, words and us*.

As the members of the steering group shared the individual character of our own traditions, we were able to explore the boundaries within which our local churches can 'be' together and then to write a text reflecting that unity.

At the CT meeting that adopted the constitution I read part of Psalm 133: "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!". The conversations I had with the new members of CTLD about my own Quaker experience showed me the importance of open dialogue and friendship in strengthening local unity. The new constitution reflects this.

*Mark Lilley, CTLD Vice-Chair and QCCIR Clerk*



Part 3 of *The changing face of faith in Britain*, a report published by Britain Yearly Meeting in March 2018.

## Young people and interfaith engagement – making a difference together

The Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN) was set up in 1987 to “advance public knowledge and mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the different faith communities in Britain, including an awareness both of their distinctive features and their common ground and to promote good relations between people of different faiths”.

One of the visible highlights of the work each year is Inter Faith Week, organised by the IFN in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and by Interfaith Scotland. Despite the changing landscape of faith in Britain, and amid increasing secularisation, grassroots interfaith activity is increasing. There has been a qualitative shift in terms of interfaith interaction and there is now far more scholarly dialogue and action-based programming.

The focus of the National Meeting in 2018 was on young people and interfaith engagement. It was seen as a culmination of work over eight months, resulting in a ‘call to action’ paper and the publication of *Connect* – a youth interfaith action guide. Frances Hume from Interfaith Scotland gave an impressive account of the work of the Scottish Youth Interfaith Programme. Young people involved in the Connect process gave presentations on their interfaith activities and on their desire for activity-based rather than dialoguing encounters. There is a passion to make a difference.

In the workshop ‘Young people and dialogue, including difficult issues’, we heard of young people working on how to explore the deep and difficult issues of interfaith encounters. There was much discussion on how to create safe spaces so young people can unpack the prejudices of their faith and cultural traditions in a fruitful way, echoing the words of the speaker Rev Canon Dr James Walters of the LSE Faith Centre, who had stressed that we “can’t shy away from difficult conversations or else victimhood festers”.

Copies of all publications can be downloaded from [www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/publications](http://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/publications).

Lynda Williams, QCCIR

## The changing face of faith – developing our stories and work

In 2018 QCCIR commissioned a report – *The changing face of faith in Britain: How should Quakers respond?* – from the Centre for Research in Quaker Studies at Woodbrooke.

Ben Pink Dandelion’s survey of area meeting Friends in part 3 of the report (*Charting Quaker ecumenical and interfaith involvement*) sought to tease out which groups – ecumenical, interfaith or non-religious – local Friends were working with, and uncovered a rich tapestry of stories. In sharing and exploring local experiences, QCCIR seeks to continue and inform the ongoing dialogue around local groups with which Friends can find common cause. There are spiritual and practical reasons for Friends’ ecumenical and interfaith work, and there are moments of both breakthrough and difficulty that accompany this work. Friends explore what they see as their own boundaries and how these are constituted. These were the themes of a joint QCCIR/Woodbrooke conference in 2019. There are a great many faith groups and churches in the existing ecumenical and interfaith structures with whom Quakers have connections, but how can we explore the criteria we have set for ourselves that establish our boundaries? Can we agree with all groups? Are there ideas or attitudes that Quakers would find troubling?

QCCIR wants to develop the work of understanding and identifying the changes in the religious landscape of Britain and would welcome any experiences local Friends have of their connections and cooperation with new groups. Local stories and relationships are significant to all Friends.

*The changing face of faith in Britain: How should Quakers respond?* is available from the BYM website at [www.quaker.org.uk/qccir](http://www.quaker.org.uk/qccir).

## Working with your local Muslim community

Friends across Britain Yearly Meeting stepped up their communication with local Muslim communities following the attack on worshippers at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, on 15 March.

Friends wrote letters and cards expressing sympathy and delivered them to mosques. Others travelled to join Muslims at Friday prayer. Many mosques organised special events to remind everyone of the need for friendship and community, which Friends attended. Public events were held in many cities, at which all faiths participated, and speeches expressing our shared views were given.

At their city event, Michael Wright of Middlesbrough Quakers said:

“We are ready to work with others who seek to build understanding, trust and friendship between men, women and children of different faiths, different ethnic origins, different self-identities, and different political views, including across the Brexit divide. Let us not just talk and pray together,



QCCIR committee members on the steps of Friends House, London, in October 2018. Photo: Eoin Stephenson

but from today begin to know one another better, to learn from each other, and to act together, so that blessings and peace can prosper amongst us all.”

There are many opportunities to engage with your local Muslim community, including participating in shared Iftars or breakfasts during Ramadan, or in joint community projects such as discussions on peace and peacemaking.

*Marigold Bentley, Secretary to QCCIR*

The Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations (QCCIR; *Quaker faith & practice* 9.13) keeps Quakers informed of movements towards cooperation within the Christian Church and opportunities for interfaith dialogue, and it responds on their behalf to other Churches and faith communities.

The Secretary is Marigold Bentley: [marigoldb@quaker.org.uk](mailto:marigoldb@quaker.org.uk), 020 7663 1060.

<b>Current members</b>	<b>Area Quaker Meeting</b>	<b>Serving until end</b>
Mark Lilley (Clerk)	Lincolnshire	04/2021
Kate Arnot	South East Scotland	04/2020
Kim Ashcroft	Sussex East	04/2020
Sue Beardon	Sheffield & Balby	04/2022
Freya Blyth	Nominated by Young Friends General Meeting	10/2020
Claire Bowman	Central England	04/2022
Catherine Brewer	Northumbria	04/2021
Douglas Butterfield (Asst Clerk)	Chilterns	04/2020
Gethin Evans	Nominated by Meeting of Friends in Wales	04/2021
Stephanie Grant	Luton & Leighton	04/2021
Nicola Hoskin-Stone	Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire	04/2020
Huw Lloyd-Richards	East Scotland (co-opted)	12/2021
Judith Mason	Banbury & Evesham	04/2022
Rachel Muers	Leeds (co-opted)	
Evelyn Shire	Craven & Keighley	04/2022
Janet Scott	Cambridgeshire	04/2022
Eoin Stephenson	(Nominated by IYM) Surrey & Hampshire Border	04/2021
Lynda Williams	Southern Marches	04/2020
Marisa Johnson	FWCC EMES Secretary (ex officio)	

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Contributions are welcome for future issues.

The opinions expressed are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the committee.