QUAKER LIFE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

13-15 Oct 2023

A report by Jacinta White (Horsham LM)

Around 50 Quakers from 38 Area Meetings attended the Quaker Life Representatives Council in person at Abingdon, staying at Milton Hill House.  
We were joined by around 15 Friends online for some of the sessions.  
Quaker Life’s purpose is to support Quaker communities to thrive.  
  
It was the Council meeting since the Covid pandemic with the option to meet face to face again. I experienced it as extremely joyful and got the impression other Friends did as well.

Not staying at Woodbrooke for this event, as we had in the past, felt strange, and we spoke of this amongst ourselves but the food was good ( home baked biscuits at coffee time). The rooms were spacious, staff attentive, and the weather was extremely kind.

Abingdon Friends had organised a guided autumn walk to the nearby village of Steventon, taking in the local sights and countryside on Saturday afternoon.  
Not a great walker I decided to try to see if I could do the 2 hours. It was memorable and joyful. It is always worth stepping out of one’s comfort zone……  
  
*Note* I started with the informal side of the event. This is because being together again was so important to me. As Quakers we are more than the sum of our parts when we sustain and nurture our communities. When you look around the circle at our meeting for worship and know that the Light shines through all of us. When you listen to others and speak of things you do not often find the words to name.  
  
There was positive energy as we explored Corks & Boulders with Zelie Gross.  
Zelie encouraged us to use coloured paper, scissors, glue & pens (out of my comfort zone again) to cut out boulders and write on them answering the questions: What anchors your Quaker community? What anchors you as a Quaker? We then got the opportunity to walk around the room and look at the things Friends had written on their boulders. Some boulders: Stillness, mindfulness, attend Peace/ XR protests, role sharing, Sustainability actions, make changes in our meetings and shared lunches.  
  
We need to ask ourselves, ‘What really matters? Why are you a Quaker??  
We can lose heart if we are not comfortable with changes or if our community is not feeling especially healthy. Not the same as it was….  
We need an anchor with solid ground to sink into when the sea gets choppy…..  
Seek a future where we let our lives speak. What does that mean to you?  
Some of the labour that needs to be done in our quaker communities cannot be laid down. Which tasks are fundamental?  
It is also important to remember that self-care means being a responsible Friend when it comes to taking on things that need to be done.  
  
In my home group afterwards we explored this a bit further and it was mentioned we may need to navigate our ship through the boulders.  
This ship carries different things on its journey.That our testimonies could be an anchor and that we also needed a Light house……  
One Friend remarked that corks may seem weaker than boulders but they float so you could make a raft……  
Our facilitator drew a nice poster with the ship & anchor, writing down what it was carrying at a later session when we thought about how we could feedback to our Area Meetings. Feedback can be made visual; creating a simple poster to start a conversation.  
Another suggestion was to travel around your AM visiting the Local Meetings with your story about how you experienced the Quaker Life event rather than having a slot on your AM Business agenda. (Or do both to reach more Friends)?  
  
Tim Gee spoke to us about the Worldwide Family of Friends. It was set up to connect Quakers in many countries. He mentioned that 2024 marks the 400th anniversary of George Fox. This is an opportunity to plan events and activities…..  
He brought his guitar and got us all to sing!  
  
We are encouraged to approach our Local Development workers if we need help.  
There are now 15 of them each in different areas. They can give support and advice about anything to do with your Quaker community.  
  
The leaflet “Our faith in the future” is a word picture of what Quakers in Britain today would like the Society to be like in future. It is very colourful and based on contributions from Quakers throughout Britain. Leaving each individual, meeting or committee free to discern where they are today and then decide what actions they need to take to move their part of the yearly meeting towards this vision.  
To find out more go to [www.quaker.org.uk/future](http://www.quaker.org.uk/future).  
  
We had a final session with Susie Tombs who facilitated an Experiment of Light moment. This helped us to ground before we had Sunday meeting for worship.  
It was good to enter in silence as we had quite a diverse, lively session that morning.  
I had a personal feeling that some Friends present were at some sort of crossroads.  
These are the lines that came to me during the silence.  
  
Travel and do not fear the journey.  
The Light is always with you and all around.  
Wherever it may take you.  
Be on that adventure.  
It will give you peace and Joy.  
  
*Jacinta White, Horsham meeting,  
West Weald Area Meeting.*