

# CIRcular

For Friends involved in local ecumenical and interfaith work



Issue 35

Yearly Meeting Gathering 2017

## From the clerks

The Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations (QCCIR) is a relatively large committee, with 17 members in 2016. These include some ex-officio members such as the YFGM interchurch/faith secretary and the staff member for the Europe & Middle East Section (EMES) of Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC).

In light of the Brexit referendum QCCIR has spent time this year reflecting on the implications for interchurch/faith work and the need for continuing engagement with European churches. The Conference of European Churches (CEC), of which EMES is a member, has taken a proactive line, issuing a rallying call 'What future for Europe?: reaffirming the European project as building a community of values'. In April QCCIR was represented at a conference on this subject in Scotland.

2017 is the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Gretchen Castle, General Secretary of FWCC, reported to QCCIR in January on the launch of the commemorative year in Sweden last October, and BYM will be represented at a service in Westminster Abbey this October. Committee member and theologian Ben Wood has written a paper that we hope will help Friends reflect on the implications of this anniversary for Friends.

QCCIR has a new research partnership with Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre entitled 'The changing face of faith in Britain: how should Quakers respond?'. We are very pleased that BYM Trustees have agreed to fund this, and look forward to sharing the results with Friends.

*Rowena Loverance, QCCIR*

## The changing face of faith in Britain: how should Quakers respond?

Faith observance in Britain is changing and Quakers are not immune. What impact, if any, is the changing face of faith expression in present-day Britain having on British Quakers? Forty-eight



QCCIR's Mark Lilley and Rowena Loverance in Dunblane

per cent of people say they have no religion. At the same time, the number of people with non-religious beliefs and identities is increasing. There is also a growing number who see themselves as 'spiritual but not religious'. This change in society has affected Quakerism too, with membership falling and the age profile of members increasing.

However, as Quakers we are well placed to work both with those with an expressed faith and those without. We are a well recognised liberal church. Our lack of hierarchy, openness of worship and active social and peace concerns may appeal to many 'non-religious' people. Can we identify and learn about new faith and faith-type groups with similar values with whom we can work?

Using legacy funding, QCCIR has initiated a short research project on these issues, which is being carried out by the Centre for Research in Quaker Studies, based at Woodbrooke. By understanding more about these changes within society and exploring how we can work better with them, can we create new partnerships on common causes? Can we develop better relations with other faith communities, both formal and informal, and increase the number and diversity of people who come into contact with Quakerism?

The research will include a survey of new attenders to see what attracted them to the Society. Current faith observance in Britain will be reviewed,

noting trends in the organisation of traditional churches, new forms of church, and spiritual and non-faith communities, for example the Sunday Assembly. There will be a look at some relevant current Quaker projects to identify those where partnership with both religious and 'spiritual/wellbeing' groups would be worth investigating.

The project is now under way. Interim findings will be presented at a special interest group at Yearly Meeting Gathering, and a weekend conference at Woodbrooke is planned for March 2018.

*Bessie White, QCCIR*

## 'Spirituality and End of Life': QCCIR Day Conference, York, 4 March 2017

As well as arranging lively interest groups with guests from other churches and faiths at Yearly Meeting, QCCIR offers Friends the opportunity to attend a stimulating conference each year.

The topic chosen for 2017 complements the work undertaken by Quaker Life Central Committee on end-of-life issues. It gives Friends an opportunity to explore other faith perspectives on end of life.

Fifty-three Friends gathered at York's Friargate Meeting House in March to hear from speakers and participate in workshops on the topic of other faiths and end of life. A highlight for many Friends was the experience of attending a 'death café' – a friendly way to meet people and discuss all issues relating to death and dying.

We were privileged to have morning presentations about end-of-life rituals, practices, beliefs and behaviour from Trupti Patel, the president of the Hindu Forum of Britain, Andrew Foster, the Methodist chaplain at York Hospital, and a previously recorded presentation from Rabbi Amanda Golby, who is a member of the Faith and Dementia Network. These were followed by lively questions. Workshops were offered by the Baha'i faith and palliative care practitioners, and a careful explanation of how to run death cafés was given.

Leeds Area Meeting's book *Assisted dying* was available for sale during the day, and the relaxed atmosphere in the meeting house stimulated many informal discussions among participants during breaks. It was interesting to note that some Friends had travelled from Wales and the West Country, particularly for the interfaith perspective on this topic. They commented that it was a unique perspective for them. The closing plenary was facilitated by the organising team – Hannah Brock (YFGM representative on QCCIR), Ben Wood and Kate Arnot took questions from the floor.

*Marigold Bentley*



Trupti Patel speaking at the QCCIR Day Conference, Friargate Meeting House, York, 4 March 2017. Photo: Marigold Bentley

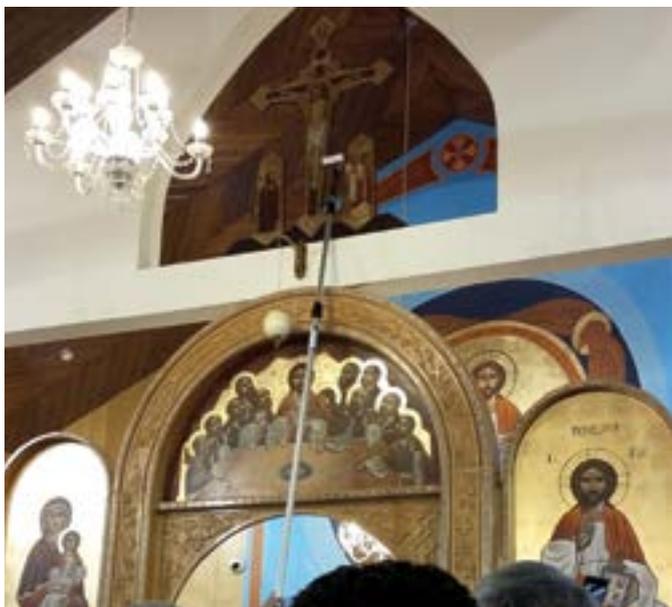
## Meeting with diocesan coordinators for interfaith dialogue

This cheerful meeting of Roman Catholic diocesan coordinators took place from 13 to 14 March at St Anselm's Church in Southall, a parish where at least 250 faithful Catholics attend a midweek mass at 9.15am in the stylish, modern church. With them were two Quakers – Bessie White and Fred Ashmore – and Alan Dixon of the Salvation Army, invited to take part and enjoy the proceedings.

The first afternoon of exchanges included wise and helpful comments on the importance of working together and the value of shared meals to exchange thoughts and insights. We shared a meal and visited a night shelter in a local Anglican parish, but run by the Southall Interfaith Forum with mixed faith volunteers. Most of the users are Punjabi speakers, who have come to the UK to seek their fortune but have found it harder than they thought.

On the second day we met a rich mixture of other faith leaders contributing special insights and lively comments. I had a very strong sense that Southall is many faiths but one community. We heard of some of the tense and difficult events in the past 40 years, during which faith groups have supported and protected one another. I met the Hindu leader who, as Mayor of Ealing, used his casting vote on a planning committee to achieve consent for a mosque. I also met Charanjit Ajit Singh, former director of education for the borough and long active in a variety of interfaith organisations. The comment "I thought Indian women are downtrodden" was greeted with mirth by her husband and all of us.

This is the value of these interfaith encounters – breaking stereotypes and puncturing assumptions. Southall works well because its geography makes face-to-face meetings easy. The general advice



Anointing the icons in St Mark and Pope Kyrillos VI Coptic Orthodox Church, Hounslow, May 2017. Photo: Bessie White

was that you have to find opportunities to meet people.

The event ended with a visit to what is claimed to be the largest Gurdwara in Europe. We were given a tour followed by a presentation of the key principles of Sikh belief and an enjoyable meal, served around the clock to anyone who wants it. "To think about God, it is better not to be hungry."

*Fred Ashmore is a member of Kingston & Wandsworth Area Meeting*

## Visit by Coptic Pope

In May Bessie White and Anne van Staveren represented BYM at a special service at St George's Coptic Cathedral in Stevenage. It was led by His Holiness Pope Tawadros II at the start of the first pastoral visit by a Coptic Pope to the UK. There were many other guests representing churches and inter-church organisations.

The lively service was led by singing from a male choir in white robes and red damask sashes, accompanied only by cymbals and triangle. The sanctuary was open to reveal the altar and glorious wall painting behind.

Messages of support came from Theresa May and the Archbishop of Canterbury, other senior church leaders and the Egyptian Ambassador. Between them they stressed the faithfulness of the Coptic Church in the face of persecution. John Sentamu, Archbishop of York, quoted the African phrase "If the toe is hurting the whole body bends down. Anyone who touches you is doing the same to us".

Two days later I had the privilege of attending a second service officiated by Pope Tawadros II

for the consecration of a new Coptic Church in my home area of West London. The Pope and other clergy spread holy oil on the altar in the sanctuary and each icon was anointed with a long roller. Ruth Cadbury MP and the Chair of the Interfaith Group made brief speeches of congratulations.

*Bessie White, QCCIR*

## Christians Across Watford – a locally based Christian unity movement

For some years I have been joining with local Christian leaders for regular breakfast meetings. The group is called Christians Across Watford, with a strapline 'learning to be one church in and for our town'. More recently I also joined them for annual 30-hour residential events. The power of the Spirit moving at these events has been palpable, our differences laid aside as we have sought to know how God would have us serve our town.

I have learnt from Gather, a national network of unity movements, that:

"All over this country, in cities, towns and villages, God has been doing a hidden work. Christian leaders and churches over the last twenty years have been forming vibrant mission-focused unity movements based on a foundation of prayer and friendship."

[www.gather.global/about](http://www.gather.global/about)

This unity movement is springing from the grass-roots, and Gather is tracking and linking these groups: another aspect of the changing face of faith in our country today.

*Stephanie Grant, QCCIR*

## Thy Kingdom Come

Thy Kingdom Come is a global prayer movement that invites Christians around the world to pray between Ascension and Pentecost for more people to come to know Jesus Christ. What started as an invitation from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in 2016 to the Church of England has grown into an international and ecumenical call to prayer.

The initiative is expressed in 'Christian' language, but noting the diversity of views and the openness of Friends about the meaning of prayer, and that the initiative encourages individual expression, QCCIR felt that this period of prayer would fit well with the local work of Friends in their interchurch relationships. It was advertised to Quakers by means of an article in *The Friend* and information on our cluster group.

*Stephanie Grant, QCCIR*

## QCCIR 2017

We know that humanity is in turbulent times (a theme to be addressed during Quaker Week later this year). QCCIR represents an aspect of Friends' steady, thoughtful and respectful committee work, which goes on throughout the year on behalf of the yearly meeting. The activities change year-on-year depending on discernment and religious context. Yet the acknowledgement that Quakers in Britain must be represented through the ecumenical instruments (Churches Together in England, Churches Together in Wales – Cytûn, Action by Churches Together in Scotland, and Churches Together in Britain & Ireland) remains consistent. QCCIR also benefits from a wider European religious perspective through the contribution of



QCCIR members gathered at Old Churches House, Dunblane, in June 2017. Photo (and cover photo): Eoin Stephenson

the Europe & Middle East Section of Friends World Committee for Consultation. I am thankful that Friends offer their service on this committee.

*Marigold Bentley, June 2017*

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, 020 7663 1060.

<b>Current members</b>	<b>Area Quaker Meeting</b>	<b>Serving until end</b>
Rowena Lovrance (Clerk)	London West	04/2019
Kate Arnot	South East Scotland	04/2020
Kim Ashcroft	Sussex East	04/2020
Hannah Brock	Nominated by Young Friends General Meeting	10/2017
Douglas Butterfield	Chilterns	04/2020
Stephen Clement	Nominated by Young Friends General Meeting	10/2017
Gillian Court	Northamptonshire	04/2019
Gethin Evans	Nominated by Meeting of Friends in Wales	04/2018
Stephanie Grant	Luton & Leighton	04/2018
Nicola Hoskin-Stone	Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire	04/2020
Mark Lilley (Asst Clerk)	Lincolnshire	04/2018
Rachel Muers	Leeds (co-opted)	
Evelyn Shire	Craven & Keighley	04/2019
Eoin Stephenson (Asst Clerk)	(Nominated by IYM) Surrey & Hampshire Border	05/2018
Bessie White	London West	04/2018
Ben Wood	Leeds	04/2019
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.