

THE YOUNG QUAKER

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Identity and Values



“One of the unexpected things I have learnt in my life as a Quaker is that religion is basically about relationships between people. This was an unexpected discovery, because I had been brought up to believe that religion was essentially about our relationship with God.

If we are sensitive, we find that everything that happens to us, good or bad, can help us to build a vision of the meaning of life. We can be helped to be sensitive by reading the Bible and being open to experience of nature, music, books, painting, sport or whatever our particular interest may be. It is in and through all things that we hear God speaking to us. But I do not think I am alone in my certainty that it's in my relationships with people that the deepest religious truths are most vividly disclosed. “

George Gorman, 1982

News

YFGM Roles Review Meeting

On Saturday the 29th, 13 YFGMers gathered in London to examine the current roles in YFGM. Despite the 32 degree heat, Westminster Meeting House provided a cool refuge for us to talk, listen openly to one another, and question some of level of work of the volunteer roles we ask our YFGM members to do for the community. This was part of an important process in examining how best to continue to run out YFGM gatherings without asking too much of our community or role holders. After all, YFGM gatherings are run by the community, for the community, and over the past few gathering we have recognised the importance of looking again and what each role does.

We began the day by considering what YFGM is to us and to bring our reflections to the roles review back to basics. We asked ourselves 'what can we reasonably ask of roleholders to preserve these central aspects of YFGM' not 'what can we ask of roleholders fullstop'.

Through periods of silent worship and careful clerk/eldership a sense of worshipful sharing was felt by the group. We understood that we need to review the terms of references for our roles to make sure accountability is there to protect the role holder and the community, make these readily available, and offer training for role holders where possible. We hope this is reflected in the results of the roles review meeting. The work from Saturday meeting will go back to the wider YFGM meeting in October 2019 before anything is implemented formally.

Welcome to New YFGM Coordinator

We are excited to welcome Simon Overington-Hickford as YFGM's new coordinator! This YFGM will be Simon's first YFGM, and he has previously been an attender at Blackheath Meeting, Watford Meeting and JYM. Simon will be the coordinator up to August 2020.

Quakers disrupt world's biggest arms fair

Hundreds of Quakers took part in a week of non-violent direct action against the world's largest arms fair in London 2-9 September. The DSEI (Defence Security and Equipment International) arms fair happens once every two years at the ExCel centre in London Docklands, and allows arms buyers and sellers to network and make deals with some of the worlds largest arms companies. The peaceful protests aimed to disrupt the set-up of the arms fair before it took place 9-12 September. Events included a climate justice day, a migration and borders day, and a no faith in war day. A Meeting for Worship was held on 3rd September, which was broken up by police who ordered the participants to move. The actions of the police officers have been criticised for not being respectful of the Meeting as a religious gathering. Around 50 people were arrested for not moving at the Meeting, and around 116 people were arrested throughout the week.

International Day of Peace 2019: 'Climate Action for Peace'

The United Nations International Day of Peace takes place every year on 21st September, with this year's theme focusing on 'climate justice for peace'. The day involved a large number of peace organisations, including Quakers, from across the world issuing a joint statement to call on governments to move from commitment to action on peace. The UN describes the day as "devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, both within and among all nations and peoples". This year, the statement focused on "draw[ing] attention to the importance of combatting climate change as a way to protect and promote peace throughout the world".

News

Quakers involved in Youth Climate Strike

Friends from across the UK have been involved in a week of action starting 20th September calling on political leaders to take urgent action to avert climate breakdown. Young Friends took part in strikes from school and lessons, and other activists have also been involved in actions to show support and solidarity. Quakers in Britain have issued a statement of support for the strikes:

“We are facing climate breakdown. The impacts are already fanning the flames of war, injustice and ecological destruction around the world. Those who have done the least to create this crisis are being hit hardest. Yet, as a faith community that values all human life and the planet we share, we take hope and inspiration from a global movement demanding urgent climate action. Together, we must hold those in power to account and build a truly sustainable and just economy.

“Quakers in Britain uphold those taking part in and supporting the Global Climate Strikes, including our staff members. To confront our climate crisis we must question business as usual. We thank the youth strikers for their leadership for this day of action.”

Quaker Peace and Social Witness 2020 Conference

The annual Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW) conference is now open for registration. The conference will take place 20-22 March 2020 at Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick, Derbyshire. QPSW is planning to include work programmes on: Peace education, Peace and disarmament, EAPPI, Climate and economic justice, East Africa, Turning The Tide and Sanctuary Everywhere. Registration, and more information about the conference, is available at: <https://www.quaker.org.uk/events/2020-qpsw-spring-conference>.

National Quaker Week

This year's annual 'Quaker week' took place from 22nd September to 6th October. This year's theme was on 'Quaker stories'. Quaker meetings, schools and other Quaker venues across the country have held outreach events to celebrate Quaker work, faith and community. This included a weekend retreat at Charney Manor on 'Finding out about Quakers: a retreat for enquirers' run by members of the Quaker Quest team. The week also involved Friends across the UK sharing their Quaker stories on social media, using the hashtags #QuakerWeek and #QuakerStories.

Quakers take part in animal rights march

Friends from across the UK were among the 12,000 vegan activists who took part in a record-breaking march last month demanding 'an end to all animal oppression' and blockading Trafalgar Square for almost an hour.

London Peace Walk is back weather permitting

The London Younger Quaker worship group were forced to delay their peace history walk as strong winds and rain stopped it from going ahead. Yet, the city's young adult Quakers will not be put off as the history of non-violent activism around their part of central London is too deep to ignore. The stories of feminist and LGBT+ activists, socialist and anti-colonial militants, campaigners for civil rights and peace, all united by their commitment to radical non-violent change, all have a place in a few square miles of central London. Be it the YMCA near Tottenham court road where the first black civil rights group in the UK was founded, a nondescript house near Charing Cross where the women's freedom league struggled for feminism, socialism and peace was headquartered, or a flat a few metres away from the British museum where Bertrand Russell was arrested for refusing to kill, all these stories and so many others of people struggling for justice and peace can be found on the history walk that London Young Quakers will certainly be walking very soon (weather permitting).

Changes to the Gender Recognition Act

Lynda Berry shares the conclusions of the Brighton Young Friends on transgender inclusion issues in the Quaker community

I am going to write about something hard to write about; the tension over changes to the Gender Recognition Act. I am a cis woman, who, until recently, had never encountered feminists who reject trans women as women and is still working on my awareness of transgender issues. Last August, I attended a Quaker friend's funeral and met a Brighton Quaker who updated me on the conflict between transgender individuals and feminists groups. The conversation had become polarised, and no communication or understanding was possible. Brighton Meeting itself had to struggle with whether to cancel a booking made by A Women's Place, which takes an anti-transgender stance.

In 2004 it was a breakthrough to be able to change a birth certificate. Now times have changed, and in 2016 the Women and Equalities Select Committee listened to the evidence of transgender people on the shortcomings of the act. The proposals put forward was to allow individuals to self identify without the need to be diagnosed with 'gender dysmorphia or having to undergo surgery or hormone replacement'. Britain is not alone in either reviewing or rewriting legislation of this nature; However, some women's groups have objected strongly. These groups are concerned that changes to the act could allow access to women's spaces by men who could use a Gender Recognition Certificate as subterfuge.

The Quaker Life Committee is aware that many Quakers are now exploring gender diversity and seeking to become more aware of these issues. In response, they have written a statement as a starting point for this discussion within the wider Quaker community. Brighton Young Quakers took up the opportunity to explore and respond.

They met on the 19/02/2019 and 19/03/2019

to discuss the Quaker Life Central Committee's Initial Statement on Gender Diversity. Young Brighton Quaker's found aspects of the Initial Statement troubling. Firstly its attempt to be even-handed seemed to ignore the terrible violence and discrimination faced by trans and non-binary people. The police recorded 1,651 hate crime offences against trans people in England and Wales in 2017-18. This number is likely a significant underestimate of the true extent of transphobic hate crimes due to under-reporting, a consequence of the many years of police harassment and violence faced by trans people.

Brighton Young Quakers reject the Initial Statement's claim that the women's groups, Woman's Place and Fair Play for Women, are not transphobic. These groups produce materials which depict trans women as violent, sexually offending men, placing trans women at higher risk of hate crime. They are concerned that these feminist groups are using Quaker spaces to gain legitimacy. It should be a Quaker policy to not allow them bookings in the same way that a group critical of homosexuality would not be welcome.

BYQ hope that future statements will seek to throw more light on the complexity of the conversations about gender diversity. There is still much to be done in educating Friends about gender diversity and the changes which have been proposed by the new Gender Recognition Act. It is, for example, untrue that the Gender Recognition Act will affect who is eligible to use single-gender spaces. It is the Equality Act of 2010, which defines this.

Quakers have to lead the way once we have unified on an issue; however, it took forty years for Quakers to stand up for equal marriage. Hopefully, this will not be the case for gender diversity.

Climate Perks

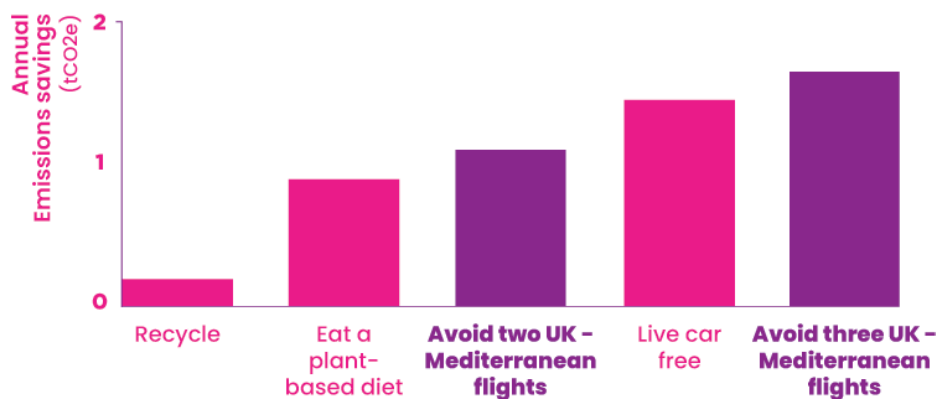
Cathy Hall describes a new employee incentive scheme for climate-friendly holiday travel

A new policy was introduced at my company recently, one that surprised and excited me. If an employee chooses to avoid using flights for their personal holiday travel, the company will offer (extra) paid leave to cover a longer journey time. The initiative is run by the UK-based NGO Climate Perks, whose aim is to help cut carbon emissions by reducing the incentive to fly. Their website offers various statistics in support of their goals:

- 50% of people are ready to reduce the amount they fly, but only 3% actually do
- Each year, only half the population gets on a plane
- 70% of flights are taken by just 15% of the population

Cutting the number of flights taken should be a relatively easy way to reduce an individual's carbon footprint. A hard-hitting graph on the website, reproduced here, makes this clear. Surely, I thought to myself, it would be less effort for me to replace a short-haul flight with a train and ferry than to actually stop eating cheese.

Most flights are taken by professionals; people who have limited annual leave and wouldn't want to waste it on a long train trip when they could catch a plane instead. Time is what stands in the way, influencing people to fly even though they are sensible of its impact on the environment. The NGO has identified that employers are perfectly placed to promote a change in travel habits by rewarding, or at least compensating for, more environmentally friendly behaviours.



Source: S. Wynes and K.A. Nicholas 2017 *Environ. Res. Lett.* 12 074024

One of my favourite things about Climate Perks is the way in which it influences people into making environmentally positive choices. Even the name brings out the positivity in their approach. Rather than trying to influence people's personal choices within a system that makes it difficult, their approach is to try to change the system to make the climate-friendly option the more appealing one.

Imagine if the vegan products in the corner shop were as varied and tasty as the non-vegan ones? That would certainly influence my eating habits. Again, the barrier is time (and energy). It takes more effort to travel further to go to a supermarket that stocks things I think it is more ethical to eat. So, I will definitely think twice about my travel plans to my next holiday destination, although it's still cheese for now, I guess.

Visit <https://www.climateperks.com> for more information, and details of how companies can get involved.

Voluntourism in The Gambia

When Bryan Osborne of the Lisa Kent Trust contacted us about putting an advert in The Young Quaker, I took the liberty of asking him some questions about his personal journey with the charity and as a Quaker

How is the Lisa Kent Trust connected with Quakerism?

The Lisa Kent Trust was founded in 2001 following the death of a nurse called Lisa Kent in an accident. Lisa had a love of children. Our founder, Liz Tinkler, was aware of the need for more education in Gambia. Liz is a member of her local Baptist church in Comberton Cambridgeshire. I was first drawn to the Trust in 2012 and was touched deeply by the purity of the journey this charity was on. At this point I had not become a Quaker although inside in the darkest corners I had been Quaker. The Lisa Kent Trust draws strongly on both Faith and on Christian values.

How does the Lisa Kent Trust's work incorporate Quaker values?

Before traveling the second time I had a chance encounter with a Quaker friend. I had no idea where this would lead. He had been struck by bereavement in The Gambia and further meetings began to engage me with the whole idea of being Quaker. I sought the grave of his family member in The Gambia and couldn't find it. I returned saddened but to smiles and encouragement. I had my first Meeting for Worship in 2017. It was a most emotional experience. I asked to join as a Member later and now I am a Member at St Neots Meeting, a small, relatively new Meeting in Cambridgeshire.

I returned again to Gambia in 2016. I had had a kindling spiritual journey and was aware of far more human need. I was drawn to the connection with young people in The Gambia as well as towards what I now know are our Quaker Testimonies. By this time I was sponsoring a child's education in The Gambia with Lisa Kent Trust, and I was following my Quaker values in my work with them.

Although I am the ONLY Quaker working with Lisa Kent Trust, the path of Quaker and the Traditional Christian Church run together in shared values. This is an incredible path.

How have your experiences with the Lisa Kent trust affected your journey and witness as a Quaker (personally)?

My life is now one of encounter, connection and sharing of the values I carry as a Quaker. It has been an amazing and constantly developing journey.

I was asked by Lisa Kent Trust to become a Trustee. The Trust is blessed by very sincere spiritual and human values and these are reflected in the work the Trust seeks to do and in the delivery of education. The Trust provides the young in its schools with opportunity, confidence and a sense of values.

I am probably one of the very few Quakers actively working in projects in The Gambia, I cannot say THE only one!

I am a member of QIAG (Quakers in Africa) Group and it is a joy to work with this group and to share and to learn from our combined work. Without the encounter and my journey with Lisa Kent Trust I just wouldn't be here.

Lisa Kent Trust is NOT an evangelical mission but one that seeks to give the young of The Gambia the opportunity for a future and not just an existence.

My own Faith is so richly enhanced by my experience of the The Gambian community and the small part I play there with Lisa Kent Trust.

Voluntourism?

Its really about Encounters, Sharing, Discovering and Enrichment. It gave me a great "spotlight" to the start of my path as a Quaker.

You may or may not find it as powerful, but by joining Lisa Kent Trust for an experience in The Gambia I will guarantee that there will be Joy, Friendship, Self Discovery, Emotions (by the bucket load) and probably a few Tears.

I know that those who travel with us come home somehow far more "connected".

Voluntourism in The Gambia; A new way to help



Lisa Kent Trust offers unique trips to the Gambia where you can experience life in a developing country and experience the culture and way of life of the Gambians.

You will stay in good quality accommodation away from the tourist area and be able to mix with the local community. You will have the expertise of an experienced guide as well as the opportunity to join in with some of the following:

- Cookery workshops – where you will visit the local market to buy produce and then cook it in the Gambian way!
- Bird watching
- Wildlife and boat trips,
- Visit to local craft markets
- Visits to our schools and the opportunity to work with our teachers and the children, and really get to understand the differences between Gambian and UK education systems

All our trips are tailor-made to suit the individuals. Price are £1,500 (flights included), and are from 1 week upwards. All transport in the Gambia, trips and some meals are provided.

On each trip the Trust runs brings people offering very different skills. Recently a young student nurse experienced a very different approach to nursing by working in a local clinic. On day 3 she delivered a baby the delight of all concerned! This was a fantastic experience but also resulted in a great bond being formed between the mother and the Lisa Kent Trust.

A hearing and language therapist also experienced time in our schools. Many children had their ears checked, resulting in quite a few being diagnosed with problems therefore enabling the problems to be dealt with. Other volunteers worked in small groups with children helping them to catch up.

For more detailed information visit the website www.lisakenttrust.org or call directly on 07803 123023 or email: bryan.osborne@lisakent-trust.org

You can see more about th Lisa Kent Trust's work here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlkpKFk-7sIY>

Writers...

The editors would like to thank all those who have contributed to this edition of *The Young Quaker*.

It would be impossible to produce the magazine without the ideas, articles and illustrations that you send in.

We're always looking for new material. If you've got an idea for an article, photo, drawing or poem you'd like to see in *The Young Quaker*, get in touch with us. The next issue, due out in time for the next YFGM in May, will have a submission deadline of 1st April 2019.

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Cover photo by Elly Shine

What is...

The Young Quaker is a magazine for young Friends everywhere, produced in print and online. Published by Young Friends General Meeting, TYQ comes out three times a year, to coincide with YFGM weekends, meaning that you can expect a new issue in February, May, and October, full of news, comment, and more.

Young Friends General Meeting is a community for young adult Quakers aged 18-30ish, in Britain. Our main events are the three General Meetings which take place at Quaker meeting houses around the country in February, May, and October each year.

If you'd like to get involved in YFGM, come along to a YFGM event, or to find out more visit www.yfgm.quaker.org.uk or email yfgm@quaker.org.uk. You can also find the YFGM group on Facebook.

Quakers, or the Religious Society of Friends, are a religious group with Christian origins. Quaker worship is mostly silent, with people speaking when called to do so by the 'Inner Light', sometimes called 'that of God within everyone'.

Central to Quakerism are the Testimonies of Peace, Equality, Truth, Simplicity and Sustainability. A commitment to these principles has put Quakers at the forefront of political and social issues; campaigning for the abolition of slavery and more recently for the legalisation of same-sex marriage.

YFGM Catch Up (May 2019)

By **Sam Cooper and Rici Marshall Cross, co-clerks**

We gathered in Liverpool for a weekend of focusing on our community with friends new and old. In our business sessions we took the next steps of our commitments to trans and non-binary inclusion, and of our ongoing roles review. Business was conducted with a note of joy, and we heard ministry expressing positivity and even gratitude on what YFGM has so far discerned and achieved, and optimism about the future. In a Mental Health in Meetings workshop, we considered how we can improve support for Friends within YFGM who are facing mental health challenges, and highlighted the need for good guidance for our role-holders in knowing where boundaries are. Our Mental Wellbeing Concern, which we discerned in February still lived and worked amongst our community, continues to underpin our work and witness, and particularly our consideration of how roles are undertaken, which will continue in June and October. We enjoyed meeting with local friends, and a plethora of SIGs from Quaker service to Lindyhop were met with enthusiasm, and a treasure hunt around the meeting house which brought out our competitive side. Our Sunday was filled with space and light; an afternoon of unstructured time allowed us to worship and play. We explored Liverpool, visited museums and made a Quaker coat of arms, played board games, talked and talked, and brought our Meeting for Worship out into the city, while families played, people passed by and the birds sang in Chavasse Park. In spirituality sessions we explored what it meant to hold someone in the light, and in a long session that ran into our epilogue we held in the light our living and our dead, and we held one another. And throughout the weekend we cooked and cleaned together, working side by side on the day-to-day tasks that allow our community to run.