

Quaker Outreach Then and Now

We arrived in Kings Langley in 1960 with four young children and a dog. Impressed by Friends Peace Testimony I had recently been accepted into membership. My Monthly Meeting alerted the local Meeting to our move into their area. Our new neighbours Jim and Freda Scott, both birthright Friends, were not dismayed and greeted us with a cake. They were wonderful neighbours, true Quakers, and we in turn looked after them in their older age. Dear Freda ironed our numerous shirts and Jim drove me to Hemel Hempstead Meeting. I have been a Member for nearly fifty years, and seen my Meeting's ups and downs, our overworked clerks and the difficulties of wardenship. Couples have had to work together to balance family needs against the demands of Meeting.

If our Meetings are to survive I suggest we have less words and more celebrations. We must not become "thou shalt nots" but try to reflect the healing and humour of Christ's teaching in the way we live. Silence by itself is not enough. Our worthy works worldwide are splendid and imaginative but may make enquirers feel inadequate. They are fully occupied with elderly relations and grandchildren. If we have reached an enquirer how do we connect with them? Somehow we must give them our precious time and try to explain our beliefs, while we listen to theirs. In fact "lifting each other up with a tender hand". As it

was stressed by JYM we need to connect. Would it be possible to devote half an hour before Meeting for Worship to making these connections? A Quaker half hour in fact.

Can we somehow share the business meetings so that they are enjoyable with less words and lengthy minutes? *The Friend*, worthy and wordy, could possibly encourage members' creativity so that we feel involved? See *Quaker Life* - it says it all. We do sometimes laugh at ourselves and that could be our salvation!

I have attempted outreach and feel I have failed. I tried to explain my beliefs to a dear friend here in the care home. He was interested enough to send for the literature but it did not inspire him. He says he has not enough belief to respond in any way at present. We have our own language of course but it means very little to those people we are trying to reach. We tell them we do not gamble, do not take oaths, are not extravagant, and denounce violence. Everyone has a different experience of God so it is difficult to generalise, but surely it is possible to discuss it if we have time in a Quaker half hour. We must not be stuck in our past but change perhaps introducing beauty into our ways of worship – music or poetry; making peace studies challenging and thought provoking?