

**Response to *The Friends Quarterly Essay competition***

From: [REDACTED]

## **What will guide Quakers over the coming decades?**

### **Answer = More Texts Like This**

When we saw the invitation to try to answer the question 'What will guide Quakerism over the coming decades' we thought that rather than have a long discussion followed by a composite 5000 word minute we would move in the opposite direction. We are a small meeting - twelve on a good day but more often seven or eight - and when it was suggested that we should try to write a response with the minimum of discussion in a series of eight minute sessions of silent writing it seemed close enough to Quaker traditions to be worth trying.

There was little taste for editing other than looking for literals and blatant grammatical errors. The faith and practice of considered 'spoken ministry' was our beacon and the techniques of emailing our comfort. We would not let each other stumble. If our processes were right then just as we can find strength when we open our core publications at random so will others begin to see what we were trying to express and in love build on our footings.

### **Contributors:**

## **Text**

### **Bread and Veggie pies**

A Friend in our meeting sometimes brings bread she has baked. She grinds the grains in order to make the bread, and she offers the bread to us, when we are 'calling' (said with a short 'a') after Meeting for Worship.

When we did this writing exercise another Friend brought some vegetable pies which she had baked and which she warmed through in her camper van oven. They were simply delicious.

Both the offer of the bread and the giving of the pie are acts of communion: central in a coming together to share food.

Though Quakerism is not without its ritual, it is not ritualistic and there is no hierarchy in how people are fed.

### **Why we wrote in this way**

As a meeting we felt uncomfortable with the idea of competition offered in the advertisement but we could use the prize money to support some charities. We looked for a Quaker, but modern, way to respond. Before us was the knowledge that the Bible is a collective document written by a number of contributors. Similarly, *Faith & Practice* is a collective document, as are the key documents of most religions. We have reflected this principle in our submission and used computers and emails to think about how to move into the next decades.

### **Area Meetings & Committees**

Area meetings are becoming difficult. We find it hard to find representatives to fill the posts at all the meetings and committees we are entitled to attend. I also think it is difficult to justify the time and petrol costs involved. We are fighting climate change yet we often travel thirty miles for meetings. We should make them more manageable by using telephone conferencing and email.

### **Equality**

As a conscientious objector I had heard and read about the Quakers' non-violent approach. When I first came to England I wanted to experience a Quaker meeting. I found the long silence difficult at first but appreciated the beautiful flower arrangement. About 30 years later when I got fed up with unimaginative sermons in the evangelical church I went again to a Quaker Meeting. This time I appreciated the silence but also the equality among attenders and the possibility for everyone to make any contributions in word and deed without being prevented by hierarchical structures.

I now feel the beauty of the inclusiveness and the responsibility that rests on every attender to make his or her contribution. The freedom from dogma is very refreshing and the general belief that our entire lives should be the witness rather than our words only seems to be genuine.

## **A Constant Flow**

As we understand the foundation of our religious body, our basic beliefs, we need to enable this to flow through the organisation that is the Society of Friends.

The society has a complicated mesh of committees – national, regional, area, local, and I wonder 'Are these fit for purpose?'. Do they reflect our basic beliefs and how can they be adapted or evolved to fit into the times we live in now?

Change is difficult for everyone and being the inclusive, equal body we are, change happens slowly, because we have to find consensus.

However I want to think practically as the area meetings vary and our area, Central Yorkshire, is a spread eagled, thinly spaced one, making it hard to find people to serve on all the committees, with the result that this hinders the work needing to be done, even when the initial intention was positive.

Finding the balance between not losing the smaller and very valuable meetings like ours and streamlining the areas and ensuing committees is a challenge for Quakers in the next few years.

## **The nature of the Society and our environmental commitment**

As I sit to write this, it seems that there are two key aspects of development that I need to address. These aspects are summed up in the questions 'Who are we?' and 'What do we do in relation to ourselves, others, the World around us, and God?' Both questions are important, I think, because they deal with our internal and external states as Quakers.

'Who are we?' here is intended to denote our identity as a faith group – our values, attitudes, beliefs and so on, which is interlinked with the other, more external and active question 'What do we do?' - the actions which grow out of our internal spiritual states of being.

During one of the very first Meetings for Worship that I attended, I became aware of the close presence of God, a stillness and nearness which left me feeling entirely accepted. Then, in the peaceful, (self?) satisfied silence of my mind and spirit, a small voice spoke: 'Good then. You have experienced God. Now what are you going to do about it?'

That question really is my own personal take on St Paul's statement that faith without works is dead. It will obviously lead different people to give different answers. Some of my answers are below.

For me, in terms of the question 'Who are we?' I feel prompted to write about the nature of the Society itself and the on-going debate: are we a Christian organisation, or post-Christian, or theist, or something else?

Powerful positions have been struck and weighty words spoken and written in this debate - and will be. This is good.

My own comment is that one of the reasons that I came into the Society was the sense of openness and inclusivity that I experienced during my first meetings and in most of the meetings that I have attended thereafter.

Is the Society essentially Christian, or a group with Christian roots that has formed new links with a wide range of other faith groups, or is it evolving into a wholly new faith group? I would argue that these are vast questions that cannot and should not be answered definitively at the start of the twenty first century.

If faith and spirituality are for us a way rather than a destination then the Society is right to take an evolutionary attitude to such issues. So the nature of the Society will necessarily be revealed over time - and will be constantly revealed, in the same way as the nature of God is being constantly revealed to those who seek God.

Reach out to God and God - whoever, whatever, wherever God is - will reach out to you. This process is something that will occur through the whole of our lives and beyond. If God is the 'great I am', no matter what faith you subscribe to, this leads me to argue that God by God's very nature will in many ways remain infinite and unknown. It is alright to know what you know of God as well as to acknowledge that there are things that you do not know. To continue that changing conversation with yourself, with others and with God is a precious, vital state to be in.

The second aspect I feel led to write about is our involvement in protecting and nurturing the environment. Recently Radio Four's *Sunday* programme featured a speaker who argued that all deeply-held convictions may lead to spiritual groups forming. He pointed to environmentalism as a potential faith grouping of the future.

Quite so, this movement may develop in such a way. I am prompted to think of other faith groups which have venerated Nature and our and God's sacred place within it, for example,

Pagans, Celtic Christians, Practitioners of African Tribal Spirituality, to name but a few. Quakers surely have a place on such a list.

### **Ground Rules**

Before you can discuss any issue, there is a need to establish ground rules. What language are we using? What are the basic ideas from which I develop my argument?

I am a religious person - I believe there is a force for good - let's call this force God. I also believe that we can listen to this inner God or we can ignore this inner God, but each of us has the power to contact that of God within ourselves if we choose.

'Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us into new life.'

I belong to a religious society which is a group of people who acknowledge this force for good and acknowledge that of God within themselves and within me. This is the central and most important statement.

There will be those who cannot accept the statement I make about God: that is up to them. We were each created individuals and each must find their own worth.

This is my experience; what is your experience?

We are a Society with the central meaningful statement, 'What is your experience?' For some, their experience leads them to make a central statement which is different from mine, but my experience has led me to make these statements. This is my creed. A creed must be more than a notion, it must be a way.

We can sit together in a meaningful silence.

The Society of Friends is a group that has no unifying creed, but is centred on a method of worship - the silent meeting - and a method of business administration.

The Quaker Meeting for Worship is centred on a meaningful silence. Being silent the worship can contain several languages and still be a united and meaningful silence. For those whose creed is different from mine, they and I have to accept that we are speaking a different language.

My experience has led me to believe that Jesus had a special relationship with God. What that relationship is, is something I am trying to work out. What is clear is that relationship led to a unique body of teaching that helps me to relate to that of God within me.

Jesus taught one prayer, that prayer contains the statement 'Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.' That statement is the future of the Religious Society of Friends.

The prayer which contains this statement gives us an idea of what that Kingdom will be like: a kingdom that is like heaven, where people are at peace with themselves and with each other; a kingdom where each of us has, each day, 'our daily bread'; where we forgive those who trespass in the way we hope we will be forgiven if we trespass.

Are we there yet?

If not the Society of Friends still has a job to do - a reason to be, over the coming decades.

### **Partnerships**

The Buddhists' note left on the draining board read, 'We have taken your teabags. Ta'. We like the Buddhists, applaud this new found worldliness and see them as close to us in some aspects of their practice and philosophy. One of our number goes to their meetings and they pay us a rent. That is always nice. They are welcome.

When the Spiritualists wanted to use the Meeting House we decided not to let them for their traditions and philosophy does not sit comfortably with us. We have to make choices and what goes off in our Meeting House is serious. Partnership agreements matter and if entered into and should be the fully debated.

I do not see all other churches as natural allies who should be embraced too fully just because they are Christian. There are other partners who seem to be more appropriate and while we may work with them on social concerns some attitudes to hierarchy, women and leadership, and the relationship between love and sexuality cause us difficulty. I think that we could also look at secular groups like the Fabian Society and Friends of the Earth.

## **Cornerstones**

*Faith and Practice*; *Advices and Queries*; and the Quaker testimonies are cornerstones for me, many of the seventeenth and eighteenth century contributions still relevant today, because the human condition is eternal.

I marvel at the wisdom and experience which is contained in *Faith and Practice*. The Testimonies are appropriate for individuals and society as well as the Society of Friends.

## **The Glory of the Natural World**

God has spoken to us across time through the glory of the natural world: the burning bush, the speaking mule, the columns of fire and smoke, sweet manna growing out of the earth, Gospel writers represented as eagle and lion. More prosaically, but perhaps even more importantly, we enjoy landscapes, sunsets, a myriad of plants and animals. Increasingly we have a growing awareness of how our safety, well-being and future are inextricably bound up with the world around us.

How can we work to protect the environment? By considering how we can 'walk lightly' on the earth - for instance, through recycling; careful marshalling of fuel, food, water; considering our environmental impact through travel, trade, and building; increasing our awareness of how our comfort and desires can lead to damage and strain on the environment through our hunger for out-of-season fruit and vegetables, foodstuffs being brought half-way round the planet. These are just a few areas that are central to this commitment, which itself relates to our testimonies of simplicity and equality.

Our beginnings and our endings are encapsulated by the earth: 'earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.' We come out of the world and we return to it. And the world itself proceeds from the actions of stars and planets: so we are, quite literally, made of star dust. Perhaps in that thought we can find humility and dignity to inspire us to do our part in protecting the environment now and for the future.

## **Theology**

I believe that the Mennonite Yoder, whose church tradition also had a peace ministry like the Quakers, shows a way forward. His book entitled *The Politics of Jesus* shows the distortion

of the original message of Jesus over the centuries in the churches. Yoder identifies the dynamics of the original message in transforming and opening up the stifling power structures in politics, society and even family life. The dynamism of the original message has been replaced by what we might call Religion and this seems to favour conformity. This should be rejected for we need to retain freedom from dogma. Today and in the future we have personal responsibility for our own creed but when seeking and finding it we must ask the question, what has fuelled past movements and what has stifled them?

Identifying with the less fortunate, the non-establishment Jesus showed his love for sinners. His healing of the sick, his opposition to repressive religious rules like aspects of the Sabbath, his challenge of the legal system by exposing its injustice by paying and especially in paying the ultimate price of his own life: these are powerful concepts.

Resurrection was not a foregone conclusion; it was the result of the ultimate sacrifice, it is what the person who sees faith not in the light of dogma but rather more like an investment, which is an initial deprivation but which bears fruits over which the faithful have no control. The ethics in most religions are roughly the same and can be summarised in 'love your neighbour as yourself' and 'help the poor'. What prevents us from doing that is the recognised truth, fear for our lives.

Jesus has overcome this fear by his life and resurrection. Whoever practices this kind of faith even in a small way will recognize the significance of the resurrection and not brush it away as a fairy-tale. To practice this kind of Christianity would be good news indeed and create a new man, free from greed, but this is not possible without sacrifice.

How more relevant could Quakerism be in the future in a world of greed and selfishness. Over the centuries the churches have turned terms like incarnation and the Cross into mystical or magic events. When reading the New Testament at face value it talks of something becoming real not "spiritual" and the struggle that goes along with it.

## **Families**

I am saddened when I hear of meetings which do not welcome children, because this feels to me to be at odds with our fundamental belief in equality, and must, as a consequence, also make parents feel unwelcome. This surely is not Friendly!



## **Joining the Quakers**

I wanted to get away from highly structured churches and their services - I wanted to strip my faith to its bare bones and start again from its core. I wanted to find peace, silent contemplation, non-judgmental people and from here to find a religious body that shared my values. I found this in the Society of Friends.

I feel a huge social responsibility; I wanted to work with homeless people from the age of 8 or 9 and this work has led me to work with people who have all kinds of problems including addiction, mental health problems, and who find themselves excluded from society.

One of the things I love about Quakers is the genuine interest and commitment to these issues; another thing I love is the acceptance, the peace, the simplicity.

I struggle with the silence when I have to calm my mind and focus; it's hard to focus on God sometimes. Another thing is the bureaucracy, although inevitable I do think it can be simplified throughout.

## **A lack of systematic teaching**

I feel that there is perhaps a lack of teaching and biblical orientation, the latter being my main source of inspiration to lead a less selfish life and to be open to the needs of the less fortunate.

## **Commitment and Humour**

My husband went first and came back and said, 'You might like it. The people seem to have a sense of humour and there is some good talk after meeting. Like me you would admire their commitment.'

## **Dogma and Ignorance**

I love the lack of dogma and because I am a Quaker I do not have to recite the words from other people but listen to myself and work out what I do and what I do not believe. However I must acknowledge that this has a serious fault line which will need addressing in the coming decades.

One of the difficulties of being a small meeting is that sometimes knowledge of issues that are being debated in the wider Quaker Community does not reach us. A new Friend who had cut his teeth in Hampstead came up and started to talk about the Quaker Testimonies: Peace, Equality, Integrity and Simplicity which provide us with a shared set of values. I had not heard of the testimonies although I had been in membership for many years.

### **For a New Millennium**

Just as the Quakers up-dated their practice at the beginning of the twentieth century to face problems that had evolved in the recent past like the impact of science on society, Darwinism and the new biblical criticism, now we have to evaluate our position a hundred years on in multicultural societies where the sands are constantly shifting.

One of the big challenges of the future is how we educate new attenders in an organisation where everyone functions like a priest. Once more we are in the business of educating the priesthood.

### **Simplicity**

Our Meeting House is fit for purpose and will see us through the coming decades without much trouble. When we sold the old one we had money to build a very simple and elegant suite of rooms. We have a kitchen, an upstairs reading area and toilets which have wheel chair access. The windows are high and natural light can stream through onto four benches and a simple wooden table. It was designed along the lines of early Quaker Meeting Houses. This means it is a manifestation of our testament to simplicity. It is beautiful.

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### **Faith and Practice**

Some of the organisational lines go all the way back to George Fox in the seventeenth century but we have no official priests because everyone is a priest. A collection of old and very up to date policy and reference statements are contained in *Faith and Practice*.

Regular updating using modern technology in the future will make the debate about content more democratic and urgent.

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### **Meeting Size**

There is a great strength in decentralisation and in small meetings. Although we are generally less than twelve our meetings are not too small because we have a chance to minister in

traditional ways. We should continue to respect customs like the one which says that it's rarely appropriate to speak in the first half hour and not to respond without due consideration. If we lose track of the structures we lose sight of a key and distinctive strength. Newcomers must be tutored in a more deliberate way for we can only look forward if we know these traditional templates.

Those who go to bigger meetings can easily feel excluded and also witness interchanges which sometimes seem like debates rather than ministry. Once lost these treasures are hard to replace. Here we celebrate a wide breadth of belief. Even if it takes 40 years to make a decision we should always look forward. We have our traditions but we often make new decisions in advance of other groups, for example the decision at Yearly Meeting 2009 to press government to allow us to marry same sex couples under the auspices of the Religious Society of Friends.

### **Birthright Quakers**

I was brought into Quakerism by my Mum bringing me here when I was little. I like Quakerism because Quakers help the world be a better place and they try to stop wars between other countries.

When I come to meeting my brothers and I do an activity with Lynda, after that we come into the main room and have silence. Jonny finds it hard to stay silent. After the silence we all shake hands then my brothers and I play with the LEGO while we have drinks and biscuits. Every month my Mum stays longer for the monthly meeting where they talk about what has happened since the last meeting. They talk about where and when are the next special meetings are. I usually get bored in these meetings so I bring my book.

The Quaker meetings I go to are in Pontefract and sometimes York.

### **Why I Stayed**

I first started attending a Quaker meeting because my husband had gone along to one and he said he thought I'd like it. I was sceptical, though I'd visited a Quaker Meeting House many years earlier and had liked the woman who'd shown us round and whose sense of humour appealed to me when she said that the garden was pretty because of the underlying Friends pushing up the daisies.

I expected to miss hymn singing, but found I didn't. I adored the silence; and the ministry that came from a gathered meeting; and the talk after Meeting for Worship which often continued on from the spoken Ministry.

I respected and admired the commitment to peace, justice, simplicity and integrity.

I also found that the lack of a hierarchical structure and the bottom up organisation appealed to me. George Fox's statement that we can all have a direct line to God spoke to me, as did the statement that 'There is that of God in every man'.

I find that the absence of a priesthood and dogma continue to be important to me and I value Friends' ministry, finding it insightful.

I would not want these key elements of the Society to be lost in the coming decades.

### **The Light**

Live the present in the light - moment by moment. The future takes care of itself.

### **Promoting Quakerism**

My knowledge and understanding of Quakers is insufficiently developed to offer an authoritative and constructive opinion relating to the 'Future of the Quakers'. However, therein lies one of the perceived problems that may affect the future of Quakers. I find it easier to learn about the past and origins of the Quakers rather than the here and now.

It would be my guess that there are many people who would identify to much and many of the values and beliefs appertaining to the Quaker movement but are unaware of this due to the low profile regarding its existence and activities.

I have no doubt that there are many younger members of society who have strong moral convictions on many of the values and beliefs appertaining to the Quakers but cannot affiliate themselves to Quakers unless there is a more open and public stance taken to raise awareness of Quaker values and beliefs.

The Quaker future may lay in recognising that there are potential Quakers out there who do not realise there is a body of people who share their values and beliefs. Working out a strategy for connectivity to these potential 'future Quakers' could be critical to the future of the Religious Society of Friends.

The future of the Quakers may rest in ensuring that the critical mass of membership does not fall below a point whereby the bureaucracy built on times past is too cumbersome to relate to current membership.

### **Secularists**

Outside The Society of Friends I would call myself a proselytising atheist but inside, at formal Meeting I think of myself as someone who is simply a materialist modified by love. This is a complicated distinction for a number of reasons. The conduct of the meeting, the silences, the conventions such as, 'Do not follow someone who has ministered without a proper gap of time for consideration,' is so different from cut and thrust debate that some modifications must occur.

The other thing which modifies my behaviour is the people who sit beside me; all to the right of me, for an hour on Sundays are close to me. Many of my friends, my Friends, do believe and although some take the agnostic position they have a wisp of belief. I do not. I am as firm in my faith as the Pope is in his. Yet I cannot think this group of Yorkshire Friends is other than progressive and moral rather than backward and deluded.

In the coming decades the Quakers will find more people like me wishing to enter communion with them and they will be accommodating because Quakers will not be rushed therefore change will come gradually with quiet pauses and respect shown for others.

If a major national debate is needed then it will come when required but we should ask ourselves, 'Is it needed or can customary practices and our muscular tolerance let us gently manage conflict?'

### **Bureaucracy**

Perhaps there is a perception of an overwhelming bureaucracy in the Society and perhaps it is not entirely well founded, or at any rate, the Society seeks to remedy matters. I speak as a (not particularly efficient as yet) representative of Quaker Life Representative Council who has become uncomfortably aware recently that my function should be one of liaison between local and area meetings and through Quaker Life to the Central Committee. I ought to be the face of the Area in Quaker Life, and the face of Quaker Life in the Meetings. If Quaker Life begins to function as it hopes, then the perception of 'us and them', Friends House and the grass roots, should disappear. This should affect our attitudes in our dealings with

bureaucracies in life in general, and our way of working, our practicality and simplicity, and our egalitarian attitude, might just rub off.

Here we plead simplicity, and the life of Jesus. Jesus knew his theology, and the rabbis were astounded by his knowledge and wisdom, when he made his bar mitzvah. But when he preached, it was not from his learning as much as from his wisdom. The Ten Commandments were simplified to 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength, and love your neighbour as your self'. He did not quote texts as much as create parables. And above all, he lived his faith, his love and his hope.

We hope and endeavour to do likewise. We should be well versed in the Bible, particularly the New Testament, because we should not seek to do away with the 'law and the prophets' but to fulfil them. Our lives must speak for us.

### **Responsibility**

Personal responsibility is an attractive notion to me, but it's also scary; it can be a burden. For example, if we accept the Quaker testimony about the environment then I am bound to do my best to live sustainably. I utterly believe this, but I also acknowledge that I fail many times. How can I square this? Perhaps it's the idea that we are on a journey, and that what matters is making the journey, whether it's in connection with the environment or with any other issue.

It seems to me that one of the dangers in Quakerism is that it can be easy to excuse one's failings: we don't do blame. However, personal responsibility dictates that we need to recognise our failings and to try to do something about them. Perhaps this is where community can be helpful, in that discussion/single issue meetings are ways of getting back on the road, by listening to others' experiences and views.

Thus we journey, and over time we hope to make progress, but there will be times that we fall by the wayside. What Quakerism teaches me is not to flagellate (where is there benefit in that?), but to learn and to endeavour to travel forward in the Light.

### **The Social Strategy**

Quakers do not have a social strategy; they **are** a social strategy.

## **Real Politics**

Should Quakers have a political standpoint?

Should we say, 'Get out of Afghanistan.'?

Can we walk away from big issues in the coming decades?

## **Issue based organisations in fellowship**

Since issues like Global Warming bind us together and make us more visible, we should ensure that we constantly go out of our way to get issue-based organisations to understand us and our organisational practices. This is the way forward and I believe that some of our traditions are so modern that they need to enter the traditions of other bodies.

During the CND demonstrations of the 1980s we made a lot of friends in progressive organisations. At that point we became engaged with real politics but chose our issues for in depth involvement so that our faith and practice, especially our commitment to Peace entered the main stream of another populist movement. We should do that again especially as the Environment lobbies expand and become more vocal. Our place-based cellular organisations, Meeting Houses and social literacy are major resources.

## **Language**

The way we speak matters and while I do not think that we should go back to the 'thees' and 'thous' which were used at the beginning of the Society of Friends I feel that the courtesy we find in phrases like, 'We hope so', rather than straight 'Yes' when we are asked to agree a decision - though at first seeming a little strange - rests on sound, thought out principles. How can we know what others think or if they agree in the way that we do? Best leave in the concept of hope and uncertainty in the wording.

This courtesy and elegance goes deep and there is a special ness about the way we conduct ourselves and our business. Clerking, a great skill, lies at the centre of our tradition and it should continue to be a rock on which we conduct our business. For instance the wording of Minutes is agreed there and then and does not rest on the remembrance of a minute secretary working three weeks later. What decision was taken is understood before the topic discussion ends by someone who is listening to the feeling of the meeting and writing a minute, which is presented to the meeting for its consideration. If principles can be agreed at a meeting at Friends House when a thousand people are in attendance debating a controversial topic then anything is possible.

I also have a taste for ancient words. The recent decision on same sex marriage was preceded by a 'threshing' - pure seventeenth century agrarianism - but what a lovely word and how apposite. The corn heads got bashed around but in the end flour for baking lay around.

Yes in the future we might have to acknowledge Text-speak - and why not - but let us not reject Quaker-speak in our push towards tomorrow. In the coming decades we should try to make the 'agreed minute' part of the traditions of other organisations to which we belong.

### **What does the future hold?**

There is a large proportion of older members, and there are small meetings, and we are faced with perhaps the greatest challenge of all time, global warming. Scientists recently suggested that the only way to meet this challenge effectively is to adopt a 'wartime mentality', a willingness to give up luxuries, to support one another, and as a society focus on one common goal.

Quakers already have the tradition and way of life to make this a natural choice, but I feel there is a sense of fragmentation, a lack of communication; a vague feeling of 'us and them' that isolates the meetings. There needs to be a greater sense of 'pulling together', and perhaps this will only come when big problems occur. However, every Quaker with a 'bee in his or her bonnet' will greet a Friend similarly afflicted, and connections will be made. Similar connections will be made with enthusiasts outside the Society. In that way the Society and its influence will be strengthened. We hope to be a power to the good.

### **The Future For Quakers**

We are an organisation and a worshipping body different from any other, in that while we are 'the Religious Society of Friends', we include atheists and people whose creed derives from other religions. Non-religious people often feel drawn to the Society.

The breadth of our scope and the focus on equality are demonstrated in our organisation. Few serious decisions are taken without consultation at the most local level. It may take forty years for a decision to be arrived at (as in same sex marriage) but the system seems to function nonetheless. And it is a system which causes the members to feel personally responsible, not only for the decisions taken by Quakers as an organisation, but also in our



personal faith and our lives. The feeling of equality and membership pervades not only our life in worship, but our everyday lives.

# Appendix 1

## Subjects for the book suggested in 3 Minutes Brainstorming

Custom in meetings  
Quaker discipline  
Family ministry  
Language  
Equality  
Personal response  
Partnership  
Tradition  
Faith  
No faith  
Theology  
Bureaucracy  
Peace  
Integrity  
Simplicity  
Life style  
Funerals and wedding  
Philosophy  
Membership  
Attendees  
Social issues  
Enquiring  
Inclusivity  
Centralism  
Grass roots support  
Silence  
Community  
Faith and practice  
Organisation  
Thoughts on content  
Silence

## Appendix 2

### Writing the manuscript.

We planned to meet at 9am, failed but had technology and seating arranged by 9.30. We sat in a circle around a flipchart entitled 'Content' and contributed words relating to subjects which would need to be part of the Questions: 'Practice in the future'. That done, with a pause of less than a minute, each of the initial seven contributors wrote for 8 minutes, a ten year old Friend acting as a timekeeper. We then read round the room to get a feel of our collective voice, paused for comment and then talked about the responses. We then took fifteen minutes to write on a subject of our choice. Some wrote about one of the topics on the board.

New people came for Meeting for Worship and we broke for 45 mins which was followed by food, tea and a natter. After that, people read out their 15 minute contributions and we discussed the editing and structure of the book, the timetable, design compatibility and editing. We thought that we would like to have the book of the work in one document before the sun set and we managed it by 3.30.

It was assumed that some of those not present would wish to contribute and we would e-mail them the rough document and ask them to look for literals and to alter, or add their own pieces as appropriate. When we thought of editing we decided that we would not seek to follow the rational structure found in Faith and Practice but leave things to 'chance'. Our 'chance order' was alphabetically dictated by the first word in each contribution. On hearing this someone said, 'If I had known that, wishing to be the first in the book, I would have begun 'Abel was the brother of Cain'. To which someone responded. 'Aaron was the brother of Moses'.

By 1.15 all but three of us had left and were tidying up waiting for the Friend with technical knowledge to return and bring the fruits of four laptops and several hand written pieces into one document. Over the next couple of days a few emailed pieces arrived and were incorporated into this final document late on Wednesday evening.