



Newsletter – January 2018

Diary: January 2018

Sunday 7 January	Preparative Meeting – 11.15 am after Meeting for Worship
Saturday 13 January	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House
Sunday 14 January	Area Meeting – 2.00 pm, Banbury Meeting House
Saturday 20 January	Week of Prayer for Christian Unity – Quaker-led worship, 12.30, Guild Chapel
Tuesday 23 January	Stratford Inter-Faith Forum – 7.30, Stratford Meeting House
Saturday 27 January	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House

That All May Be Free

This year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity will be held from Thursday 18 to Thursday 25 January. In Stratford, there will be daily worship in the Guild Chapel from 12.30 – 1.00 each day except Sunday. And Stratford Quakers will be leading the worship on Saturday 20 January.

This year the themes and resources for worship have been produced by churches in the Caribbean, and they raise some of the contemporary issues addressed by these churches.

Week of Prayer For Christian Unity 2018



For example, abuses of human rights challenge us to consider our manner of welcoming of the stranger into our midst. Human trafficking and modern-day slavery continue to be huge issues. Addiction to pornography and drugs are serious challenges. The debt crisis has a negative impact upon nations and upon individuals. Family life continues to be challenged by the economic restrictions which lead to migration, domestic abuse and violence.

On Saturday 20 January, the third day of the Week, the theme is "Upholding human dignity", with a focus on the problems of addiction. Our image of a slave is often of someone wearing iron chains,

being exploited and forced to work against their will. But there are other forms of enslavement where the chains may be less visible. Addiction, in its many forms is an assault on human dignity; those suffering from an addiction struggle to be fully human. This is easily recognised in some of the well-known types of addiction: alcohol, drugs, gambling or pornography. But we can all be drawn away by things that have a fascination for us personally: soap operas, e-mail, even chocolate.

Christian unity is not about a surface uniformity of creeds or liturgies. Jesus himself pointed to its essence: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself” (Luke 10: 27). It is this focus, worked out in our daily life, that joins people together, whatever they profess or whatever church they do or do not belong to. Love fills and gives meaning to our lives. But addiction reduces the space available for this love – it seeks to substitute itself as the most important thing in life. Whenever things crowd to the front of our lives, we are not free to live as we would.

How can we be fully alive and fully human? There is an extraordinary passage in one of George Fox’s early letters in which he writes about the risk of enslavement – and how to avoid it. “Whatever it is you are addicted to that’s where the tempter will get you. If he can trouble you there he gets an advantage over you, and then you are finished. So see what’s happening to you, what you are doing, then wait there in the light of what is pure in you, and you will find forgiveness. When you have seen what’s going on in your mind, and the temptations there, do not think, just submit to reality. You will then receive power.” (Rex Ambler’s modern English version in *Truth of the Heart*, 1:90).

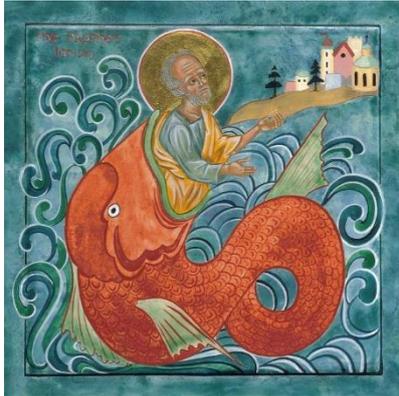
Stratford Quakers will be exploring this further, and the implications for Christian unity, on Saturday 20 January in the Guild Chapel through a themed Meeting for Worship. Please come to join us.

When Things Fall Apart

Richard Rohr is a Franciscan friar who has been exploring over many years the themes of mysticism, action and contemplation. He founded the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1986, where he is currently Academic Dean. A prolific author, he posts a daily meditation on the Center’s website - sometimes based on his own writings, sometimes on the writings of others - through which he explores a specific theme over the course of a week. The text below was posted on Friday 29 December and entitled *When Things Fall Apart*.

“The word *change* normally refers to new beginnings. But transformation more often happens *not when something new begins but when something old fall apart*. The pain of something old falling apart—disruption and chaos—invites the soul to listen at a deeper level. It invites and sometimes forces the soul to go to a new place because the old place is not working anymore. The mystics use many words to describe this chaos: fire, darkness, death, emptiness, abandonment, trial, the Evil One. Whatever it is, it does not feel good and it does not feel like God. We will do anything to keep the old thing from falling apart.

“This is when we need patience, guidance, and the freedom to let go instead of tightening our controls and certitudes. Perhaps Jesus is describing this phenomenon when he says, “It is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matthew 7:14). Not accidentally, he mentions this narrow road right after teaching the Golden Rule. Jesus knows how much letting go it takes to “treat others as you would like them to treat you” (7:12).



“Transformation usually includes a disconcerting reorientation. Change can either help people to find a new meaning, or it can cause people to close down and turn bitter. The difference is determined by the quality of our inner life, or what we call “spirituality.” Change of itself just happens; spiritual transformation is an active process of letting go, living in the confusing dark space for a while, and allowing yourself to be spit up on a new and unexpected shore. You can see why Jonah in the belly of the whale is such an important symbol for many Jews and Christians.

“In the moments of insecurity and crisis, “shoulds” and “oughts” don’t really help; they just increase the shame, guilt, pressure, and likelihood of backsliding. It’s the deep “yeses” that carry you through. Focusing on something you absolutely believe in, that you’re committed to, will help you wait it out.

“Love wins over guilt any day. It is sad that we settle for the short-run effectiveness of shaming people instead of the long-term life benefits of grace-filled transformation. But we are a culture of progress and efficiency, impatient with gradual growth. God’s way of restoring things interiorly is much more patient—and finally more effective. God lets Jonah run in the wrong direction, until this reluctant prophet finds a long, painful, circuitous path to get back where he needs to be—in spite of himself! Looking in your own “rear-view mirror” can fill you with gratitude for God’s work in your life.”

This year, a meditation from Richard Rohr will be included each month in this newsletter. And you can read Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditations at <https://cac.org/category/daily-meditations/>, where you can also sign up to have them delivered to you every day by e-mail.

Thank you from Alice

Alice would like to thank everyone for the flowers and Marks & Spencer voucher given to her for her birthday. Both are much appreciated!

Stratford Interfaith Forum

The next meeting of the Stratford Interfaith Forum will be on Tuesday 23 January at Stratford Quaker Meeting House, when the speaker will be James Pavitt, Clerk of Stratford Quakers, who will be talking about Quaker Faith in Action.



Interfaith Forum meetings are open to anyone, and include opportunities for questions and debate. January's meeting will be an opportunity both to tell others about Quakers and to hear from others about their perspectives on spiritual issues of importance to Quakers.

The Forum meeting will be taking place on the date we would normally hold our monthly Study Group, so to allow everyone to attend the Forum meeting, the Study Group is cancelled this month. Study Group meetings will start again in February, and we will be discussing at Preparative Meeting in January what themes we might explore this year. Please bring your suggestions and ideas.

Helping the homeless in Stratford

Back in August, the newsletter reported how Stratford Quakers had been supporting work by Stratford Churches Together to investigate the options for providing a night shelter in Stratford. The push for a night shelter followed a rise in the number of people sleeping rough in Stratford over the past year or so, and the idea had support from Stratford-on-Avon District Council. Visits had been made to night shelters in Leamington and Rugby, and an outline plan for a shelter project had been discussed with homelessness charity Housing Justice.

The project was based on the idea that each participating church would provide a shelter for one night a week, with equipment like sleeping bags passing on each day to the next place. But progress has been slow. Stratford Quaker Meeting House, for example, did not meet the standards required; for various reasons, other local churches have also found it difficult to offer premises.



In the meantime, further thought is being given to other ways in which homeless people in Stratford might be helped. There have been comments from homeless people that the weekends are more difficult times for them. The Oasis Christian Centre runs a lunchtime session on a Wednesday, so a suggestion being examined is to set up lunchtime sessions at the Link Project in Stratford town centre at the weekends. The aim would be to provide food at lunchtime and give the homeless the opportunity to talk. The District Council is in favour, but there is an issue with planning consent for the use of the building at weekends. The Council is prepared to seek a change in planning permission and is also prepared to train people in counselling the homeless.

The volunteer group which has been working on these ideas over the last year, and which includes Quaker representatives, is looking to expand to bring together a team to organise the lunchtime sessions and to continue work on the development of a night shelter. If you are interested or want to know more speak to Arnrud Wood or Roger Matthews.

Themed Meetings for Worship

We decided a year ago to hold themed meetings for worship on fifth Sundays during 2017, and five themed meetings for worship were held last year. In 2018 there will be six fifth Sundays – at the ends of March, April, June, July, September and December. Do we want to continue to hold themed meetings for worship? If we continue with themed meetings for worship on fifth Sundays, the first themed meeting for worship will be on Sunday 31 March, and we will need to choose the theme at February's preparative meeting.