



## Newsletter – March 2017

## Diary: March 2017

Sunday 5 March	Preparative Meeting – 11.15 am after Meeting for Worship
Saturday 11 March	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House
Sunday 12 March	Area Meeting – 2.00 pm, Banbury Meeting House
Tuesday 21 March	Study Group – 7.30 pm, Stratford Meeting House
Saturday 25 March	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House

## Quakers join call to help child refugees

Quakers in Britain have joined with other churches in writing to the Home Secretary to express their concern at the Government's announcement that it intends to suspend the programme for the safe resettlement of unaccompanied minors seeking refuge in the United Kingdom.

In May 2016 Parliament committed itself to an ongoing programme of resettlement for lone children, following Lord Dubs' amendment to the Immigration Bill. While exact figures were not given in final legislation, the number envisaged was considerably more than the limit that has now been imposed as the Government has declared its intention to suspend the programme in a written ministerial statement.



In a joint statement and a letter to the Home Secretary, leaders of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, Quakers in Britain, the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church have urged the Government to reconsider and to adopt a policy that prioritises the well-being of children.

*A helping hand is basic humanity (credit: Rob Pepper)*

The statement:

- points out the potentially damaging effect of signalling to already vulnerable minors that they are unlikely to find safe passage and resettlement if they make themselves known to relevant authorities. Compelling evidence shows that many such children have simply 'disappeared' from temporary refugee camps;
- highlights work already done by churches and community groups to provide welcome and support for refugee children and families;
- encourages an approach that actively seeks to engage with such agencies, rather than limiting provision to the capacity of local authorities.

Paul Parker, Recording Clerk for Quakers in Britain, said: "The ability to ask for sanctuary is a human right, and the willingness to provide it is an act of basic humanity. If the effect of the Government's

decision is that a child's safest route to sanctuary in Britain is to risk their life on the back of a truck, then we as a country must do better."

According to a 2016 survey more local Quaker meetings are working to welcome people forced to flee their homes than on any other issue. Responses include setting up and supporting City of Sanctuary groups, befriending newcomers, protesting at detention centres, sourcing and providing accommodation for refugees, sending donations to Calais and in some cases helping out in refugee camps in person.

In recognition of the current situation, of a tradition of helping refugees and of the significant concern being shown by local meetings, Quakers in Britain are planning a programme supporting Quakers to take action and advocate for change together. The programme will also play a part in trying to change negative attitudes towards people on the move.

There will be a chance locally to hear more about plans and to contribute ideas to the development of the programme at a special meeting at Coventry Friends Meeting House on Monday 27 March.

## “I will lift up my eyes to the hills”

Our monthly Study Group meeting in March will look at Psalm 121: *I will lift up my eyes to the hills.*

The session follows on from February's study group meeting, which looked at Psalm 23: *The Lord is my shepherd.* The discussion was wide-ranging, finding far more in a short six verse psalm that might have been expected! We also had the benefit of advice about different translations from Paul Edmondson.

One interesting question about the psalm is whether it is unrealistically optimistic. Is it simply saying “God looks after me, so I'm OK!”? We saw how the psalm progressed from being led beside still waters to the valley of shadow to arriving in the sight of our enemies. And the last verse, often translated “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me ...” reads differently in the original Hebrew, where it is more of a plea: “Let but goodness and mercy follow me ...”.

The Study Group meeting in March will take place on Tuesday 21 March, starting at 7.30 pm. As before we'll be looking at Psalm 121 and exploring together our individual responses to it. There's no preparatory reading – except to read the Psalm a few times to become familiar with it, reflecting on its meaning for you.

## Toilets twinned!

Our autumn fundraising raised enough money to twin two of the toilets in Stratford Quaker Meeting House with latrines in developing countries. The certificates have arrived and show that we are twinned with a latrine in Bukoro Village, Muramba Parish, Uganda and with a latrine in Kanyatsi, Rutshuru, Democratic Republic of Congo.



*Kanyatsi, DRC*



*Bukoro, Uganda*

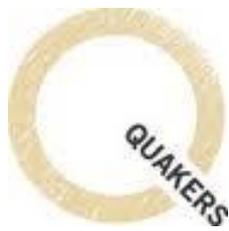
Why twin? Good sanitation and clean drinking water are fundamental to communities – yet 1 in 3 people worldwide don't have access to somewhere safe, private and hygienic to go to the toilet. The human and economic impacts are enormous: every minute a child dies from diarrhoeal diseases and 60 per cent of all rural diseases are caused by poor hygiene and sanitation.

Investing in sanitation is one of the most cost-effective forms of aid. It is estimated that for every £1 spent on water and sanitation, £8 is returned through saved time, better health and increased productivity.

You too can twin your loo! For more details see [www.toilettwinning.org](http://www.toilettwinning.org).

## And our next appeal is for ...

Britain Yearly Meeting, the national body that supports and co-ordinates Quaker activity in Britain.



Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) is the central organisation which co-ordinates all the main decision-making bodies in Britain: not only Yearly Meeting itself and Meeting for Sufferings but also a number of other important committees and bodies which keep the Religious Society of Friends going. BYM is also the main public face of Quakers, liaising with other churches and religious bodies, dealing with the press and media, and maintaining the Quakers website, which provides a wide range of information for both Quakers and non-Quakers. BYM also provides information about Quakers to everyone who enquires to it, through the website, by post or in person at Friends House in London.

In addition, BYM organises activity across a wide range of fields of concern to Friends.

- International work - Quakers have long supported peace building and peace builders internationally. In East Africa we support peace builders to change the core conditions that lead to violent conflict. We implement the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel.
- Peace - We support Quakers to live out their deep commitment to peace. This includes promoting peace education, challenging militarism, campaigning against war and for disarmament, and supporting the peace movement in Britain.
- Social justice - We work on specific aspects of social justice in Britain. Our longstanding work for a more compassionate criminal justice system continues. Housing and housing conditions is another long standing Quaker concern. We are also developing work around forced migration (see the first article in this newsletter).
- Economic justice - Quakers call for an economic system that has equality, justice and environmental sustainability at its heart. We work on welfare and inequality, corporate accountability and ethical finance, whilst exploring principles and practical steps towards a 'new economy'.
- Sustainability - In 2011 Quakers in Britain made a commitment to become a low-carbon, sustainable community. We support local action to live out this commitment, and we campaign for energy justice and action on climate change.

BYM organises social action training and tools, offering a range of workshops, courses and resources for Quakers and others working for non-violent social change, and it also administers grants to support groups and individuals in work based on Quaker values.

For more information about the work of Britain Yearly Meeting, see <http://www.quaker.org.uk/>. To contribute to the appeal, make donations through the collection box at Stratford Meeting House or speak to our treasurer Elliot Wassell.

## The Underground Railroad returns?



*Fugitive slaves fleeing Maryland to an Underground Railroad depot in Delaware, 1850*

In the years before the abolition of slavery in the United States in 1863, slaves escaping from servitude in the south travelled along the Underground Railroad – a network of safe houses run by abolitionists that enabled escaped slaves to travel covertly to Canada – and freedom. Now, with the regime of President Trump saying that millions of undocumented migrants in the United States will be seized and deported, a new Underground Railroad is starting up in the United States, again offering sanctuary to those threatened with arrest and the chance to flee with their families to Canada.

Quakers in America are among those who are making church premises available as sanctuaries for undocumented migrants faced with deportation. And while Federal agents currently don't enter churches in search of migrants, there are fears that the churches' defiance of the Government will lead to new threats – so networks of private homes are also being created to help migrants to escape arrest.

The movement is growing rapidly. LA Voice, an interfaith organisation in Los Angeles, is working with 200 places of worship in the region to provide sanctuary. In Minnesota, a faith-based organisation ISAIH is working with 25 local churches willing to take in undocumented migrants. Nationally, more than 800 congregations have promised to support the National Sanctuary Movement.

Things aren't that bad in Britain. But recent stories of long-term migrants with strong family connections to Britain being refused the right to remain in the country – and then summarily deported – suggest that we should not be complacent.

This was one of the reasons why Stratford Quakers made a public statement in February in support of Quakers in America who are taking a stand against the discriminatory actions of the Trump regime, endorsing a formal statement by Quakers in Britain: "There can be no peace without justice; no love without trust; and no unity without equality. Our faith urges us to welcome the stranger as our equal and friend, feed those who are hungry and shelter those who are homeless, needy and frightened."

In their statement, which was reported in the local press, Stratford Quakers also noted that there could be no greater contrast than that between the kindness shown by the many people in Stratford who have come together to welcome refugees from Syria and the attempt of President Trump to stop all Syrian refugees from coming to the United States.