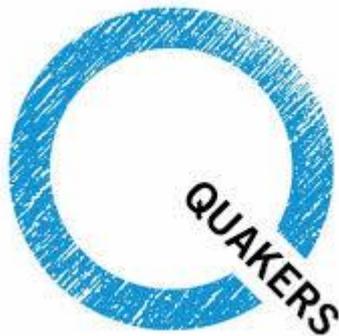


Stratford-upon-Avon Quaker Meeting



Newsletter – March 2018

Diary: March 2018

Sunday 4 March	Preparative Meeting – 11.15 am after Meeting for Worship
Saturday 10 March	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House
Sunday 11 March	Area Meeting – 3.00 pm, Broad Campden Meeting House
Tuesday 20 March	Study Group – 7.30 pm, Stratford Meeting House
Saturday 24 March	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House

All Things Change and Grow

Continuing our series from the daily meditations of Franciscan Richard Rohr, here is the piece published on Monday 26 February 2018 on the controversial topic of Christianity and evolution.

“It is hard for me to understand why some Christians are so threatened by the notion of evolution. Are they not observing reality? Why this stalwart attachment to inertness? Perhaps static things appear more controllable? I suspect such resistance largely comes from our ego and our unconscious. I do recognize the human psyche’s need for stability, security, and superiority. These ego-needs are so strong that they allow people to ignore or misinterpret what is visible all around them, and even to ignore their own obvious “growing up” and healing processes. Even our cuts and bruises heal themselves—by themselves.



“Today, every academic, professional discipline—psychology, anthropology, history, the various sciences, social studies, art, drama, music, and the business world—recognizes change, development, growth, and some kind of evolving phenomenon. But then we go to church and think we must switch heads. Somehow, Scripture study and systematic theology thought themselves above the fray, untouched by our constantly changing context. In its search for the Real Absolute, theology made one fatal mistake: It imagined that any notion of God had to be static and unchanging, an “unmoved mover,” as Aristotelian philosophy called it.

“Yet there is little evidence that this rigid god is the God presented in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and even less in our Christian understanding of God as Trinity, who is clearly much more an active verb than a noun. But then, this central doctrine of the Trinity had very little effect on practical theology or the ordinary lives of most Christians. We preferred a stable notion of God as an old white man, sitting on a throne—much like the Greek God Zeus (which became the Latin word for God or “*Deus*”), a critical and punitive spectator to a creation that was merely a mechanical clock of inevitable laws and punishments, ticking away until Doomsday. What a negative world view!

“This is not a God you fall in love with, because humans are not programmed to fall in love with mere principles and forces. Love demands both give and take, which is what we mean by a “personal” God. And this is exactly what people of deep prayer invariably experience—an *inner dialogue of give and take, of giving and being received*. This is why the mystics consistently use words like mercy, forgiveness, faithfulness, and healing to describe what they experience as God. These all imply a God who does not just impose rules, but in fact changes them *for us!* If God is Trinity, then God is Absolute Relationship, even inside of God. *And every time God forgives, God is saying that relationship is more important than God’s own rules!* Did you ever think about that?”

“I am convinced we are still in the early years of Christianity! Our appreciation for the Gospel is evolving too, as we learn to honor context as much as text. The Christ Mystery itself is still “groaning in one great act of giving birth . . . as we ourselves groan inwardly, waiting for our bodies to be set free” (see Romans 8:22-25).”

Tax Justice

Church Action for TaxJustice (CAT) is now in formation, as a partner body to Tax Justice UK, itself formed a year ago as the UK arm of the international Tax Justice Network.



There will be a national launch of CAT in the House of Lords on Tuesday 17 April, hosted by Richard Harries, former Bishop of Oxford. The main speakers will be Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury and Chair of Christian Aid, Michaela Youngson, President-elect of the Methodist Conference, and Paul Parker, Recording Clerk of the Religious Society of Friends. A national committee for CAT is in formation, with members from Christian Aid, the Quakers, the Methodists, Tax Justice UK, Christians on the Left and others. Other Christian bodies have been invited to join.

The aims of CAT are to

- Promote an awareness of the crucial issue of Tax Justice in the context of the idea of a ‘race to the top’, a fair tax system which highlights the fundamental relationship between taxation and public services, in the national and wider context;
- Seek to raise awareness throughout the Churches and faith communities of the urgent need for Tax Justice at a national and international level;
- Encourage Christian and all religious bodies to promote Tax Justice in their education, mission and financial policies and practices;
- Support initiatives and campaigns, especially around transparency.

Its initial targets will include

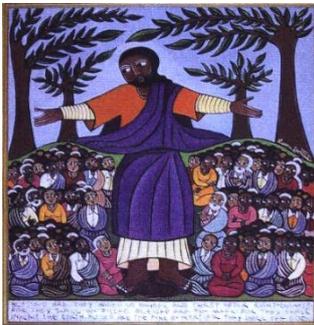
- Getting the Churches as investors to ask all major companies in which they invest to publish their tax policy,
- Campaigning for the UK Government to establish a public register of all trusts and foundations held by its citizens offshore, especially in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies;

- Urging the Government to establish a public unitary system of financial reporting, on a country-by-country basis, by Transnational Corporations, and the Churches – national and local – to campaign actively for this.

The Birmingham-based Methodist Tax Justice Network is in process of becoming CAT (West Midlands) and will be holding a Public Meeting on the Fair Tax Mark in the Diocesan Offices by Snow Hill station on Monday March 19th at 6 for 6.30 pm. The speaker will be Richard Livings, who is the Project Manager for the Fair Tax Mark, and there will be discussion about getting more businesses and local authorities to apply for the Mark. For further details, [visit the MTJN website](#).

Blessed ...

The Study Group meeting in March will continue the discussion of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) which we started at our meeting in February.



It's easy to think of the Sermon on the Mount being addressed to large crowds (perhaps the five thousand who later needed lunch!) But Matthew says: "Seeing the crowds, he went on to the mountain. And when he was seated his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak." (Matthew 5: 1-2). So the Beatitudes are addressed not to the "general public" but to Jesus's disciples: it's a smaller group of disciples, those who are being initiated, who hear this challenging sermon.

The Study Group meeting will start at 7.30 pm on Tuesday 20 March at Stratford Quaker Meeting House. In February we found the daily meditations on the Beatitudes by Richard Rohr a useful companion. These were circulated separately to February's newsletter, so if you cannot find your copy, contact Roger Matthews on 01789 298503.

Kindling our Meeting

For the last two years we have hosted a Kindlers-on-the-Road workshop in October. In 2016 the workshop looked at *What does Love require of us?* and last year we looked at *Deepening Quaker Worship*. The workshops have been open to people from other meetings, and have been held on Saturdays, lasting all day with a break for a shared lunch in the middle.

The workshops have been well received by those who took part, so shall we host another workshop this autumn? Possible topics include:

- *Answering that of God:* How do we discern and answer 'that of God' in everyone?
- *Prayer:* Explore the concept and practice of prayer. What does prayer mean to you?
- *Vocal Ministry:* The varieties of vocal ministry against the background of deep silent waiting.
- *Finding Our Own Silence:* Exploring what helps and hinders our experience of silent worship.
- *Nurturing Our Meetings:* Discovering love, peace and tenderness through creating radical welcome and opportunities for deepening connection
- *Listening:* Listening to others, to ourselves and to God. Finding the light in ourselves and the world in a spirit of love and attention.

Homes for Syrian refugees

Welcome Here, Stratford's local refugee support group, welcomed a third family of refugees from Syria to Stratford in November 2017. The group augmented the basic supplies provided by the official Home Office scheme with children's toys, baby clothes and equipment, and a welcome pack of fruit and food. Welcome Here volunteers offer friendship and social support, help with interpretation by local Arabic speakers, and English language tuition, as well as help with transport.

In March a fourth family of Syrian refugees will be arriving in Stratford under the Government's scheme, accommodation having been found for them by Stratford-on-Avon District Council.

The Council has offered to receive 12 Syrian families. But finding housing here in Stratford remains a major difficulty, and Welcome Here volunteers are searching for suitable homes for more families. They believe that there are generous-minded property owners within Stratford who would wish actively to support a displaced Syrian family in need of a home here.



Syrian refugees with friends in Canada

Welcome Here is looking for privately rented housing (social housing cannot be offered as it would displace local families in need). Rent for privately rented accommodation in Stratford is usually high, but the need is for accommodation that is affordable on housing benefit. The families will have to manage initially on benefits while they learn English and look for jobs, but they are responsible tenants and will have the support of the council and Welcome Here.

Any type of housing can be used, as families are chosen according to the accommodation available. The council pays an initial 2 months' rent while the families are preparing to come to this country, and furniture and other necessities are supplied by the Council with the help of Home Office grant.

Roger Matthews, chair of Welcome Here, would like to hear from anyone about properties which could be homes for Syrian refugee families. For a preliminary discussion contact him on 01789 298503 or by e-mail at roger.matthews@phonecoop.coop.

Meals for the homeless

Stratford Quakers, with a little help from their friends, served lunches to homeless people in Stratford on Saturday 17 March and Sunday 18 March, as part of the pilot programme of weekend lunches being run by local churches at the United Reform Church on Rother Street. Saturday's lunch offered chicken soup or leek-and-potato soup, while on Sunday, the soup on offer was minestrone. On both days, the soup was supplemented by rolls and sandwiches donated by Pret-A-Manger in Stratford and by fruit.

Many thanks to Arnrud Wood for organising the two days, collecting the rolls from Pret-A-Manger – and cooking the soups on Saturday! And thanks to the two teams who helped on the two days. Stratford Quakers will be providing lunch next on Saturday 10 March. If you would like to help in any way, contact Arnrud on 01789 414743 or by e-mail at arnrid@hotmail.com.