



Newsletter – November 2017

Diary: November 2017

Sunday 5 November	Preparative Meeting – 11.15 am after Meeting for Worship
Saturday 12 November	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House
Saturday 12 November	Area Meeting – 2.00 pm, Evesham Meeting House
Tuesday 14 November	Inter-Faith Forum – 7.30 pm, Stratford Meeting House
Tuesday 21 November	Study Group – 7.30 pm, Stratford Meeting House
Saturday 25 November	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House

First sanctuary campaign gets under way

British Quakers' *Sanctuary Everywhere* programme is starting its first campaign: seeking changes to the law on immigration detention. Stratford Quakers will be discussing at our November business meeting how we can support this as a Sanctuary Meeting.

What is immigration detention? Basically, people can be locked up on the authority of the Home Office without any involvement of the courts. Detention is normally used to establish a person's identity or the basis of an immigration claim; to effect removal; and where there is reason to believe the person will fail to comply with conditions attached to a decision to allow them to live outside of a detention centre. People can also be detained while awaiting a decision on leave to enter the UK.



There are currently nine Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs) in the UK – seven are run by private companies under contract to the Home Office, with the remaining two operated by the Prison Service. Investigations by BBC's Panorama programme *Undercover: Britain's Immigration Secrets*, broadcast on 4 September, revealed shocking behaviour by staff at one of these centres: Brook House near Gatwick Airport.

According to Home Office policy, there should be a presumption in favour of temporary admission or release rather than detention. Detention should also be used sparingly, and for the shortest period necessary. Alternatives to detention – where the cases of individuals can be resolved without resorting to detention – should be used wherever possible. But in practice, many are detained for long periods without access to legal pathways to release.

Home Office statistics show that at the end of June 2017, nearly 3,000 people were being detained in an IRC. More than half had been locked up for more than 28 days. Nearly 10 per cent had been detained for more than six months. One man had been detained for more than four years. But

legally, IRCs are not prisons and those detained in them are not serving sentences. The UK is the only country in Europe that does not have a limit on how long someone can be detained in this way.

In March 2015, a cross-party panel of MPs and Peers published a report which concluded that the enforcement-focused culture of the Home Office resulted in the official policies not being followed, and as a result there were too many instances of unnecessary detention. The report recommended:

- a maximum time limit of 28 days on the length of time anyone can be detained;
- a presumption in favour of community-based resolutions rather than detention; and
- decisions to detain should be rare and detention should be for the shortest possible time.

The Home Office accepted the need for change, but has been reluctant to change the law. There has been no action to date on any of these recommendations. Parliament agreed amendments to the Immigration Act 2016 which mean that anyone who has been detained longer than four months should automatically have their case reviewed by a court. The Act received Royal Assent in May 2016, but the Home Office has yet to introduce the legal requirement to review such cases.

British Quakers are supporting calls for radical changes to detention arrangements. To start, we are asking for the introduction of the Immigration Act 2016 requirement for a court to review cases where someone has been detained for more than four months. But in the longer term, we are supporting calls for the introduction of a 28-day time limit on detentions and for the much wider use of community alternatives to detention.

What can Stratford Quakers do? As a first step we can write to our local MP asking him to support the introduction of the automatic review of cases where detention has lasted more than four months. This is already the law: it needs to be brought into force. We can also press the case for a time limit to detentions. We can take these actions as a Meeting and as individuals, and we can talk to other churches and concerned local groups about joining together to press for change. We'll be discussing this further at November's business meeting.

Inter Faith Week

Inter Faith Week 2017 will take place between Sunday 12 November and Sunday 19 November. Building good relationships and working partnerships between people of different faiths and beliefs is part of the year-round work of many people and organisations in the UK. Having a special Week provides a focal point, helping to introduce inter faith activity to a wider audience, so that more people are made aware of the importance of this vital work and are able to participate in it.



Here in Stratford, the Stratford-on-Avon Interfaith Forum (SAIF) meets in Stratford Quaker Meeting House every two months. Its Aim is to foster respect and compassion through dialogue and co-operation. Its Vision is to bring together people of all faiths, in recognition of the value of diversity in our society: "We will appreciate similarities, respect differences and learn about one another. In this

way we will develop strong and positive links and relationships between people of all generations from different faiths and cultures, for the long term benefit of the community.”

SAIF’s next meeting will take place during Inter Faith Week on Tuesday 14 November, when Kumar Bhatti Khan will be talking about the Muslim Faith. The meeting will start at 7.30 pm.

Membership of SAIF is open to any person of any faith who accepts the Aim and Vision of SAIF (see above). Members agree not to try to convert others to their own faith, but expect that their own faith will often be deepened by insights from others. They accept that there are many areas where members have very different views.

Deepening Quaker Worship

On Saturday 21 October, Stratford Quakers hosted a Kindlers-on-the-Road workshop on the topic *Deepening Quaker Worship*. The workshop went well, though the numbers were sadly depleted by illness.

Those attending explored ideas about worship as well as their thinking about prayer. An illuminating exercise was being asked to select a picture that best illustrated how you saw Meeting for Worship. Choices included pictures of a path through a wood, of clasped hands, of light filtering through trees on to a spiral drawn in a bed of pebbles, and of medieval villagers skating on a river of ice!



Three different images of Meeting for Worship. What would be your image of Meeting for Worship?

We’ll be exploring the theme again in November’s Study Group, which will take place on Tuesday 21 November at Stratford Quaker Meeting House, starting as usual at 7.30 pm. We will be using the Silence and Waiting unit from the *Becoming Friends* handbook, which helps us to think about the nature of Quaker worship and our personal experiences of worship.

Speaking Christian ... about the Lord’s Prayer

This month we reach the final topic in our series based on American theologian Marcus Borg’s book *Speaking Christian: the Lord’s Prayer*. Borg’s discussion of this is rich and will be covered in two parts, concluding next month.

The Lord’s Prayer is included in almost every act of Christian worship and it is one that most Christians know by heart. Its words are so familiar that they are often taken for granted. But, says Borg, its content is surprising – both for what is included and for what is not.

Three versions of the Lord's Prayer have come down to us from early Christian writings. It is included in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, and it is also found in the *Didache*, a text from around 100 CE which is not included in the New Testament. Matthew's version is almost the same as the *Didache's*, and is the form used in most churches:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to a time of trial, but rescue us from evil.

Missing from Matthew is the sentence "For the kingdom and the power and glory are yours forever". A version of these words is only found in the *Didache*.

Luke's version is shorter and different in a number of ways.

Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.

Because of the different versions, scholars are uncertain whether the prayer goes back to Jesus or whether the versions are products of different early Christian communities. If Jesus taught this prayer to his disciples, how do we account for the different versions? Did he teach it in different ways? Or did he teach the core of it and then communities developed it in different ways? But whatever its origin, it tells us the gist of what early Christians thought mattered most to Jesus. "To be committed to Jesus meant to pray for, to yearn for what is in this prayer," says Borg.

Borg starts his discussion by pointing out what is not included in the prayer.

- It's not about an afterlife. There is no petition asking God to take us to heaven when we die.
- It's not about material success. There is no request to God that we prosper materially.
- It's not about belief. It does not ask God to help us believe.
- It's not about Jesus. There is nothing in it about believing specific facts about Jesus.

So what is the prayer about? It starts with an opening address to God as *Father*. Borg writes: "Most likely the Aramaic word *abba* is behind the Greek word in Luke and probably in Matthew as well. *Abba* in Aramaic is a familiar form of "father" ... It was commonly used to refer to one's own father and thus has the connotations of "papa" or "dear father" in English. ... It is family imagery – about intimacy and belonging. *Abba* affirms that God is like a dear, intimate parent and those that use this prayer belong to the same family."

There are at least two ways to see the next line: *Hallowed be your name*. Are we reminding ourselves to keep God's name holy? Or is it addressed to God: "Make your name holy"? More on this next month.

And then the prayer asks: "*Your kingdom come*". Borg writes: "The kingdom is, of course, the kingdom of God. It is the heart of Jesus's message in the synoptic gospels ... Importantly, the kingdom of God is not about heaven, is not about an afterlife. It is about the earth, as Matthew's longer version ... makes explicit: "Your will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven ... So we pray for the coming of God's kingdom on earth. ... The kingdom is God's passion for the earth: a world of economic justice and peace, where the nations beat their swords into ploughshares ... every family has its own vine and fig tree ... and no one is made to live in fear".

We shall continue our exploration of Marcus Borg's discussion of the Lord's Prayer next month.