



Newsletter – September 2017

Diary: September 2017

Sunday 3 September	Preparative Meeting – 11.15 am after Meeting for Worship
Saturday 9 September	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House
Saturday 23 September	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House
Wednesday 26 September	Study Group – 7.30 pm, Stratford Meeting House
Thursday 5 October	Quaker Week talk – 7.30 pm, Stratford Meeting House

Creating sanctuary in Stratford

Last month's newsletter reported on a new national Quaker initiative – Sanctuary Meetings – which was launched at Yearly Meeting Gathering at the beginning of August. Recognising that Britain can be a hostile place for people new to Britain, the initiative aims to create a culture of welcoming hospitality which answers that of God in everyone.



Quakers across Britain are working in different ways to welcome newcomers to the country, including supporting and establishing City of Sanctuary groups, lobbying local councils, visiting detention centres and working with the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network. The Sanctuary Meetings project forms part of a wider Quaker Peace and Social Witness *Sanctuary Everywhere* Programme, working towards a manifesto which includes abolition of immigration detention centres and the right for asylum seekers to work.

Stratford Quaker Meeting, along with all the other local meetings in the country, has now been invited formally to become a Sanctuary Meeting. Sanctuary Meetings are part of a national network of Quaker Meetings working together to develop a culture of welcome and hospitality. Becoming a Sanctuary Meeting involves a commitment to building a culture of welcome, challenging racism in all its forms, and working to change laws on destitution, detention and deportation.

Becoming a Sanctuary Meeting is a decision for Meeting for Worship for Business, and we will be discussing whether Stratford Quaker Meeting should become a Sanctuary Meeting at our preparative meeting on Sunday 3 September. The starting point is simply to identify one or two people willing to act as a link with the Programme Coordinator, and Arnridd Wood and Roger Matthews have already volunteered to take on this role. Arnridd and Roger are also active in the Welcome Here group, which has been set up to provide a community welcome to Syrian refugees resettled in the town, and Stratford Quaker Meeting has also actively supported Welcome Here.

The Sanctuary Meeting initiative is led by Tim Gee from Quaker Peace and Social Witness, and Tim will be speaking in Stratford about sanctuary and the wider issues of migration on Thursday 5 October during Quaker Week.

Brummana High School

Our new charitable appeal is for Brummana High School in Lebanon.

Founded by Quakers in 1873, Brummana High School was one of the first and only schools in Lebanon open to all faiths. Based on a campus in the hills above Beirut, it has educated generations of children from different community backgrounds, inspiring them with the school's motto "I serve". There are around 1,100 students at the school, including young Syrians – refugees from the civil war in their own country.



Brummana High School is a non-profit fee-paying school. Tuition costs are average compared to similar schools in Lebanon, where a large majority of children are educated in the independent sector. Never very strong, the Lebanese state education system suffered during the 17-year civil war that wracked the country, during which many teachers emigrated.



In recent years, and especially since the Syrian civil war started 6 years ago, Lebanon's economy has deteriorated. Jobs are scarce and the cost of living has risen sharply, and many Lebanese families are struggling to make ends meet. Brummana High School therefore runs a bursary fund to help needy families to meet school fees and enable their children to attend the school.

Over the next three months, Stratford Quakers will be collecting money for the School's bursary fund. Contributions can be made in the box at the Meeting House or by contacting our treasurer Elliot Wassell at Elliot.wassell@yahoo.co.uk. The bursaries will help provide a child-centred education in an open, tolerant and peaceful environment to children in a country that has been torn by civil war and is now surrounded by violence and instability.

Speaking Christian ... about the Lord's Supper

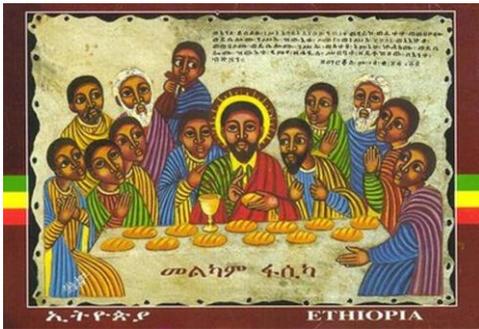
This month, in our series based on theologian Marcus Borg's book *Speaking Christian*, we look at the Lord's Supper – also known as (Holy) Communion, the Eucharist or the Mass.

Gathering at a table for bread and wine has been a primary practice in Christianity from its earliest days. The idea that the bread and wine represent in some way the body and blood of Christ is also very early – though for hundreds of years there have been differences about how this representation works. Those who believe in *transubstantiation* hold that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. An alternative view is *consubstantiation*: the bread and wine are not changed, but the body and blood of Jesus are "in, with and under" the bread and wine. And some simply understand Communion as a memorial in which we remember Jesus and what he did.

But, says Borg, these were not questions that bothered early Christians. In first-century Christian practice, a meal of bread and wine was accompanied by words associating them with the body and blood of Jesus. And in these early days, this meal of bread and wine had several meanings.

First, bread and wine were the staple food and drink of the Mediterranean. Though a meal might include more, bread and wine were and symbolised the material basis of existence. Moreover, says

Borg, the early Christian sharing of bread and wine was a meal, a full meal: this primary Christian practice is based on food, the sharing of the staff and stuff of life.



Second, shared meals in early Christianity were a continuation of the meal practice of Jesus himself. The Gospels include accounts of meals. And for Jesus, food mattered: the Lord's Prayer, for example, includes a petition for daily bread. Moreover, Jesus was known, and sometimes criticised, for eating with people whom many would avoid. So the meal practice of Jesus symbolised and embodied a radical inclusion of all people.

Third, Jesus is “the bread of life”, “the living bread that came down from heaven” (John 6:48, 51). This theme of Jesus as the manna in the wilderness associates him with the imagery of exodus: Jesus is food for a journey, Jesus is about a new exodus, a new liberation. Finally, the body and blood language associates bread and wine with Jesus' death. “Separation of body and blood occurs in a violent death,” says Borg. “These words are thus reminders that Jesus died a violent death, killed by the powers that rule this world.”

But many eucharistic liturgies obscure these meanings, says Borg, because they place an emphasis on sin, guilt and sacrifice – in particular, the idea that Jesus offered his body and blood to atone for the sins of the world. But the meanings of the Eucharist, this meal of bread and wine which goes back to the beginnings of Christianity, are much richer. “The Eucharist is about food, shared food, inclusivity; it is about becoming one with Christ and one in Christ; it is about spiritual food for a journey; and it is about participating in Jesus's passion for a different kind of world.”

Quakers do not include a formal sacrament of bread and wine in their worship. But as Borg's discussion makes clear, the practice reflects ideas, a way of living, that will resonate with Quakers.

Faith in action

The next meeting of the Stratford Quaker Study Group will take place on Wednesday 27 September – note the changed date! - when we will be discussing the idea of “faith in action”.

Quakers aim to live in accordance with our spiritual experience. Some of our spiritual insights, which we call testimonies, arise from an inner conviction and can challenge our normal ways of living. Harvey Gillman writes: “The word *testimony* is used by Quakers to describe a witness to the living truth within the human heart as it is acted out in daily life. It is not a form of words but a mode of life based on the realisation that there is that of God in everybody, that all human beings are equal, that all life is interconnected. It is affirmative but may lead to action that runs counter to certain practices currently accepted in society at large.” (*Quaker faith & practice*, 23.12).

Over time, a number of testimonies have developed: to truth and integrity, to justice and equality, to simplicity, and to peace. As a result, Quakers have been led to undertake actions consistent with these values. For example, because Quakers recognise the equal worth and unique character of every person, they have been led to work to change systems that cause injustice or give rise to unequal treatment of individuals. In the past, Quakers were prominent in campaigns against slavery and for prison reform; more recently Quakers have sought to help refugees and asylum seekers.

This way of thinking is consistent with the Christian roots of Quakerism. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is inviting people to think about the things they do and whether these are rooted in love. “Go and do likewise”, he tells those listening to him: the emphasis is on “do”. Early Christianity was seen as “The Way” – an idea reflected in Quaker *Advices and queries*: “Remember that Christianity is not a notion but a way” (*Advices & queries* 2). And we are also asked: “Are you following Jesus’ example of love in action?” (*Advices & queries* 4).

But putting faith into action is not easy. It may sometimes be unclear how we should act or what we should do in response to a particular situation. And putting faith into action is not just about how we respond to the big issues of the day: it is also about how we act in our daily lives, in the day-to-day interactions we have with family, friends, the people we work with or meet in the street. Early Quaker shop keepers, for example, decided that the importance of truth as a value in their lives meant they should always offer clear and fair prices. This was in an age when prices were more often set by haggling, so Quaker shop keepers soon became known for their fair dealing: they were living their testimony to truth every minute of every day.

We will be exploring the idea of faith in action at our monthly Study Group in September. In advance of the meeting, you might like to think about some questions that help explore this issue.

- How do you try to live out in your life the Quaker testimonies to equality, simplicity, peace and truth?
- Have you ever done anything especially challenging or difficult because you felt the need to live out an important value in your life?
- Are there issues where you feel unsure or uncomfortable about Quaker values or how they reflect on the way you live now?

Friends of the Holy Land

Friends of the Holy Land is a recently established charity which aims to help vulnerable Christians living in the traditional Holy Land – now Gaza, Israel, Jordan and Palestine.

Around 200,000 Christians – 1 per cent of the population - currently live in the area familiar to many from the Old and New Testaments, and many suffer from a range of problems, including difficulties with employment, health and housing. Friends of the Holy Land was set up in 2009 to help and encourage Christians to flourish in the lands of their birth. It does this by raising money to help Christians in need, as well as raising awareness of the challenges many of them face.



Friends of the Holy Land’s 2017 national gathering will be held in Kenilworth on Saturday 30 September at St Francis of Assisi Church on Warwick Road, CV8 1HL from 10.30 to 4.00. Among the speakers will be Husam Wahhab, a lecturer at the University of Bethlehem and a member of FHL’s Holy Land Committee, and Lynn Boyle, a vicar from Stockport who has just returned from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land which has included visits to projects supported by Friends of the Holy Land. Phone Karen Baxter on 01926 512980 if you would like to attend.

For more general information, see <https://www.friendsoftheholylan.org.uk/>.