

Annual Report of Leicester Local Quaker Meeting 2010

The report is written in the format of the National Quaker Framework for Action 2009 – 2014 as this provides a clear guide to the priorities that we have set ourselves.

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a. Strengthening the spiritual roots of our Meeting and in ourselves:

We aim to be an inclusive worshipping community where everyone is welcomed, valued and nurtured.

Our Sunday Meetings for Worship have been attended weekly by between 50 – 80 people and has regularly welcomed visitors and newcomers, several of whom have continued to worship with us.

Other weekly Meetings are held on Wednesday lunchtimes at Queen's Road and in the homes of Friends. The fortnightly Meeting for Worship at Kibworth, now in its 17th year, is attended by a group of 12 Friends and Attenders who support each other in their spiritual life. They greatly miss Doney Doro, a founder member of the group who died this year. Meetings continue to be held monthly at John Woolman House, attended by Leicester Friends and a small group of residents. Elders have held meetings at the homes of some Friends who are not able to come to Meeting because of ill health or disability. The Prayer group continues meet fortnightly to uphold Friends who are in need.

All Age Worship continues to play an important part in the spiritual experience of many friends who enjoy the opportunities to focus upon aspects of worship in a multi-generational setting. Held monthly, these well-attended Meetings are led by those wishing to share their gifts with the Meeting. They are arranged by Elders. A workshop facilitated by Quaker Life entitled *Worshipping Together: All Age Worship* has helped us to develop our thinking and practice about ways for the whole meeting to worship together and to 'know one another in that which is eternal'.

Elders continue to facilitate 'Afterthoughts' sessions after Meeting on a monthly basis where Friends can express what has been in their hearts and minds during meeting. The sharing of these thoughts can be very profound.

Sharing Life Experience interviews have been a wonderful way to learn about the spiritual journeys of Friends and have been inspirational in-reach for the meeting. Four earlier talks have been published in a book by our own *Quaker Press* entitled *My Life, My Faith*, which we treasure. We are looking forward hearing more of these talks in 2011 and hope that more books can be produced.

Our children and young people are loved and valued and are supported by a hardworking children's committee. The committee's work has been strengthened this year by support from overseers and elders who are concerned to help make the children's meeting more integral with the whole meeting and for adults and children to get to know each other better. The committee encourages all in the Meeting to join in with or help to run the activities of Children's Meeting. Friends have much to offer in sharing their values and experience with our Meeting's children.

There are currently 19 children in attendance, some regularly and others less frequently. Our young people's group has been laid down temporarily until our current children become of an age when they need different provision. Meanwhile our older young people continue to flourish and are taking into the world much of what they have learned through their Quaker beginnings. Several young friends from Leicester work in national Quaker committees such as Junior Young Friends and Young Friends General Meeting. One is

serving as a Quaker Peaceworker.

Meeting safety is important and we follow the recommended procedures. 22 Friends are now registered with the Criminal Records Bureau to enable them to work closely with our children

Some of the activities that the children have enjoyed with adults have been crocus bulb planting in Victoria Park, a sleepover, Apple day, art workshops with children from the Neve Shalom Synagogue and dancing at a ceilidh. Friendship, creativity, simplicity, equality, environmental concern and worship have been learned whilst having fun.

Three much-loved Friends, Dorothy Sterling, Len Langrick and Doney Doro, have died this year and we miss them greatly. We thank Funerals Committee for conducting their funerals and supporting their families as well as supporting other Friends who have been bereaved.

Friends from Leicester have contributed to the life of Quakers nationally by serving on central committees and being our Meeting's representatives at conferences. We thank them for this service on our behalf.

Several study groups have helped deepen our understanding and our faith. One group has explored Quaker history and its relevance for today and another has studied Advices and Queries.

Nominations group has found names of people willing to work on committees. They recognise that many Friends have busy pressured lives and are unable to take on the work that is required, but with discernment the group has worked hard to make sure the committees work well. They are particularly grateful to Friends who express an interest in working in certain areas.

One positive change that has affected the way we work to support each other has been the setting up Friendly-8s groups. These have replaced colour groups and allow us to meet in small groups and share activities that help us to get to know each other well. The functions of the colour groups such as providing teas, leading All Age Worship and attending John Woolman House have been organised in other ways.

The setting up of Friendly-8s groups has allowed Overseers to concentrate more closely on their main function of making sure newcomers are made welcome, encouraging caring friendships and entering with sympathy into people's needs. Above all they have upheld members and attenders both practically and spiritually.

The sharing of food has always been a loving tradition at our meeting. This year Elders have cared for us by organising breakfasts on the first Sunday of each month and Outreach have helped us get to know each other and newcomers at bi-monthly bring and share lunches. We thank our catering committee for the part they have played in organising these and other events where food has been served.

b. Speaking out in the world

We hope that we have confidently expressed our Quaker faith and values to those who wish to know more about us. We aim to have a quiet but clear voice as 'Speaking our truth' is important for our wider work in the world.

Outreach Committee have worked hard to put our message across, using our own media such as a bright new welcome leaflet and a newsletter, development of our popular website, and by taking opportunities to make our voice heard in the local media by radio interviews, letters to the Leicester Mercury and articles and photographs of our events. A Quaker stall at the Riverside Festival let many people know of our work with asylum seekers.

The Big Outreach Conference organised by Quaker Life was attended by one Outreach member and two others went to Woodbrooke's *A Visible Welcome and a Clear Voice* on our behalf.

Quaker week provided a focus for outreach activities. As well as newspaper articles and two radio interviews (one on Radio 4), two interesting talks were organised and members of the public and other faith groups were invited. One focused on Quaker values in workplace of the chocolate firms and the other was an interview with two Quaker Peaceworkers about work on a national level.

Another activity during Quaker Week was the planting of crocus bulbs in Victoria Park. The children and adults who took part in the pouring rain greatly enjoyed this activity and hope that park users will enjoy the flowers in the spring.

National Interfaith Week also helped us speak out. One Friend gave a talk about Quakers at his workplace. We were one of the sponsorship groups of an Interfaith event at County Hall, focussing on the needs of asylum seekers.

The Meeting House was open to visitors during National Heritage Saturday in early September. We hosted the Stoneygate Conservation Society's exhibition of local architecture and visitors were interested to see our building and hear about how we use it.

Our Meeting House is a wonderful asset for outreach as it is well used by local groups and its frontage passed by many people. Plans have been made to replace our notice board and signage and make a more welcoming entrance and foyer. Our garden is well cared for and attracts many people who relish its quiet space and beautiful trees and shrubs.

c. Peace

Our Peace Group has held vigils and has written letters on our behalf to heads of state and government ministers responsible for military policy. Friends in the meeting are individually involved in a number of peace ventures such as ecumenical accompaniment in Palestine, alternatives to violence, work with asylum seekers and teaching about peace to young people. Our hope is that Meeting provides these Friends with spiritual sustenance to continue this work.

d. Sustainability

Quakers at Leicester are committed to sustainability and try to lead others by example. After the failure of Copenhagen summit to make any lasting international changes we may be feeling rather daunted by the urgency of task ahead of us but many Friends are living their lives in ways that impact less on the environment. Some are involved in local environment organisations and national campaigning groups. Our Living Witness representative keeps us informed about Quaker and other initiatives. This autumn eight

Friends joined together to take part in a community carbon reduction study group entitled 'Footprints'.

Green Living group has continued to meet throughout the year but with less support than before the Copenhagen summit. We were heartened to hear a talk by Sarah Russell, the City Council's lead councillor on the environment and saw the work that the council is undertaking, while recognising that more is needed.

Green Living Group and Outreach groups worked together to organise Apple day in the Autumn, an enjoyable and informative day where we were joined by many visitors and other campaigning groups. Through games, craft activities, talks, displays, eating apple snacks, and using a community apple press, we celebrated apples as food that is available to us freely with little impact on the environment.

e. Strengthening local communities

Leicester Quakers have played a part in fostering cohesion in our city and county. We have met with people of other faiths and none to understand each other and to work together in projects such as supporting asylum seekers and refugees.

The needs of people who have been forced to migrate from their homes due to global unrest and poverty is a concern of our Meeting. We seek to reduce the effects of destitution by working with support groups such as City of Sanctuary, The Red Cross and the Welcome Project and by generous giving of gifts, food and clothing. We are seeking new ways to help destitute asylum seekers with funding for their essential needs. A FANS (Friends and Neighbours) group met weekly at the Meeting House providing a safe, comfortable space for friendly conversation and English teaching.

We are represented on Leicester and Leicestershire SACRE to advise and support schools in the teaching of multi-faith Religious Education. Two Friends attended a SACRE workshop entitled *Sacred Spaces* to facilitate visits from schools to our Meeting House.

Our Quaker University Chaplain works on an ecumenical team to offer spiritual support to students at Leicester University. We are pleased that several students from the University attend our Meetings for Worship both on Wednesdays and Sundays.

The Leicester Interfaith Fellowship meets monthly at our Meeting House and holds interesting discussions and talks.

The Clarendon Park Women's Interfaith group meets together at regular intervals for friendly discussion about their lives and faith. Members of the group went for a snowy late November walk to celebrate Interfaith Week.

Our representative on South Leicestershire Christian Partnership works with other churches to promote ecumenical understanding and several Friends support 'Christians Aware'. Women's World Day of Prayer was held at our Meeting House this year. The Meeting House hosts a Meeting for Worship as part of the lunch-time pilgrimage of local churches during the Week for Christian Unity. We are also part of the annual Christian Aware Inter-faith pilgrimage in Clarendon Park.

We continue to have dialogue with St Phillip's Centre which fosters relationships with other faith groups. Our Quaker week talk by Daniel Edge, a Quaker Peacemaker who worked

for the Christian-Muslim forum was held in conjunction with St Phillips and encouraged them to apply for a Quaker Peacemaker next year for a similar project.

Recently we have joined with other faith groups to support our Muslim neighbours when threatened by the views of a racist group. We prayed together that mutual understanding would overcome extremism and we were pleased to celebrate all that is good about our shared lives together in Leicester.

f. Using our resources well:

We aim to be good stewards of the resources in our care – people, our building and our finances.

Our Meeting House has been looked after well by our conscientious staff and resident Friend. We seek to be exemplary employers and aim that our employment practice demonstrates of testimony to equality. Earlier this year some difficulties came to light about the way we pay our staff salaries. Contracting the Quaker Housing Committee to administer staff pay has now rectified this position.

This year we have continued with our plan of ‘greening’ the Meeting House and the ceiling of the large meeting room was fully insulated and decorated. Energy efficient lighting was installed. We had planned to replace our very old heating appliances with a more energy efficient system but difficulties with the contractor have delayed this plan. We are seeking further advice on our heating replacement and hope to complete the work in 2011.

A quinquennial report has given us a detailed picture of the state of the building. It appears to be generally in good order. The report has listed repairs and routine maintenance that need to be done and has advised us on a time scale and order of priority. House Committee have attended to matters that needed to be addressed this year such as the rebuilding of the front porch and fire safety recommendations. It is a helpful document that allows House Committee to plan future work.

The garden is well cared for by our garden coordinator who links with House Committee. We pay for the regular services of a gardener for two hours per fortnight and our cleaner, Brian Gale, mows the lawn. There are plans for the building of a willow house in the garden and the replacement of garden play equipment.

Earlier this year problems came to light about the way our financial affairs were being managed and our accounts maintained. It was clear that only loose structures were in place to supervise the care of our finances. This led to changes in the way that Finance Committee operates and the appointment of a new treasurer.

It is now clear that our financial situation is sound and we have financial reserves that cover our long-term costs. Our Treasurer keeps clear records of our income and expenditure and reports monthly to Finance Committee. Finance Committee meets regularly to ensure our financial affairs are well managed and reports to Local Business Meeting and to the Trustees of Leicester Area meeting. Terms of reference for our treasurer’s work and that of the Finance Committee have been drawn up and an assistant treasurer has been appointed. Procedures have been put in place to obtain written estimates for spending above certain limits. The treasurer has drafted a budget for 2011 to give guidelines for our spending.

A tremendous amount of work has taken place on our behalf by our convenor of Finance Committee, our new treasurer and other members of the committee and we thank them for the care and attention they have given to the task.

We have been well served this year by our Trustees of Leicester Area Meeting who have worked with us in improving our practices and have given us advice.

Our committees, staff and appointees have served us well this year. Work by individual members and attenders, both directly for the Meeting and for wider causes, has helped us live our lives according to our Quaker testimonies. Working in unity, we have strengthened our spiritual roots and our Meeting has continued to flourish.

Angela Walker
Clerk of Leicester Local Quaker Meeting

December 2010