

AUTUMN ROUND-UP 2018

Beetle Drive



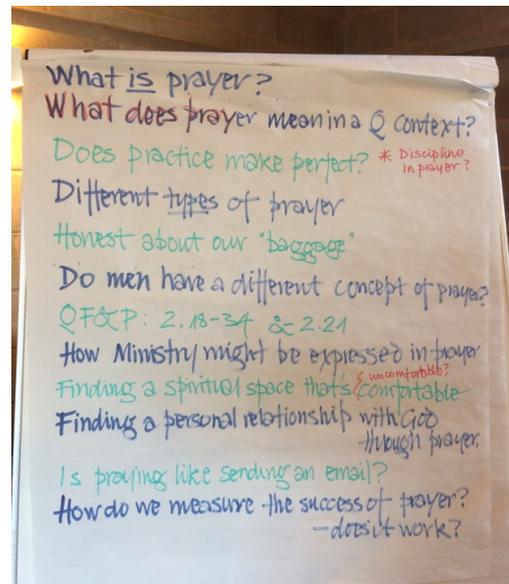
On 11 August Pastoral Friends organised a Beetle Drive for us – something we have never done before, followed by a delicious afternoon tea. It was great fun. Twenty Friends enjoyed an occasion full of laughter – it brought out a touch of competitive spirit! Something we hope to repeat.

Spiritual Adventure Day

On 15th September we held a Workshop on the Theme of Prayer, run by the Kindlers. The approach was exploratory, giving the 16 Friends who attended a safe place to ask questions about prayer. What does prayer mean for us? How to interpret it? What forms might it take?

One of the optional activities was re-writing the Lord's Prayer in a way that was most meaningful for us. We hope to have a couple of examples to include in a future newsletter.

Evaluations showed that people valued highly the space to share and connect with Friends at a deeper level, as well as widening our concepts of prayer.



Banner and Bunting Workshop

Friends enjoyed working on the banner and bunting for Quaker Week and other events



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QUAKER WEEK - 29 Sept - 7 October

The theme for Quaker Week this year was 'Room at the Table for More'. The aims were to celebrate Quakerism and reach out to the local community. We held two events in Cheltenham.

On Thursday 4th October we held a Community Celebration. We invited our room hirers and the local community. It was a great success. Nearly all our hirers were represented, and several people from the local community joined 15 Friends – over 30 of us in all.

A local Syrian couple made tasty snacks and Syrian baclava, while Friends also brought home-made cakes. It was a great opportunity for chat, networking, and answering any questions people had about Quakerism. We had plans of the Meeting House development on display so that people could ask questions. Our table displays included sanctuary meeting leaflets, white poppies, Quaker information and fair-trade goods. The banner and bunting created at the September workshop made the meeting house very welcoming.

The 15-minute taster Meeting for Worship was well attended.

There was a really great atmosphere. The games, which included bagatelle and table skittles, were very entertaining and popular.

We are looking forward to building on this event next year.

Six of us held an outdoor Meeting for Worship at Pittville Park on **Sunday 7th October**. As well as being a very visible presence with our information table and colourful banner as part of outreach, we were surprised at how lovely we found the experience. We hope to repeat this next year.

Remembrance Sunday



Cheltenham Quakers laid a wreath of red and white poppies at the Cheltenham Festival of Remembrance

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This year Cheltenham became a Sanctuary Meeting

Where did the idea come from?

- Quakers across Britain are working in different ways to welcome newcomers to the country, including by supporting and establishing City of Sanctuary groups, lobbying local councils, visiting detention centres and campaigning with the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network. Friends expressed a desire for greater support with current work and developing new projects. They also wanted a more coordinated way of working together for political change.
- Sanctuary Meetings 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.
- Rooted in the conviction that there is that of God in every person, Quakers across Britain are working to welcome people seeking sanctuary.
- "Through Quakers' longstanding work welcoming newcomers to our shores, we have seen up close that the government's creation of a 'hostile environment' is increasingly embedding policies of discrimination into the practices of the British state. Quakers in Britain are committed to working with others to change this, creating a culture of compassion and welcoming hospitality that answers that of God in every person."

What does being a Sanctuary Meeting mean?

Being a Sanctuary Meeting means a commitment to building a culture of welcome, challenging racism in all of its forms and helping change the laws on destitution, detention and deportation.

A Sanctuary Meeting is a Quaker Meeting that is committed to:

- Joining local initiatives to build a culture of welcome (eg GARAS and CWR)
- Building alliances with groups opposing racism (eg STOP FUNDING HATE)
- Working with others to change the laws on destitution, detention, deportations and removals. (eg QARN, LIFT THE BAN, RIGHT TO REMAIN, THESE WALLS MUST FALL)

On September 22nd, Gloucester Area Meeting ran a very interesting and stimulating Sanctuary Meeting workshop so that all local meetings could share their experiences and learn about becoming a Sanctuary Meeting. A delicious Syrian lunch was prepared by Hanan Shami.



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Syrian Refugee Families in Cheltenham - an update

Bill Flynn from Cheltenham Welcomes Refugees writes:

During the last two years many Friends, volunteers and the local community have responded to appeals for household items, clothes, toys and furniture for Syrian refugee families arriving here in Cheltenham under the UK Government's Relocation Scheme for Vulnerable Syrian Persons.

The generosity and helpfulness of the local community has been amazing with many helping the families to learn English, learning to drive and pass their driving test, meeting and conversing in English, attending social events with the Syrian families and even being taught Arabic by qualified members of the Syrian community.

One really incredibly generous and compassionate response has been from a member of St Gregory's parish to arrange for their inherited home to be rented by a Syrian family living in the hope that they might leave their refugee camp in Iraq where living conditions were so difficult. Without this offer the family would probably not have qualified for being relocated here. They are a family who have now been given the opportunity to come to a safe place, with decent living conditions, have the support and help they need to overcome the effects of the traumas they have experienced and build a new life.

All the families are helped and supported by their Refugee Resettlement Officer, Amina, at GARAS (Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers).

Amina has sent us the following update on the families:

"We have 20 Syrian refugee families in Cheltenham now. 7 of these families arrived this year. Some have settled in better than others. We try to address medical needs, both physical and mental, and obviously this impacts how they're feeling on a general basis. But all make an effort to go out, be social, get familiar with the town and enjoy the local parks and shops. The children are all doing great. They are spread out in various schools and nurseries and pick up English so quickly.

The adults attend ESOL classes at GlosCol, and spend many hours every week attending these classes. Some of the Syrians who have been here for over a year speak really good English. Good enough for them to work and look for suitable jobs.

Of course learning a language is hard and takes time. Especially as English is such a different language to Arabic! Different language rules, different sounds etc. Some have passed their ESOL exams and received their certificates.

Socially they mostly hang around with each other, which isn't surprising, as they can speak Arabic with each other, cook the same type of food, the same cultural aspects and they have their shared experience of leaving Syria due to the civil war. But they've also done a good job in learning about the cultures here, and always asking questions about it, seeing as some things are so different to what they're used to in Syria.

There have been many significant events for them such as the birth of new babies, but also the loss of loved ones. These events have brought the families even closer together at times of celebration and of sadness.

Many have passed their driving tests and during the summer, with the help of one or two driver volunteers from St. Greg's, all the families enjoyed a day on the beach at Weston-Super-Mare. Hanan, whom many will remember from CWR meetings and community events was able to visit her brother in Germany whom she hadn't seen for two years. He is now married and his wife is expecting their first child. Seeing her brother and hearing the news gave Hanan great joy. Hanan provided the Syrian snacks for the Quaker Week Community Celebration at Friend's Meeting House. Hanan and her husband have started a catering business "Fattoush".

A great achievement is one of the adults being granted a place at the University here in Cheltenham.

Some have jobs, such as chef, taxi driver, painter/decorator, retail assistant, Arabic tutor. Others are looking for work, but it's difficult, especially when language is a barrier.

New families are always welcomed by the older families, and greeted with warmth and kindness.

The children seem happy and within a few weeks it's apparent that even they feel a bit more relaxed and confident in their new environment."

Thank you everyone who has given help and support in any way to the Syrian families. Your compassionate and generous support has helped all the families feel welcome and helped them to begin establishing a new life for themselves."