

Report on Leinster Quarterly Meeting
23rd June 2018
Enniscorthy Meeting House

The theme of the day was Quaker Discernment.

Meeting for Worship was followed by Leinster Quarterly Business Meeting

Attendance: 25

J J Power, Clerk, opened the biannual business meeting in which several issues were discussed. We were informed that the first half of the moieties payable to Ireland Yearly Meeting are due by the end of June 2018 and the second half is due in September 2018. Retiring Elders and new Elders were nominated by Dublin Monthly Meeting and appointed. A number of Friends are due to retire from the LQM Education Committee and LQM Committee brought forward the names of three Friends for consideration to serve on the LQM Education Committee and these Friends were duly appointed. Vacancies remain on the LQM Education Committee and LQM Committee are asked to bring forward names for consideration at the LQM in November 2018. A number of Friends were nominated to bring forward names for Clerk of Ireland Yearly Meeting. Two Friends were appointed to bring forward names for consideration for appointment to LQM Committee as a number of Friends are due to retire from that Committee in November 2018.

Friends joined together to enjoy a picnic lunch with tea and coffee provided by Enniscorthy Friends. In the glorious weather, there were opportunities after lunch to do some sightseeing and to visit the Farmer's Market across the River Slaney.

Afternoon session. Theme: Quaker Discernment.

Attendance: 31

Simon Lamb delivered a very thought-provoking and challenging talk on Quaker Discernment.

As Friends we need to seek the divine will in our lives and Simon referenced the life and works of Thomas R Kelly. Do we follow only half way to fulfil God's will in our lives? How do you understand what is the divine will? Simon challenged us to consider if we follow only half of the way and fall short of submitting ourselves in obedience to God. Why should we seek God's will for our lives? Simon explained that God's only tools are His people – we are the only instruments for change. We are challenged to not just do 'good things' but to be a part of the divine plan. Simon suggested that we are cogs in the wheel and each one is important in the overall scheme.

To be able to discern God's will, we have to create space to 'hear' what God is saying to us. We need to come to God with an open heart and a willingness to be obedient to His will.

Discernment can be individual and corporate and God may have a plan for me and a plan for my community. We need to start with a personal relationship with God and an openness to hear. (Revelations 3 V 21 & 22; Isaiah 30 V 21; John 10 V 4; John 14 V 26; John 16 V 13).

God's voice may not be the most obvious voice we hear; we need to test the voice (1 John 4 V 1-3). In terms of discerning God's will for us and what we are called to do, we need to know the difference between 'openings' and 'leadings'.

An opening is when a general or universal truth is revealed to us. For example, John Woolman became aware that slavery was wrong (opening) and then felt compelled to preach against it (leading). We might experience an opening but resist the leading, which calls us to action. The leading might be experienced as a consistent thought that will not go away until we act on it. This may be God's intervention to lead us to take action which can be uncomfortable as it was for John Woolman who was challenging commonly-held beliefs that it was OK to put people into slavery and to profit from this.

So why is it that we often fail to hear the divine call in our lives? Simon explained that our world is too 'loud' and busy. The 'noise' of our lives can close out the potential for us to hear the divine voice. We also need to guard against the belief that God would not choose us as this too can reduce our ability to hear His voice.

Simon expressed concern about the spiritual level of Meetings. Are we closing out divine callings? Are we avoiding the discomfort of being used by God as the task might be difficult? Simon also advised that we need to learn some 'tools' of discernment and suggested six 'tools':

Discipline: Waiting in the presence of the Lord for God to reveal Himself, for example in Meeting for Worship or in quiet reflection alone.

Prayer: Having a dialogue with God, not a monologue – being open to hear His voice (Ref: Douglas Steer)

Scripture: Reading the scripture – knowing the scripture is not the truth but is a tool to lead us to the truth

Fasting: Can assist in becoming more in tune with our inner voice

Seeking advice: Discussions with trusted Friends and friends and being open to their advice

Compassion: Having a tender heart for those around us and their circumstances

(Ref: Galatians 5:22-23 and fruits of the Spirit)

Leadings need to be tested to ascertain if they are in line with the Divine will. We need to have patience; if the thought/call to action is still there in six months then you

need to act on it. We can also test the leading but bringing it to a Meeting for Clearance – these Meetings are more common in the UK but are something we might consider convening more often in Ireland. We also need to test a leading against that inner voice. If the leading is God's will He will open the door and give us strength to endure. Sometimes we need to make a fool of ourselves in the name of God as true leadings can be difficult and challenging. Simon encouraged Friends to read Robert Barclays 'Apology' (1676). We are called to bear witness to God's will in our lives. Caroline Fox (1819–1871) wrote in her journal at the age of 21 '*Live up to the light thou hast, and more will be granted thee.*' Our challenge is to listen to that still small voice (1 Kings 19 v 12) and be open to hear the voice of God; and to responding to it. "*Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"*" Isaiah 6:8.

As we seek and follow God's will in our lives, the whole community benefits. We are also called to respond as a collective. Simon challenged Friends to ensure that there are no barriers between Friends and referred to the World Gathering of Young Friends in 1985 which was seen as a defining moment for the divided theologies of Quakers around the world.

Simon challenged us all to use Quaker libraries, to read Scripture and other material so that we are able to share in Meetings for Worship. Quakers need to know the principles that underpin our principles and we will find this in Scripture. Quaker principles are based on the new covenant with God and the teachings of Jesus.

We will be uncertain and Simon read a quote from the Trappist Monk, Thomas Merton:

"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone."

A discussion ensued and Simon was thanked for his enlightening and challenging talk. Following a period of silent reflection, Friends enjoyed a wonderful afternoon tea prepared by Enniscorthy Friends, which included the now famous strawberries and cream.

The new format for LQM where business matters takes up only a very small part of the day allowed Friends to devote most of the time to hearing speakers, discussing the chosen topic and just chatting with Friends, which is a welcome and significant change to the focus of the gathering.

The next LQM will be held in Churchtown Meeting House, Dublin, in November 2018, subject to the agreement of Churchtown Friends.