

Yearly Meeting 25-28 April 2019, Dublin

It's Monday morning, post IYM, and I am still buzzing from the adrenalin and stimulation of meeting and listening to all the lovely Friends and variety of challenges presented at IYM. We are so lucky that each one of us can attend Yearly Meeting every year and have the opportunity to have our voices and concerns heard. Whilst we are diverse in the expression of our faith, we have a common understanding of our spiritual life and heritage, so I always get a sense of renewal and homecoming at Yearly Meeting.

The many visitors and representatives from Australia, India, USA, Slovenia, Belgium, Luxembourg, Britain and Switzerland contributed to and enhanced our connections to the world family of Friends. We also welcomed representatives from other churches in Ireland.

The programme highlights

Niamh Hardiman presented the many parables of Jesus from unusual angles which challenged us. As Niamh said, "Parables provoke you to think, like a Quaker query rather than being bound by a rule". Niamh also reminded us of the "boundless love and generosity" of Jesus as seen in the parables.

The Middle East was referenced in a number of sessions. Peadar King, an Irish film-maker who aims to highlight the humanitarian crises in different parts of the world, spoke to us and presented a film about Syria. The Public Lecturer, Noah Merrill, had also worked with families in Syria and Will Haire spoke about Friends' involvement and funding of young people attending Brummana and Ramallah Friends' Schools in Beirut and the West Bank. Will explained how important the influence of the Quaker ethos is in these schools, in promoting understanding amongst the variety of people in the Middle East. Many of the pupils of these schools go on to become very influential in their societies. Friends believe it is of great value and importance to support these schools and their pupils to finish their education in sometimes precarious financial situations.

About 170 people attended the **Public Lecture given by Noah Merrill from the USA**. Noah encouraged us to cherish our communities of deep hope and to renew our appreciation of the ocean of light in a world which is fracturing and where people, despite modern tools of communication, feel increasingly isolated.

Small groups

The real encounter and challenge of engaging with each other often takes place in the special interest groups, spiritual reflection, and worship groups.

I attended the ones on Climate Change and Community. Many practical issues were aired to answer the questions "What can I do myself?" and "What can we do as a society?" Useful suggestions included:-

- Lead by example, work with others, get involved locally
- Bring your own boxes for buying salads at delicatessen
- Don't spray weeds
- Reduce food miles
- Lobby for a CO2 label on food we buy
- Self-imposed carbon tax
- Plant trees, preserve bogs
- Buy less
- Counter-cultural affirmation of contentment
- Continuous trees; not cutting down after 30 years

Every city in Ireland can have a forest

The idea of Ireland as a Peace Island

Helen Haughton presented the basic principles on which Ireland as an Island of Peace could be based:-

No manufacture of or holding of fairs selling arms

Defence forces would need to be limited and trained in peace keeping

Police trained in peace keeping, along the lines of restorative justice and mediation

Education in peace keeping in every age group from primary to tertiary

Training in mediation and increase in the number of mediation centres in Ireland

QCEA

Loretta O' Brien was quick to jump into a spare few minutes in the programme and update us on the successes at QCEA. The Peace Tool Kit has been adopted by the European Commission and the military. Funding of QCEA is a major issue and Friends and Meetings are encouraged to support QCEA.

Younger Friends

Stephen Browne reported on his year as an intern at Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva. He was thrilled to represent Quakers at the UN in Geneva and to be able to ask a question which was answered by Mary Robinson. I think, listening to Stephen's presentation, I had the distinct impression that this year of opportunity had been life-changing for him.

Young Friends continued to show their enthusiasm for the many activities and opportunities available for them. Young Friends also reported on working with refugees in Greece. JYM took place in Waterford over Easter weekend - the theme was forgiveness. Susie Harty presented the epistle and Young Friends were delighted to have a second weekend when they could meet up. The life-affirming and positive effect of these events on the young people is evident in their enthusiasm to attend Quaker events.

There are many amazing opportunities and challenges available to Young Friends and Attenders - do encourage the young people in your Meetings to avail of these. They are often life-changing.

Work in South India

Arun Massey from South India told us of his work rescuing young girls who have been "sacrificed" by their families to Hindu goddesses. Sadly, this belief/ superstition leads these children to be pushed into prostitution. Arun and his wife provide a loving and safe environment for these children and have been able to give them all the basis for a new life. Friends were delighted to collect over €1,000 to give Arun for his work.

Safeguarding Children and young people.

Sheilagh Reaper-Reynolds launched the new Child Safeguarding Policy, which covers both jurisdictions in Ireland. The work on this document has taken 5 years and we are very appreciative of the work involved in producing it. The policy is now contained in a loose leaf folder (all pages are numbered but, as the details change, we should be able to update it more easily than in the previous bound edition). Friends should be careful to make sure not to lose any pages. The policy also includes an anti-bullying policy. All PMs, Allowed and Worship groups must have the policy in place.

Farewells

We said goodbye to Rosemary Castagner who is retiring from her post at Quaker House Dublin. Rosie has served Friends always with a smile and way beyond the call of duty for the last 15 years.

Rosie's successor in Quaker House will be Mary McNeilly along with Valerie Howard, whom Friends already know.

We also said goodbye to Carolyn Ritchie, the IYM Youth Co-ordinator who has given 9 years of her life to cherish and nurture our young people. Without wanting to put off potential successors, Carolyn's duties have involved sleeping on hard floors, cooking and travelling extensively round Ireland and other parts of the world with Irish Young Friends, organising child protection training, ensuring all who work with the children and young people in our society are police-vetted. We wish Carolyn every happiness and success in the next part of her journey through life.

I am also going to mention our Clerk, who has given three years' service to Friends. Heather Bewley has fulfilled this role representing and clerking the Yearly Meeting through challenging times with great skill and tenderness.

Finally, dear Friends, research has shown that dancing is one of the very best things to keep you young and fit in mind and body. Friends, young and old, tripped the light fantastic night away with Larry & Ita Southard keeping us in step. There was not one wall flower around the room - everyone danced! What a wonderful uniting event! My "concern" is for more **dancing** next year.

- Bronwen Haire, South Belfast Meeting