



# FORTY-THREE

OXFORD FRIENDS' MEETING  
43 ST.GILES OXFORD OX1 3LW

## NEWSLETTER

Number 394

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### Two thoughts on worship

In 2011, Val Ferguson obtained permission to reproduce online an excerpt from Geoffrey Durham's *The Spirit of the Quakers*, for one year. That period being expired, we have replaced the text with the below two quotations from *Quaker Faith & Practice*. **BPM**

*How, then, shall we lay hold of that Life and Power, and live the life of prayer without ceasing? By quiet, persistent practice in turning all our being, day and night, in prayer and inward worship and surrender, towards Him who calls in the deeps of our souls. Mental habits of inward orientation must be established. An inner, secret turning to God can be made fairly steady, after weeks and months and years of practice and lapses and failures and returns. It is as simple an art as Brother Lawrence found it, but it may be long before we achieve any steadiness in the process. Begin now, as you read these words, as you sit in your chair, to offer your whole selves, utterly and in joyful abandon, in quiet, glad surrender to Him who is within. In secret ejaculations of praise, turn in humble wonder to the Light, faint though it may be. Keep contact with the outer world of sense and meanings. Here is no discipline in absent-mindedness. Walk and talk and work and laugh with your friends. But behind the scenes keep up the life of simple prayer and inward worship. Keep it up throughout the day. Let inward prayer be your*

*last act before you fall asleep and the first act when you awake. And in time you will find, as did Brother Lawrence, that 'those who have the gale of the Holy Spirit go forward even in sleep'.*

**QF&P 2.22 Thomas R Kelly, 1941**

*Prayer, we learn gradually, has far more to do with listening than with talking. In emotional stress the thoughts are so obsessive that they leave one no opportunity to listen. So, when we know someone is in trouble, we can and must listen (pray) for them. A Friend who had missed meeting for several weeks told us that she knew we had been praying for her before we said so; she had felt it and been*

Continued on page 2, column 1

### From *Quaker Faith and Practice*

There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath different names; it is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from any where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation soever, they become brethren.

**QF&P 26.61 John Woolman, 1762**

*Thank you to Joe Bowness for choosing and reading this from the copy of QF&P presented to him last October at our All-Age Worship.*

**Deadline for contributions to the February 2012 issue: noon, Friday 20 January**

*Contributions, preferably of 500 words or fewer, would be appreciated to [newsletter@oxfordquakers.org](mailto:newsletter@oxfordquakers.org), and items for the calendar on page 6 can be emailed to [lukesamuelmartin@gmail.com](mailto:lukesamuelmartin@gmail.com). Paper copy can be left in one of the editors' pigeonholes at the Meeting House. For information: tel. 01865 557373 or visit [www.oxfordquakers.org](http://www.oxfordquakers.org)*

Continued from page 1, column 2

*sustained by it. She had thought there was no point in prayer or belief in God, but she had been helped by the knowledge that we still prayed and believed. It seems that one can do no less than this. We are seldom given guarantees that it is effective, just hints along the way; but they are hints we cannot ignore. We cannot prove the effectiveness of prayer, but nor can we cast scorn on examples of the kind I have given.*

*A friend tells me that when she prays for someone she does not so much pray to God for them as for God for them. This seems to me a vital clue about prayer. It is God that the troubled person needs, not our advice and instructions. As we learn more about worship we learn to listen more deeply so that we can be channels through which God's love reaches the other person. It is God at work, not we ourselves; we are simply used.*

QF&P 2.26 Diana Lampen, 1979

## Report on Quaker Quest

Running Quaker Quest for the third time (Oct – Nov 2011) seems to have been a good experience for all concerned. Thirty-three people attended our first evening – fifteen of whom were 'questers', a few of whom had been attending Oxford Meeting. Thereafter, the number of questers averaged eight to ten. In addition to the core team each week about six to twelve supporting Friends came too. They provided a wonderful source of Quaker experience and insight, acting as welcomers, hosts and discussion facilitators. Together, they created a warm and supportive atmosphere and a deep centre for the Meeting for Worship. We thank all those who helped over the eight weeks of Quaker Quest.

Most of our speakers had not contributed to Quaker Quest before. It was a particular joy to hear more of the personal journeys of Friends from Oxford, Witney and Headington Meetings.

This time most of the questers attended all four sessions, enabling us to get to know one another. In small groups and at the question time they led us into some thoughtful and challenging conversations. We hope to see some of them again at Oxford Meeting.

Val Ferguson and Ursula Howard 2



### Holding Minute<sup>1</sup>

#### **Becoming a Sustainable, Low Carbon Community in Oxford & Headington Meetings**

We have met to consider how we may individually and collectively own the strong commitment made in the Yearly Meeting Gathering minute 36 to become a low carbon sustainable community.

We have recognised our fear and trepidation in face of the huge challenge facing us but we take courage and hope from the exhortation to act only out of love in a spirit led and joyful process of change.

In our worship-sharing we have heard that we need to live imaginatively and cheerfully, learning to adapt and rediscover the simpler and healthier way of living we have known in the past; learning to share information, support and even money and housing.

Other words that have resonated are hope, joy, connectedness, connecting, celebration.

Making the decision to change and taking the first steps is the difficult part. So we are ready to change and to embrace a more fulfilling way of living.

We hope to gather again on 6 January to consider the practical steps that we can take corporately as well as individually to give substance to our commitment here in Oxford and Headington Meetings.

<sup>1</sup> A 'holding minute' is one that holds the ongoing matter in hand until the next meeting.



## Introducing Members and Attenders of Oxford Meeting



**Katherine Talbot,**  
talking to Tanya Garland

I arrived in Oxford in 2003 as a medical student and eight years later I'm still here. I studied for six years, qualified, and I am now at Stoke Mandeville Hospital training to be an obstetrician and gynaecologist. It's a seven-year programme so I'll be rotating around the local hospitals for some time yet!

I am the first person in my family to be a doctor and the first girl to go to university. I am also the first of three daughters – and we're all quite different. My youngest sister is training to be a dentist, and my middle sister is training to be a fight choreographer. We were born in Surbiton, Surrey, but, when I was six my father's job moved us to a small village in SE Wales. It must have been a huge change for our parents. Our summers and weekends were full of visitors – my parents' childhood and church friends. I remember when gas came to the village, and I grew up loving the countryside.

I went to the local school and then on to the comprehensive. One of the best aspects of the area was the County Music Service. Through this I learnt to play the cello and joined a series of local orchestras. From that beginning I have gone on to make many musical friends, played in the Royal Albert Hall, travelled to most of the capitals of Europe (lots of very smelly bus journeys) and played for the Queen.

Then, because of my father's work, we moved again, ending up in a Suffolk village. I was fourteen and it was a big upheaval. I went to a girls' private school, just before my GCSE years, which was a considerable culture shock! Looking back though, there were many positive aspects to the move. I made some very good friends, learnt to sail and I was able to join another very good orchestra. The change was difficult for my parents – but on reflection, I believe that they made the right decision. I owe a huge amount to my parents; they are two people I can talk to about anything.

Both of my parents were very involved in the church so I was brought up a Christian. From the outward appearance you would probably have described me as an evangelical Christian, in the sense of believing in Christ as redeemer, but as far as I was concerned, I was just a Christian. I always had a very active faith. I was heavily involved in the church youth group and a Christian sailing holiday for young people. On arriving in Oxford, I joined the Christian Union and attended services at St Aldates and St Ebbe's. Being a Christian was central to who I was.

Then my faith unravelled! The reasons are difficult to pin down but my experience in Africa was a catalyst. I was in Malawi and Zambia as a medical student for three months and I met many *believing* Christians, including some whose beliefs were intertwined with superstition and witchcraft. I wondered what we had in common spiritually. My experience of life, both at home and in the hospital, was not matching up to the church's teaching either. So, I stopped attending church, stopped praying and stopped reading my bible. It was a big shift. I felt I had lost something and needed space to think.

Then, I met Matthew and we became girlfriend and boyfriend. We were both working as doctors at the Horton Hospital and Matthew would disappear off every Sunday morning to Meeting. Being a Quaker was obviously important to him. So I decided if I wanted to find out more about Matthew, I needed to find out more about Quakers.

I enjoy the space of Meeting. It allows me space to keep seeking. People ask me if I am going to become a Quaker but until I rediscover my faith in God, I prefer to remain a Seeker rather than a Member. I had such a strong faith and I want to rediscover it. The power of prayer had been very real and a part of me wants to regain that strength of relationship with Christ. But I want to be absolutely sure that it is the truth. I respect what Quakers originally set out to be, founded on the teachings of Christ, and I don't want to enter into Membership until I can truly identify with that same Christian Quaker identity.



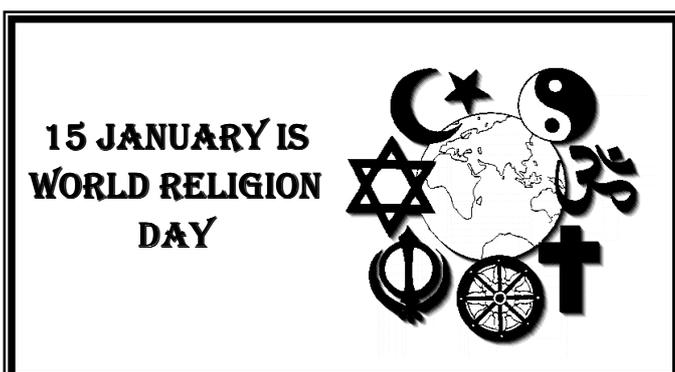
## Churches Together in Central Oxford

Last week, as one of our interfaith/inter-denominational team, I attended the quarterly meeting of Churches Together in Central Oxford (CTCO). This unites representatives from all the Christian groups in the town centre — Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Roman Catholics and many more. For me the most attractive part is meeting so many interesting people with different spiritual philosophies, but with a basic belief that our faith is calling us to do all we can to put into practice Jesus' injunction to love our neighbour as ourself.

So at this meeting we heard about an inquiry by the four central Anglican churches into the needs of the city centre. We had a long discussion about homelessness: we heard from the chaplain to the homeless, Mary Gurr, about her work and had an update on the new Gatehouse and the Crisis Skylight centre in George Street. We saw the latest draft of a leaflet we are planning with location and details of all churches and Meeting places in Central Oxford. It has been delayed by a late decision to include interfaith as well as interdenominational information.

A speaker from Christian Aid told us of a proposal to hold weekly lunchtime talks next Lent on issues of social justice. There was a suggestion that some of us should join with Manzil Way mosque to form an Oxclean group in March. We informed each other about our Christmas arrangements and the programmes for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January. And there was much hilarity over the plan to bring a donkey to the city on Palm Sunday. We were rebuked by one member who thought such mirth over a donkey unfitting when there was so much suffering to alleviate. I thought it was good that we could relax and laugh together in true friendship.

Elisabeth Salisbury



## Hungerford Bridge

*January is a marble month,  
when old men drift into the calm orbit of death.  
And the quick shudder and clutch at fires,  
or mutter bleak prayers for March.  
And yellow-bright armies.*

*Here is only desolation.  
Where the skeleton wind clatters his paper bones.  
Even the lipstick-coloured shops seem grotesque.  
Stacked against the sky with a menaced air.*

*Crossing the chill bridge, a heap of rags under  
an archway.  
Out of the tattered dirt the eyes of a man look  
out blankly.  
Does he feel the seasons under his many layered  
facade?  
Or is it always January for him?*

MJG

## Considering Keith's Conundrum

Keith Wilson (December issue, page 1) is worried lest Jesus should have said "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me", finding it 'uncomfortable to dismiss what seems to be such a clear pronouncement from Jesus himself' though recognising that perhaps 'these are not truly the words of Jesus.'

Rest assured, Keith, that it is quite extraordinarily unlikely that Jesus said this. It has long been recognised that John's gospel is a meditation on the significance of Jesus which came out of the early church; overwhelmingly scholars believe it is of a late date.

Likewise, a member of the Meeting recently said that most holy men attracted disciples and she didn't quite like it that Jesus had "chosen" twelve disciples. Many think that the number twelve was a later imposition on the text; a way of saying that Jesus was the messiah — they represent the twelve tribes of Israel that will be gathered in.

Someone else said in my hearing that they didn't quite like it that Paul had said that women should be silent. The well-known Cambridge professor and Pauline scholar Morna Hooker has suggested that 1 Cor. 14 verses 34-36 may well be an interpolation.

Everyone a little happier I hope?

Daphne Hampson

**The Bible** says many things (indeed, something for everybody, ripe for cherry-picking which accounts for its popularity) and trying to sort out the true from the untrue, the relevant from the irrelevant, the spiritual from the unspiritual, is an impossibility; and most liberal Quakers, I think it is fair to say, don't even bother to try, including myself. The truth is, nobody knows. Is stoning adulterers and homosexuals (even a boy who disobeys his father!) to death, as commanded in one of the 613 plus Mosaic Laws (which includes the Top Ten!), or genocide, a good thing? I wouldn't have thought so. On the other hand, there are elements in both the Old and the New Testaments which are more positive and some people may find helpful. George Fox and the early Quakers found that what may be called a rational response, emanating from their own (or anyone else's) limited mind to the Bible didn't work, and relied instead on direct receiving of the Spirit for knowledge and guidance; and, so far as I am aware, this continues to be the position for liberal Quakers up to the present day. The point I am trying to make is that if you are going to worry about the importance and significance of one passage in the Bible, as Keith appears to be doing, you've got to worry about everything else. In other words, you can't pick and choose what you're going to worry about: either worry about it all, or don't worry about any of it. Words are not the truth; they can only, at best, point to it.



So my advice to Keith would be: stop worrying about what you read in the Bible; in fact, you could stop reading it altogether (except of course for I Cor: 13 and Gal 5: 16-26 – to do a bit of my own cherry-picking!). After all, it was written thousands of years ago. Instead, concentrate on something more contemporary and relevant such as *Quaker Faith & Practice* and other Quaker books, for a good, positive, uplifting read. But most of all, continue to attend Meeting for Worship where your experience will be pristine and new rather than someone else's regurgitated, and probably inaccurate, comments and observations. As Margaret Fell would have said to seekers after the truth: "You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this; but what canst thou say?" What is your *own* experience?

**Ron Hillier**

**This conundrum** used to trouble me too as I wondered how I could honour my love for Jesus of Nazareth and authentically respect the path

chosen by those of other faiths or none. Whether these words were actually spoken by Jesus or not, they are a part of Christian tradition. I have found commentators from the Hindu perspective, itself profoundly inclusive, very helpful.

Quoting his own guru, Paramahansa Yogananda writes: "... in such passages as John 14:6, Jesus meant, never that he was the sole Son of God, but that no man can attain the unqualified Absolute, the transcendent Father *beyond* creation, until he has first manifested the 'Son' or activating Christ Consciousness *within* creation."

Sandy Bharat quotes Ravi Ravindra: "We have an indication here of the power and majesty of *I am*, the sacred name of God ... Whenever exalted statements are made by Christ, he reminds his disciples that he has become so transparent to the Divine Ground that those who have seen him have seen the Father, for he has nothing of his own, neither the words nor the works ... The important point to be emphasised again and again is that a person can do nothing of any value in their own name, which is to say based on their own energy and for their own sake."

Neil Douglas-Klotz has written several books exploring interpretations of Jesus' words in the Aramaic or Syriac scriptures used by Eastern Christians. In *The Hidden Gospel* he writes: " 'I am the way, the truth, and the life' should be taken in the sense of what one calls "love language": appropriate for those within a particular faith community, but not applicable for those outside of it ... In this sense, the person of Jesus, whom his disciples see and who walks, talks, and eats with them, provides a doorway between the realities. Through his presence they can find a personal relationship with *abwoon*, the breathing life of all ... Focusing on the teacher as a doorway to the divine is a spiritual practice that still exists today in Jewish and Islamic mysticism."

For all that, though, I am generally wary of amassing quotations and arguments that can so easily draw us out of the heart into the head, and away from the spirit of Jesus' prayer for his disciples (John 17:22) "that they may be one, even as we are one."

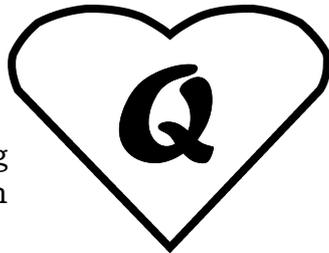
## CALENDAR FOR JANUARY 2012

*All 43 St Giles unless otherwise indicated*

Sunday 1	12:30 pm	Meeting for Worship for Business	Thursday 19	7:30 pm	Young Adult Friends
Friday 6	7 pm for 7:30 pm	Friday With Friends (see p. 2 & Dec. issue)	Saturday 21	11 am - 3 pm	Extended Meeting for Worship
Thursday 12	7:30 pm	Young Adult Friends	Thursday 26	7:30 pm	Young Adult Friends
Saturday 14	10:30 and 2 pm	Area Meeting (Oxford; see below)	Friday 27	7-9 pm	Economic Justice Study Group (see below)
Wednesday 18	1:45 pm	Friends Fellowship of Healing	Sunday 29	12:30	Bring-and-share lunch

## Meetings and Notices

At Area Meeting on **14 January** (see page 5 of the Dec. issue), **Sandra Figgess** from our Meeting will speak on the topic of 'Answering that of God in our own Hearts and Minds'.



The next Junior Yearly Meeting (for those whose birthdays fall between September 1993 and August 1996, inclusive) will be held from 25-28 May, during BYM.

Applications for Open Places that are received after **31 January** stand less chance of being accepted.

[www.quaker.org.uk/junior-yearly-meeting-2012](http://www.quaker.org.uk/junior-yearly-meeting-2012)

There will be a meeting of the 'Economic Justice Study Group' on **27 January** from 7:30 - 9:30 pm in the Garden Room.

We will continue to investigate the monetary and economic policies which have produced the current world crisis and led to pronounced social inequality both here and abroad.

**Dennis Price**

### MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

**Sundays** at 9:30 and 11 a.m. at 43 St Giles (followed by coffee and tea)

**Wednesdays** at 12:15 p.m. at 43 St Giles (followed by coffee and tea)

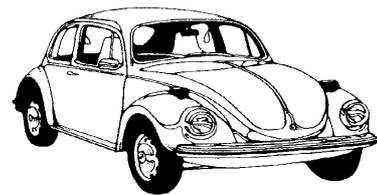
**Tuesdays** and **Thursdays** at 7:30 a.m. at 43 St Giles (followed by breakfast at 8 a.m.)

**Sundays** at 10 a.m. at The Priory, 85 Old High St, Headington

### OPENING TIMES (43 ST GILES):

Wednesday - Friday, 9:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Those who would like to use the car park other than for Quaker-related business need to display a current permit (this will be yellow in 2012). A permit costs £75 and lasts for a calendar year. Please contact the warden if you would like one.



**Dave Dight**

*Forty-Three* is available online, at [www.oxfordquakers.org/newsletter](http://www.oxfordquakers.org/newsletter)

If you are considering writing an article or notice but would prefer it not to go online, please don't hesitate to contribute it. Just indicate that the piece is not for inclusion in the internet version — no reason will be asked for.

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