

Catching Light Conference, High Leigh,

13th February 2016

There were some interesting speakers, discussions and role play exercise around this subject at this Outreach conference. One speaker, Geoffrey Durham, said that with reducing numbers Quakers were getting close to self-extinction, yet there is a spiritual hunger in the world that Quakers might fulfil for some people. So we all need to be out there, not proselytising, but being more visible and transparent (and training can help with this). Outreach shouldn't be limited to a once/year occasion, but something we do naturally all the time. We need practice telling each other our stories, so we can find stories which may have meaning for new comers, something that sparks their curiosity, turns a light on (not give them lists of testimonies, etc). Early Quakers were guided by their own peak experiences and showed people a new way of religion through direct encounter with the divine.

Another speaker, Mary Lou Leavitt, was involved with the Quaker Peace Action Caravan in the eighties, campaigning for nuclear disarmament. She told how her activism fed her spiritual growth. She said don't wait until you feel spiritually ready before acting, spiritual readiness comes and grows as you act.

“Beginning with action comes a deeper faith and the need to seek and practice a stillness where I can feel and listen to the Spirit”. A balance between mystic and activism is needed. We can't confront evil with our own strength alone.

Maya Williams spoke with her baby in a baby carrier. She has been an activist for some time (even going on demos with her baby). To her, Meeting is very important to her activism: when she doesn't go to Meeting, she is in a rush, and doesn't have the stillness, clarity and support she needs.

Kevin Redpath had lots of stories about what they have done in Street Meeting. Inreach and outreach are interdependent, the former strengthening the vitality of a Quaker Meeting through the sharing of spirit given gifts., which help build a spiritual community. Street Meeting has strengthened its community by doing common tasks eg scrubbing down the benches, sharing newsletters with other LMs. For outreach they have improved their website eg so it reformats for smartphones and tablets, has Google analytics, and a donations page for Calais refugees. Street LM partners with other faiths, eg fundraising concert with United Reform church, and on fridays their Meetinghouse is used as a mosque. They have challenged inertia, used marketing materials from Friends House, tried to be visible, and participate in civic life. They have also made videos of friends answering “What does being a quaker mean to me?” They have put people’s stories in newsletters, had an exhibition of art, shown wool against weapons scarf on wall of the Meeting house, and finally, lots of tea and cake!

Kevin suggests that Meetings should have an outreach group with a budget, where suggestions are researched and assessed for viability. I realised I did not know if certain people looked at outreach in our Area Meeting (apart from the university and prison chaplains)?? Would people think this or other ideas mentioned above might be desirable in our Area Meeting?

Heather Rostron