

**Quaker Life Rep Council -14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> Oct 2017**  
**Shape Shifting- new models of Quaker Meeting and community**

This event was a rallying call to our Meetings to simplify and become more nourishing, exciting and experimental.

Michael Long (Clerk to QLRC) opened this event and asked us to consider:

‘Do our Area and Local Meeting structures support our beliefs, concerns and our purpose? Or are we serving our structures at the expense of what we could be experiencing and what we could be doing? What gets in the way?

How creative can we be in how we do our business? Do we burden ourselves with responsibilities we could manage better without? What can we let go? Are we liberated enough to be able change?’

Fox was quoted with striking relevance to our Meetings today:

*‘Take care of not getting into a form without the power, for that will bring deadness, and coldness and weariness and faintings.’* (George Fox works 7:170)

This weekend felt like stepping on a moving vehicle. We are joining a moving current within BYM to become more alive in the Spirit and to embrace change. Our 3 Key Note speakers were Deborah Rowlands (Clerk to BYM), Paul Parker (Recording Clerk, BYM) and Julia Ryberg (Ministry and Outreach Coordinator FWCC/EMES)

Deborah invited us to ask ourselves and our Meetings:

What gives life?

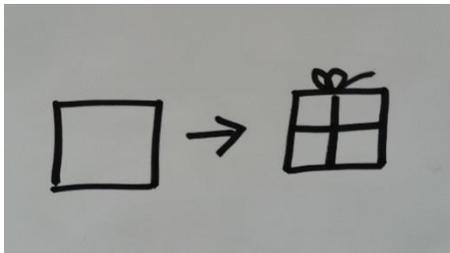
Why do we meet?

What is Gospel Order? - This was defined as like the three-legged stool, where all 3 of the following uphold the stool

- inward life of worship and discernment,
- functioning of the church community,
- social testimony

Julia asserted that we should not be shy of naming your own gifts and offering your own services to nominations with a ‘humble heart’....

She invited us to consider: ‘what is needed, not what is expected. What is needed include ...making decisions together and caring for each other. Using our gifts is more important than structure. How are simplicity, community, equality, truth and peace evident in your workings? If we are doing these things, then **how** we are doing it is not important.’



Julia never asks a meeting about numbers, but asks ‘how does the truth prosper in your meeting?’ A group of four people, which is alive, is far better than a larger group which has no life.

*“The life of a religious society consists in something more than the body of principles it professes and the outer garments of organisation which it wears. These things have their*

*own importance.....but the springs of life lie deeper... They are to be found in the vital union of the members of the society with God and with one another, a union which allows the free flowing ... of the spiritual life which is its strength.”*  
 (William Charles Braithwaite, 1905. *Quaker faith & practice* 10.04)”

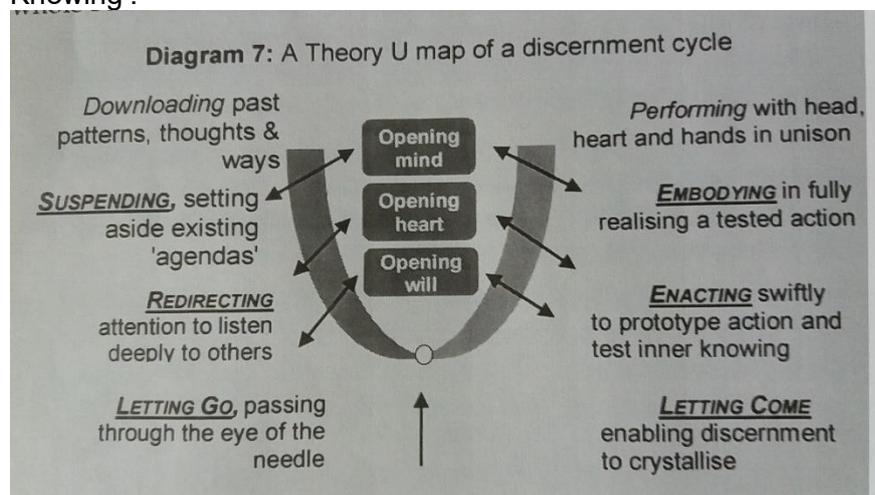
Paul Parker encouraged us to make sure we tell people when we notice a particular gift in them. He encouraged us to simplify with a light touch. We have a lot more flexibility to change things than we think. A clean slate policy allows us to start afresh with nothing and add as needed. No one rule fits all- there isn't a 'done thing'. Respond to the needs of your Meeting and your community. Keep Faith in Action as central to Area Meeting agendas. He talked about the growing number of Sanctuary Meetings.

We were encouraged to learn from successes of other Meetings through telling our stories. I attended 'Storytelling' workshops led by:

Alison Mitchell (Devon Meeting), *Worshipping Differently* – Alison enthused about all day Meeting for Worship which many described as very powerful and timeless.

Alison also shared her Concern for 'How we respond to Mental Health (MH) in our Meetings'. She wishes to visit Meetings with this Concern and is keen to meet with people who have lived experience of MH issues.

Simon Best (Woodbrooke Head of Learning) explored the theme of 'Finding our Meetings Ministry- what new expressions of Quaker community might be possible'. Simon is offering to visit Meetings through 'Woodbrooke on the Road' to help us explore this further. Simon shared this U map as a guide for change from Joycelin Dawes' book 'Discernment and Inner Knowing'.



Helen Drewery (BYM Head of Witness and Worship) explored : How might Meetings be helped to simplify the way they run themselves. How can we free up time and energy for the important things. It was here I learnt that there is no rule that states that Meeting for Business must not have a fixed end time and that having a shorter Meeting could help focus.

Other ideas shared over the weekend were:

Outdoor worship

Worship Singing before Mf W (Once a month, St Andrews Meeting has a singing session from 09:45 to 10:15 in preparation for Meeting for Worship.)

Away Days- (High Wycombe Meeting are having an Away Day at the beginning of November to explore the theme, 'What Does It Mean To Be Quaker?' Craig Barnett's book on *Quaker Renewal* will form the background reading in preparation for this)

Outreach events- (High Wycombe Meeting hosted an afternoon event entitled *Meet Your Neighbours* on Sunday 1 November, as part of Quaker Week, and there was a steady stream of visitors)

For those who might feel anxious at the idea of change the following quote which was shared, may bring some comfort:

*"The Truth is one and the same always, and though ages and generations pass away, and one generation goes and another comes, yet the word and power and spirit of the living God endures for ever, and is the same and never changes."*

(Margaret Fell Quaker faith & practice 19.61)

We will be exploring the theme of this QLRC weekend at our next Area Meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> November. If anyone would like to see all the papers and documents from this event please let me know. I would also like to recommend reading Craig Barnett's little gem of a book on Quaker Renewal, which I bought whilst at Woodbrooke (£5). I found that it consolidated and expanded on much that we'd covered over the weekend.

Chrissie Hinde

### **EXTRA QLRC- The Wider Historical Context- -Michael Long**

***The Manchester Conference 1895-*** *"challenged the old thinking and distressed some."*

Our Society, then, faced the challenges of falling membership, changing demographics and generational divide. It was middle class through and through. The Society was insular, fixed in its beliefs, sticking to scriptural and not spiritual revelation. They were sceptical of science. The Society was looking too much inwardly and not enough outwardly.

John Wilhelm Rowntree, who was 27 years old at the time, said:

*"Friends are not bound by a heritage of creeds, and need not break with their great past to put themselves in touch with the present."* Rowntree envisioned a revitalised faith *'...deeper in its basis, clearer in its vision, broader in its charity...and as warm in its love ...'* rising out of the *'... seeming chaos...'* of the modern world. He died ten years later at the age of just 36.

Frances Thompson spoke at the Conference. She said:

"God's Truth is given for every age and it is our duty to welcome the Light which may just be reaching us." A fuller quote, recorded in Chuck Fager's excellent retelling of the Manchester Conference is interesting:

*"Friends, of all people, should hail with joy the thought that knowledge of all kinds is progressive, that the Divine revelation to man is not finished, but ever unfolding, that for every age the manna of God's truth is given, and that it is our inestimable privilege to, as well as our duty to, welcome the Light which may just be reaching us, as from some till now unseen, though none the less fixed star of Heaven. Nay more, we are guilty if we shut our eyes to it, and prefer to live by the Light vouchsafed to an earlier age."*

We can recall, that we did experience a seminal shift in our structures out of **RECAST Report (Representation, Communications and Accountability in our Structures)** which went before Yearly Meeting in 2005. Memorable changes included the requirement to register as charities, the introduction of Trustees and the laying down of General Meetings in England. Less well remembered, RECAST also advocated amalgamation or dividing of Area Meetings, freedom for Friends to make flexible

arrangements for business and social contacts between different local and area meetings and an emphasis on meetings as communities and families of Friends.