

WORLD QUAKER DAY 2020

Friends, today is World Quaker Day. This remind us that we are part not just of Area Mtg and Yearly meeting but also of a family of Q communities around the world with some 400,000 members. As has been our custom in MK, an elder offers some prepared ministry.

In preparation for this, I visited again the FWCC website. If you haven't done this recently I think you will find it time well spent. You can view videos of Friends reporting on how their Meetings have been affected by Covid and how they are responding to it. For example, in East Africa, Quakers find it hard that their congregations can no longer sing and dance together. But deprived of Sunday meetings, large multi-generational households are worshipping at home in ways they had not done before. And just like us, East African Q have been delighted to discover the opportunities provided by on-line meetings, extending their communities of worship, and joining them up, across a continent where travel is often slow or expensive. They also tell of creative social action in response to the challenges of Covid – supplying PPE to hospitals, for example.

Within the Quaker family, the differences of worship style, theology and circumstances are striking – but so are all the things we have in common. We do not want to be distracted by arguments over creeds and beliefs; we know to wait patiently in stillness for the promptings of the spirit; and we are committed to supporting each other as a community of seekers & servants, each struggling with doubts and confusion in our lives.

We can draw strength and inspiration from Quakers around the world. We do not just have to *look back* to Quakers of the past, we can *look across* to the inspiring work Quakers are doing, now, beyond the English-speaking world.

Reflecting on the idea of World Quaker Day, my perspective shifted. I realised 'the world' is not remote places out there – it is present among us. In our own meeting Friends have strong connections to the Americas north and south, to the Caribbean, to countries in Europe, the Middle-East, Africa, Asia and Australasia. In our seeking, we draw on wisdom traditions from around the world. In truth, our meeting has tendrils and personal bonds stretching out far and wide around our dear planetary home.

It is a truism that the world has shrunk over the course of our lifetimes. Through fast travel and communications, we are now much closer to people and events around the world. In particular, the scientists have discovered the damage we are doing to the planet, while, journalists keep us abreast of these and other developments. Both professions are now world-wide communities (and in their ways, truth-seekers). Musicians and football clubs have fans and followers world-wide. For these and many other reasons, the world is now part of our consciousness, our taken-for-granted background awareness, *to an extent that has never happened before in human history*.

Being part of a world-wide Quaker fellowship brings something more. It offers the chance through intervisitation of *knowing personally* – through relationships and sharing lives. Knowing personally provides moments of unmediated depth to enrich the breadth provided by knowing about. Which is to say, *while travel broadens the mind; it takes relationships to deepen it*. If you have worshipped abroad with other Quakers, you will know this.

Friends, this vastly increased awareness of the world, and all the opportunities to know it better, these cut both ways – they bring comfort and discomfort. We know ever more about the thorns and nettles, in the magnificent garden of life – as well as about the glories.

The theme for World Quaker Day is ‘What does it mean to be a Quaker today? Living a Faithful Life in a Changing World’. For me this takes me back to Fox’s great question and to others we are familiar with: What canst *thou* say? How will our lives speak? What is the service that is ours to undertake? What does love require of us? – always accepting that this may not be great busyness?

RP 4th November 2020