

Quaker Life Rep Council 10th October 2020

'Re-imagining Our Future'

'How can we walk with a smile into the dark? We must learn to put out trust in God and the leadings of the Spirit' (QF&P 29.01).

This was the second QLRC meeting on zoom and 86 people attended. The theme was how might our Quaker communities look in the future? What have we learned from lockdown that we might feel encouraged to carry on into the future? What has been challenging and how might the technology to which many of us have suddenly been introduced be used positively and creatively?

Jonathan Carmichael our first speaker was enthusiastic and inspiring. He linked the future of on-line communication between Friends to 'simpler meetings' of which he is the project manager. The internet enables us to meet without the need for travelling, allows the participation of Friends who might otherwise struggle to attend. Perhaps we could embrace the concept of 'being together' rather than 'coming together.'

A phrase he used was '*meetings without walls*', not bound by space or set times- the spirit is everywhere, not just in a meeting house on a Sunday morning. Thanks to programmes such as zoom, Friends can now link up with Meetings for Worship all over the country and even the world! Children and family members can participate by joining in for short periods, as happened on Saturday. Along with all this excitement however there is always the underlying challenge of inclusivity. Not everyone is connected to the internet, or wishes to be. How can we work within our AMs to include everyone, how do we evolve and adapt to the changing world around us?

A lot of questions! Our two other speakers spoke of lockdown from two very different perspectives. Robert Wilson from Orkney AM spoke of the need to simplify our business methods, sometimes in very radical terms. As meetings we need to consider what we can lay down and what it is that we need to truly nurture our communities.

Emily a 12year old Quaker from Shropshire spoke of how young people in her AM have stayed connected through lockdown. Not surprisingly perhaps by making full use of the internet - sharing experiences and on-line activities such as crafts and story-telling and also the support of Teenage General Meeting (TGM) which has given young people the opportunity to express themselves and explore their spiritual lives together. One thing Emily said really stood out, - that we should consider our children as part of the whole meeting and not as a separate group.

I brought away from this conference the realisation that the internet is with us to stay whether we like it or not and that we should try and embrace it and discover its creative possibilities, not as an alternative to traditional ways of worship but as an extra way of connecting us to each other and the wider world. Some Friends in my home group expressed regret that the conference had not addressed the wider social issues of lockdown but at a time when so many of our meetings are struggling it seemed timely to think of our future as a Society as well.

Anna Mullett