



STAFFORDSHIRE QUAKER



WINTER ISSUE, FEBRUARY 2024

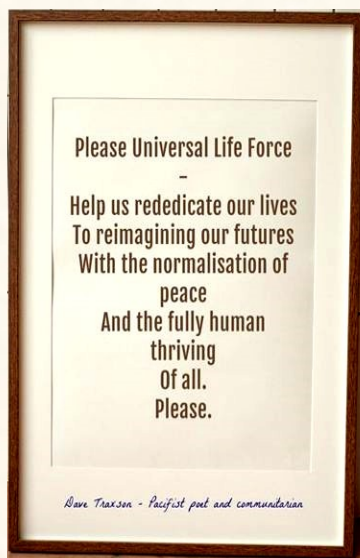
THE PLAYGROUNDS OF GAZA

The grim reaper
Scythes down a generation
Of children for the State.
Futurecide.
The political extermination of children
To stop them breeding is
Unconscionable -
Yet happening today.
The targeted executions
Add a new level
Of pain and trauma
To an already helled
And scorched earth
Non-existence.
No excuses stand.
More young lives fall.
Not revenge
But genocide.

And....
The children suffer....
Gunning them down
And bombing
Their futures.
The explosive devices
Traumatising their innocence -
Shrapnelling their minds
And injured souls.
The children suffer.....

And today....
The little children suffer....
Their futures erased,
Their rainbow energies
Truncated by a State's malfeasance.
Our laws as humanity
Must stop the gored horrorscope
We witness
On our screens daily,
In their screams daily,
As death scythes
Its murderous way
Down the alleys and streets,
Through the playgrounds and parks
Where little children
Should not suffer.....

Dave Traxon
Wolverhampton Meeting



Please Universal Life Force
-
Help us rededicate our lives
To reimagining our futures
With the normalisation of
peace
And the fully human
thriving
Of all.
Please.

Dave Traxon - Pacifist poet and commentator

See further articles on pages 4 and 5

DEPTHS OF CONCERN

- *Anger*
- *Grief*
- *Protest*
- *Earthcare*
- *Ubuntu*
- *Compassion*

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THANK YOU, WOLVERHAMPTON MEETING

THE FUNERAL
EVOLVED INTO
A BEAUTIFUL
AND UPLIFTING
EXPERIENCE.

I would like to thank my local Wolverhampton Meeting for their kindness and support after the death of my husband, Peter Stedman, last September. There were many individuals who provided me with moral support through many acts of kindness and, also, as a collective community. I was able to draw on their experience and insight when planning and creating Pete's funeral. I will be forever grateful for their help as the funeral evolved into a beautiful and uplifting experience.

Following on from this, three weeks later, in November 2023, my Quaker community continued to uphold me by providing the



perfect place for Pete's Memorial Meeting for Worship at the Meeting House. It was just the right size to comfortably welcome many of Pete's F/friends to worship and socialise together. Another excellent use of our Meeting House! Once again, this also became another very rich and meaningful occasion which I found inspiring and healing.

When I now reflect on both of these uplifting occasions I see the natural occurrence of Outreach! Many people were touched by both events, which introduced many people to our beautiful experience of silence. Even the lovely people who carefully printed the Order of Service became interested in their local Quakers! We never know each day who we may encounter and whose lives may be touched by the Divine.

Thank you again to all at Wolverhampton Meeting and 'God Bless you Pete!'

Lisa Stedman
Wolverhampton Meeting

WORLD RELIGION DAY IN LEEK

On 21 January, to coincide with World religion day, Leek Meeting held a joint Meeting for Worship with the local Staffordshire Baha'i group. This is the third year this has been held at Leek.

World Religion Day, which is held on the third Sunday in January every year, was founded by the National Spiritual Assembly of Baha'is in America. Its aims are to bring together the many and various faiths, giving an opportunity to listen to each other, and celebrate the differences as well as recognising shared views and philosophy.



This year the theme of the Baha'i readings was "The Light", and during the hour there were Baha'i readings on the subject.

The following are two of the readings:

O SON OF MAN!

My calamity is My providence, outwardly it is fire and vengeance, but inwardly it is light and mercy. Hasten thereunto that thou mayest

become an eternal light and an immortal spirit. This is My command unto thee, do thou observe it.

O SON OF BEING!

Thou art My lamp and My light is in thee. Get thou from it thy radiance and seek none other than Me. For I have created thee rich and have bountifully shed My favor upon thee.

(Both readings from Baha'u'llah - hidden words.)

Linda Skellam
Leek Meeting

THE FUTURE OF THE PLANET AN AREA MEETING WORKSHOP

The initial idea – that Area Meeting could profitably consider how far our spiritual beliefs as Quakers have taken green issues on board and how far these beliefs shape our actions - had arisen a year before, but it did seem that the workshop at October's Area Meeting in Stafford had benefited from the time spent in preparation. The first attempt had been booked in March for Stone but unexpected snow caused its postponement.

The sessions were planned by Roger Oldfield (Stafford LM), John Babb (Wolverhampton LM) and Jonathan Heal (Stone LM).

Approximately 25 Friends attended and engaged in discussion on three topics presented by the organising trio.

The first topic dealt with the idea that since the first few decades of our history we Quakers have tended to focus on human affairs, and the suggestion that we might now be led to a greater sense of oneness with all that is, including non-human nature on planet earth.

The second asked for suggestions on what a Planet Earth testimony might contain.

Finally the discussion groups were challenged on how far Friends might go in drawing attention to the problems that Planet Earth now faces. The arrests of a number of Friends involved in Extinction Rebellion were highlighted by John Babb, as well as three specific cases of Quaker civil disobedience:



Adam Priestley was a Conscientious Objector, having resigned from the Friends Ambulance Unit after conscription was introduced in 1916.

In 1984 Helen Steven got inside Faslane Submarine Base to make a statement against Trident nuclear weapons. In pleading guilty to the charges, she said 'had I done otherwise I would have been guilty of far greater crimes against my conscience and against humanity.'

Rajan Naidu of Stourbridge LM has served terms in prison after Just Stop Oil protests, and claims that 'Quakers have to be far more than nice people if we

are to come anywhere close to being the patterns and examples that our world so badly needs.'

As with all such workshops, the point was not to come out with well-defined answers, but to stimulate discussion, thought and, for

some of us, future action. Many Friends willingly reported that they had enjoyed the day as well. Stafford Meeting House on a bright and sunny day in October provided a cheerful venue.

A more interactive session than usual provided an opportunity for Friends from different LMs to get to know each other after the disruption of the pandemic period. The workshop might well be repeated elsewhere. I have had a report published in the *Stone Gazette*.

Jon Heal
Stone Meeting

CONSIDER HOW
FAR OUR
SPIRITUAL
BELIEFS AS
QUAKERS HAVE
TAKEN GREEN
ISSUES ON
BOARD AND
HOW FAR THESE
BELIEFS SHAPE
OUR ACTIONS

WE ARE ALL PALESTINIANS?

I have clocked up six Pro-Palestine marches in London since October 7 last year. I feel it is the least I can do to make my voice heard. A feature on every march has been a stranger coming up to me and thanking me for coming. Sometimes it is 2 or 3 strangers. I assume my new friends are Muslims and I stand out as an unexpected participant. I am not entirely sure why. Is it because I carry a walking stick? Or because I have grey hair? Or obviously not a Muslim? Or just look English? Or maybe they want a passing chat with a stranger.

QUAKERS HAVE TO BE FAR MORE THAN NICE PEOPLE IF WE ARE TO COME ANYWHERE CLOSE TO BEING THE PATTERNS AND EXAMPLES THAT OUR WORLD SO BADLY NEEDS.

Some sections of the white community are highly visible with banners and flags. Always several brands of Communists, who have found a good cause. Socialist Worker do a good business in handing out placards. The Jewish Bloc definitely high profile, with their clear message of "Not in our Name!" Increasingly a presence from



Trades Unionists, occasionally a church group.

But Quakers, where are they? By chance I met a small band of Friends from Guildford, but not an official delegation. No doubt other individuals were hidden in the crowd, but I do feel the impression is that Quakers wish to tread carefully on this one.

Why is that? To me, what I can see unfolding in Gaza, whatever the coming International Court of Justice decision on South Africa's case against Israel, is a sin against humanity. No ifs, no buts!

That's why I have no choice but to get up early and get myself there.

To quote again from Rajan Naidu (whose case was discussed in the Saving Planet Earth workshop at Stafford, see page 3):

'Quakers have to be far more than nice people if we are to come anywhere close to being the patterns and examples that our world so badly needs.'

Jon Heal
Stone Meeting

GAZA: REACTIONS IN STOKE

The war galvanised huge support for Gaza in Stoke-on-Trent. Our Muslim community took the lead but recent gatherings have become more diverse. A Stoke Palestine Solidarity Campaign will be formally inaugurated on 11 February. Medical staff are protesting the war and a Radical Art Collective and Art

Stop Stoke are holding sessions to plan 'creative action.' A Newcastle MP's meeting for residents was picketed, and I'm sure there have been other actions. I am proud to have addressed three rallies in Stoke and marched in London. On Saturday, I will front a boycott at Barclays Bank. I have found myself

compelled to speak as a Quaker. It was falling in behind a Quaker banner at the early CND marches which introduced me to Quakerism. Now, to regularise my position, I am applying for membership!

Angela Glendenning
Stoke Meeting

PALESTINE: GRIEF IS BETTER THAN ANGER

Since October we have been in a war in the Middle East which is particularly disturbing. There is every indication that the mass slaughter of Palestinian civilians will continue. Also there is a risk that terrorists will attempt ethnic cleansing of Israeli settlers in Palestinian territory.

When anyone acts out of anger they will make a bad situation worse. No one should ever be a 'slave to their passions'. In the days of slavery the life-expectancy of a slave was five years. It is better to reflect, to exert some guidance on our feelings and reactions, and to feel grief for the innocent victims. Then there may be some useful intervention.

The background to the present Middle East conflict can be summarised as follows:

Between 1948 and 1973 Israel successfully defeated several invasions. In 1976, at Entebbe in Uganda, they mounted a spectacular rescue of hostages. Perhaps, pragmatically, there was some justification for these. But all of this was half a century ago.

Successive Israeli governments have made no effort to resolve the underlying issues, i.e. a just redistribution of land and residential property between Israelis and Palestinians.

Concerning the recent con-

flict between the Israeli government and Palestinian terrorists there are war criminals who should be tried by due process of international law.

As regards the attack by Hamas on the Israeli kibbutz on October 7 there was an inexcusable lack of security by the Israeli authorities.

Warnings had been ignored. Some Israelis are accomplices and accessories.

The Israelis reacted with indiscriminate aerial bombardment and artillery barrage of Gaza City. They surrendered to their feelings of outrage.

The international community led by António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, and Joe Biden, current US president, should have demanded an immediate, unilateral and permanent withdrawal by the Israelis. Anything else e.g. requesting 'surgical strikes' or a 'temporary cease fire' is appeasement.

The Israeli leadership want nothing other than confrontation with the Palestinian terrorists regardless of the situation of the majority of Palestinians.

Here Friends must, just for once, give some consideration to military tactics. If the Israelis had wanted to deal with Hamas they could have:

- policed Gaza City with infantry and reservists and



declared martial law

- sent their special forces into the Hamas tunnels and fortifications.

Casualties among Palestinian civilians would have been very much less. Also the Israelis would have taken significant casualties among their special forces.

Instead the Israelis chose to make Gaza uninhabitable and to devastate the civilian population. This winter, how many more will die from starvation, cold, exposure and illness? The Hamas terrorists are surviving, literally 'fighting fit'. They have scored a propaganda victory and will recruit many more terrorists.

If there is ever to be security in the Middle East there can be no compromise on the following:

- it is the Palestinians who are the indigenous people
- just because a place is mentioned in the Old Testament that does not give an immigrant from Europe or America the right to enter and occupy land.

John Nicholls
Wolverhampton Meeting

FRIENDS MUST,
JUST FOR ONCE,
GIVE SOME
CONSIDERATION
TO MILITARY
TACTICS

QUAKERS AT TELFORD ARMS FAIR

The Telford Arms Fair (SDSC-UK) took place on November 1-2. This fair had previously been held in Malvern but sought a change in venue because of the protests that were held against it.

At short notice, led by Ellis Brooks, a planning group was set up to organise protests against the holding of this event at the Telford International Centre.



The Quaker vigil on November 2

On November 1 there was a small protest by a mixture of Quakers and Extinction Rebellion protestors, four of whom were arrested for blocking the road into the centre.

On November 2 Telford Quakers held a silent vigil outside the venue. Over 50 people supported this vigil, including good numbers of Quakers from Wolverhampton and Clun Valley Meetings. There was no intention for people to be arrested, just a silent Quaker Meeting for Worship with some spoken ministry.

The four people arrested appeared before Wolverhampton Magistrates on December 12 and were bailed to appear at Walsall Crown Court next May.

Motivated by concerns to challenge the arms trade and its associated climate damage, those who took part in the protests felt their protest to be worthwhile. However the SDSC-UK organisers have judged their arms fair to be a success and have pledged to return to the same venue next year.

The planning for protests again next year has already started and hopefully with more time to organise we can increase the numbers taking part. We hope more Staffordshire Quakers will join us.

John Babb
Wolverhampton Meeting

MOTIVATED BY
CONCERNS TO
CHALLENGE THE
ARMS TRADE
AND ITS
ASSOCIATED
CLIMATE
DAMAGE

Quakers with the arrested protestors, Wolverhampton Magistrates Court, December 12



QUAKERS AND CLASP

CLASP (Churches Across Staffordshire and the Potteries) held its annual Retreat and AGM in November, at Shallowford House, a Christian Conference centre north of Stafford. There were 16 participants many of whom were the head of their church in a wide area stretching from Chester to near Bristol. There was a Roman Catholic, a Salvation Army major, Anglicans including a Bishop who chaired the sessions, Baptists and United Reform Church ministers.

The first two sessions were spiritual, led by the Venerable Megan Smith, an archdeacon from Lichfield Cathedral. She argued that it would be wrong to pray for more for ourselves. She sent us off to spend 90 minutes contemplating the abundance of God's gifts in our lives, and then to consider how that might lead to a new understanding of God. This long period with no tangible inputs was tough for many. One remarked that as a Quaker I should find it easy.

Megan's second session started with a consideration of two Bible stories. First, the "Feeding the Five Thousand", of which there are two versions. In one Jesus recognises the problem and solves it so abundantly that lots of food is left over. The conclusion was probably that God provides abundantly without even being asked. The other version

has it that the disciples recognised they had a problem and went to Jesus for a solution. The lesson here was probably that we should bring our needs and problems to God. We were sent away again, this time to consider what problems and issues we might present to God. I could not help but contrast Megan's approach in which she took it upon herself to interpret the meaning behind the stories in the Bible with the Quaker Bible study method which asks each participant to consider and share their own reaction to a Bible story or passage. However, I found the exercises helpful.

After Megan's evening session to my surprise everybody repaired to the bar where my group of five mostly Methodists purchased a couple of bottles of red wine. The Bishop had beer and the Salvation Army major made do with a cup hot water.

(At the) AGM the accounts showed an income of about 24K most of which is spent on the one employee, Robert Mountford, whose job title is Enabler. He was given a below inflation rise despite several people claiming he was the best Enabler they'd ever come across. It was agreed to ask churches to increase their subscriptions. Apparently we do not contribute – I suggest AM considers doing so.

Robert gave his annual report, which was impressive in terms of the amount of work he gets through, helping churches in his wide area to form Churches Together groups, and other religious initiatives. He maintains a Facebook page. Within a few hours he had published a photo of us.

In discussion about events in 2024 he mentioned the George Fox 400th anniversary. He suggested that this might be the main feature of the next meeting, which will be in July on Zoom.

In the past I have written that I feel out of place amongst these Bible- and Christ-centred Christians but we know that BYM nationally is keen to maintain these links and we also know that the major churches very much welcome Quaker involvement. I was able to make several contributions to the discussions.

I thank Area Meeting for sending me again but if we had a permanent AM Clerk he or she might better attend. Another observation – Shallowford House would make a perfect venue for an AM time out.

Stephen Petter
Wolverhampton Meeting
(May I re-title myself
"AM Ecumenical Representative"?)

IT WOULD BE
WRONG TO
PRAY FOR MORE
FOR OURSELVES

UBUNTU

This extract from Stephen Petter's report on last October's Quaker Representative Council conference points to the fact that the African concept of 'Ubuntu' is to be at the heart of this year's celebrations of the anniversary of the birth of George Fox. The full text of the article has already been circulated by Area Meeting clerks.



"LIVING IN THE SPIRIT OF UBUNTU"

... we were delighted to have a visiting speaker in the person of Tim Gee. Tim is well known for the many books he's written in his career as a leading Quaker and has recently been made general secretary of Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC).

Tim gave us an interesting talk about the varieties of Quakers in the world. Some



Tim Gee

countries including Kenya and Bolivia have several yearly meetings while some yearly meetings cover several countries, such as the recently formed Central European Yearly Meeting. Evangelical Friends are by far the most numerous.

AN ANTHROPOLOGIST ONCE PROPOSED A GAME TO CHILDREN IN AN AFRICAN TRIBE. HE PUT A BASKET OF FRUIT NEAR A TREE AND TOLD THEM THE FIRST ONE TO FIND THE FRUIT WOULD WIN IT ALL. WHEN HE TOLD THEM TO RUN THEY ALL TOOK EACH OTHER'S HANDS AND RAN TOGETHER. THEN THEY SAT TOGETHER, ENJOYING THEIR FRUIT. WHEN HE ASKED WHY THEY RAN LIKE THAT, AS ONE COULD HAVE TAKEN ALL THE FRUIT FOR ONESELF, THEY SAID 'UBUNTU': HOW CAN ONE OF US BE HAPPY WHEN ALL THE OTHERS ARE SAD?

Tim went on to tell us that as next year is the 400th anniversary of the birth of George Fox this will be celebrated by Quakers throughout the world. Already many Yearly Meetings have told FWCC of their extensive plans.

The theme is to be Ubuntu, an African word which "refers to the deeply held belief, morality and custom that every person is worthy of being recognised, respected and heard..." Ubuntu is

also the theme of the imminent world plenary of Quakers. FWCC has produced a booklet "George Fox 400 – Birthday Pack", and the current edition of their journal is headed "Living in the Spirit of Ubuntu". FWCC is also producing a new Quaker Song Book and Tim ended his session by leading us all in singing a newly written Quaker song.

Stephen Petter
Wolverhampton Meeting

Ubuntu is not just a word; it is a way of living. It resonates strongly with Quaker values of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality and peace and the Biblical emphasis on

loving God, cherishing creation, and treating others as we would wish to be treated.

Friends World Committee for Consultation

COMPASSION

Helen Buckroyd of Lichfield Meeting reflects on whether we can find happiness through compassion for others.

At the start of the New Year, we often reflect on how we might change for the better. For some it might mean more exercise, for others a focus on losing weight by giving up sweet treats, having a go at a dry January or a new word for me - going 'veganuary'. Often coupled with the desire for physical change is a desire for a spiritual/mental change. I have seen in social media, and streaming on my own phone since January the first, many tips for those in the pursuit of happiness.

What might be interesting for us as Quakers is the notion that happiness can be reached through compassion for others.

Let's reflect on Advices and Queries 4: *Are you following Jesus' example of love in action? Matthew 14:14-21 And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick.*

It is compassion that motivates love in action. As followers of Jesus, compassion is a lens through which we need to view the world.

So I was delighted to find out that being compassionate is one of the tips for a route to contentment or happiness suggested on Michael Mosley's BBC Radio 4 programme aired on New Year's Day called *Just One Thing - Happiness Special* which can also be found as a podcast on BBC Sounds. I would thoroughly recommend all the tips, but tip 2 - *treat social friction as free therapy* - might resonate amongst us as Quakers. This is a phrase coined by Dr Rangan Chatterjee whose interview with Michael Mosley is the subject of the podcast.

What does that mean? It means that whenever you encounter an irritating or annoying social situation, reframe your view of the actions of others with compassion. The way to achieve compassion is by using your imagination. Dr Chatterjee even gave the incredible example of an Auschwitz survivor who used her imagination to make bearable, the unbearable! Listen to the podcast to find out more. Here is the link below.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001ts5r>

Reflect on those situations when you have observed the behaviour of others with increasing irritation and walked away angry, resentful or simply unhappy. Not uncommon in our modern lives!

Consider a middle-aged, stern-faced woman at the supermarket check-out paying her small bill with lots of loose change that falls annoyingly from her hands and takes the check-out assistant a few minutes to count and then place in the till. Impatience often prevails, coupled with a negative internal dialogue. Let's use our imagination. What if this woman's husband is lying dangerously ill in intensive care in hospital? She has used her ready cash on extortionate car parking fees for the daily visits to sit by her husband's side holding his lifeless hand. On her return from hospital, her heart leaps as she finds behind the bread bin - a hidden jar of change. She can now afford that small but deliciously sweet Swiss roll (which would last several days) as an afternoon treat. Her moment of peace sitting in her lonely living room with only her cat for company. The resentment slowly fades away. Compassion carries you towards your own contentment!

Picture the driver of a fast car as he cuts you up on your way to work. He could be a surgeon rushing to work at the local children's cancer ward late for a life-saving operation. He has just left his youngest child screaming and shouting at him because he could not help him find that special school water bottle.

(continued on page 12)

TREAT SOCIAL
FRICTION AS
FREE THERAPY

DEPORTEE, 28 JANUARY 1948



Nigel sang 'Deportee' when Stafford Friends shared items which had inspired them.

I learnt this song in 1964. I was camping in the Lake District. We were sitting round a camp-fire singing all sorts of songs of the 60s but this one has stuck in my mind ever since. I suppose that was when I was at university, I met people from all over the world and learnt that we are all human beings, not labels. When I was doing research for my PhD in a laboratory at Leeds University I worked with a Korean, a Pakistani, a Bangladeshi, an Indian from Goa, two Australians and a Spaniard. There were only two of us from England. Several of these friends came to my wedding in 1970. I feel privileged to have worked with all these people. When I hear the word 'illegal immigrant', 'refugee', 'deportee' and other words that are thrown at people in desperate situations then I hear in my head the song 'Deportee', especially verse five.

Nigel Peckett
Stafford Meeting

The lyrics of 'Deportee' are by Woody Guthrie and the music by Martin Hoffman. It is about an air crash in Los Gatos Canyon, California, in 1948. Guthrie was inspired to write it by what he considered the racist mistreatment of the passengers before and after the accident. The crash resulted in the deaths of 32 people, 4 Americans and 28 migrant farm workers who were being deported from California back to Mexico.



Woody Guthrie

The crops are all in and the peaches are rotting
The oranges piled in their creosote dumps
You're flying them back to the Mexico border
To pay all their money, to wade back again

[Chorus]

Goodbye to my Juan, goodbye Rosalita
Adios mis amigos, Jesus and Maria
You won't have a name when you ride the big airplane
All they will call you will be deportee

My Father's own father, he waded that river
They took all the money he made in his life
My brothers and sisters come working the fruit trees
And they rode the truck till they took down and died

[Chorus]

Some of us are illegal, and some are not wanted.
Our work contracts out and we have to move on
Six hundred miles to that Mexico border
They chase us like outlaws, like rustlers, like thieves.

[Chorus]

We died in your hills, we died in your deserts
We died in your valleys, and died on your plains
We died 'neath your trees, and we died in your bushes
Both sides of the river, we died just the same

[Chorus]

The sky plane caught fire over Los Gatos canyon
A fireball of lightning, and shook all our hill
Who are all these friends, all scattered like dry leaves?
The radio says they are just deportees

[Chorus]

Is this the best way we can grow our big orchards?
Is this the best way we can grow our good fruit?
To fall like dry leaves, to rot on my topsoil
And to be called no name, except deportee

[Chorus]

Goodbye to my Juan, goodbye Rosalita
Adios mis amigos, Jesus and Maria
You won't have a name when you ride the big airplane
All they will call you will be deportee

REFUGEE, 12 DECEMBER, 2023

On 25 November, 3 Stafford Friends sat at a concert in St Mary's, a stone's throw from Bridgewood House, currently accommodating about 70 asylum-seekers. With us were D., a West African isolated by language at Bridgewood, and 3 Iranian Christians.

One Iranian, N. (57), was keen to talk, using his smartphone for Farsi-English translation. 'What kind of church is this?' he asked, and then told us about his family back home. He, his 2 companions and indeed most or all the Iranian Christian group in Stafford had to leave their beloved families because of brutal persecution of Christians and others; overall there have been 100 executions in the last 2 months. Mary and Joseph were supposedly once refugees in Egypt because of the birth of Jesus; Iranians in Stafford are refugees because of Christ too. Most, presumably, travelled on the terrifying boats. Some walked most of the way across Europe. The companion of one was shot by Bulgarian police. Here, Iranians and others have been treated by the state and part of the community as just problem statistics. At Dover, one Iranian Christian was so badly treated that he is frightened of being sent back. One of two others, asked why they had been transferred from Ipswich to Stafford, said 'because we are rubbish'.

And yet, despite all this, there at St Mary's, N. spoke into his smartphone and the translation came: 'God loves everybody. We are all God's children. We are all equal.' What can you say?

D., a Muslim, is 22. In the 2021 election back home he supported the winning party. A military coup followed, the election was cancelled and he was imprisoned. After 7 months, without visitors, his father bribed a guard to free him. D. fled, crossed Africa and the Mediterranean, reached France, where he was badly treated, and crossed the channel to escape. Christ was executed by a military dictatorship; D. was incarcerated and traumatised by another.

On 8 December any men who happened to be around at Bridgewood were told that everyone was to be dispersed within 11 days. Others heard willy-nilly. Yesterday, each received a slip of paper with nothing but the name of another hotel and the date of removal. And this is Christmas.

We met N. and other anxious Iranian Christians today. N. still found time to point out proudly that the Magi allegedly came from his homeland. He is the only Iranian Christian being sent to Birmingham, separated from Farsi-speaking friends, most of whom will be in Walsall. As his English is so weak he will be isolated. But this is Christmas.

D., who is being sent to Crewe, looks shell-shocked. He has not slept well since his prison experience back home. The trauma continues. At Christmas.

70 others are working through similar feelings. They must adapt to somewhere new, at Christmas, when in churches we hear 'goodwill to all men' whilst, outside, potential support services are closed down for up to two weeks. Because this is Christmas.

If and when they receive leave to remain, ex-Bridgewood men will be driven from their homes with short notice. Many could join thousands of refugees already sleeping in parks and railway stations, or on friends' sofas. Their only Christmas present.

Money has been found to fill St Mary's and other churches with Christmas decorations, to cover streets and buildings with lights, to buy mountains of throwaway gifts. Is there no compassion, no money, in the bleak midwinter, for shoes, coats and a room at the inn for asylum-seekers who have nothing?

As we queue up for Christmas, what do we imagine it is about? Do we live up to N's humbling message of love and equality? Is this really Christmas?

Roger Oldfield
Stafford Meeting

Via the Stafford Welcomes Refugees network Stafford Friends have been supporting asylum-seekers who came to Stafford in the spring.

Since this article was written the group of 70 or so men have been scattered even further afield, to shared housing from Nottingham to Peterborough, but Friends are still working with others to support many members of the group, wherever they are.

GOD LOVES
EVERYBODY. WE
ARE ALL GOD'S
CHILDREN. WE
ARE ALL EQUAL.

COMPASSION (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9)

Feeling a failure as a parent, torn between work and family life, he rushes out of the front door.

Now consider the opposite. 'Hate' in the words of Graham Greene is *'just a failure of imagination'** which results in a growth of harboured wrath and resentment destructive for both the subject and object of hate. I remember

reading many years ago a powerful Chinese proverb that has always stuck in my head — *Those who seek revenge must dig two graves.*

Although it is not always easy in those moments of rash impatience to put oneself in someone else's shoes, the ripple effect of such a leap of imagination is as powerful as a stranger's smi-

le on a summer's day.

Compassion can lead to contentment and it is scientifically proven!

*Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory*

Helen Buckroyd
Lichfield Meeting

THOSE WHO
SEEK REVENGE
MUST DIG TWO
GRAVES.

OUTREACH IN STOKE

Stoke Meeting's plans for a new monthly format, are taking shape. Debs Williamson reports that these 'Meet the Quakers' events are to be held monthly.



Discovering Quakers

Quaker Meeting House, 2 Miller Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme, ST5 1QJ
Sunday 18th February 2024 from 10:30am - 12pm

Your local Quaker meeting invites you to join us to discover what it means to be a Quaker and to enjoy a period of silent reflection.

We welcome all regardless of religious background, sexuality, age, or spiritual beliefs.
Come along and discover what the Quakers can bring to your life!

Come and join us from 10:30, the meeting starts at 10.45 and we'll finish about 12 with a chat over tea coffee and cake.

Scan the QR code below for more information or email stokequakers@gmail.com

Our Website

**Simple.
Radical.
Spiritual.**

YOU MAY LAUGH, FRIEND

A woman Friend used to repeat a verse of a hymn and then go on in rather a sing-song voice. One of her Meeting remarked he never knew which was hymn and which was her.

A Quaker Meeting decided to hold a meeting open to the public. Unfortunately the printer dropped one letter from 'Society of Friends'. It was the 'r'.

From W. H. Sessions,
Laughter in Quaker Grey.



CLOSING DATE FOR NEXT ISSUE: END OF MAY BUT PLEASE START NOW!

ARTICLES ARE USUALLY A MAXIMUM OF ABOUT 620 WORDS LONG — ONE PAGE

GABI AND ROGER OLDFIELD

8 MENDIP AVENUE, STAFFORD, ST17 0PG

ROGEROLDFIELD@MYPHONE.COOP

STAFFORDSHIRE QUAKERS
ON THE WEB

WWW.STAFFS-QUAKERS.ORG.UK

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