

"We wish to see meetings and individuals confidently express their Quaker faith and values wherever opportunities arise ..." (A Framework for Action 2009-2014)

A REVIEW OF OUR YORK QUAKER QUEST ACTIVITIES (2013-2016)

Offered for consideration and future action to the three York Local Meetings

In August 2013 we had a useful meeting at Friargate for our 3 local meetings with Quaker Quest Network. This encouraged us to take a broader perspective on the subject as well as to look at what we had already done and what had already worked well in terms of our Outreach activities generally. We looked at what information, experience and opportunities we had valued in the early stages of attending Meeting for worship. From this it emerged that connecting the Meeting to the wider world, and enriching the spiritual life of the Meeting were both important. Indeed, from this it also became evident that 'in-reach' activities for our own members were equally as valuable.

In the last two years our QQ team has involved two members from Friargate, and one each from New Earswick and Acomb. This 'spread' we discovered has been useful in terms of the breadth of people to call on across our meetings. (Previously the QQ group had 11 members which was probably too many.)

Over 3 years we have held a number of events under the QQ banner; a full day event giving a 'taste' of various Quaker subjects and themes; evening events using the tried and tested model of 3 speakers talking for brief periods and allowing for participation of all in break-out groups; held stalls at York-wide events such as the York 50+ festival; arranged external activities and had plays performed at Friargate on 'Quaker' themes. We have also had a very useful session with Bone Jones of Friargate Meeting who brought his expertise from the York Archaeological Trust on marketing and evaluation skills and how to raise the profile of Quakers through appropriate publicity and activities. Harrogate Friends shared with us their experience of very successful inreach and outreach too.

In planning this year's recent QQ (two) evening events, we took into account our learning from the previous years. We had in the past paid for expensive adverts in the local press and in Local Link, but none of our participants came from this source. Most of the attenders at previous QQ events had come via word of mouth or personal contact. So this time we focused on that, plus getting our message across at the two universities (we had good contacts at both) and through the normal routes of libraries etc as well as at our meeting houses already worked well in terms of our Outreach activities generally.

Our Experience in October 2016

Interestingly, the numbers of people attending have stayed roughly the same over recent years: 6/8 at each of the two evenings. This was the same as last year. And equally important- those people were, as before, those who had some connection with

Quakers- either through Friends, or because they had started attending meeting for worship and wanting to learn more.

Our experience has been that from that number of 6-8, two or three of those people become attenders at our meetings. While this seems to make the complex task of arranging Quaker Quest worthwhile on one level, on another if we really want to attract larger numbers we need to change our format, style, or our publicity and approach and the way we put our message across. Despite having good contacts at both universities, we have not succeeded in engaging students in recent years.

The feedback forms were positive including those written by the few absolute first-timers who came. We do not yet know if any will follow up the experience.

Our current position

We feel as a group we have reached a 'stalemate' and 'run out of steam'. We have put a lot of work and energy into these events and feel that we have done our 'bit' to the best of our abilities. It may require a different approach, and/or a different team to plan the strategy for the next few years. However, our experience has led us to believe that the following is important to take from this exercise:

- Working together strengthened our appreciation of the three York meetings as a group, bringing together friends (speakers, welcomers, catering helpers) from all of them, enabling us all to get to know each better through shared activity and through sharing spiritual journeys that underpin our lives. *One helper said: "I find these events spiritually inspiring. Please ask me to help again if you need me."*
- Attenders already involved in our meetings came and got a lot from hearing our speakers – as did we, and the speakers themselves (from formulating their ideas, and from hearing one another.) *One speaker said, "I so enjoyed speaking at the QQ event. As well as learning about other Friends which I did not know, I learnt a lot about my own spiritual journey by having to think about it and put it into words that would be relevant to others. Thank you so much for asking me to take part."*
- In several ways, QQ 'firmed up' people's relationships with and within our meetings, as well as allowing time for spiritual reflection.
- The need for consistent inreach was evident as attenders came to savour and learn from talking with more experienced Quakers and hearing their stories, in preference to "studying books" as well as having an opportunity to share about their own journeys.

We feel it would be valuable to hold on to these benefits when changing the overall approach with a revised strategy.

The future

This will depend on new individuals coming forward with energy and commitment to look afresh at outreach. Also to engage the backing of each local meeting for help with events

and ensure that there is continuing welcome and support for enquirers who may start attending as a result. Some ideas that we offer are:

Inreach:

- Put together a monthly inreach programme across the York meetings, akin to Harrogate's. Keep links with Harrogate and Thirsk who may welcome involvement.
- Produce a professional quality Welcome Pack for enquirers (cf London Quakers who have done this), copies to be readily available in every LM

Outreach:

- Create a small group to concentrate on holding the vision and propose a more long term strategy for outreach, with the aim of raising awareness of Quakers in York, holding specific one-off events and running Quaker Quest , supported by an enlarged team ready to share specific time-limited tasks. QQ is not short of funds (eg. application may be made to the Quakers In Yorkshire outreach projects committee) but of enthusiasts to try things out.
- Invite individuals to a meeting to brainstorm ideas and discover what sort of help would be forthcoming in support of these aims. Link in with any future developments at Friargate of a Quaker Centre
- Plan a steady advertising campaign, instead of one-offs. Take up Bone Jones's suggestions for a much longer term press release strategy to raise – and then maintain - the York Quaker profile long before any planned events. For example – if the relevant Friends and organisations agreed - autumn/winter 2016/2017 might be linked to a further WW1 exhibition/publicity & to Holocaust Memorial Day.
- Use Quaker Week – eg. get a group to run a Parliament St stall giving out leaflets on a Saturday
- Run Quaker Quest and link it to other outreach events taking place across the York meetings
- Raise wider awareness of Quakers in York using local and social media, publicity at appropriate events e.g. Stop the War, Peace Lectures, Stand up against racism, stalls at Freshers Fairs, Over 50's Festival and at York Pride

In conclusion, although as a group we feel it is time for us to lay this down, we are happy to offer future support to any Friends willing to devote some time and energy to developing a strategy as suggested above. We would be willing to convene an open meeting in the new year to harness interest and enthusiasm if this was felt to be helpful.

We look forward to hearing the responses of our three local meetings to this report.

Sally Bourton (Acomb), Ruth McCarthy (New Earswick), Barbara Webb and Barbara Windle (Friargate) November 2016

"Outreach is for me an invitation to others to join us in our way of worship and response to life which are so important to us that we wish to share them." Edrey Allott, Quaker Faith and Practice 28.09