

## *Quakers in Stitches at Kendal...*



It's July 4th 2009 and thirty two dyed in the wool Quakers thread their way from Leeds towards the Tapestry. As Kendal begins to loom, thought of the Tapestry's Tea Rooms begins to weave its magic spell over Friends' minds and, sharp as a needle, many make this their first point of call. I could spin this out into an even longer yarn by embroidering more and more bad puns into this woolly and threadbare canvas, but I suspect that it might leave my future editorship of this journal hanging by a thread.

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# Creating Community: Creating Connections

## Yearly Meeting Gathering University of York

25 July – 1 August 2009



Yearly Meeting Gathering  
**York**  
Junior Yearly Meeting

### *A new kind of event...*

In the past some of the separate national BYM events have been Yearly Meeting, Junior Yearly Meeting, Senior Conference, Young Friends General Meeting, Residential Yearly Meeting and Summer Gathering.

Billed as

***“All the buzz & business of Yearly Meeting  
All the fun & fellowship of Summer Gathering  
All the energy & excitement of Junior Yearly Meeting”***

this year BYM will hold its first of a new kind of Quaker event – the **Yearly Meeting Gathering**.

Yearly Meeting Gathering will be a fusion of Yearly Meeting, Summer Gathering, Junior Yearly Meeting and a Children and Young People’s Programme for those aged 0–15.

Over 400 separate events will be going on as part of the Yearly Meeting Gathering 2009. Lots of these will be ticketed to make sure there is space for everyone who wants to attend - you’ll be able to pick up tickets at the Central Hall every day for the next day’s events and some tickets will be kept back for non-residents to pick up on the morning.

Residential Gatherers are expected to include around 160 aged 0-15 and 110 participants at JYM.

Non-residential over-19 day visitors are also welcome, and special arrangements will help these Friends play as full a part in YMG as possible. Day visitors should book by contacting the YMG office.

### *Committed Relationships...*

Meeting for Sufferings minuted 22 years ago, “*We recognise that many homosexual people play a full part in the life of the Society of Friends. There are homosexual couples who consider themselves to be married and believe that this is as much a testimony of divine grace as a heterosexual marriage. They miss the public recognition of this in a religious ceremony... We have found the word “marriage” difficult but we are clear that we have a responsibility to support all members of our Meetings and to uphold them in their relationships. We can expect that some committed homosexual couples will ask their Meetings for a celebration of their commitment to each other. Meetings already have the means whereby Meetings for Worship can be held for this purpose... The acceptance of homosexuality distresses some Friends.*”

Friends have the opportunity to return to these issues at York and with this in mind Steven Walton’s report for LAQM on last year’s Woodbrooke conference on Committed Partnerships occupies the next two pages.

To find out more about Yearly Meeting Gathering visit the main website, [www.ymg.org.uk](http://www.ymg.org.uk)

# Conference on Committed Partnerships

Woodbrooke from Monday 2nd June to Wednesday 4 June 2008

## A report by Steven Walton

Friends may have seen two articles about the conference in June 2008 editions of The Friend giving personal reflections. Pamela McDougall of Scotland left the conference feeling hurt and marginalised by the reception of her beliefs. I too was unhappy and left seriously considering remaining in membership. The fear, ignorance, prejudice and hostility encountered during the conference reminded me of Friends reactions during a Woodbrooke conference Quakers HIV/AIDS twenty years ago.

A Quaker Life Working Group on the recognition of partnerships under the auspices of BYM was formed. The working group were asked to propose a position and a way forward for a Meeting for Sufferings report later in 2008. The working group conducted a series of sounding exercises and sought the opinions of Special Interest groups, Area and Local meetings, Friends House and individuals within the Society. The consultation framework was to consider the variety of committed relationships.

During this conference we were looking at same sex relationships. We met in plenary and small groups. We looked at the theology of marriage; terminology for current and for possible future use; children and young people; the role of Registering Officers; our relationship with other churches if we proposed changes in our practice and possible changes to Ch.16 Of Quaker Faith and Practice. We learnt in the opinion of our Parliamentary Liaison Secretary there is no willingness for legislative change of the Civil Partnership Act by the current Government.

In traditional Christian theology marriage is a heterosexual institution. The form of the ceremony marking a marriage, the purpose of marriage and the ability to seek annulments has changed over the centuries. The Church and the State have appropriated marriage for their own purposes changing the terms of marriage to reflect public opinion. John Boswell a gay religious historian has published evidence for same sex commitments celebrated by the early Christian church. The omission from the conference of John Boswell's research is deeply significant and doubtlessly unintentional.

Differences were over terminology as much as proposing a way forward. Marriage was seen as an exclusively heterosexual institution. The use of marriage in a same sex context was deeply troubling causing shock, hurt and tears. A gay couple I know have entered a Civil Partnership and consider their 43 year relationship a marriage. Are they in a Civil Partnership or married?

The heterosexual representatives were in the minority. There have been criticisms there was a deliberate over representation of lesbian and gays. I saw no personal agendas or group organisation. The presence of an empowered minority and empowered women to boot could unsettle Friends. A couple of people felt intimidated into silence. Was this avoidance and opting out?. The predominance of lesbian and gays I hope does not reflect an attitude within the Society at large that same sex commitments within a Quaker place of worship is of special interest to a small number only. The whole Religious Society of Friends will need to consider this issue in time for future Yearly Meetings. Our decisions will be of interest to other churches.

Many people are not aware of the differences between Civil Partnership and marriage.

Religion is seen as homophobic and homophobia adopts a religious stance. The Bible is used to justify inequality, in other contexts the Bible is seen as one source of inspiration for Quakers.

Same sex couples are required by law to marry" in front of the magistrate". Early Friends rejected this and went to prison for this.

The pain experienced by heterosexuals on these issues get higher priority than lesbian and gay members.

Some Friends do not take lesbian and gay relationships seriously and not recognise the pressures and rejections. Heterosexual love is seen as more meaningful and significant than gay love - there is no significance.

This is about discrimination/inequality, not sexual practices. We need a Quaker theology of marriage and committed relationships.

We all need to remember that ignorance and fear lead to confrontation.

Friends will have opportunities to attend special interest groups, activities and workshops to prepare themselves for the business at Yearly Meeting in York.

“For the right joining in marriage is the work of the Lord only... for it is God’s ordinance and not man’s - and therefore Friends cannot consent that they should join them together for we marry none - it is the Lord’s work, and we are but witnesses.” Geo. Fox QFP 16.01

There was a very strong feeling for equality. Spiritual equality or human rights equality? Here is the challenge and tension: if we consider all consenting adult relationships to be of equal spiritual worth then to have a marriage ceremony and a Celebration of Commitment ceremony is a denial of our Testimony to Equality. Impassioned voices wanted immediate change.

At times the conference came close to a Quaker verbal altercation. I found one session too loud, personal and subtly abusive. A salutary lesson that Friends are not always liberal, tolerant and accepting. Tensions were stoked during the week by thoughtless yet probably honest comments e.g. same sex love can be compared to the love of a man for his dog.

If the conference was truly representative then the Society has a lot of hard thinking and serious decision making. Do we as a Religious Society of Friends step back from a legal right/privilege to conduct marriages according to our own traditions and rites in favour of a single ceremony for heterosexual and same sex couples?. Do we as a former Monthly Meeting that supported a gay couple to marry albeit in another country’s Quaker meeting take unilateral action of our own to withdraw the Registering Officer role from any Meetings for Worship for Marriage in this Area Meeting? Do we want to remain with the status quo and keep the inequity?

In April the Quaker Lesbian & Gay Fellowship held a Threshing Meeting for members to consider their own thoughts and seek to understand others opinions.

During the day a number of issues were brought forward.

## *A timeline...*

To set the conference in an historical setting I’ll provide a timeline from a QLG Newslet for Quaker activity around same sex relationships.

**1963 Towards A Quaker View of Sex** was published by Social Responsibility Council. See QF&P. 22.15

**1973** David Blamires wrote **Homosexuality from the Inside**. The living experiences of a gay Quaker.

**1987 MfS** acknowledges there is **no inherent reason why same sex celebrations of commitments cannot be held**. See QF&P 22.45

**1994 QF&P** includes a statement formally including the **MfS decision** of 1987 into our discipline. Celebrations of Commitments begin to be held. See QF&P 22.45

**2003 Notts & Derby MM** minute MfS asking **if the Civil Partnership legislation might include a religious celebration**.

**2006 Pontefract Meeting** writes to MfS wanting **progress on celebrating and legitimising same sex commitments in a Quaker MfW**.

**2006 Quaker Life** begins the **soundings process**.

**2008 Quaker Life** seeks **specific proposals** and the conference in Woodbrooke is held.

LEEDS AREA QUAKER MEETING  
*ELDERS AND OVERSEERS*

invite

ALL FRIENDS IN LEEDS AREA MEETING

to an open meeting  
on **WEDNESDAY 15 JULY** from 7 to 9 pm  
at ADEL MEETING  
to consider the topic of

**TESTIMONIES TO THE GRACE OF GOD  
IN THE LIFE OF FRIENDS.**

How do we celebrate the lives of Friends?

Do we make it a practice to write a testimony for each Friend in our Meeting who has passed away?

Are there guidelines for such a testimony?

What do we do with it when it has been written?

**The meeting will be facilitated by Susan and David Robson, both of whom have considerable experience in working with this topic. They have recently come into Leeds Area Meeting from Huddersfield.**

**now**

is your chance to volunteer to work in a  
*Circle of Support and Accountability*

**The Leeds Circles Group**  
will soon be in a position to carry out initial training  
and selection procedures for volunteers

If you wish to learn more about Circles or to put your name forward  
please contact

**[philomena.ohare@btinternet.com](mailto:philomena.ohare@btinternet.com)**

## *A Dark Storm Coming*

There's a dark storm coming  
And who knows where it will lead  
The right wing on the march again  
On racial hatred do they feed

Spreading their message of hate  
Against those with darkened skin  
The message to convey  
*Their to blame for everything*

*All our troubles and our woes*  
So white man can't you see  
*If we get these coloureds out*  
*Our country will be free*

And I stand back in total despair  
And sadness fills my heart  
Have things gone thus so far  
To tear our world apart

That it's not the person inside  
That matters any more  
*Your colour and culture are everything*  
*So we will show you the door*

And learn absolutely nothing  
From the lessons of the past  
When the door shown, led to a chamber  
Later filled with gas

All because of hatred  
And the perverted point of view  
*That because my skin is white*  
*I am superior to you*

But how can these people believe this  
On what basis can this stand  
So lacking in humanity  
And the dignity of Man

But you see it's so very easy  
During hard and troubled times  
To blame the ones you see as different  
And say they're *not our kind*

But we are part of one Humanity  
For all are born the same  
And this culture of hate and intolerance  
Is a world gone insane

So we have to stand together  
And retake the centre ground  
And stop this dark storm coming  
And turn it right around

And regain a sense of balance  
And see the truth for what it is  
That if mankind can't live together  
Then we slide into the abyss

We can stop this dark storm coming  
If we hold it to the light  
And together as one humanity  
Make this storm take flight

And show the world once and for all  
That It's the loving content of our hearts  
That makes a person different  
And makes them stand apart

For if the loving content in our hearts  
We can share without fear  
We can tell this dark storm coming  
There's no place for you here

*Paul Martin Emery*

I wrote this just after the last elections and it shows my alarm at the rise of the BNP and also the rise of the right wing across Europe. I can only hope that we will all reconnect with our common humanity and realise the danger before it is too late and stop what I see as a real dark storm coming.....

## *Help: Boys wanted!*

There are lots of girls planning to attend the ever popular Quaker Junior Holiday at Buckden House from 17/08 to 21/08, but not many boys. Do you know of any boys linked to your meeting between the ages of 9 and 12 who may be interested in a week of exciting activities which includes, among other things: football, outside games, climbing, pot holing and exploring the Dales?

They will be well fed and cared for and are guaranteed to return home thoroughly exhausted!

Because we have so many girls booked, we are also seeking support of additional women helpers who can join the staff team - you need to be CRB checked.

If you are interested, please contact Robert Keeble, 0113 2422208

## *Vacant flats at Quaker House:*

There will shortly be a number of vacant flats at Quaker House - could one of them become your new home? Quaker House consists of 12 flats for the active over 60's. There are a mix of one and two bedroomed flats. The outlook is very pleasant with views over a well cared garden and the location is superb for those wanting to pursue a greener life style in their retirement years.

Located next to Carlton Hill Meeting House, but less than a mile from the city centre, everything is on your doorstep from Woodhouse Moor park, local shops and buses every few minutes including the X84 bus taking you all the way to Skipton for a day trip!

Carlton Hill meeting, with its residential Wardens, Robert and Lea Keeble, holds a Friday coffee morning as well as social activities including community lunches and breakfasts. In addition to the meeting, the site is also served by Age Concern, with meals, classes and activities throughout the week.

## *Talk by Marino Restrepo*

Marino Restrepo, who travels round the world witnessing and giving powerful talks, will be speaking at **St Paul's R.C. Church Hall, Alwoodley, King Lane, Leeds on Thursday 16 July at 7.30pm.**

Marino Restrepo was born in the Andes Mountains of Colombia in a small coffee-growers town. In 1985 he was signed to Sony music of New York as an exclusive artist with his band Santa Fe. They released a number of albums worldwide and toured throughout the world following the release of their records.

Marino's life took a drastic turn during his visit to his hometown in Colombia at midnight on Christmas Eve in 1997. While he was driving into the ranch of one of his uncles where he was to spend the night, he was kidnapped by the Colombian rebels of the FARC (Revolutionary Arm Forces of Colombia) and taken to the jungle as a hostage for six months. During the first fifteen days of his kidnapping, he was kept in a cave with bats and different kinds of bugs. In that very cave, and after finding out that he was sentenced to death by his captors, he went through a mystical experience that changed his life forever.

## Meeting for Sufferings

Britain Yearly Meeting is held annually and is the main decision making body for Quakers in Britain – any Friend may attend. Throughout the rest of the year, this role is undertaken by Meeting for Sufferings, which has representatives from each of the Area Quaker Meetings. Meeting for Sufferings meets about five times a year and it could be thought of as a sort of national ‘threshing meeting’

On 06/06/09 Meeting for Sufferings met for the last time prior to new representatives being appointed at BYM which is to be held in York at the end of this month. Many friends are asked to serve two triennium, but for some at the meeting on 06/06/09, this was their final ‘Sufferings’.

The main theme of the day was looking at our Quaker witness to peace. This is the first out of the priorities identified by friends in the ‘Frame work for Action’ which is being looked at by Sufferings. We have agreed to look at one of the priorities at each of our future meetings. Judging from the large amount of correspondence, many meetings throughout the country have engaged with the framework and are finding it to be a very useful tool. My impression is that Leeds friends have yet to use the framework into our decision making process as fully as we might and on reflection, I think that as your representative, this may, in part, be my own failing. Incidentally, friends may like to be reminded that the priorities are:

- Strengthening the spiritual roots in our meetings and in ourselves
- Speaking out in the world
- Peace
- Sustainability
- Strengthening Local Communities
- Crime, Community and Justice
- Using our resources well

The session started with a presentation by the Northern Friends Peace Board. Many Leeds friends will know a great deal about the NFPB - when I first came to Leeds in 1990, the NFPB office was at Carlton Hill Meeting House and the office assistant was Jude Acton. The two friends who gave the presentation were Philip Austin and Anne Bettys - I have known both of these friends for many years and I later enjoyed a lunch with them in the Friends House restaurant. The most interesting part of their presentation was the reflection on the ‘Building Peace - Tackling Racism’ conference which was held at Huddersfield Quaker Meeting House in 2008. An excellent short DVD and study pack has been produced, and I recommend it to all friends.

The next presentation was from ‘Friends of Hlekweni’ - this project was set up by Quakers some forty years ago and gives support to the ‘Hlekweni Rural Training Centre’ in Zimbabwe. I was particularly interested in this presentation as my own grandfather, Stanley Keeble, an expert in organic farming, was also working for an NGO in rural development in the early 1960’s in what was Rhodesia. I have since researched his work and it transpires he was involved in a different project at Nyfaru, before moving to neighbouring Malawi to continue development work there. Hlekweni provides training in sustainable rural agriculture, carpentry, sewing and most recently, AVP (Alternative to Violence Project) training. This work is supported by Central and Southern Africa Yearly Meeting and is also funded by QPSW (Quaker Peace and Social Witness).

The third and final presentation of the morning was about St.Ethelburga’s Centre for Reconciliation & Peace. I had never heard of this project, but following the IRA bombing of Bishopgate, London, in the early 1990’s St.Ethelburga’s church, which was completely destroyed, was rebuilt as a centre for reconciliation and peace. QPSW funds a Quaker Peace Worker to work at the centre - we learnt that this Quaker input has proved invaluable.

The afternoon session was introduced by Helen Dury, the Secretary of QPSW (Quaker Peace and Social Witness), who detailed the areas of QPSW work, especially Peace Campaigning, Turning the Tide and Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, the last of which is by far the most involved and expensive to support. If you want more information about any of these, please see the Quaker Website, which apparently, is about to be greatly improved in the next few weeks.

The proposed Quaker Statement on Climate Change was considered. Many suggestions have been received from local meetings and further improvements were offered at Sufferings. There was an overriding desire to get a statement ready without further delay and to my surprise, friends at Sufferings were happy to entrust the final draft to a triumvirate of clerks, namely the Clerks of Sufferings, QPSW and Trustees. In procedural terms, this was very unusual, but ‘time has run out’ and we need to act. When completed, the statement will be submitted, along with statements from other faith groups, to the UN Secretary General who will be presenting them all to the Climate Change Conference at Copenhagen in November.

*Continued on page 9*



The last significant item of business was to consider a minute received from Nottinghamshire & Derby area Meeting regarding concern at the violent policing experienced at the G20 protests in London. We heard from members of Sufferings who had themselves witnessed the violence of the policing. One friend, a former long serving police officer, suggested that this method of policing would have been a 'policy decision' and as such, it was essential for us to engage with the senior police officers who make such policies. Another suggestion was that we offer our services and expertise in non-violence training to the police. We were moved to ask QPSW to look at this matter and bring forward suggestions of how we might proceed.

In the concluding worship, many friends were able to offer their thanks for the opportunity of being able to serve as a representative on Meeting for Sufferings. What became apparent is that there were many 'weighty Quakers' among these retiring friends and the implication of this was clear to myself and others present, namely, there will soon be many new representatives at Sufferings who will no doubt regard us as 'the weighty Quakers'. Speaking for myself, its safe to say that they could be very mistaken as I still find myself very humbled at Sufferings

**Robert Keeble**  
Leeds representative at 'Sufferings'

If there is light in the soul.  
There will be beauty in the person.  
If there is beauty in the person.  
There will be harmony in the house.  
If there is harmony in the house.  
There will be order in the nation.  
If there is order in the nation.  
There will be peace in the world.

**Chinese Proverb**

## *J'ai dû me perdre quelque part...*

### **I must have got lost somewhere...**

The doors were too wide open;  
too many people I didn't know, or that I knew too well, had eaten up my space;  
I had no place of my own any more and I couldn't find myself,  
only bits of me scattered around.

Or I had closed my inner doors too tightly,  
I could only glimpse in the muddy dregs of my being  
some dried-up remainders of buried promises.

I must have got lost somewhere...  
pushed about by the shuffling currents,  
or drawn in against the wind.

But a voice still speaks to me:  
remember, you are a path leading to infinity,  
a field rich with seeds waiting for the spring;  
you are made to journey, to germinate, to give birth.

What makes you who you are, is not a rigid treasure  
needing protection from all threats.  
It is this endless movement, this living energy,  
where nothing ever gets lost,  
which grows and blossoms as it travels across time.  
It is this all-binding energy of love, which makes you unique,  
which launches you into the future.  
It is this voice calling you without ever getting weary,  
and which you sometimes call God.

*From ...  
Évangile et Liberté, Juin-Juillet 2009, page 8,  
Poème de Jacques Juillard, pasteur Eglise  
Reformée de France, Vincennes.  
Évangile et Liberté, fondé en 1886, est le  
mensuel francophone du Protestantisme libéral.*

Translated from the French  
by **Helen Leach and Edwina Beier**

## *Decimal Theology*

Quaker Quest came to Adel in June. There were four Wednesdays in June, and on each Wednesday there was a Quaker Quest session. We were very pleased with the result – a fair number of Questors came to the first session, and a goodly number continued to come for all four sessions. It would seem our leafleting of Adel had paid off. But that is a continuing story...

I was asked to contribute to the second session, which looked at “Quakers and God”. I don’t think it was the most popular option, for those who had to prepare something to say, that is. Anyway, being the sort of fellow who likes to take ideas to pieces, and having a bit of a mathematical background, I quite enjoyed the challenge. I decided that, for me, there were ten Gods (or gods).

I can tell you that I’m not keen on all of them, in fact I would go so far as to say that in the course of my life I have rejected five of them, and that I’ve come to warm to the other five. Given that the presentation had to be in two halves, that fitted in rather well. So, here they are:

1. **God the Creator** Yes, he’s the chap who created the world – not necessarily in six or seven days – and still keeps the clock wound.
2. **God Almighty** He’s the fellow who can work miracles, who’s quite capable of answering our prayers, if he’s so minded.
3. **God, our Moral Compass** No, he’s not Gordon Brown’s father, but he did give us a clue as to how we should lead our lives, starting with the tablets he passed down to Moses.
4. **The God of Forgiveness** Now this is the guy you might find mentioned at a Billy Graham event. He’s the person who takes away our sins, particularly if they include some reference to an area below the belt.
5. **The Personal God** This is the chappie who has a plan for you and me, and to whom we can turn when the going gets tough.
6. **God, the Ground of our Being** This guy’s a bit harder to grasp, but he’s there in all we hold dear, what we treasure, what we believe in.
7. **God as in “That of God in Everyone”** Now this is rather like the one above, an extension from ourselves to others.
8. **God is Love** You knew of course that love is an acronym; it stands for Listening, Openness, Valuing and Encouraging.
9. **The Word was God** Now here we are looking at our words, the importance of what we say, and how we say it.
10. **God, the Light of the World** I like to have a picture in my mind’s eye of my life being a blanket which is stretched out in front of me, and of a light being shone on it.

So, there it is. Can you guess which are the five gods I embrace, and which are the five I’ve left behind? I’m offering three copies of John Robinson’s “Honest to God”, one to each of three Friends – or others – who get it right, and who can say what is the essential difference between the gods I like and those I don’t.

**Quentin Fowler**