

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (QUAKERS) IRELAND YEARLY MEETING

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To Friends Everywhere

We send warm greetings from Ireland Yearly Meeting, held from 31st March – 3rd April 2016 at King's Hospital School on the western outskirts of Dublin. The theme of our Yearly Meeting was "Who is my Neighbour?", underpinned by a quotation from C. Winifred Lamb written circa 1954: *"How can we, such a small insignificant group of people as the Society of Friends help to stem the tide of evil and hate, and greed and fear that is so widespread in the world today?"* (Quaker Life & Practice: A Book of the Christian Experience of the Religious Society of Friends in Ireland, paragraph 4.13).

We welcomed Friends from a number of other Yearly Meetings and worship groups and enjoyed sharing with them in our many sessions, in worship sharing, bible study and in special interest groups. Ten Irish Friends had the opportunity to participate in the World Plenary Gathering of FWCC in Peru in January. This was a wonderful occasion to connect with Friends from all over the world and to explore our shared heritage and beliefs. Ireland Yearly Meeting has answered the call from FWCC to initiate two concrete actions on sustainability by January 2017.

In our Ministry & Oversight session, the topic was "The Gift of Conflict". We were encouraged to welcome conflict rather than avoid it, as it offers the potential for compassion, creativity and innovation. Our Public Lecture, given by William D.A. Haire, was entitled *"Who is my Neighbour? What is our Testimony on Inclusion?"*. Drawing on the actions and testimonies of Fox, Bellers and Woolman, Will noted that our faith and tradition is only of value if we also live it now. Poverty and social exclusion are not inevitable and can be changed. Reflecting on his career working in Government in Northern Ireland, Will found that "unreasonable optimism" was a very necessary requirement in life. A positive faith is essential in the face of tough challenges. This is also essentially the message of Quakerism.

We considered the question of "Who is my neighbour in a European context?" and heard about the work of QCEA and how a few Friends can have a not insignificant impact on EU policy. We heard from a group of Dublin Friends who are concerned with welcoming refugees. A Friend from German Yearly Meeting spoke movingly of the German approach to creating a "welcome culture" for refugees. Our Peace Committee reminded us that, while we help refugees, we also need to consider how to address the causes of the conflicts which lead to such misery.

We also considered the serious and increasing incidence of homelessness in our country, and decided to express our concern publicly in a statement addressed to the authorities in both jurisdictions of Ireland, urging them to take urgent action to tackle the underlying causes of homelessness.

Reflecting on our theme, we are mindful of the story of the Good Samaritan, and Jesus's challenge to us to "go and do likewise". We encourage Friends everywhere to work for social justice and to take action, both individually and collectively, to assist those on the margins of our society and address the causes of inequality in our communities.

Signed on behalf of Ireland Yearly Meeting

Daniel H. Sinton, Clerk

Ireland Yearly Meeting