



Forty-Three newsletter

Number 497
September 2020



Oxford Friends Meeting
43 St Giles Oxford OX1 3LW

Living Out Our Quaker Testimonies on Sustainability

August Bank-Holiday Weekend
Local Action by Extinction Rebellion (XR)

Wildfires in California; deliberate destruction of the Amazon rainforest; strange, sudden changes in temperature in the UK – all these and more make action on the climate emergency feel crucially important now.

Extinction Rebellion (XR) has three aims:

1. Tell the Truth

Government must tell the truth by declaring a climate and ecological emergency, working with other institutions to communicate the urgency for change.

2. Act Now

Government must act now to halt biodiversity loss and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025.

3. Go Beyond Politics

Government must create and be led by the decisions of a Citizens' Assembly on climate and ecological justice.



BP's new CEO, Bernard Looney, has committed the company to spending 3% of its revenue on Renewables. He needs to be held to it. Furthermore, banks should be forced to withdraw their investments in those companies who ignore the climate emergency.

In XR we were absorbed in preparations for Summer Bank Holiday demonstrations. XR actions were planned for all over Oxford (and much bigger ones in London, Cardiff, Manchester, Birmingham), and that took a lot of detailed planning and cooperation.

For the Friday 28 August event, the Canaries (the Jericho and North Oxford affinity group) dropped a banner proclaiming 'No future for Fossil Fuels' on a bridge over the A40, and also targeted local petrol stations. Non-violent actions with no risk of criminal damage aim to raise political awareness. We hope XR

impacts on the public and maybe on oil companies.

As a practice-run at communicating our vision, on the previous Saturday Alan and I accompanied the Oxford Red Rebels from Walton Street to Bonn

Deadline for contributions to the October 2020 issue: Tuesday 15 September

Contributions, preferably of 500 words or fewer, can be emailed to newsletter@oxfordquakers.org, or a paper copy can be left in the pigeonhole of any editor. Items for the calendar (on the last page) can be emailed to office@oxfordquakers.org.

Square and the Westgate. We were supporting the Youth Strikers who were campaigning to publicise the exploitation verging on slavery of children and women, chiefly in India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Lesotho by the UK Fashion industry. The Rebel actors, dressed in long flowing robes and red masks, were moving very slowly, silently, and dramatically. But they needed the supporting flag bearers to explain to the bemused public what on earth it was all about.

To many shoppers in Westgate's clothing stores, released from COVID lockdown, the demonstration may have seemed an unpopular challenge. But some people were supportive and interested, and we wished we had had more explanatory leaflets. A helpful article in the Guardian describing a factory in Lesotho showed that firms like Levi's put out plausible statements setting out standards for workers' rights – but in practice they ignore the local factories' hideous treatment of their staff.

British firms that outsource their clothing manufacture to Africa and the Far East need to be held to account for putting profit before people. Quakers cannot duck the need to take action on social justice, in spite of competing demands on our time.

Eric Roberts, on zoom from Portland, Oregon, drew my attention to the final essay written by the courageous black Senator and life-long civil rights activist, John Lewis. The essay was addressed to the public and – by Lewis's request – was printed in the New York Times on the day of his memorial. In the piece, Lewis urged us all to get into 'good trouble, necessary trouble'.

Virginia Allport



Crisis and Vision

The lovely Greta Thunberg has reminded us that we now know what a real crisis looks like, and we can see that we have not been treating climate change as a crisis. Greta has a knack for putting things very clearly.

With the pandemic there has been a willingness to commit to 'whatever it takes' to bring the number of cases down. There is a clear goal. We know what we are trying to achieve, though not always how to achieve it. This helps to focus the efforts of large populations in responding to leadership from medical experts and governments.

It occurs to me that a similar goal with regard to climate change would be to bring the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere down. It is currently 412ppm (parts per million). The pre-industrial base was 280ppm, and there was a time when we aspired to keep it below the 'safe level' of 350 ppm. I don't hear this goal being talked about any more, but why not? Surely that is what it is all about?

Our vision has to be of a world where ice sheets and glaciers no longer melt. If this is an impossible goal, then scientists need to say so and to suggest another one. As it is, we wander around with our heads full of vague aims of reducing emissions, failing to focus clearly. The UK is due to host a big climate conference next year. How might it be affected by a population with a clear vision of what needs to be achieved?

Jeanne Warren

Where Two or Three are Gathered Together

I find myself wondering what it felt like for Oxford Friends thirty years or more ago when the single Sunday morning meeting for worship split in two. Was there a sense, for a while, that the 11:00 meeting was THE meeting and the 9:30 meeting a kind of splinter group? Did some people have a sense before lockdown that 'their' meeting was the main one and the other was 'other'? Lockdown and the zoom meetings challenge any settled notions of how the heart of Oxford Quaker Meeting beats and offered new fragmentations and possibilities.

For me, it has become possible to attend weekday meetings frequently and develop new kinds of Friendship within the smaller group and its after-meeting discussions about books, birds, society, swimming – as well as worshipping at my usual time with most of my usual Friends. For others, choice or necessity have led them to worship on their own with neither the online nor the physical presence of others.

We are encouraged to 'seek to know one another in the things that are eternal' (Advices & Queries 1.02) and we do this by worshipping together, and also through our human needs for care, refreshment and concourse that happen alongside worship. A cup of tea, a smile, a word, a spiritual breath, can all be routes to seeking the eternal with others.

Now fresh splits have taken place between those who continue to worship by zoom, those who can return to the Meeting House and those who do neither. I am surprised by how I experienced this as a disruption when familiar faces were no longer there on the screen but were back in the building. I realised that I had felt I belonged to a particular community that had lost parts of itself; zoom and its physical partner are different meetings for an unknown length of time. In the first week of this, I had a momentary visceral desire that the two parts should somehow report back to each other – to share what had taken place – and without this something would be missing. The community within which I understood 'the things that are eternal' had been separated. But our manner of worship is to establish seeking within the collection of people

who have come together, the 'two or three' who have gathered, and not to be blocked from this by mourning the loss of some other grouping. This perception can, I hope, overcome any sense of fragmentation in our worshipping community. So, instead of becoming frustrated that we cannot yet blend online and face-to-face meetings, I have settled to worshipping within the meeting as gathered and am grateful that I can do so.

Writing this has involved many pauses for thought about those Friends who have been worshipping with neither physical nor digital contact with others.

Anne Watson



Call Out For Garden Volunteers!

We need help in the Meeting House garden in September and October, particularly with planting spring bulbs which will be arriving shortly. The gardening team gather on Thursdays from 12:00 until 16:00, but we can work around your availability.

No experience is needed. Every hour helps!
Email or phone the office.

E: office@oxfordquakers.org / T: 01865 557373

The Gardening Team

One Year Later

Almost exactly one year ago, while visiting a friend in Oxford, I attended a Meeting for Worship. As a visitor from Chicago, I was met with a welcoming warmth from many people. That was followed by a great sense of calm as we sat in nearly unbroken silence on a lovely July morning. I left at peace.

My plans called for me to return to Oxford this summer, but it's no surprise to anyone that these plans, like so many other of our man-made plans, had to change. Among my disappointments was having to abandon my return visit to the Oxford Friends' Meeting House.



But then I discovered that through the wonders of Zoom I would be able to return to a Meeting for Worship. I attended this morning. (Yes, I needed to set my alarm so I could arise at 03:00. No, I had no difficulty staying awake. But those are both good questions.)

After the Meeting for Worship, I went through into the virtual Garden Room.

I wasn't too sure of what to expect. The pandemic has forced many behavioral changes. Zoom meetings have enabled many human interactions during this pandemic, but Zoom is not exactly the same as sitting across a table, or across a Meeting Room.

It seemed to me that most things are the same and some things are different.

Most importantly, the sense of calm I derived from sitting silently with a group of people all reflecting inward was every bit as powerful today as it was last year. The unqualified welcome I received was still as strong. I was made to feel at home.

In some respects, the Zoom experience was better than in person. I could identify names and faces much more easily. I could participate in the Garden Room in an interesting discussion with a dozen people, hear everything that was said and see all of them clearly. In the real garden, I would only be able to speak with a few people at a time. Using Zoom, geography was no obstacle to participation. I thought I would be 'travelling' the

furthest distance to get to 43 St. Giles, but I was wrong. Two others were there from Portland, Oregon, another 2,000 miles further away.

In other respects, the Zoom experience was not as good as being there in person. I missed being able to shake hands. There is an unusual mixture of togetherness and separateness when everyone is sitting physically in the same room. And looking at the faces on the screen can be distracting. I found I needed to close my eyes in order to truly turn to my inward thoughts.

I understood from the discussion that while the Zoom was underway this morning, there was a parallel live Meeting for Worship. I also understand that the long-range plan is to have these two meetings combined, pending delivery and installation of the right kind of video equipment. You will discover how easy or difficult it is to 'blend' the online and in-person meetings. I wish you well and hope it is successful.

I am so appreciative of the welcoming kindness extended to me by everyone this morning. It was a memorable and meaningful time.

Thank you.

I'll be back.

Michael Hughey



Fragility

A tale about being Black in Britain

I'd met my Jamaican friend three years ago when we were both students at LSE, before all this coronavirus stuff happened. We became close. I was telling him over coffee the other day about an incident I observed on the Underground in London.

"A tall white man was cursing an elderly Black man. I don't know if he was drunk or not. Doesn't matter. What he was saying was awful, calling him a n-----, telling him to go back to where he came from, who did he think he was, taking our jobs, freeloaded, etc."

"So, what did you do?" my friend asked.

"I felt ashamed to be white," I replied.

"Okay. I get that. But ... what did you DO?" he repeated.

I looked at him, then looked away. I recalled the tension of that day, the indignity, the shame, the hesitation and fear, the Black man's resigned expression. That white man was tall, muscular. I was short, slender, female. What *could* I do?

"Nothing," I said finally.

My friend nodded slowly. "Right. And what did everyone else do?"

I told him that some protested, some got off at the next station, some sat in silence. One woman said, "That's a hate crime!" The tall man shouted, "F--- YOU!" And the ranting went on.

"So what did the Black man do?" asked my friend.

"He didn't do anything, just sat there taking the abuse as if he'd heard it all before, and looking uncomfortable and sad."

"Did anyone call the police?"

"One man was on his phone but I don't know who he was calling. Another man said he was going to push the red stop button, but he didn't."

"Was anyone filming it?"

"Yes, several people were, on their iPhones. One woman said she'd send the video to the BBC and put it on social media."

"Did you? Film it?"

I felt my face grow warm. "No."

Then I told him about the young white woman who got up from her seat.

"She had been sitting listening and watching. She moved to sit beside the Black man. She got out a fresh bottle of water and offered it to him. She asked him if she could make a phone call for him, to family or a friend. She smiled at him. She stayed with him. At the next station, two policemen got on. They listened to the people, approached the tall man and led him away."

"Mmhm," my friend murmured. He paused. "You know, I do understand how you felt," he went on. "but racism and white supremacy won't die until white people see it as a white issue they need to solve rather than a black issue they need to empathize with. Silence is approval."

"I cried afterwards," I told him.

He leaned over and put his hand gently on my arm. "Tears," he said, "are not enough."

Carol Macfie Lange

When Words Don't Work

"Whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must be silent." When I recently encountered this quotation, my first thought was that the claim it makes is self-evident and thus of little interest. After all, if we can't speak of something, what other choice do we have but to remain silent on the subject? Then I realised that the quotation has a more interesting implication: versatile as language is, it doesn't always provide us with the words we need to describe a particular concept or situation. With this realisation, two examples from my own experience came readily to mind: the concepts of 'love' and of 'god'.

'Love' and 'god' are perfectly good words you may think, but for me they are often not the right words. Consider 'love'. I have a few close friends of whom I am very fond. To say that I like them is inadequate, but I can't bring myself to say I love them because that word carries with it so much baggage and is so open to misinterpretation. There simply isn't an English word to express what I feel – although I believe in this respect the ancient Greeks were rather better served, so perhaps this is just a deficiency of English rather than of language as a whole.



I find the situation with god even more complicated. If I say 'god' or even 'God' am I conflating the biblical god with the many and various gods of ancient mythology? Does my use of the word evoke the vengeful Old Testament god of Deuteronomy 20:16 who told the Israelites they 'must not leave anything alive that breathes' in the cities they inherit, or even the not-so-very-loving New Testament god of Acts 5:1-11 who struck down Sapphira and Ananias for lying about their wealth? Almost never would I intend or want these entailments, so what word should I use for god?

It's clear that, contrary to our intuitions, language isn't all embracing; there are gaps that words can't adequately fill, which raises another question. If we don't have words to describe something, does that mean it is unknowable? I'm no philosopher but my lay person's answer is a definite 'no'. Even without words, we can and do experience these things. I certainly experience how I feel about my friends, and I believe I experience God in Meeting and in my life.

So, with a statement that at first seemed to say nothing but the obvious, Wittgenstein (the quotation is the concluding proposition of his *Tractatus*) was actually saying something quite profound. My interpretation, for what it's worth, is that there are many things about which perforce 'we must be silent', but that doesn't make these things unimportant. In fact, to my mind many are more important than those things for which words come easily. Could this be one of the reasons that we Quakers so greatly value silence?

Keith Wilson

It's All Connected

Starting at the beginning of September, in many UK towns but especially in London, Extinction Rebellion (XR) will be promoting messages to the public that the climate change situation is even more urgent than previously thought. As the students say, 'there is no planet B'.



One thing that would change the climate very fast and for the worse, would be the use of nuclear weapons. It is feared that this could lead to a 'nuclear winter' lasting up to ten years and resulting in starvation and mass migration.

It makes sense to eliminate nuclear weapons world wide. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), a.k.a. the Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty, agreed by the UN in July 2017, will soon have achieved ratification by 50 countries.

That 50-state threshold is the minimum necessary for the treaty to come into effect. At that point it will become the multi-lateral disarmament treaty the UK says it wants.

But we of XR are skeptical because NATO, possibly as a result of being bullied, has refused to sign. NATO also appears to have prevented us from even hearing about the Ban Treaty.

The Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT), signed in July 1968, committed states with no nuclear weapons to

never acquiring them. States with nuclear weapons agreed, in exchange, to share the benefits of peaceful nuclear technology and to pursue nuclear disarmament, aimed at the ultimate elimination of their nuclear arsenals.

We remember that under Article VI of the NPT, all Parties undertook "to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control."

We in Oxford are at real risk from the nuclear warheads that are being transported on the A34. They go in special convoys, and in the event of a shunt accident we would be at risk of plutonium radiation discharges. These convoys travel from Aldermaston to Scotland about 6 times a year – not an idea I fancy.

We must keep reducing CO₂ and working to protect the planet. For me that also includes eliminating nuclear weapons.

Sarah Lasenby



CALENDAR FOR SEPTEMBER 2020

During the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic, most meetings and events are being held via Zoom-Rooms.

Please contact the office for more details.

Email: office@oxfordquakers.org

Telephone: +44 (0)1865 557373

From Quaker Faith and Practice

As Quakers we are impelled by our faith to make our lives an active witness for peace and justice. Our historic testimonies to equality, justice, peace, simplicity and truth challenge us to alleviate suffering and seek positive social change.

QF&P 8.11



MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

Please note that for the time being, most meetings for worship are via Zoom-Rooms.

For more information, contact the office at

office@oxfordquakers.org

+44 (0)1865 557373

Sunday: Meetings for Worship

9:30 & 11:00

**First Sunday of each month:
Meeting for Worship for Business**

12:15

Monday: Young Adult Friends

20:00

Tuesday & Thursday: Meeting for Worship

7:30

Wednesday: Meeting for Worship

12:15

Forty-Three is available online, at
www.oxfordquakers.org/newsletter

If you are considering writing an article or notice but would prefer it not to go online, please don't hesitate to contribute it. Just indicate that the piece is not for inclusion in the internet version. The same applies to calendar items.

*The views expressed in this newsletter
do not necessarily reflect those of the editors.*

Editorial Team:

SHERRY GRANUM, JULIET HENDERSON,
and ALEX SMITH

(Joint Editing and Production);

DEB ARROWSMITH, JACQUI MANSFIELD, and MAX HOWELLS
(Calendar and Distribution)