

Low carbon future for Quakers

Quakers in Britain have committed their whole movement to becoming a low-carbon, sustainable community. They have always tried to lead simple lives but this decision goes further: it means every Quaker in Britain will be urged and supported to reduce their carbon footprint.

A plan is being drawn up to turn this commitment into action and members have agreed to support each other and hold each other to account to achieve it.

A statement by Quakers says: "We can no longer ignore the fact that our planet is finite. We have not only inherited the earth from our ancestors: we have borrowed it from our children and from their children."

More than 1,500 Quakers made the decision gathered at the University of Kent in Canterbury for their annual Yearly Meeting last week to discern the way ahead for Quakers in Britain. The eight-day programme for all ages, from 30 July to 6 August, was an inspiring mix of worship, business, spiritual growth and fun.

Recording Clerk Paul Parker said: "We met to grow in the Spirit. We listened to God and we discovered with certainty that what the world needs of us at this time is to change our lives. Our decision is exciting. This involves every child, every adult, every person in our Quaker community."

The decision is rooted in Quakers' longstanding work for a peaceful and more equal world. Quakers understand that many global problems are connected: speakers during the week highlighted the fact that the environmental crisis is inextricably linked with global economic injustice.

The meeting also decided to challenge the values of consumer capitalism and engage with politicians and other decision makers to develop policies to safeguard people and planet. "We believe this corporate action will enable us to speak truth to power more confidently," says the minute recording the decision.

The same theme of sustainability and spirituality in challenging times was explored by Pam Lunn, of Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, in the Swarthmore Lecture, traditionally delivered during Quakers' Yearly Meeting. She said: "We need to take with utter seriousness the place of theology, religion and spirituality as necessary to our human response to the challenges now facing us. People of all faiths have a crucial role to play."

She spoke about Quakers' practice of spirituality and about the "absolute need for serious and sustained spiritual discipline if we're to develop the inner resilience to meet the challenges and demands that face us."

Yearly Meeting focused on many aspects of Quaker life. During one session a woman who recently celebrated her marriage expressed profound thanks to Quakers for campaigning on same sex marriage. Many listening shared the joy of the two women as she movingly described the "profound step on our spiritual journey".

This was one of the first marriages of same sex partners since Quakers decided at Yearly Meeting in York in 2009, to seek a change in the law so that same sex marriages can be prepared, celebrated, witnessed, reported to the state, and recognised as legally valid, in the same way as opposite sex marriages are celebrated in Quaker meetings. Quakers are clear that changes they are making will

stay within the law.

Quakers' Yearly Meeting decision in 2009 asked for a revision of Quaker Faith and Practice – the book of Christian Discipline which guides Quakers in Britain. And those gathered in Canterbury have updated text on marriage and acknowledged further changes will reflect future changes in the law.

Quakers, who were given the right to conduct marriages in England and Wales in 1753, do not have clergy. They do have registering officers who are present at the solemnisation of a marriage at a meeting for worship.

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Notes to editors

- Quakers are known formally as the Religious Society of Friends, a radical Christian movement founded in seventeenth century England.
- Around 23,000 people attend nearly 475 Quaker meetings in Britain. Their commitment to equality, justice, peace, simplicity and truth challenges them to seek positive social and legislative change.
- Last year, the Equality Act 2010 lifted the ban on civil partnerships being held on religious premises in England and Wales (as long as a faith group wishes). So far, the Act hasn't been implemented: Quakers have responded to a Government Consultation on how this will work and see difficulties because of the costs involved.
- The Swarthmore Lecture, established in 1907, is under the care of Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre trustees. Pam Lunn teaches at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre. Review copies of the book are available from annev@quaker.org.uk

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