



QVA News

Spring 2012

Quaker Voluntary Action: www.qva.org.uk

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Confined by checkpoints :
yet we refuse to be enemies

Our Appeal for Peacework in Israel and Palestine

QVA has joined with Friends International Center Ramallah (FICR) to launch an appeal for donations to support our work in Israel and Palestine. An appeal leaflet is being sent out with this newsletter (or can be found online at www.qva.org.uk) which explains why this appeal is being made – and how you may respond.

Why give to this cause? Geoffrey Braithwaite in his article on page 2 describes both the darkness in these lands – and the light over the darkness emerging from Quaker work. He describes the active witness by Ramallah Friends Meeting, now threatened by shortage of money, which seeks peace through refusing to be enemies and building new relationships.

Ramallah Friends declared on the front door of their Meeting House that: 'There is no way to peace. Peace is the way.' They need our help in doing this.

Come retreat with us: faith into action

With our current determined support for the People of Palestine, which is this year's focus for QVA fundraising, we should not forget where they all began. The first working retreats were based in the cradle of Quakerism, Swarthmoor Hall. There was an abundance of useful work to do in the hall and grounds and an enthusiastic manager who could choreograph this to suit all strengths and abilities. At the same time, a retreat facilitator blended sessions of quiet spiritual reflection and social group time, where meals could be prepared and enjoyed, into the timetable of the day.

This pattern, bringing faith into action, is the bedrock of our working retreats. A Meeting discerns a piece of work which a group of people could give concentrated time to, in return for providing accommodation. For example, the work on redeveloping Airton Meeting House and the adjoining hostel into a community centre for the village.

Participants' feedback comments show the benefits, personal, spiritual and social, which come from working intensively together and with time for reflection away from normal life.

Our overarching theme in previous years has been peace; this year, in tune with our Yearly Meeting commitment, it is sustainability.

Our first foray into Palestine in Autumn 2009 also enabled us to experience firsthand how testimonies are tested to the limit when a people's very existence is threatened. Just ten days was quite life changing for all involved.

Do come and taste one of our retreats. You won't regret it.
Anne Reynolds

Working Retreats 2012

March 26-April 1 **Congenies: France**
Garden development at old Meeting House. £180

April 21-May 2 **Ramallah Palestine/Israel**
Community projects and Israeli/Palestine encounter. £390

May 7-11 **Swarthmoor Cumbria UK**
Work to old Hall and grounds £120

June 9-16 **Bamford Peak District UK**
Young persons project work at Bamford Quaker Community £160

July 6-8 **Stone Staffordshire UK**
Camp and work to support sustainability initiatives £50

July 16-20 **Barmoor North Yorkshire UK**
Fun and self development for young people with autism £30

July 21-28 **Bedford Wood Bedfordshire UK**
Young persons woodland project £150

Sept 8-15 **Bamford Peak District UK**
Work with a sustainability focus at Bamford Quaker Community £160

Oct 8-12 **Swarthmoor Cumbria UK**
Work to old Hall and grounds £120

Oct 20-31 **Ramallah Palestine/Israel**
Olive picking and Israeli/Palestine encounter £390

Interested? Contact Jasmine Piercy:
Tel: 00 44 (0) 7910 434941
Email: jasmine@qva.org.uk

Nine Life-Changing Days in Israel and Palestine

Last April, I took part in the QVA working retreat in Israel – two days – and Ramallah – seven days – to experience life under military occupation and better understand the issues that had troubled Meeting for Sufferings (MfS). I learned more in those nine days than in any other comparable period that I can remember. It changed my life.

Just four days earlier, MfS had agreed to recommend to Friends that they boycott goods produced in the ‘illegal’ Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Over 100 members of MfS signed a greetings card to “all Friends in Palestine and Israel” which we delivered at Ramallah Meeting for Worship – see picture.

We heard many voices: from Israeli and Palestinian peace groups, the local mayor, the Friends School in Ramallah and from Palestinians at home or work and from an Israeli settler at home in one of the settlements. We were inspired by the work of the Ramallah Friends Meeting – and by its clerk, Jean Zaru see picture – and by the work of the International Center linked to the Meeting.

Everyone has his or her own truth to tell and this brought the impersonal facts and statistics that describe the situation to life: the relentless confiscation of land for new settlements, the large scale demolition of houses (248,000 since 1948); uprooting of millions of olive trees, the severe water rationing and the containment of a whole people behind barriers and checkpoints and more.

Yet, far from coming home with a feeling of despair, I felt a surge of hope. Whether we were talking with peace groups or with the mayor and his colleagues or with the school students or with other Palestinians, they all believed in nonviolence as the way to disarm the oppressor. “The opponent prefers violence by the opposition, because they can deal with that.” * Counter pressures will inevitably come from all sorts of quarters, including internally, but the welcome and the dignity of the Pal-

estinians and their positive approach to their hardships – all so different from the stereotypes that are broadcast (“all Arabs are terrorists” etc) – was deeply moving and heartening. It was a joy and inspiration to get to know them.

Quaker support and witness is vital



Jean Zaru receives greetings from Meeting for Sufferings

in this part of the world and is where Quakers have a long-standing and well-established presence. More and more, the Ramallah Friends Meeting and the Friends International Center depend for their very existence on Quakers from everywhere – the loyal few who live there plus the many visiting individuals and groups.

On learning that the future of the Center was in doubt because of lack of funds, we brought back a QVA concern to do something about it. The Center is short of about 70 days funding out of 365 a year. At £160 per day, we believe that we – QVA – can make this happen. Geoffrey Braithwaite.

* Quoted in Kaufman-Lacusta, M (2011) Refusing to be enemies: Palestinian and Israeli nonviolent resistance to the Israeli occupation. Reading UK: Ithaca Press

‘Real change is not simply transferring power from one group to the other, but changing the relationship between us.’ Jean Zaru

From her book (2008): *Occupied With Nonviolence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press

Learning about living sustainability at Bamford

Ten of us came together in September to develop a retreat centre with a sustainability focus at the re-launched Quaker Community at Bamford, Derbyshire. This is worthy in itself. But this was a working retreat with a difference. It was a pilot test in use of the working retreats model to educate and promote movement to a way of living that will sustain life on this earth in all its abundance.

We ‘set to’ to insulate buildings, paint and decorate and do work in the extensive grounds – stacking wood, scything and raking a meadow etc.

We worshipped together and reflected on themes at the crossroads between the sustainability of our world and the spiritual life. I learnt a lot – I think we all did.



Old work—new experience. Clearing the meadow at Bamford

A group reflection, for instance, that applied the twelve steps programme used by recovering addicts to climate change exposed the need to make amends to those we have harmed – a task that Friends have yet to take up. More practically I ate ‘vegan’ for a week and found, surprisingly, that I liked it.

The value of it all is beyond rational assessment. We worshipped together, drew support from one another – and were changed. This pilot will be repeated. Martin Smith

A retreat that calls for a radical, sustainable witness



The irony that the eight of us (pictured) had traveled to Sweden by plane to explore the issue of sustainability was not lost on any of us. But this removal from our daily lives was necessary for us to reflect deeply – and so it proved, for by the end of our week we felt led to speak to the issue.

We made discoveries. We found that our work, in and around the Svartbäcken Retreat Centre, both contributed to sustaining the environment and nurtured our souls. Very quickly a sense of community arose among us, with an

Retreat at ‘Maison Quaker’ in France

The Maison Quaker (pictured) is a Quaker miracle! Deep in the South of France near Nimes, the house and large garden have a unique address in France: 11 Avenue des Quakers!

Donations from around the world enabled France Yearly Meeting to purchase it in 2004. Subsequent donations funded its adaptation as a Quaker Centre with a multi-purpose Meeting Room for Worship, retreats, conferences, workshops and holiday accommodation. Much remains to be done: clearing the burial ground, removing trees, shrubbery and stumps and completing the car park.

To our delight we received more groups in 2011 and, of course, a quiet stream of visitors, mostly Friends from America, Britain, New Zealand and elsewhere in France.

awareness that we all offered different insights and skills to the group: from helping someone back onto a bike after twenty years, to chopping fruit for meals and to providing musical accompaniment on our cabaret night (fishnet stockings were not compulsory!). We learnt that

we all have an important role in sustaining each other.

Spending time outdoors, surrounded by woodland and lakes, reminded us of the inextricable connections that we have with the world around us and sustainability seemed more pressing than ever. We discussed the impact that we can have as individuals and identified many steps that we can take to live sustainably, some easy, and asked ourselves: ‘why don’t we just do them?’ Such thinking makes it harder to slip smoothly back into old habits as we return

to our ‘normal’ lives. We talked, too, of the more complex tasks of working with others to create sustainable Meeting Houses or neighbourhoods and found many starting points for action.

What do we say? To enact significant changes, we need collective effort. While individual endeavours may help, piecemeal actions are not enough to deal adequately with the complex global issues that obstruct the path to a world able to sustain life in its abundance. As a society with a presence from the local to the international level, we are well placed to be an influence and an example to others. We have a rich heritage of radicalism from which to draw inspiration and insight on how to make progress - enabling us, perhaps, to go beyond ‘tinkering at the edges’ and to begin to tackle the economic and environmental inequalities inherent in the status quo.

Rae Ritchie



In April and December we had working weekends, pausing every hour, to be present and appreciate the love and care of those working. We finished the Summer House. Visitors who prefer to camp will now have showers, kitchen and a lovely place to eat!

2012 is already looking good; our new Resident Friends are due to arrive at the end of February. On March 26 through to April 1, we are hosting a QVA Working Retreat, a week when we have a wonderful balance of gardening, practical work, meditation and lots of sharing, especially the preparing and sharing our meals together! Further details on www.qva.org.uk or [jasmine @qva.org.uk](mailto:jasmine@qva.org.uk).

If you come to stay for a week or a few days in our pleasant accommodation, local Friends are keen to show you some of the interesting sites nearby, e.g. the Arenas at Nimes, the Roman site of Ambrussum. There are lots of interesting brochures in the porch, one entitled “Congénies et La Garrigue Gourmande” giving hints as to where to find tasty wild herbs. Look at our website: www.maison-quaker-congenies.org
Richard Thompson

Clerk's report: Volunteers are our greatest asset

We are fortunate in having such an experienced and professional team organising our working retreats. Our Co-ordinator, Jasmine Piercy, has developed the programme over several years, building positive relationships with participants, host Meetings and enquirers. She has brought in other facilitators and we look to train more each year. Participants tell us of the warmth and care they feel from the first contact with QVA through to the actual retreat experience. Thanks to you all.

QVA could not function without its volunteers. Tasks are varied and can be done from home and we would like to hear from you if you could offer us some time. In 2011, for example, volunteers processed donations, posted newsletters, organised retreats, publicised QVA and represented us at a European Friends Peace and Service conference in Brussels. A big thank you to all of them.

We were pleased to welcome Geoffrey Braithwaite (pictured) as a new Trustee this year. His experience as a company secretary has given new impetus to our fundraising; in particular he has worked on our appeal

for work in the Middle East being launched this year. He writes elsewhere in this Newsletter of the profound nature of his recent experience in Ramallah.

Trustees met in person in Birmingham in May 2011. We also speak to each other regularly by telephone conference which enables us to live apart and yet function at low cost in time and money. The current Trustees are: Geoffrey Braithwaite (St Albans Meeting), Julian Hodgkin (Bonn), Conor Jerram (South Manchester), Anne Reynolds (York), Jane Robinson (Bolton), Martin Smith (Wooldale) and Richard Thompson (Reading, UK and Congenies, France). All Trustees welcome your comments and queries, and we are always on the lookout for new Trustees. Conor Jerram



Treasurer's Report: Viable but needing support

This is my first year as treasurer and I find myself on a steep learning curve. The accounts for last year are still to be finalised but we look set to break even. This is thanks to all our donors, and some much needed support from Trusts, and this year we

have also received a sustainability grant from Quaker Peace and Social Witness for our pilot project at Bamford.

We hope that those local Meetings who have not been able to continue their support recently will remember us in the future, especially in the light of our new Palestine appeal. We have seen a drop in the number of Meetings

giving us financial help over the last few years.

We rely heavily, however, on standing orders, largely made by individuals – and this provides predictable income. Many of the individual donations are Gift Aided and this meant that we could reclaim over £1000 from the Inland Revenue last year. We try to keep expenses

as low as possible. Our part time Retreats Co-ordinator operates at very modest cost from a home office and administrative work is mostly done by volunteers. That said, our costs are rising, especially in our work in Palestine and sadly, we have lost a few of our long-term donors. We need your support. Jane Robinson

Please donate to QVA

Please send donations and/or a standing order form – see below – to: **Ann Gimpel, QVA Donations 21 Mayfield Drive, Loughborough LE11 2EA.**

Gift Aid Declaration

Please sign if you pay UK tax as this adds to your gift and **provide address details in the form below.**

Please treat all donations I make to QVA from the date of this declaration as Gift Aid donations

(signed).....

(date)/...../.....

Standing order form/address details

Please return to Ann Gimpel (see above) not to your bank

Your name:

Address:.....

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.....Postcode:.....

Tel No:(optional):

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Email: (optional):

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Your bank name:.....

Bank Address:.....

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Ac No:.....Sort Code: - -

Amount: £.....

Ist Payment :/...../..... (Immediately if blank)

and then (**please circle**) monthly / quarterly / yearly.

Instruction to the bank:

Please pay the above to **Triodos Bank 16-58-10** for the credit of **Quaker Voluntary Action a/c 03269501**. (Ref QVA) until cancelled by me

(signed).....