



the VAN

Winter/Spring 2015

Quaker Voluntary Action News www.qva.org.uk
102 Oakwood Drive, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL4 0XA
Tel: 00 44 (0) 7811 387 543 E-mail: geoff@qva.org.uk

OLD AND NEW WAYS TO TRANSFORMATION

The QVA mission is to provide voluntary service opportunities appropriate for our time. In 2015 this is leading us to further existing initiatives – in seeking truth and personal transformation, through our retreats, and building understanding and involvement to support peace making in Israel-Palestine. But we are also led to bring forward new projects in Eastern Europe, in building community and exploring good practice in living simply. Read about all this here – and become involved if this is right for you.



QVA holds a working retreat each year to help with the olive harvest in Palestine - a land afflicted by hatred and prolonged conflict. What is our leading in this work? We know from our faith and deep stirrings within that conflict can only be resolved by coming together in love. Jonathan Lutz speaks for us: **“Commitment in foreign countries does not begin with knowledge in economy, interest for peace and environmental questions nor does it begin with sociological, political or ecological principles. Our life’s whole hearted engagements begin with something else – with people’s longing to love, to cry with those who are crying, to laugh with those who are laughing, to embrace those who are afraid, to plant God’s good seeds in everyone’s heart and to help it grow until love’s light shines in us all and changes the world.”**

INVITATION TO A RETREAT...

Spend some time working as part of a team on a practical project, living, and eating together and engaging in matters of the spirit.

Daily programme

Morning Meeting for worship and three hours **Work** **Afternoon** reflection session **Also** Free time, social time and evening Epilogue

Costs

Travel costs and arrangements are covered by participants. Most projects offer free accommodation. Bursary help is available.

Details and application form

QVA Retreats Bookings.
Swarthmoor Hall, Swarthmoor Lane,
Ulverston, Cumbria LA12 0JQ
Tel: 0044 (0) 7530 844611
Email: bookings@qva.org.uk

WORKING RETREATS RGRAMME 2015

March 24-31 Congenies, France

18th Century Quaker Centre near the South Coast. Varied work tasks in garden and burial ground. £190

July 13-19 Bamford: Derbyshire, UK

At the Quaker Community. Gardening tasks in a beautiful Peak District setting. £170

Aug 8-15 Casubia, Poland. Working on a small farming cooperative which provides training for young adults with disabilities. £190

Sept 12-19 Freiburg, Germany.

Learning about sustainable living in Green City Freiburg. £280

Oct 5-9 Swarthmoor, Cumbria

UK. Quaker Centre in English Lake District. Varied tasks in extensive grounds. £150

October 19 - 28 Ramallah,

Palestine Quaker-Palestinian-Israeli encounter. Supporting the olive picking harvest. £490

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

Balaton, Hungary Volunteering at a multi-ethnic camp for children in July. Details: jasmine@qva.org.uk

Head, Heart and Hands

Day conferences in UK to explore working together in community. Details:

richardthompson1@gmail.com

QVA IN THE MIDDLE EAST In 2014 QVA began a programme of placements of volunteer 'Friends in Residence' at Ramallah Friends Meeting, Palestine. Here Jasmine Piercy reports on her experience in this role.

Ramallah

The invitation came through in May – I um'd and ah'd – surely we can find someone to fulfil this service by the autumn. Slowly, as the weeks went by, the realisation dawned – it might be me? On the 3rd October I arrived in Palestine to spend two months serving as Friend in Residence for the Ramallah Meeting. My heart was at peace.

Before long I had met most of the local members and regular international attenders – a wonderful mix of dedicated souls. The ministry of song, fellowship, sharing and silence spilled out into the weeks and the deep stillness of the Meeting, like an underground river, permeated through all the rocky troubles that were finding fresh ground in the region.

In the middle of my stint was the QVA Working Retreat: Twelve of us from Britain, New Zealand and the Czech Rep. coming together to learn about the situation first hand and participate in the annual olive

harvest. We reflected, some journalled, and each day a new voice or encounter added to the unfolding story. Time in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Ramallah was balanced with visits to kibbutzim, a hilltop farm, a settlement and traditional rural villages. Everywhere we were welcomed and challenged by the opposing realities that rub alongside in this outwardly peace-forsaken place.

Recognising the huge relief of having kept safe for our twelve days together, I returned with gratitude to my oasis in Ramallah and allowed a natural rhythm to carry me through my final weeks residency. The warm sunny weather soon became howling gales and sloshing rain which themselves dictated activities somewhat. Meditative leaf sweeping and mopping puddles were welcome chores, whilst harbouring wet visitors and making sojourns to Friends further afield added greatly to my evolving experience and



connected me with the wider world to which I was soon to return.. Although I am left with as many new questions as understandings, this opportunity has given me a depth of perspective and insights that nurture a profound respect for those who persevere here along the path of peace seemingly against all odds.

Through 2015 Ramallah Meeting would like to build on this new initiative and has asked QVA to help recruit suitable candidates to serve as Friends in Residence. If you already have some experience in the region and are available for a 2-3 month period of service, please get in touch with me: jasmine@qva.org.uk



The Ministry of the Garden

Sitting on the wooden bench, the honk and hum of Ramallah Main Street behind me, the small olive grove laid with rocks, bright flowers and hanging peppers stretching up to the Meeting House ahead, I watch and listen and wait. Some mornings, if it's hot enough, old tortoise will venture out from under the jasmine bush for a ramble. Small and slow, quiet and quakerly. We commune, in silence.

The gate to the garden unlocked means that anyone can pop in, rest here awhile or sit and share what's on their hearts and minds if they'd

value a listening ear. Actually it is an exchange. The solidity of the simple bench, the charm of the breeze, the backdrop of reassuring bustle and the tranquil garden itself, create a safe haven for being true to one's deepest murmurings.

On the many occasions that I've stepped out from the garden to

visit with people in other places, other homes, I carry its peace and purpose as old tortoise carries its home; the sanctuary of a nomad who understands the land belongs to no-one, the land belongs to the land. We carry our true home within, that is the challenge and freedom of the eternal pilgrim.

Within the historic walls of Jerusalem, home to the Abrahamic faiths, adherents come to pray. 'But *they* will stone you,' says an American Israeli Jew, a young woman tour guide who grew up in a settlement. She is referring to the Arabs, if you were to walk through the Old City.

'But *they* will stone you,' says an American pro-Palestinian, an older woman and Quaker who is revisiting the region. She is referring to the ultra-orthodox Jews, if you were to drive there on shabbat. But '*they*' implies the same thing whichever side of the wall you are sitting.

I'm back in the garden. Light streams through the high trees. I allow the voice of fear and judgement to fade. My heart can open a little more to the pain and mess that we are all in. I reach out and touch the space that is available here and now. And I am glad I came.

If one may not walk or drive lest they be stoned or worse, possibly the way to the holy 'city of peace' may be the way of the humble old tortoise. Jasmine Piercy

Peace is based on respect, co-operation, well-being and the presence of social justice' Jean Zaru Palestinian Quaker

Wired by Fire

'I baptise you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me... he will baptise you with the holy spirit and fire.'

I had the privilege to attend three QVA Working Retreats in 2014 - all different, by people, place and pace.

The first was in the Netherlands at Laren, an amazing project with yoga sessions, lessons in eastern massage and practices in compresses combined with meditative gardening in the grounds. This created a blend of the Spirit of Japan in the flat lands of Holland, with a Quaker atmosphere of our answerable Green concern. Even walks in the woodlands feeding mozzies and ticks didn't darken the sense of an awesome feeling of Presence. The grand Woodbrook-ershuis and the cute Quaker



Meeting House in the woods, kept invisibly the memory of attendance by previous groups of Friends who have visited these spaces in past times.

The second event was at Bamford (Peak District, UK) which has become a traditional one for me because my first QVA experience happened there three years ago. This is like the first love that is unforgettable! The Quaker Community project provided my favourite meadow mowing activity and the gathered group of international

Friends deeply and cheerfully contributed to work and retreat sessions as well as to social times.

The third involvement was at Swarthmoor (Cumbria, UK) the birthplace of Quakerism. It was a great feeling to see what had been done in the historical grounds by prior volunteers. The fruits and investments of our time and energy are very visible and tangible and much appreciated by the regular local volunteers, staff and visitors.

What was common to the three episodes? The fire! I took on the duty of providing quiet evenings around the hearth and building the bonfire in all three places. Baptised by bonfire, initiated by team work, bound by retreat sessions, we elucidated clearly our Quaker witness and testimony leading us towards Truth and Transformation, the theme of QVA 2015! Alexander (Sasha) Gorbenko



Studying Green City Freiburg

QVA is organising a working retreat with a difference in 2015 – one less concerned with physical work but more involved in learning. We are running a retreat in Green City Freiburg.

The City of Freiburg (pop 230,000) in South West Germany has gained an international reputation for 'its advanced environmental practices.' (Wikipedia). This is seen in extensive use of solar power, high quality public transport, mass cycling and sustainable living – and much more.

Working with the local Quaker Meeting, QVA will be holding a one-week retreat designed both to draw lessons from the Freiburg experience and to reflect on how we may live simply in the light.

The retreat is planned for September 12th to 19th 2015. Martin Smith and Gordon Matthews

Head, Heart and Hands

The first Quakers found that the 'power within' was greatly strengthened by the 'power between' in their Meetings. We, in QVA, have found the same in the running of over forty working retreats over the last seven years. We feel a leading to explore how this 'power in community' may be released to greater effect in Local Meetings and Quaker Groups in pursuit of leadings, drawing on our own experience.

We are planning a series of small size one-day exploratory conferences on this topic to be run in different parts of the UK in May-June 2015. Dates and venues have not yet been fixed. We hope to provoke new thinking around a discussion paper that we are preparing. If you are interested in being involved contact me at: richardthompson1@gmail.com

Why the title to this piece? We are using these words – head, heart and hands – because these seem to us to be essential elements in community change. Richard Thompson and Martin Smith

Eastern Europe

We are glad to announce two new ventures initiated by Friends in Eastern Europe.

In July we will be supporting Hungarian Friends with their Friendship Camp at Lake Balaton. Children aged 8-12 from the different ethnic communities living in Hungary are invited to spend a week together learning about each other's cultures through songs, stories, games and language. QVA seeks to recruit six Young Friends to join the team. If you are aged 18-30 and would like to be considered for this project please contact Jasmine Piercy at jasmine@qva.org.uk

Our first project in Poland will be held in August at a farm about 100km from Gdansk. The smallholding offers young people with disabilities the opportunity to gain skills and training in animal care. We will be helping to improve the access road, clearing a field and creating a pond boardwalk amongst other tasks. The event is open to all and we extend a warm invitation to applications from Eastern European Friends.

From our Clerk

Dear Friends, looking ahead, we have an exciting programme for 2015 including new initiatives such as a sustainability retreat in Germany and assisting with a children's project run by Hungarian Friends. Jasmine Piercy, our Co-ordinator, married in the autumn of 2013 and she and Sasha will be setting up home in Slovenia in 2015 on a "semi sabbatical" although remaining very much involved. In consequence, bookings during 2015 year will be administered on our behalf by staff at Swarthmoor Hall.



Geoffrey Braithwaite is now our donations secretary and company secretary as well, and, because of this, the official address of QVA has changed to his home address. (See heading on page 1).

In addition, I have taken over as manager of our supporters' database. Please contact me (jfrombury@aol.com) if your details need to change.

We post many copies of our newsletter and programme to individuals. If you would be happy to receive this material by email instead please do let me know as this will save us money.

Finally can I highlight our appeal for more Trustees. I feel all our Trustees deserve thanks for their work. But we would welcome others to join us and bring their energy and perspectives to enrich our work. In Friendship, Jane Robinson Clerk of QVA Trustees.

Three-Year Joint Appeal raises £56,000

The three-year appeal to support the peace making ministry of Ramallah Friends Meeting (RFM) and the work of QVA in Palestine-Israel has raised £56,000. £38,000 of this has gone to the Meeting and the rest (£18,000) to QVA. So a big thank-you to all who gave support.

The appeal – now closed – has helped to put the peace-building witness of the two bodies onto a sound financial footing. This was not the case in the spring of 2011 when participants on the QVA Ramallah retreat at that time became concerned that the international ministry of RFM – operating then as Friends International Centre Ramallah (FICR) – was seriously short of money. There was a funding gap of about £160 per day.

Success in restoration of funding did not come easily. RFM has had to respond to external and internal pressures that interrupted the running of the appeal. Externally, it was imperative that the Meeting establish its status as a 'church' after this was put in doubt by the Palestinian Authorities and led to temporary suspension of the RFM bank account. This was addressed, in part, by merging FICR back into the single RFM. Internally the FICR Co-ordinator retired and a new way forward discerned for the Meeting.

RFM has now received a substantial donation from Sweden Yearly Meeting and, with the proceeds of the appeal and continuing funding, secured the future of its work for the foreseeable future. Once again, thank you to all who have contributed and a special thank you to our regular core supporters for giving throughout the appeal. Geoffrey Braithwaite and Martin Smith

Volunteers wanted for interesting work.

There are modest, manageable and rewarding volunteer roles to assist the working of QVA. We are looking for: (1) New trustees. This would involve about four telephone conferences a year and a one day meeting in the UK; and (2) Administrative help. These roles are flexible – capable of being fitted around your commitments and can be undertaken from your home. Interested? Please ring me, Jane Robinson, on 07946 887634 or email jfrombury@aol.com

Please donate to QVA
Donations keep us going and enable us to do new things. Please send donations and/or a standing order mandate – see below – to: **Geoff Braithwaite, QVA Donations, 102 Oakwood Drive, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL4 0XA**

For taxpayers, we would gain extra income if you also complete and send the gift aid declaration – set out below – to the above address.

GIFT AID DECLARATION - (please sign if you pay tax)

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

(signed).....

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

Please sign if you pay tax and remember to notify us if you no longer pay income and/or capital gains tax equal to the tax we reclaim on your donations.

DONATION/STANDING ORDER FORM

Please return to Geoff Braithwaite, 102 Oakwood Drive, St Albans, Herts AL4 0XA, not to your bank

Your name:

Address.....

.....

.....Post code.....

Tel No:

E-mail:

I enclose my donation for £.....

Payable to Quaker Voluntary Action or instruction to my bank as follows:

Your bank name:.....

Bank Address:.....

.....

..... Postcode.....

A/c No:.....Sort Code - -

Amount: **£**.....

First 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**.

(signed).....

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

Would you like a receipt? Yes/no (Please circle)

If so, may we use your email? Yes/no

(Please circle)

Disclaimer: The articles published in the newsletter are not necessarily the views of the Quaker Voluntary Action Committee, management or staff. Although every effort is made to ensure information in this newsletter is accurate, QVA can accept no responsibility for errors arising from information we have been given.