

## Devon and Cornwall Quaker Gathering

St Austell 23.02.2013

### Understanding Friends Worldwide

Minute .....

25 Friends are present.

Following the 2012 World Conference in Kenya organised through the Friends' World Committee for Consultation, we have heard from Ruth Homer and Martin Touwen about that Conference and have extended our understanding of Friends worldwide.

Tony Fitt acted as our Clerk and introduced us to the Friends' World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) for which he had previously worked as Executive Secretary of the European and Middle East Section. The FWCC was set up in 1937 as a consulting body, and he emphasised that it was without authority or power. During the subsequent question and answer session, it was pointed out that our presence at the Quaker United Nations Offices in both New York and Geneva was through the existence of the FWCC.

Ruth, a member of the Quaker World Relations Committee and Quaker Friends of Cuba, described the miracle of safely gathering over 900 Friends from all over the world with the support of extremely limited financial and administrative support. She spoke of her work as an interpreter at the Conference, and of the steps which had been taken to ensure that language should not be a basic problem restricting any delegate's access to the proceedings. During an afternoon workshop session, the problems of language were further explored in respect of cultural differences; differences in Quaker practices; differences in Quaker specific language, and differences in grammar and linguistic structures when seeking equivalence in translation. In engaging in these activities, Ruth described how she had been enabled to expand her understanding of her own religious practices and spiritual being.

Martin, a representative to World Gathering from Netherlands Yearly Meeting, a member of the European and Middle East Section of FWCC and Clerk of the Finance Committee of the Quaker Council for European Affairs, described the structure of FWCC and presented a graph of the variety of Quaker practices in various parts of the world. On one axis Christian Evangelism was measured against Universalism, and on the other axis Silent Meetings were measured relative to Programmed Meetings. Again he spoke of the learning experiences of sharing such diversity of practice, and realising the commonality within, summed up in the following quote from a young Nepalese Quaker:

"I do not understand clearly about trinity, but I know God is with me..... I do not understand clearly about light, but I know I should shine..... I do not understand clearly about different types of Friends, but I know they are all my Friends. I do not understand clearly about Friends' various beliefs, but I believe we are one"

Pradip Kumar Lamichhane, Nepal

Martin said he had taken back to the Netherlands the idea of establishing a twinning arrangement between world-wide Meetings with different traditions, and also the wish to explore, experimentally, different forms of worship within Netherlands Yearly Meeting. He

suggested that worldwide there was general acceptance of our testimonies. During questions, it was suggested that if FWCC could produce an agreed statement on any of the testimonies, it would carry enormous weight internationally.

At the end of the day we reflected positively on the World Conference Call for Peace and Eco-justice, known as the Kabarak Call, after the University which hosted the Conference. It was felt that this was a very moving statement engaging with our own Minute 36 concerns. The imperative for action was clear.

Once again, Gathering provided opportunities for us to share experiences, to broaden understandings and to enjoy the social friendships which lie at the heart of Quakerism. We thank our speakers for stimulating us in these ways. We thank St Austell Friends for their hospitality, and the Devon and Cornwall Gatherings Arrangements Committee for organising this meeting.

We depart in the hope to meet again at Sheldon on the weekend of May 31st. There will be a further day Gathering in Exeter in October, with a date to be confirmed.  
(Minute by Bob Lovett, Torbay Meeting)

NOTES:

For further information on FWCC visit the web site at the following link:  
[www.fwccworld.org](http://www.fwccworld.org)

Other reading suggestions which were offered during Gathering were:

*"Speaking Christian"* by Martin J Borg;  
and a paper published in "Quaker Eco Bulletin" Vol 12 No 1 entitled *"Quaker Eco Justice Strategy: Equality and the Experiment of the Earth Quaker Action Team"*