

10.30 am at St Lukes College Exeter, then at the Meeting House, Wynards Lane.

Minute 09.46

45 Friends are present

Today's Gathering, however, has not been restricted solely to Devon and Cornwall Friends. In a public session in the morning, more than 130 Friends and others have heard Richard Wilkinson, Emeritus Professor of Social Epidemiology at Nottingham University and founder of the Equality Trust, talk about the research behind his book, "The Spirit Level - Why more equal societies almost always do better". This research, undertaken over a number of years by Professor Wilkinson and his colleague Professor Kate Pickett, reviews a large number of studies across the world in which the economic wealth, and in particular the gulf between the richest and poorest in developed societies, is correlated with a wide range of measures of social well being. Their findings, rigorously analysed and tested, demonstrate that there appears to be a limit to the benefits of continued economic growth, and, secondly, that in societies where there is a great disparity between rich and poor (eg USA and Britain), the quality of life is generally poorer than in societies where there is not that wealth disparity (eg Japan and the Scandinavian countries)

Gathering has then heard responses from three Exeter politicians: the Labour MP and Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Ben Bradshaw; the Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for the Conservative Party, Hannah Foster; and the Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for the Liberal Democrats, Graham Oakes. The three politicians have then joined Richard Wilkinson and responded to questions from the Gathering.

Shared lunch has been held in the Meeting House, and in the afternoon, as part of a meeting for worship, the Convenor of the Arrangements Committee has led a further session seeking ways in which concerned members of society, and particularly concerned Friends, might develop strategies for bringing about a more equitable society. A number of suggestions have been made and the convenor has undertaken to reproduce these ideas and make them available to Local Meetings.

The Gathering has been informed of the dates of future Gatherings, and of the need for nominations for Friends to join a planning group for the Residential Gathering in June 2010; and also to replace the current Convenor, who indicated at the beginning of the year his wish to lay down his responsibilities.

The Gathering thanks all the contributors to this event, and in particular Exeter Friends for their hospitality and domestic organisation.

We part in the hope to meet again at Sheldon in June 2010, and end with a period of silent worship.

Bob Lovett, Convenor  
15.30 Saturday October 17th 2009