

Living Witness: 2012 review and prospects for future work

Based on staff review paper for trustees meeting 3rd December 2012

Working with the Quaker Community at Bamford

Trustees decided in 2011 to support the development of the Quaker Community at Bamford as an example of Quakers seeking to live sustainably and as a retreat centre. With refurbishment work nearly complete (the buildings are now fully insulated with improved heating systems and some new wood-burning stoves) the Community is beginning to find its feet. Four new members moved in during December 2012/January 2013 and there is a growing range of facilitators for its retreat programme. It is becoming established as a venue for like-minded groups including the Alternatives to Violence Project, and was used for a residential meeting of the BYM Canterbury Commitment Group.

Laurie Michaelis has devoted most of his energy (unpaid) to the Community during 2011-2012. In addition to routine Living Witness gatherings we offered eight sustainability-themed retreats at the Community in 2012, mostly facilitated or co-facilitated by Laurie. The Community retreat programme for 2013 has slightly fewer retreats with a wider variety of facilitators.

Laurie plans to leave the Community in the spring of 2013 and will become available for other Living Witness work.

Working with the Canterbury Commitment Group

Living Witness trustees Jonathan Dale, Rachel Berger and staff member Laurie Michaelis are on the Canterbury Commitment Group, which is responsible for overseeing the BYM commitment to become a low carbon sustainable community. The group has now met four times, including a two-day residential at Bamford Quaker Community.

One of the main activities of the group so far has been reviewing returns of completed meeting checkups and climate impact calculators from local meetings. The group has also talked about providing technical and other support to local meetings, perhaps through volunteers. However any such support would almost certainly come through the activities of the participating organisations (QPSW, Woodbrooke, Living Witness) rather than through the group itself which would play a co-ordinating or relationship-building role.

With this co-ordinating function in mind, a subgroup made up of Jonathan Dale (for ESP Goup), Maud Grainger (for Woodbrooke), Barbara Windle (for Quaker Life Central Committee) and Laurie Michaelis (for Living Witness) has been asked to look at the spiritual and human dimensions of the commitment. This group made a number of suggestions for work including producing leaflets on the commitment and its spiritual basis. It has also talked about incorporating Canterbury Commitment issues into Quaker Life and Woodbrooke work with elders and overseers, but has not reached any agreement on this.

Link Group and Summer School

In 2012 the spring Link Group gathering was quite small, and we decided to combine the autumn gathering with the RP gathering. Interest seemed to pick

up and we had a group of about 15, plus Quaker Community members. The summer school attracted about 12 paying participants along with Community members.

These events seem to be needed still and we propose to continue running them as in the past. We have included a Link Group gathering in the Quaker Community programme in March 2013 and a summer school in August.

Publications

earthQuaker continues to be in demand and Dee is receiving plenty of contributions. In 2011 we worked with QPSW to produce the *Sustainability Toolkit* and revised climate impact calculators. The *Toolkit* has been well-received, although there have been some adverse comments about the calculators, partly due to problems with the online versions. Laurie is expecting to do some work with QPSW to improve them before meetings are asked to use them again.

Steve Mandel did some work to update *Walk Cheerfully, Step Lightly* so that it could be included on our website as a background document to the *Toolkit*.

It is perhaps time in 2013 for LW to consider a new publication setting out in depth what the Canterbury Commitment might mean for Friends and Meetings, and providing some guidance on ways to implement it. We might focus in particular on deepening spiritual community in local meetings, and engaging with others locally and nationally (including the relationship between Quakers and other faith groups, the Transition Movement, local, national and European politics etc.).

Laurie's 2008 draft book *Waking Up* might form the basis for one or more new publications – as discussed by Trustees several times already.

International connections

Laurie was convenor for the advisory group for QCEA's Sustainable Energy Security Programme. The group was laid down in October with the retirement of the QCEA Joint Representatives (Liz Scurfield and Martina Weitsch) and the ending of Paul Parrish's programme officer contract, but members have continued to speak by Skype to share experiences and leadings in their ministry. The countries best represented are Germany, Norway and Britain, with some involvement in Switzerland and Italy. The group hopes to expand to form a wider network, probably including at least Ireland, the Netherlands, France and the other Nordic countries.

Laurie is also involved in a wider international group that has been speaking by telephone conference occasionally, convened by QUNO.

Working with local meetings

Living Witness works with local meetings through publications, workshops facilitated by RPs and staff, and Link Group gatherings and Summer Schools.

Evidence from the Meeting Checkups and other contact with local meetings suggests an increase in activity and in the depth of engagement with

sustainability issues in the last few years. Many meetings are now talking about the issues, insulating their buildings and taking other steps. A few have been looking at the lifestyle and spiritual dimensions.

At the end of 2011, Living Witness Trustees were hoping that the BYM Minute 36 commitment (Canterbury Commitment) would lead to more requests for workshops from local meetings. In fact we have been asked for only four events this year. It looks as if meetings are mostly feeling able to work independently, often working with the *Sustainability Toolkit* and with sustainability enthusiasts and experts within the meeting.

There seems still to be considerable potential for work with meetings focused on deepening the spiritual, Quaker and community dimensions of their sustainability witness. However generally there is too little work for our volunteer resource people (RPs) to give them regular experience of facilitating workshops. Nor does the level of work justify maintaining the RP programme in its current form, with a co-ordinator and two expenses-paid RP gatherings a year. We have therefore laid down the programme and instead we are maintaining a list of Friends who can provide advice, facilitation or other support to meetings.

Future work priorities

Opportunities for future work include:

- 1) evaluating and publicising the Quaker experience so far, through writing and perhaps other media, to reach a wider audience
- 2) developing a stronger focus (in analysis and writing) on community and policy engagement – this could be the basis for new work with local meetings through policy briefings and workshops
- 3) offering talks and workshops for local meetings on community and Quaker spiritual approaches to sustainability
- 4) offering talks and workshops to other groups and networks, including interfaith groups, Transition initiatives and others
- 5) working with other Quaker organisations in Britain and abroad – in particular QPSW and Woodbrooke via the Minute 36 Commitment Group; also QCEA, QUNO and others, to develop our shared ministry
- 6) continuing to facilitate LW national gatherings (Link Group and Summer School)

Trustees and staff

Alan Allport and Graham Davey both completed six years as trustees on 31 December 2012; they are replaced by Hannah Chambers and Carla Denyer.

Jasmine Piercy, our RP Co-ordinator, also left Living Witness at the end of 2012 when the RP programme was laid down.

Financial Review

At £8569 our income declined slightly in 2012 relative to 2011, but the total in 2011 included a large back-claim for gift aid and apart from this our income increased by about £1,000.

Expenditure during 2012 was lower than income and considerably below that for 2011, largely due to a reduction in salaries and staff activity. This reflects Laurie Michaelis' time commitment to the Quaker Community in Bamford.

We retain reserves of £16,000 which represents two years of current expenditure. Trustees at their December meeting considered it reasonable to reduce our level of reserves and saw no need to seek additional funding for core costs. Any fundraising in the near future would be to support specific projects.

Receipts and Expenditures, Living Witness Project, 2010-2012

	2010 total	2011 total	2012 total
RECEIPTS			
Fees for events	5,525	1,290	3,159
Sales of publications	11	10	35
Contributions from Meetings	3,373	4,289	2,841
Donations from Friends	1,113	45	727
Individual membership fees	2,033	1,903	1,633
Consultancy	4,042	-	-
Gift Aid	-	2,020	166
Grants	4,000	-	-
Bank interest	18	14	9
TOTAL	£ 20,115	£ 9,571	8,569.31
PAYMENTS			
Salaries & NI	8,953	5,412	839
Recruitment	236	-	-
Fees for contract work	3,187	3,504	2,011
Office rent & electricity	71	45	-
Telephone, IT services	311	226	119
Equipment (incl. literature & software)	144	235	127
Stationery	136	197	6
Printing, publicity & postage	453	1,839	516
Staff travel	1,499	1,563	211
Staff training	95	160	-
Trustees expenses	151	208	276
Event venues, catering	3,009	1,970	2,471
Insurance	489	465	434
Misc & contingencies	330	625	160
TOTAL	£ 19,064	£ 16,448	£ 7,171
Excess receipts over payments	1,048 -	6,876	1,428
Balance at start of Period	13,101	14,063	7,187
Closing Fund balance	14,150	7,187	8,586
Balance in LWP Co-operative Bank Account	14,063	7,187	8,586
QGA Triodos Account	7,423	7,477	7,538
Plus creditors minus debtors (unrepresented c	87 -	16	-
Total	£ 21,573	£ 14,648	£ 16,124