

Living our testimonies in challenging times

Some reflections and questions

May 2019

Some months ago, during Quaker week, posters and other materials were encouraging people in 'turbulent times' to 'be a Quaker'. We are still in turbulent times...

- The UK's political system at the national level is stretched and its processes have been found wanting and in need of change. Civil discourse on Brexit is fraught with difficulties, fed by and feeding deepening levels of division and mistrust in public life.
- The UK continues to export weapons on a massive scale to regions mired in armed conflict, and to pour millions into nuclear weapons. Members of government have talked about enhanced lethality and increases in military spending, instead of investing in non-military approaches to tackling global insecurities.
- Climate change is reaching a critical point and the economy that drives so much of that is also driving ever deeper divisions between rich and poor.
- In communities across the country there are people living and suffering from the consequences of the politics of austerity, inequality and an economic system that is not working.
- Those not regarded as belonging sufficiently firmly on these shores struggle with the stress of not knowing, or needing to prove, their right to even be here. Many of these are also on the receiving end of hateful words and actions, fuelled by currents of xenophobia that are getting stronger.

Alongside this, positive change is happening...

- from the international nuclear weapons ban-treaty, to nonviolent rebellion against inertia on climate change, and to radical action to support those seeking sanctuary.

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- from civil society groups to new media, networks, alliances and movements, for the local to the international.
- from politicians to ordinary citizens, old and young, seeking and developing new ways of doing politics, of making change happen, of caring for one another, of defining ourselves in relation to one another and in relation to the planet.

So, to be a Quaker in such times.... What does love require of us?

- What roles can we play in promoting and supporting nonviolent approaches and progressive policies towards bringing about the changes that are needed?
- Does recognising that of God in everyone require us to engage with those with whom we most strongly disagree? What opportunities and skills do we have for doing some of the bridge-building that is needed?
- How can we be both prophets and reconcilers? Speaking out about our convictions and taking sides against the causes of injustice on the one hand, whilst on the other hand being ready to listen and to promote better understanding?
- Are we willing and ready to make common cause and to act in solidarity, challenging injustice and promoting a wider range of voices? How do we acknowledge both our power and our weakness in creating change? Who needs support? What can we do together?

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