

In these turbulent times: some reflections ahead of the NFPB meeting on 2nd March 2019

Eighteen 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 seems stretched to breaking point.
- Civil discourse on Brexit is fraught with difficulties, so deep are divisions across society.
- Our Defence Secretary envisions a post-Brexit UK role in the world that has 'enhanced lethality', whilst we export some of that lethality to regions mired in horrific armed conflict and pour millions in the ultimate lethality, nuclear weapons.
- 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 our towns and cities, the growing numbers of people sleeping on once-busy shopping streets is just one visible indication of the damage caused by politics of austerity and an economic system that is not working.
- And 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.

Alongside and within this, movements of positive change are happening...

- from the international nuclear weapons ban treaty, to nonviolent rebellion against inertia on climate change;
- from civil society groups at all levels to international networks,
- 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?

- 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?

- Does recognising that of God in everyone require us to engage with those with whom we most passionately disagree? What opportunities and skills do we have for doing some of the bridge-building that will be needed?

- Does moving beyond our current limitations demand we rethink who sits at the 'Quaker table', or indeed whether we need a table at all?

- How do we acknowledge both our power and our weakness in creating change? Who needs support? What can we do together?

- In turbulent times, what role can we play in promoting and supporting nonviolent approaches to bringing about the changes that are needed?