

- Campaigns to draw attention to the real nature of extreme-right political groups and their policies are important, especially in those periods leading up to elections. Is there a campaign that you can support locally?
- Long-term bridge building efforts, such as those based on inter-faith relationships, are less likely to make headlines but are an important bedrock on which other initiatives can be developed.
- Involvement in voluntary groups of all sorts can give many opportunities for working across barriers, helping weave the fabric of an understanding and mutually supportive community.
- We may find ourselves in a position where we can provide personal and practical support to someone facing difficulties because of prejudice.

At the centre of Friends' religious experience is the repeated and consistently expressed belief in the fundamental equality of all members of the human race. Our common-humankind transcends our differences. In addition to discrimination, intended or unintended, by employers and by the law, our fellow citizens are often subject to abuse, harassment and violence. The Religious Society of Friends has a duty to play its part in ending these abuses. Being aware of injustice and doing little about it condones that injustice.

Quaker Faith and Practice, 23.36

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Quakers in the North of Britain witnessing and working for peace

Northern Friends Peace Board

Signpost Leaflet



Tackling racism, building peace

Some reflections and suggestions

Are you alert to practises here and throughout the world which discriminate against people on the basis of who or what they are or because of their beliefs? Seek to understand the cause of injustice, social unrest and fear. Are you working to bring about a just and compassionate society which allows everyone to develop their capacities and fosters the desire to serve? Remember your responsibilities as a citizen for the conduct of local, national and international affairs. Do not shrink from the time and effort your involvement may demand.

(From the Quaker Advices and Queries)

November 2006

Discord in our communities

There is continuing need for us all to pay close attention to peace within our local communities, as well as to peace in the world.

Quaker understandings and approaches to these issues are shaped by writings such as those quoted in this leaflet. What these mean in practice will vary, but we have no doubt that there is a need for practical action at this current time. We are part of society and can be a part of activities that make real the aspiration that all are equally valuable as human beings.

Current Challenges

Particular challenges at this juncture include: the perception within some parts of our national community that some religious and ethnic groups are alien and threatening; the heightening hostility expressed in the political and media worlds towards refugees and asylum seekers; continuing divisions within some areas that serve to separate people from different races and religious backgrounds and the rise in Britain and in other parts of Europe of extreme right-wing political parties and groups.

The complexity of perceptions, relationships and circumstances means that no easy answer will be found that can address the many needs, fears and misunderstandings that exist in our communities. But we believe that we can all do something, however small. The following are some suggestions that arise from the experience of Quakers and others in taking action over recent years.

- In our own families and communities such as places of worship or other cultural groups, we should be ready to examine our own prejudices and willingness to welcome diversity in our midst.

- In areas where there is an ethnically and culturally diverse population, there can be many day-to-day opportunities for bridge-building and simple friendships. These might be in the work-place or in other groupings and settings. Make the most of these.
- We can all be alert to expressions of hostility and to the spreading of inaccurate information. Conversation and listening might be a better response to such instances than immediate confrontation.
- In the political sphere, we can engage with those in public life to encourage them to address matters of race and diversity from the basis of compassion and respect rather than fear.
- Refugees and asylum seekers often face particular hardships and difficulties. There are a good number of agencies and groups throughout the country that seek to provide support, friendship and material assistance to those in need. Do you have some time and skills to give that might be of help in this area?
- News media, local, regional and national, can be very powerful tools for shaping public attitudes towards those who are considered 'minorities'. Being alert to inaccurate or biased reporting, writing letters, joining in radio or TV phone-ins can all be useful ways of getting voices heard that might otherwise be ignored, when misleading reports serve to exacerbate misunderstandings and tensions.