

Spirituality of Almeley Meeting

Members and attenders were encouraged to come to an evening meeting at a Friend's home where we began in those two groups to consider our responses to 6 questions. The initial separation was deliberate to allow for any different perspectives to emerge freely. Differences prove to be scarcely detectable. Those unable to attend had the opportunity to answer the questions on paper. Much is a shared experience.

In considering what we most value about Almeley Meeting, many spoke of the friendship, the silence and the special quality of our old building. Some of us have much to be grateful for for support given us in times of trouble; for continuing companionship; for ministry, which is usually helpful, at times profound. Knowing the meeting is there matters very much for those prevented from attending as regularly as they would like.

Are we growing in our selves? Perhaps we are shy and suffer from too much modesty but some of us struggled to find any personal growth or even spiritual worthiness at all, yet others found those same people to offer important depths of understanding. Some have found greater peace of mind and have become more thoughtful; others talked of a growing confidence, a growth of openness and trust. We were all conscious of different phases in our lives making particular demands, whilst Almeley Meeting as a whole remains a constant.

Our biggest concerns, felt particularly by longer-term members, are about the "jobs", the "shoulds and the oughts" as one Friend puts it. Small is very beautiful, very often, but perhaps not when we are busy and torn keeping our own families and jobs going. As so often expressed, we live far apart from each other, our families are often widespread, time is precious. Yet... we recognise how Quaker business practice underpins the spiritual life, and meetings for Elders or Overseers can deepen our closeness. Is there any way to lighten the burden? Indeed are we being clear to newer F/friends just why we have the practices we do? They are not understood by some. We feel concerned to pass on Quaker practice and language, a harder task as fewer of our Members have a long rootedness in Quaker ways. We still have very few children or even, younger adults, a source of some sadness, especially to those who remember times of twelve or more young people on a regular basis. Our Children's room is in good order however, ready and waiting and we have, as a Meeting, enjoyed hosting a Link group get-together.

Our visits to Treveca are much valued, as are away days at The Pales and study sessions in the evenings; our library is well stocked (some of us not using it at all...). On a lighter note, shared breakfast before Sunday Meeting has shown a high standard of cereal and coffee choices, croissants and homemade jams. We are brought together socially through fund raising events such as coffee mornings and concerts; the vegetarian Christmas lunch is a highlight of the year for many of us; we meet for a summer picnic. In fact we enjoy breaking bread together and are looking for more such occasions.

We have growing links with Almeley church, having welcomed members of its congregation to Almeley Meeting House on four occasions, and Almeley Friends having taken part in a shared service in the church.

We can take encouragement perhaps from a Member in poorer health who said he always felt joined in spirit even though he can now only rarely be with us in body.

The planning permission for the development of the area of sheds runs out soon and we shall make a start on the project (which we now call the Roger Pritchard Room) by demolishing the sheds. We have sought prayerfully over 15 years a way forward but it is only in the period covered by this report that we have taken decisive action. We have architect's plans and a model of the new building; we have appointed a fundraising committee; and already we have raised approximately a third of the cost. Although the Meeting is supporting the decision we have taken, there are some who have misgivings at the heavy task of fundraising and the use of this money at a time of financial crisis but we are heartened by the support we have had from Area Meeting and from the Meeting House Fund at Friends' House. When we think that our plans may be too costly we are encouraged by the advice from Friends' House that Meetings should keep in mind that they are building for the future and should use good designs and materials, paying attention to environmental impact: cutting corners may not be in our best interests, even though we are moved by a desire for economy.

Perhaps Almeley Meeting is now "living adventurously" and certainly when we unite in fund raising activities there is an enhanced sense of community and corporate achievement. Almeley Friends and Attenders all speak of the value to their worship of the old Meeting House, which nurtures us. It enhances and enriches our Meetings, both in its simplicity and through the sense we have of the worshipping generations who have been here before us. We feel a need to maintain it fittingly and responsibly, and believe that the development we work for will increase its effectiveness as a spiritual place.

Elders and Overseers meet regularly both separately and jointly, considering such matters as children and young people; our relationship with local churches; ministry; attenders' concerns; and risk assessment and safety. We are a community spread widely and sparsely but Overseers try to keep in touch with those with particular needs, physical and emotional, and, where appropriate, help to find the right contacts. They have looked with care at some difficult issues and considered the implications of confidentiality. They have, with Friends, participated in Quaker Week events twice, having a stall and exhibition in All Saints, Hereford; taken part in Women's day of prayer; hosted a visit from Westfield Special School. One Overseer has and another will be attending a Woodbrooke training course. Once a month we have a collection for one of the many charities which clamour for our attention. Elders keep watch on the right ordering of Meeting. A chronology of the activities organised over the last 3 years is attached for reference. Loving sustainable care is being given to our Garden.

The financial affairs of the Meeting have remained steady over the 3-year period and in each year we have been able to contribute to both Area Meeting and BYM. Each year there has seen a small excess of income over expenditure. A separate fund for the planned extension has been opened and we have the Megan and Carl Jenkins fund for the upkeep of the premises and the burial ground.

This year we have celebrated the joyful occasion of Hannah and Henry's wedding. We have too sadly said our goodbyes to loved Friends and they lie in peace in our burial ground. Pat Orme left us in great haste but Hildegard Wajsbblum lingered. They lie among all the other faithful Friends who have worshipped here and contributed so much to the life of peace that the place embodies. We pray that our own lives will not fall too far short of the examples they have set us.