

CROYDON FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

December 2021

Dear Friends: We are at the beginning of the last month of the year and it's Advent in the Christian calendar - the time of waiting. In our meeting house we are waiting to have our central heating replaced so that we can meet again in the **warmth**, in person. We are all waiting to find out whether the discovery a new variant of the virus will result in further restrictions.. And, excitingly, we are waiting to celebrate the arrival next year of Maddy and Tom Pennington's little girl. Maddy chose this poem by R S Thomas to open our newsletter:

Kneeling

Moments of great calm,
Kneeling before an altar
Of wood in a stone church
In summer, waiting for the God
To speak; the air a staircase
For silence; the sun's light
Ringing me, as though I acted
A great rôle. And the audiences
Still; all that close throng
Of spirits waiting, as I,
For the message.
Prompt me, God;
But not yet. When I speak,
Though it be you who speak
Through me, something is lost.
The meaning is in the waiting.

R. S. Thomas, 'Kneeling' from The Collected Later Poems: 1988-2000. Copyright © 2004 by R. S. Thomas. Reprinted by permission of Bloodaxe Books Ltd.

Meeting for worship on line and in person

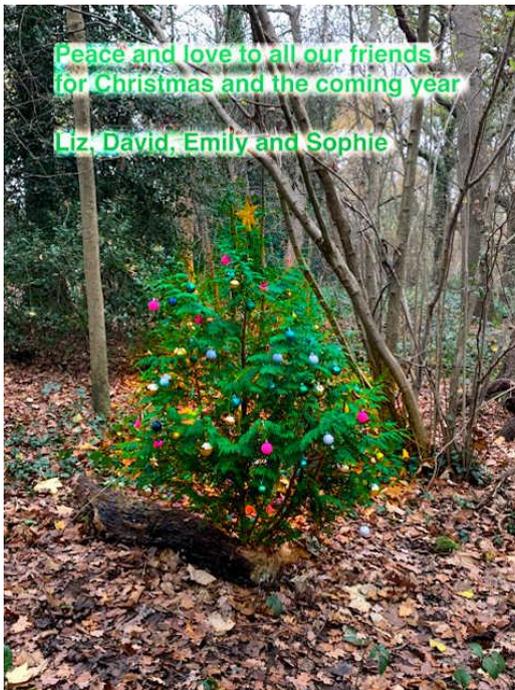
While the meeting house is without heating, one or two hardier souls meet in the common room for meeting for worship while the rest of us join together on Zoom. We plan to continue blended meetings for the foreseeable future, continue with our Fourth Sunday after-meeting sessions and start a Wednesday evening Epilogue from 9.00 to 9.20 from 5 January onwards.

Christmas Greetings and news of friends

Rhiannon sends loving greetings to all Ffriends, far and near, and good wishes for peace, good health and contentment at the festive season and in the New Year. *'And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not'* John 1.5

Joyce Trotman writes: May the peace, love, light and life of the Christ's presence be with you and your loved ones. Plenty love to everyone at Croydon Meeting.

From Tom and Maddy Pennington: Merry Christmas to everyone in Croydon Meeting! Wishing you all a 2022 full of fellowship, happiness and good health.



Above: Greetings from the Collins family.

Right, Mary Clarke photographed by Kay Papadopoulos

Anita Bennet is starting to recover from her operation, and **John Beckett** has been transferred to a nursing home following a stay in hospital.

Our dear friend **Mary Clarke**, in the garden at Burrell Mead. At the moment residents are not able to go out much, but Mary walks in the garden whenever she can; it is surrounded by trees and shrubs, so there is lots of bird activity at all times of the year. Mary sends her love to all at meeting, and looks forward to the time when she can come and be with us in person as well as in spirit.



[Love, the Human Form Divine](#)

Many writers, religious commentators and mystics have tried to put into words the ineffable concept of God: the Lord, the Divine, the Spirit, the Light, the Source, the Almighty, the Father within, the Presence, Truth, Consciousness, the Infinite, Immortal, Invisible Power, Nature's 'green fuse' to name a few attempts. To some religious groups God is understood as a living reality. Meister Eckhart, (1260-1328), for example, felt the manifestation of God 'as my own and within me'. As Quakers we too, are asked to 'cherish that of God within' and to 'respect that of God in everyone'. (*Advices & Queries 2 and 17*).

In our own time, the use of the word 'God' in a traditional sense doesn't always resonate strongly with some Friends and others as they may experience a spiritual sense of something 'beyond easy definition'.

In *Quaker Faith and Practice*, Ruth Fawell suggests quite simply that 'we make our guesses as to the nature of God' and this, as her small daughter said, can cause our minds to 'go round and round.' She feels that thinking about the life of Jesus may be easier: 'To me, Jesus is a window through to God, a person in terms of personality in a way that can be grasped by our finite minds, shows what mercy, pity, peace are like in human life.' (Qfp26:54)

Fawell goes on to write of the importance for her of turning to the Jesus of the New Testament to embrace: 'his healing word, his freedom from anxiety, his outreaching insight, ...him as a whole person... to let live and grow in my life'.

She goes on to comment that we may have much to learn about the image of fatherhood in the Old Testament but 'may be beginning to learn about God the mother as well'. (This chimes very well with a piece by Damaris Parker-Rhodes (Qfp: 26:58) where the idea of focusing upon the second period of the Gospel story is raised. She writes that this is a Christ receptive to the Divine and that 'this Yin or feminine aspect of the Christ now awaits our discovery'.

Many years before these pieces were written, William Blake, born in Soho in 1757, poet, artist, engraver, printmaker and visionary, wrote the poem, *The Divine Image* as part of his most popular of Illuminated Books, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. It expresses his own view of the same qualities of which Fawell spoke later on in 1987 whilst exploring one of his main poetic themes: the identification of man with God. In his own lifetime, which was set against immensely turbulent periods, Blake's unconventional behaviour, radical politics, searing intellect and

mysticism were much misunderstood and therefore dismissed by many contemporaries. Wordsworth even went as far as to question the London poet's mental state: 'There is no doubt this poor man was mad, but there is something in the madness of this man which interests me more than the sanity of Lord Byron'.

Blake was not one to need the stamp of approval from his contemporaries in order to give free rein to his extraordinary imagination, artistry and unique genius. His work attests to the importance to him of social justice and the care of others, particularly of those living in crisis with few choices. He felt particular indignation and sorrow at the horrific plight of some of the people he saw on the streets of London who were facing suffering and oppression from the extreme effects of war, poverty, and child labour. Standing up for fairness and equity was worth more to him than what he saw as the demands and pretence of the material world. Blake abhorred what he saw as the abuses of wealth, organised religion and empire and was a fierce opponent of the slave trade. In our own uncertain and divisive times, where many who endure grim and precarious conditions are treated as pariahs, we might consider most humbly some of Blake's ideas.

He believed that God dwells in our opportunities for everyday acts of kindness and compassion which lie in each moment of our lives but are so very easy to forget. Blake's recipe for understanding aspects of the divine is included here in the middle part of the poem:

*For Mercy Pity Peace and Love,
Is God our father dear:
And Mercy Pity Peace and Love,
Is Man his child and care.
For Mercy has a human heart
Pity, a human face:
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.*

He finishes the poem with these two lines:

*Where Mercy, Love and Pity dwell,
There God is dwelling too.*

Barbara Earl

The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart, trans. and ed. by O'C Walshe (Crossroads)
Songs of Innocence and of Experience, William Blake (Oxford University Press)

Happy Christmas

Are you planning to have a happy Christmas? Well, don't. It's a trick question!

The trick hinges on the root meaning of HAPPY. Of Scandinavian origin, the old English word HAP basically means CHANCE, and, by extension, good chance, or luck. Sticking a Y on the end of it turns it into an adjective, in the same way that something which comes to a point is POINTY and something (or someone?) worth naught is NAUGHTY. So anything that's hap(p)-y is ultimately something that comes about by chance, albeit it in a good kind of way. It's that element of randomness or unexpectedness about it that makes it impossible to plan ahead.

Just as the addition of Y turns a noun into an adjective, so the addition of EN turns it into a verb, as for example in SOFTEN from SOFT and BLACKEN from BLACK. By the same token, hap can be turned into HAPPEN; in other words, HAPPEN means to occur by chance. How often have we heard the excuse 'Not my fault – it just happened'?

Perhaps the commonest variation on the root word HAP is PERHAPS, literally meaning 'by a hoped-for process of chance'. Curiously, this word is an odd mixture of the historically Germanic word HAP with the historically Romance (= Latinate) word PER, meaning through or by means of. Without this twist I should have expected HAP to produce BEHAPS rather than PERHAPS. But there you go, these things HAPPEN.

In more northerly dialects of English you get HAPPEN meaning the same thing as PERHAPS. The *Oxford English Dictionary* quotes as an example of this usage "Appen tha means well,' he said, and 'appen tha's joost making a song and dance'. Another variation on the word occurs in the stanza from Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* beginning 'Haply some hoary-headed swain

may say / Oft we have seen him at the peep of dawn...’, etc., where HAPLY is a contraction of HAPPILY, with the sense ‘as a matter of chance’.

There’s also the fascinating construction HAPHAZARD. This amounts to a doubling up of two words meaning more or less the same thing, since HAZARD itself, originally the name of a gambling game, derives from an Arabic word meaning ‘dice’. And, of course, someone whose luck has run out is HAPLESS.

So if you are planning on having a happy Christmas, my best advice to you is not to plan it but to sit back and just let it HAPPEN.

I hope it does, and that’s my Christmas greeting to you all.

David Parlett

Exploring a coincidence – and language

Coincidences happen. Usually, they are acknowledged, perhaps with a smile, and then promptly forgotten. But sometimes, something else seems to be going on: yes, they are meaningful and need to be explored. And that’s what happened for me with Carol Williams’s recent letter to *The Friend* (15 October 2021). She was writing about the importance of everyday language: the words we use and the ones that are new and strange to us. (How often have you searched the Internet to find out what that ‘new’ word means... my latest was ‘gaslighting’... what was yours?) Whatever is going on, language isn’t fixed. Words are adopted from other cultures... sometimes existing words even change in meaning... and it is clear, as Noam Chomsky would have it, that: ‘A language is not just words. It’s a culture, a tradition, a unification of a community, a whole history that creates what a community is. It’s all embodied in a language’. So, as cultures change so there will be a need for the language that it uses to express its values, the way that it looks at and interacts with its environment, to change. Carol is clearly concerned that the language - from business and the media - used in *The Friend* has become somewhat esoteric and perhaps excluding – and argues for a ‘return to the language of our common humanity’. Of course, that is important and worth discussing, but how does all of this link to a coincidence?

Last week, I had come back from a retreat with some Catholic and Anglican friends at an Anglican centre in Woking. I picked up *The Friend* from the doormat, opened it and by chance saw Carol’s letter. It connected directly with what I had just experienced. At the retreat, we had a structured meditation that had included the reading of the New Zealand Anglican Lord’s Prayer. I had never heard it before. It was very different from the version that I’ve been accustomed to over a lifetime, starting a long time ago in the conservatism of a Scottish Presbyterian Sunday school. (I didn’t even realise that it was a *version*.) This new one reads like this:

The New Zealand Anglican Lord's Prayer

Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
 Source of all that is and that shall be,
 Father and Mother of us all,
 Loving God, in whom is heaven:
 The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!
 The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!
 Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!
 Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth.
 With the bread we need for today, feed us.
 In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
 In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.
 From trials too great to endure, spare us.
 From the grip of all that is evil, free us.
 For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and for ever.
 Amen.

- from *The New Zealand Book of Prayer | He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa*.

It was first published in 1989 and was revised and republished by Harper Collins in 1997. Articles on the Internet advise that this version has been positively accepted in the New Zealand Anglican church because it combines the traditional Anglican approach to prayers with the distinctive spirituality of the Māori people and other cultures of the Pacific. I had noticed

immediately how God is referred to as both masculine and feminine. As I sat in silence at the retreat and on the train on the way home, I was thinking that, in terms of God-language, isn't *this* more appropriate for Quakers with the equality testimony in mind? It certainly is for me.

So, language adapts to reflect our changing lives and experience. The language choices we make enable us to accommodate new ideas, technologies and perspectives. So, language isn't fixed; it is always evolving to reflect cultural change. The key would seem to be that it needs to be both relevant and inclusive and, as might be expected in a Quaker context, open to discussion.

Helen Johnson (first published in *The Friend*)

Thanksgiving



I have just celebrated Thanksgiving with my family. It is one of my favourite times of the year. I know that for some Thanksgiving is not really a celebration because Native Americans protest against Thanksgiving due to their treatment and are still seeking equal rights and self-determination, but I love the idea of a day of gratitude. Yes, of course we should be grateful for so many things throughout the year, but perhaps my love of Thanksgiving is partly because I fill my living room and dining room with lights. I have artificial LED poinsettias (can't have the real poinsettias as they are toxic to cats) and lots of LED red candles and LED artificial maple trees, and when the overhead lights are turned off and the poinsettias, candles and maple trees are lit up, I think it looks amazing. Leading up to Thanksgiving there is a lot of autumn cleaning (like spring cleaning) getting ready for winter. The beginning of winter is for me a time of reflection, a laying down of some things, and giving thanks for the things I have accomplished or

experienced during the year. This year there was gratitude for the NHS and my sister's successful cancer treatment, and gratitude for the birth of my great nephew - welcome to the world Austin.

When family and friends arrive for Thanksgiving they know to leave any moans at the door. It's a day free of politics and complaints. This is a day of gratitude for being alive. Many people I know believe that our thoughts affect our health. Research by Masaru Emoto has shown how our thoughts and words can affect water crystals. You may have heard of the experiment with bowls of water where kind, loving words are spoken over one bowl while angry and hateful words are spoken over another. The water crystals change shape as they are affected by the different vibrations. I recommend the book 'Water Crystal Healing: music and images to restore your well-being' by Masaru Emoto (2006).

Back to Thanksgiving, I am reminded to have this feeling of gratitude every day. recently I was sent the following advice: 'Take time today to look around you at the beauty of nature... and remember that all of this beauty... is created by the vibration of love from the source.' (Sent to me by a member of Jung Shim, an energy healing group.)

Pam Sellman

Living dangerously in Lebanon

I was asked to write about my time as a staff member at Brumanna High School in Lebanon in support of the December appeal for student bursaries and the staff who are paid in the local currency, which has lost most of its value.

I joined the Brumanna High School staff at the beginning of the momentous 2004/2005 academic year, which began as the school continued its recovery after the long Lebanese Civil War, and ended with the assassination of ex-Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. Mine was an unexpected short-term contract and included Godfrey as a Quaker volunteer.

It was very obvious how loyal the staff, office, teaching and casual, were towards the school. Many had taught there for the whole or a great deal of their teaching career. They had been past students and sent their children in their turn. The school is the centre of the village: parents, students and staff live locally or in the Beirut suburbs.

The school's Quaker foundation and history are well known and appreciated. It is the meeting place of the only Quaker meeting in Lebanon. All the local Quaker families had been students or taught in the school, and all are keenly interested in its well-being. British Quaker Trustees visit the school and meet local governors and staff regularly. There are always a number of Quaker teachers from abroad on short-term contracts before university or following retirement.

The Quaker ethos of service is a built-in part of school life for staff as well as the student body. An afternoon a week is timetabled for charitable activities. I remember the Saturdays clearing litter from the beach with the senior students and staff, and another planting saplings in an area reclaimed from land mines. This tradition still continues. A letter of thanks from the principal of Al Amal Institute for the Disabled, commented on the responsibility and respect shown by our students during their Acceptance and Awareness Programme. All this civic training for our young people is underpinned by our staff.

Neither the village nor the school grounds escaped violence during the civil war. Colleagues told us how they and the school had fared; we could see for ourselves the bullet holes in church buildings along the green line. The realities of life in post-civil war Lebanon became clear to us. Cars were routinely searched entering supermarket car parks; the fear of car bombs was part of daily life. On trips outside Beirut we were stopped by Syrian army blockades. There were intermittent gun battles between the Lebanese army and armed militia. US-owned businesses had armed guards posted outside. Meanwhile school life proceeded in the usual way. All the annual events on the school calendar took place as usual regardless of events outside the school gates, offering the school community security and hope for the future. They continue to do so during these truly dreadful times.

At midday on 21 February 2005, we heard the explosion of the car bomb that killed Rafiq Hariri along with 21 others, and saw the huge plume of smoke rise up above the port. This was a major catastrophe in a country just beginning to recover after the destruction of the civil war. There followed a series of car bombs throughout the country, including one outside the school grounds that shattered the windows of the science block and my office. Somehow the spirit of the people rallied around their flag, religious groups worked together to promote harmony, law and order was maintained, and staff and students threw themselves enthusiastically into the last months of the school year, culminating in public and school exams, Sports Day, the Prom, final assemblies and farewells.

At midday on August 4 2020, in the midst of the pandemic and crippled by economic meltdown, an explosion ripped through the port of Beirut with the force of an earthquake, killing and injuring 300,000 people. This was more than a catastrophe: it signalled the breakdown of a whole country, with emigration, loss of properties and employment, huge inflation and terrible poverty.

A year later, the school carries on, with staff who have no money to pay for food, fuel or medication. Principal David Gray and his team are working tirelessly to keep the school viable, to support those staff who remain and to enable them to teach our young people who are so eager to be taught and to grow. Somehow we must enable this unique school to continue.

Gillian Turner

Season of mists and mellow fungfulness



Gemma Tighe recently visited Wakehurst Place where her friend Vida Cody took a collection of fungus photos. Here are just a few, just to show how photogenic they can be.

Anagroans

Find seven six-letter words that are all anagrams of one another. When listed in alphabetical order, they may be clued as follows: flower, judges, took again, eyeball, weights, gun, rips (or eye drops?). Solution to November's Anagroans: PALEST (least colourful), PASTEL (crayon), PETALS (floral bits), PLATES (flat bits), PLEATS (folds), SEPTAL (marking a boundary), STAPLE (primary commodity).

November area meeting

November area meeting took place online, hosted by Purley Friends. Perhaps the most significant business was the official laying-down of the Happy Baby Community, initiated by Jo Doherty, as an area meeting Concern. We were reminded of Qfp 13.13: 'When a concern has run its course, consideration should be given to how this may be recognised and acknowledged. A meeting that has supported a concern should be informed when it is seen to be right to lay that concern down. Celebration for the right ending of what was rightly begun may be appropriate.' We agreed that any future requests for funding from Happy Baby Community will be considered in the way that is usual for non-Quaker organisations.

On the ongoing topic of simplifying our meetings, we heard minutes from Croydon, Epsom and Purley Friends. We asked Meetings to consider simplicity and to bring to the next area meeting their definition of simplicity and whether this definition is reflected in the activities of their meeting. If not, what needs to change? What practical ideas do they have to share? We also noted that meetings of AM could helpfully be spread more evenly across the year and asked ask Area Meeting Committee to bring to the next Area Meeting proposed dates that address this; to consider a mix of online and in person meetings; and to balance the need for additional meetings against the low number of volunteers available to host.

Finance and Legacies Committees reported that they are considering how they might work together in future and we hope to return to this topic at the next Area Meeting. We were reminded about the availability of grants from AM Legacies and that grants will be made to meet the shortfall in the Area Quota and to Brummana High School in Lebanon.

A large number of nominations and appointments were made and these will be posted on the SLAQM website (<http://southlondonquakers.org.uk/>) before January. Finally, the following dates were agreed for early 2022 (dependent on COVID situation)

16/1/22 Area Meeting Committee at Sutton MH

20/2/22 Area Meeting plus lunch at Sutton MH

20/3/22 Area Meeting Committee hosted by Streatham & Brixton LM

DP

You are invited...

Friends from across South London Area Quaker Meeting are welcome to join any of these regular events, organised by our local Meetings. No booking! No charge!

What?	When?	Where?	More info:
Croydon discussion group	4th Sundays 13:00 to 13:45	Zoom	croydonquakers.org.uk
Streatham & Brixton – Learning Together	2nd Sundays (except August) 12:00 – 13:00	In person, S&B Meeting House	For topics, contact helengeorge18@gmail.com
Epsom sharing afternoons	1st Thursdays 14:30	Cafe outside Epsom library(1st floor of Ebbisham building (parking underneath, lift available)	clerk@epsomquakers.org.uk
Epsom sharing afternoons	3rd Thursdays, 14:30	At a Friend's home	Find out where from (clerk@epsomquakers.org.uk).
And beyond our Area Meeting:			
London Friends Together 30 minutes worship, a 'conversation starter' talk, 30 minutes in groups, then sharing)	Tuesdays, 19:00 to 20:30 (‘Doors’ open at 18:45)	Zoom: http://bit.ly/LFtogether Zoom ID: 832 5021 1050 Password LQMFW	Helen Drewery 020 8643 0666 and see https://londonquakers.org.uk/lftogether/
Quaker Quest Learn more about Quakers. (Introduction to a topic and open discussion for 60 minutes, 15 minutes of worship, then informal chat.)	Mondays 19:00 to c. 20:30	Usually at Friends House, 173 Euston Road NW1 2BJ but currently on Zoom – to join see webpage	https://londonquakers.org.uk/quaker-quest/
Woodbrooke's online Meetings for Worship	Thursdays 11.00-1200 Sundays 10:30-1130 also 30 minutes at various times throughout the week	Zoom – click on link in webpage	https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/worship/

Collecting in December

5 Quaker Work at Home and Abroad, **12** Refugee Youth (‘Amazing People of the World’),
19 Friends Family Group, **26** Freedom from Torture

Next issue

There will be no January edition as such, but we hope readers will choose their favourite picture, photo or article in our 2021 Newsletters

The deadline for the February edition is 26 January 2022

Please give, send or email contributions (no longer than 500 words, please) to Gillian Turner Tel 07805087981 email gillianturner033@gmail.com and send photos direct to David Parlett on quakers@davpar.uk

The Candle in the Heart

*We all experience it –
may be for days, for months,
that inner feeling that all is tumbling.
That the precious candle in the heart is not lit:
its glow gone, and the guiding
flame no longer there.
Within us, these defiant siblings -
fear and confusion play havoc with the mind.
Anchorless and scared, are we drifting or drowning
as we witness one global sorrow after another?
Yet from time to time something stirs the heart,
the longing for Light;
to know again that we share a common heart-beat;
to accept that our fears may be shot through with hope;
that this precious planet actually teems
with life, compassion and beauty.
And then in our drifting we see the candle is not out, but lit,
inviting us back to an ever- present Truth;
a Truth that understands drowning, and brings the wounded healing.
Stumbling we may be, but our shaky hands reach for that candle
and once more feel its energies of life - as Love fills our soul.*

Peter, Edinburgh, December 2021

