

Gathering Together
From Dialogue to Public Witness
Dublin Peace Committee
Churchtown Meeting House, Dublin
20th October, 2007, 10.00am-4.00pm.

Thirty-six Friends, including one from Cambridge, five from N Ireland and others from outside Dublin region, including Ballitore and Limerick, were present.

This event is important because it marks a change in Quaker-based thinking in Ireland about public witness concerning peace. Dublin Peace Committee had run three seminars over the previous eleven months. These were *Fear of the Other*, [facilitators Miriam Logan, Jude Lal Fernando, Edward Horgan] *Power and the Other* [facilitators Mamoun Mobayed, Martina Weitsch QCEA, Mannete Ramaili, Ambassador to Ireland of Lesotho] and *Religion and the Other* [facilitator John Darcy May, Irish School of Ecumenics, Dublin].

These had a number of functions. They included examining the nature of The Other as a resource for fear and often hatred, largely in terms of projecting one's own fears onto other individuals and groups. The question recurred continuously about how to deal with that problem in the many differing ways in which it manifests itself.

These seminars also addressed a problem expressed at Peace Committee's Special Interest Group on peace at 2006 Yearly Meeting, that of Friends' frequent sense of isolation as stifling concerns and their implementation. That Yearly Meeting Group and the subsequent seminars we hope contributed to peace issues becoming shared concerns.

During 2007 Yearly Meeting and in the months following it, an appreciable number of Friends approached members of Peace Committee, essentially saying that discussion and theory had been important, but that they now felt moved to seek a forum to express their concerns in terms of public witness.

That marks a considerable change of relationship between Peace Committee and Friends. Until this, Peace Committee had considered core problems and decided on a series of seminars. Friends had taken an active part in these, but had been recipients of Peace Committee's thinking. In *From Discourse to Public Witness*, it was Friends who expressed a specific wish, to which Peace Committee responded. It now appears likely that Peace Committee will move towards facilitating Friends' expressed concerns. The structure of this event may suggest a general direction, where individual Friends express their concerns, which Peace Committee can bring together under broad topics for exchange of ideas and possible moves to witness. Peace Committee cannot deal with a large number of individual concerns, but it can observe underlying threads linking them. It can then respond effectively by focusing in seminars on needs contained in these links.

This day was a matter of exploration for Peace Committee. We did not know what might develop in the course of the day. We are now in the situation of re-examining our role in terms of Friends' expressed wishes.

We asked Friends to send us emails about their concerns, or to bring posters, or to write their concerns on the day. We provided paper and pens for this. Every piece of

written or printed material was put up on the wall. Consequently, everyone present could be aware of concerns before people spoke to them.

Claire Counihan acted as facilitator for the next part of the day. Friends and others were asked if they wished to speak briefly to their concern. After each had spoken, there was a time for silent reflection. The next individual who felt moved, then spoke. Their range of concerns and interests was wide. Concerns varied between matters which had been in active witness in some cases for years, to ideas which were just beginning to be expressed in public. Some speakers talked about their sense of inadequacy when confronted with a huge range of continuously changing and developing problems in the world.

During lunch, Peace Committee met to seek underlying links between different individual concerns expressed during the morning. They found five broad topics uniting concerns.

These were:

Irish politics and power;

International politics and power.

Ethnic diversity and tension linked to education;

The Media, Violence and Non-Violence;

Inner Peace.

Friends agreed with these topics and divided up in the afternoon to discuss them and seek possible routes to witness. Each group received the written material related to its topic.

As the final part of the day, the groups met together and outlined their discussions and ideas for moving forward.

The day ended with a short time of silent worship.

INDIVIDUAL'S CONCERNS

These concerns combine written and spoken concerns as having equal worth.

Ruth Wayne Monkstown Understanding and appreciation of peace through education [Milltown School] Problems of religion, sexuality, culture, environment, could be addressed through education.

Alan Bell Lisburn Education as part of redressing the lack of relationship between Islam and Christianity; the perceived naivety of Friends in failing to tackle anyone with clearly antagonistic views; Friends' excessive niceness in failing to confront addressing problematic issues; the question of addressing a problem honestly and without causing offence, for example to Islamic friends and colleagues.

Joy Clarke Monkstown Inner peace; what is necessary to an individual moves outwards to others; a mechanism for diffusing anger; Meeting for Worship as a working model; the Quaker way as effective.

Gerda Archer Monkstown People in power often give bad examples of action – George Bush as a generator of anger and fear; a total lack of inner peace; it is vital to be able to speak in the other person's terms in considering a problem; fear in a situation – how to avoid tension moving towards becoming a war issue; the individual with inner peace as a model for those in power.

Mark Chapman Belfast Weapons of mass destruction, Trident; nuclear weapons as appropriate for some governments, inappropriate for others; who makes this choice? Nuclear weapons are symbols of prestige, they indicate worthiness to sit at the top table; world leaders should get their own house in order before they respond to others.

- Janet Gooberman Problems in Ireland of racism, whether indigenous as in settled and Limerick travellers, or Irish and non-Irish immigrants; Ireland has relatively recent problems in comparison to the long-standing difficulties in the UK; this allows Ireland the possibility of dealing with the problem before it becomes difficult to remove; there is deep need for consultation; these problems are grass roots; racism is a common concern and needs to be dealt with through honest focus and action.
- Terry Gillespie the increase in violence against individuals, including murder, sex Ballitore crimes and assault; the dependency culture built through the media – for example, people need patches to stop smoking; the suggestion of a day without media processed violence, allowing a refocus on non-violent programming alternatives – this had caused problems for TV companies; equally, politicians do not want to be seen to set a precedent by “giving way” to any pressure group; a UN peace day; a day of no violent deaths on TV could be achievable in Ireland and then might be exportable to the EU; Ireland voted in the UN for the UN International Non-Violence Day on 2nd October; the ideas of positive days of non-violence.
- Thomas Burn People go missing, there is no closure; an all-Ireland help-line is Rathfarnham needed; there are no effective contacts, no government support in Ireland, NI or UK; charity is inadequate to deal with this, the problem needs state support.
- Trevor Matthews the military use of Shannon; the government in Ireland and Monkstown elsewhere ignored the huge numbers who walked against the Iraq war; there has been a lack of friends’ presence in this.
- Ioma Brown to create a publication / journal comprising individual ways of Monkstown dealing with violence..that this is a collection of personal accounts, perhaps illustrated. [This is an extensive text. It is appended to this report]
- Janice Johnston The Middle East is a particular concern of mine at the moment. Churchtown I am worried by our Minister for Justice’s decision to prevent a Lebanese journalist, Ibrahim Moussawi, from addressing anti-war conferences in Dublin and Galway last weekend, by refusing him a visa. The minister has refused to give any reasons for his decision. The government allows American troops en route to Iraq to continue to use Shannon. Israel has an embassy here. Israeli representatives encounter no difficulty entering this country. Yet a journalist who represents the views of some of the victims of US and Israeli policy is refused entry, even though he has been in Ireland before. As Friends, we should be concerned about our government’s compliance with US and Israeli policy in the Middle east and should be doing what we can to show them our concern. One of the practical ways of doing this is to support the Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Committee’s boycott of Israeli goods. This is a boycott which Jean Zaru, of Ramallah Meeting, encouraged us to support during a talk she gave when attending the FWCC Triennial.
- Colm Harte Where does the thinking in the concerns written up on the walls go Churchtown from here? They express the whole area of social justice; as an individual, how to come to terms with the problem of continuously changing and often sudden and new concerns; the debilitating effect of a sense of not being able to influence people in power.
- Neville Keery has an optimistic view of change in Ireland and the wider world; a

- Monkstown combination of individual action and politics; In foreign affairs, Quaker views should, can and are heard; does anyone know what the programme for government is? We should demand that a government fulfils what it has committed itself to; it is a vital task for Friends to do this; we should build upon the government's commitment to dialogue with faith communities; we can assist Yearly Meeting Committee to pressure the government to deliver on questions of nuclear weapons, the arms trade and extraordinary rendition; it is important that Friends write letters to ministers and TDs.
- Robin Buick War is patriarchal; movement to war is outside reason.
- Monkstown We may have to accept that war cannot be contained by reason and its roots are deep in our cultural heritage. We have had 4000 years of Warrior Patriarchy and every Head of State in the world is also Commander in Chief of its armed forces.
It is my contention that patriarchy exercises its control through sexual guilt and this guilt is engendered in the upbringing of the young. This happens in one way or another in every culture in the world: In general the harsher the sexual repression the more warlike the people. Guilt is what enslaves and makes the people vulnerable to the ritual of war. The cycle of war and peace can be seen as a process of patriarchy.
This essay [War and Peace] explores the connection between sexual wounding in a child's upbringing and his or her susceptibility as an adult to be manipulated into war.
- Brian Bromwich He has worked easily with Iraqis and Pakistanis on irrigation
Cambridge projects; in this context, the problem of US antagonism to both groups is antagonistic and damaging; intervention should be respectful, peaceful and economic.
- Brian Peile In the problem of understanding between Islam and Christianity in
Richhill Ireland and elsewhere, religion is a central part of the relationship; we need to know and understand their approach and our approach; the NI Interfaith Forum seeks to build contacts with other faiths.
- Rob Fairmichael Co-ordinator for INNATE, which publishes a monthly news-sheet
Belfast in email and paper versions; INNATE works in the whole area of promoting peace-related concerns and issues.
- Irene Ní Mhaille What is the most effective method of assisting the poor countries of
Monkstown the third world? Ireland is currently committing €873 million per annum to assistance; some of this does good, but this also does harm; if there is a bilateral agreement, funding goes via the second country's government; frequently funding does not reach the poor; Quakers can provide help in developing focus on this problem; We must also ask if there is a better means of providing aid than money? We should read the 2006 white paper on aid; otherwise we have a lack of the individual knowledge to ask focused questions.
- Helen Haughton To develop a Peace Grouping at the United Nations; to persuade the
Churchtown Irish Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs, to lobby for this.
- Jenny Haughton AVP has been functioning for twelve years; more people are needed
Churchtown as volunteers to help in developing and expanding its programme; the Irish Forum for Peace in Sri Lanka needs to build support amongst political parties.
- Helen Fanning the problem of a huge number of problems worldwide; no mention

Churchtown has been made of rapidly expanding Chinese dominance worldwide; their stripping away of materials and resources from Africa and Asia.

Gordon Callaghan notes the work of Tools for Solidarity, restoring tools and sending Frederick Street them to other countries which are in need of them.

Patricia Quigley Using Quaker silence as protest in a protest

Monkstown

Robin Hewitt education in relation to religions of the book – patriarchal and

Monkstown destructive views in relation to sexuality

Unknown writer Nietzsche: offers us a middle road between dogmatism and relativism; Perspectivism – this does not mean “anything goes2: Perspectives are ‘judge according to their life-enhancing or life-denying values’.

Alister Bredee World peace means one mindset big enough to make the decisions about what everybody else wants, and the rest of the world conforming. That is the ultimate definition of world peace. You say, “Oh, let’s get along!” And what each of you means is, “You do what I want.” And the only problem with that is, there are more than one of you, and you have endless desires that are born within you. The ultimate experience is, everyone having their experience and launching their individual rockets of desire, and the Universe yielding to all of them simultaneously. And everybody not worrying about what anybody else created, and so, then allowing what they are wanting. What a world that is, when there are endless desirers, who are allowing the fulfilment of their own desires. [Esther Hicks, excerpted from a workshop in Los Angeles, CA, on Saturday March 10th 2001] All is well.

Pauline Mellis Why are we all so naïve and quiet about the fact that we human beings Monkstown are a murdering race? Why are we complacent?

Irene Ni Mhaille Is Irish Government to the third world Leading to a more just and peaceful world?

As Irish citizens, we have responsibility for asking questions about how our money, as taxpayers, is spent.

As Quakers, is there a distinctive spiritual/moral contribution that we can make by way of supporting the stated ideals and objectives of our government?

History of official Irish Aid. Official Irish aid started in 1974, shortly after Ireland’s accession to EU in a bi-lateral aid programme to Lesotho in southern Africa.

Our geographical focus in intervening years became sub-Saharan Africa. Our policy focus has been the reduction of poverty.

The Brandt Report in early 1980s tried to broaden the focus of Development Aid, in all countries, to world economics and to the active involvement of Third World countries in policy issues in relation to global economic concerns. This may have affected Irish Development Aid to a small degree.

Last September, the Irish Government published its first White Paper ever on Irish Aid in which it places the cause of development at the heart of Ireland’s foreign policy. This programme of assistance to the poorest countries is Ireland’s contribution to the fight against global poverty and is, as stated, “ a practical expression of our values as a nation.” It invites the public to be involved and is committed to letting the Irish people know how their money is being spent.

Unknown writer How can Quaker values play a part? Equality among Quakers has a

spiritual basis – they believe that there is that of God in everybody and that each human person has unique human value.

Quakers believe that all of life is sacramental - care of the environment is based on its sacredness. Today as the excess wealth of the first World destroys our environment, it is mainly the Third World that suffers the results.

Religion for Quakers is about the whole of life, is non-divisive and non-competitive. It is well-placed to dialogue among competing religious blocks with a view to conflict resolution.

Quakers meet in silence to discover a deeper sense of truth. Silence can transcend differences in global multi-cultural settings.

The Quaker approach to business meetings, in its respect for each person, and, in its understanding of consensus, could have much to offer at global level.

Quakers are prepared “to speak truth to power.”

Seán McCrum Ramallah, West Bank Palestine. In a situation in which no speaker has recently seen any way out of this mess, what useful input can Friends have? Why are Palestinians so bad at presenting a very powerful case internationally? Can friends assist in this? Do Friends have an unrealistically optimistic view of Palestinians, in the sense that Palestinians could be failing themselves?

The whole question of validating peace as achievable and a realistic alternative to militarised thinking and action, to generations which have thankfully no real experience of military combat or action, but experience it as an image-/media- presented and edited phenomenon. There is considerable concern about peace, but expressed in unfocused terms and terms which regard peace activists as silly eccentrics. How to move from this situation? Is their view of peace activists as naïve fools valid? Why has peace concern not been presented in terms which make sense to their lived experience?

Unknown writer 2 Friends concerned about advancing Muslim/Christian discussion from 2005 dialogue “Building Bridges”. Where to next? Don’t keep starting – move it!

Mary Russell The role of non-violent/passive resistance to right a wrong and the necessary training/support/help for individuals who might like to engage in such actions.

MICOM Standing NI Peacebuilding Project. (SNIPP). This is an extensive and complex document. Its text is appended to this report.

Verity E. Murdoch An approach to those governments who do not offer the option of conscientious objection to their young people. Amnesty has also been concerned with this problem.

Unknown writer Oppose use of Shannon Airport for military purposes.
How: Opposition should be- public –every person, ie visible every day
-seek wider support -be an embarrassment to the authorities.
Example: -possibly be visible to aircraft using Shannon -Possible use of agricultural land with a message like “We say no to war.”
Reasons: -we can say we stood against the war, not simply as individuals, but as a group -Create discussion and thinking on the issue -Be part of a movement for change

Gerda Archer I had an interesting experience with my son when I was talking to him about your project and as he asked me what I felt was the most important factor. I found myself replying that too many people speak

about peace outside of themselves, whereas we need that place of peace within ourselves so that we can radiate it outwards in our own life to those around us. Talking is the easy part. It is living it that will make the difference. He quietly replied OK Mum, so start speaking from that energy place within you. My greatest concern is that the people running countries still believe in force by laws and wars. What a difference if they followed the way of Ghandhi.

AFTERNOON GROUP DISCUSSIONS

POLITICS AND POWER IN IRELAND

The Peace Committee should obtain copies of the programme for government and the St. Andrew's Agreement. They are important as statements of intention and of governmental approaches to current issues. Peace Committee needs to distinguish between projects, which need basic support and those which are developing well, but need moral support. Concerning Shannon, Peace Committee should seek more involvement by the government in stopping US military use and special rendition flights. Peace Committee should contact Friends in the USA to find out about their approach to US military involvement and foreign policy in Iraq and Afghanistan and in the longer term in the near and middle east. Friends should be asking focused questions and seeking answers about the functioning and usefulness of Irish aid in the third world. Peace Committee should develop a much more active dialogue with Irish Quaker Faith in Action.

INTERNATIONAL POLITICS AND POWER

Iraq and Afghanistan

In many ways Quakers feel powerless to influence western foreign policy in relation to these two countries. One recent encouraging development however, has been the Iraq Government's protest at the activities of security contractors such as Blackwater which operate outside international law and Iraqi law. There is a need to invoke the provisions of the Geneva Convention and re-establish respect for the UN.

Many Iraqis have fled their country and are now refugees in neighbouring countries such as Jordan. There is a need to support the Iraqi Government in ways which will promote peace and allow refugees to return home.

In the case of Afghanistan, a fraction of the huge financial burden of the military operation there could be diverted to purchasing the poppy crop from the farmers and then destroying it. Further investment made available by reducing the scale of military activity could then be used to improve and extend the employment prospects for the rural population.

Shannon

The Irish Government should be lobbied to allow independent searches of planes transiting Shannon to ensure that they are not transporting prisoners to Guantanamo Bay or involved in external rendition. Now that the Green Party is part of the Government and Quakers have already had a meeting with the Taoiseach, it should now be possible for Friends to raise such issues with the Government at the highest level.

Peace Grouping at the United Nations

One Friend has suggested that, through the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Government of Ireland should be lobbied to develop a Peace Grouping at the United Nations. Countries within the Peace Grouping would only use their armed forces for

peace keeping/building and would not manufacture or deal in arms beyond that which was necessary for peace keeping.

Arms manufacture

Countries such as France and the UK appear to take a pride in their arms industries as evidenced by the high profile trade fairs which are held from time to time to promote the arms trade internationally. One Friend questioned whether the availability of research funding and significant employment in the arms industry inhibits scientists and politicians from taking on the arms industry?

One Friend described a recent protest at Faslane organised by a Belfast group against the Trident Nuclear Submarine project. He said that nuclear weapons are a sign of prestige for leaders and the British should put their own foreign policy house in order before telling other nations (such as Iran) what to do about their own nuclear programme.

Quakers should write letters to lobby ministers to ensure that matters identified in Programme for Government are not allowed to be ignored such as the section on Nuclear Disarmament on page 46.

China

One Friend expressed concern about the increased economic power and influence of China in the modern world. In particular, China is involved in the exploitation of Africa's natural resources and holds a strong influence on political developments in Burma. With next year's Olympic Games in Beijing, there is an opportunity for western governments to apply pressure on the Chinese Government to improve its record on human rights in China and in some of the neighbouring countries.

Palestine/Israel

The recent refusal by Brian Lenehan to issue a visa to the visiting Lebanese journalist Ibrahim Moussawi is a matter of concern to Friends. This journalist had visited Ireland previously, but on this occasion was refused a visa for no obvious reason.

Ramallah School is of special interest to Friends and it has been learned that the Israeli authorities have made it more difficult recently for some of the Ramallah foreign teachers to renew their visas.

ETHNIC DIVERSITY AND TENSION: RECONCILIATION THROUGH EDUCATION

This discussion centred on the Irish context. Problems related to ethnicity and related violence have become increasingly problematic during the previous decade. Problems relate to Irish internal cultural ethnic tensions, between travellers and wider society and ethnic tensions between Irish and non-Irish migrants and between non-Irish ethnic groups living in Ireland.

As Friends, we recognise that every individual has their own integrity. It is important to build trust through participants in discourse recognising each other as honest. Education could play a role within schools and community groups. Education was also discussed as having a wider meaning than specifically schools-based. Education, however the word is defined, should build mutual understanding,. The education of the emotions is centrally important to understanding and acceptance. Emotional health has to be sound. Intellectual analysis can then come into effective play.

Quakers can build upon their reputation for reconciliation. This itself needs to be nurtured and cared for, because reconciliation is itself a long and complex matter. Quakers are able to work through long-term thinking and projects.

Focus is vital – intervention at a time appropriate to generating local involvement

appropriate age groups
appropriate community areas in geographical and socio-cultural terms
in each Meeting

Bigotry begins with assumptions built from anyone's safe zone. Problems of diversity are much easier to deal with in another group rather than in one's own. It is important to begin a process of challenging and exposing one's own views, to break out of our safe zones. Friends must consider that they have assumptions in their own zone, which they apply simply to keep feeling comfortable. A trained PR presenter can fool them as easily as anyone else. Individual experience should grow away from religious assumptions and ideology.

It is critically important to bring ordinary people together, not merely specialists or trained advocates. A supportive environment is critically important: again, Friends can provide this.

We suggest initially exchange visits between Newtown School and Friends' School, Lisburn. We suggest that the five Moslem schools being set up in Ireland, should be involved in this process. Other ethnically-based schools should also become involved.

We also note the effectiveness of music as a generator of understanding and discourse in often difficult circumstances. We suggest considering music and discussion as part of schools' exchange. Music allows cultures to be presented without the specifics of words. Emotional health then intellectual input. A building process can begin, involving smaller and larger groups, publicly or in private as appropriate to circumstances.

THE MEDIA AND VIOLENCE AND NON-VIOLENCE

Quakers can change matters in Ireland. Friends can pressurise the government to implement what is stated in its programme for government. There are high-profile events related to non-violence and violence, such as Peace Day on 2nd October, or Shannon Airport and US troop stop-overs and special rendition flights, related to the combat in Iraq and the near East. There is the concern of training in non-violent action. There are concerns such as violence on TV and other media as a cultural expression.

INNER PEACE

The question of finding a balance - self-fulfilment and self development; my duty towards those dependent on me and to those in wider society who also need help.

The question of looking at people who need help;

We may not necessarily be the best person to give that help; we should examine the problem to see if our talents are able to meet up to the needs expressed by someone.

The Woodbrook course on conflict resolution the Quaker way and also on Peace and Discernment;

We need to love ourselves and be able to change ourselves, before we love others or seek to change others. The tools for doing this within ourselves and others are mediation, Quaker Meetings, changing our and others' expectations. We need an assurance inside that we are here for a purpose and that there is a loving and caring God.

We should regard anger as an opportunity for development, but must not be self-destructive. This process may move us to doing something, which can be positive.