

A very inspiring Eco-Quaker Gathering, on the theme *Love and Despair: Actions and Responses to Climate Breakdown*, took place at South Belfast Quaker Meeting House on Saturday 19th October 2019. The gathering opened with a period of quiet reflection and worship, which afforded an opportunity to reflect on 'where we are'. During this quiet time sixteen attendees spoke briefly about their environmental story. Their varied and sincere contributions set the tone for an informative gathering which endeavoured to identify positive ways forward.

Thought-provoking presentations were delivered by three excellent speakers. Lindsey Fielder-Cook, Quaker United Nations Office Representative for Climate Change, had a background in human rights and peacebuilding before becoming firmly convinced that climate change is a human rights issue. She communicates with, and is inspired by, faith organisations worldwide. Courage not despair is needed. We should look back to see where we came from and for Quakers there is the encouragement that Quakers took a stance against the slave trade, a stance which ended in the abolition of slavery. Guilt trips or shaming should be avoided. Instead, in the words of George Fox, we should *walk cheerfully over the world answering that of God in everyone*.

Both Lyndsey and John Barry, the second speaker, spoke about their empathy with scientists who need to be heard by governments. John Barry, Professor of Green Political Economy, Queens University Belfast spoke of colleagues who are depressed by the serious situation of climate breakdown. He also spoke about the need for courage, hope and activism, which are often preceded by denial, anger, depression and despair. Personal change should not be encumbered by a blame culture. We need to radically come to the realisation that we do not need any more technology. Instead we need to lower our consumption. The concept of GDP should be challenged. A bizarre scenario is a car crash which results in damage to the vehicle. The outcome of this scenario would show a positive GDP when vehicle repair, litigation costs and other related costs are calculated. However, there is no GDP measure for unpaid work of women or the work of volunteers which add considerably to the wellbeing of a community. We need to re-think and remake society.

Lynn Finnegan, Writer for 'UN Earth Negotiations Bulletin' and Member of Eco Quakers Committee spoke of compassion and insight. When you are not afraid of the world's pain you can go in. Go radically not violently. Let there be no more conflict like US and THEM. Goodness runs through every human heart. Lynn spoke of the Great Turning which involves the transition from a doomed economy of industrial growth to a life-sustaining society committed to the recovery of our world. The attainment of this Great Turning can involve a mix of outrage and optimism. We are witnessing outrage and optimism now in our young schoolchildren who are trying to educate adults. Outrage is the fuel. Optimism is the direction which transforms the outrage into ethical responses and positive actions.

Fran Brady, Eco-Quaker Representative on Eco Congregation Ireland Committee