

Abingdon Quaker Meeting Newsletter

August 2026

No. 443

Meetings for Worship

Every Sunday 10:15am at the Abingdon Community Support Service (Abbey Centre), Crabtree Place, off Audlett Drive.

Thursday 6th August 7:30pm in Dorothea's Room, St Ethelwold's, 30 East St Helen Street. Please note the change of room for this month only.

Woodbrooke offers online meetings for worship on Zoom at various times during week. For a timetable and the link to the Zoom room, visit <https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/worship/>.

Other Forthcoming Meetings

Further information about these meetings is on the inside pages of this issue.

Thursday 6th August	7pm onwards	Hiroshima Day commemoration, St Ethelwold's
Sunday 30th August	After MfW	Business Meeting
Sunday 6th September	After MfW	Learning Sunday and bring-&-share lunch
Sunday 20th September		All-age Meeting for Worship and summer outing

Focus on Children and Families

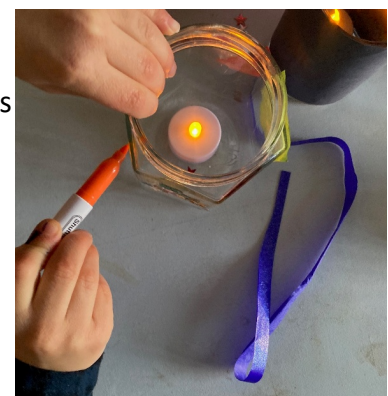
We open this issue with three articles reporting on events within Oxford & Swindon Area Meeting that explored how we might support our children, and their parents, in their developing spirituality and how we might make our Meetings more welcoming spaces for younger members. One sentence in particular leaps out from Julia Dover's experience as Children, Young People and Families Development Worker: 'cross-generational connection is core to seed thriving spaces for children, young people and grown-ups.'

Nurturing Children's Spirituality

Julia Dover summarises the OSAM 'Nurturing Children's Spirituality' session held on 6th June at Oxford Meeting House and offers ideas for how Friends might take the ideas seeded further. She says: 'A lively read for everyone even if you did not attend.'

In early June, OSAM Friends who care for children — whether as family, elders, or volunteers — met to explore how we might nurture children's spirituality. The session arose from thoughtful conversations with Friends asking to focus on how we hold space for children's innate spiritual being-ness.

The theme is a big one! And what do we mean by children's spiritual life anyway? If one nods to Enlightenment thinker John Locke, a child is born as a *tabula rasa* without spiritual or moral agency and so needs, urgently, the input of adults to fill the hole. In a modern



context, there is a vast recognition (or remembering) of children's innate spiritual presence. A few qualities of children's spirituality might be: rooted in free play and a sense of wonder; out of time, non-verbal, beyond reason or the five senses; the feel of a 'shimmering' space, attuned to light and dark. I am sure you can add to the list.

My brief to the national volunteer CYP trainers Naomi Richards and Ellie McCarthy was to lead Friends through an experiential inquiry of our own intentions when we hold space for children, and to explore what it looks and feels like to centre children's spiritual being. We shared lunch, then Ellie and Naomi led a two-hour session, while Sally Lawson and Friends cared for the children. My gratitude to all who co-created the day — through participating, planning, caring for children, and helping with lunch and cleanup — and shared love for the children in our midst.

The afternoon had three parts. First, to root our inquiry, we shared personal memories of childhood reverie in small groups. Next, we considered the distinction between nurturing and stifling children's spirituality by creating two large mixed-media collages: a 'nurturing monster' and a 'crushing monster'. We explored through imagination what it looks and feels like to create space for a child's innate connection with all that is, versus its opposite. We appreciated each other's collages, and how qualities of the 'nourishing spirituality' monster collages were vibrant, organic, flowing, uncontained, filling the space, exploring, messy and unpredictable. In contrast, qualities of the 'crushing spirituality' monsters were angular, tight, controlled, limiting the space, conceptual.



Reflections were mixed: most felt drawn to the nurturing collages and discomforted by the restrictions of the crushing ones; some felt a sense of safety in the linear structure of the crushing collage and, with deep insight, observed that they bring that same impulse to their work with children. All rich material to reflect on how our intentions — conscious or not — are the spirit with which we hold space for children. I am sorry that the session ran out of time, so spacious worship sharing about what had surfaced or how we design space for children's wonder wasn't possible. I offer a few suggestions and open questions to play with to spark exchange and experimentation.

Suggestions to play with to attune to children's spiritual presence

- Be the student. What can children teach us about our own connection to reverie? They may remind us of a way of being we have lost touch with, rather than confirming our role as the one who teaches.
- Notice what control gives us. During the workshop some Friends recognised, in creating the 'crushing' collage, a familiar comfort in its order and containment, and mused whether that same instinct may be at work in how they hold space for children.
- What happens if we give space and materials, and let them bloom? Every child needs room, materials and the quietening of adult voices to make their own connections with the world.
- What happens when we follow rather than lead? Notice what has already caught a child's attention — a puddle, a shadow, a beetle — and join them there, rather than correcting or redirecting them toward what we think they should notice.
- Unstructured time is fertile ground for wonder.

- What if we asked open questions, then simply listened without steering the answer toward a moral or a lesson?
- What if stillness were shared rather than taught? Butterflies eventually land on the flower: allow children to discover their own inner relationship to stillness.
- Try noticing the impulse to correct or interpret a child's experience of wonder; pause.
- If a child's spirituality unsettles or puzzles us, that discomfort might offer information about ourselves, not a signal to correct the child.
- Laughter, silliness and play are not interruptions to spiritual life; for children they may be primary channels of it.
- When children see us sit with uncertainty they may be more at ease with their own.

What other ideas come to mind to experiment with?

None of this is new. Friends have been circling it for as long as children have gathered among us. Perhaps the invitation isn't to master a new set of techniques, but simply to attune to the question beneath: what does it mean to trust that a child's spiritual life is already here, shimmering, and ours to protect rather than provide?

'Children's ministry is more than work with children, it is a much wider task of helping the whole church understand what it is about childhood that may help us enter the kingdom. Maybe a first step is to make space in your plans and activities to look with humility and greater attention at those children you work with this week, to seek the often-hidden ways that children are closer to God than we are' — Rebecca Nye.

Further reading: Rebecca Nye (2009), *Children's Spirituality: What it is and Why it Matters*. Church House Publishing, <https://chpublishing.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9780715140277/childrens-spirituality>.

'Way to Welcome'

Kirsty Philbrick, Quaker Life team leader, reports on a lively afternoon at Burford Meeting House on 24th July:

Eight Friends from across OSAM — including Charlbury, Burford, Abingdon and Oxford Meetings — met with Julia and me for an afternoon of playful collaboration, reflection and idea-sharing to support and grow children's, youth and family development work over the next year.

We questioned how to make Quaker communities places of belonging for all ages and recognised that, with one more year's funding (until the end of August 2027), the maximum impact will come from Julia supporting you, OSAM Friends, to experiment with new ways to connect with and welcome people of all ages.

Ideas surfaced including holding a Meeting for Worship for Play, experimenting with family meeting rather than Children's Meeting and invitations to bring your grandchildren. We noticed how collaborating and experimenting can be joyful and energising, and give us feedback to grow, learn and try new things.

We wonder what thoughts you have about welcoming people of all ages to belong in Quaker communities?

What questions or ideas arise?

Please do bounce your ideas around and reach out to Julia: she is looking forward to hearing from you: juliad@quaker.org.uk - 07529 223379.

OSAM Children, Young People and Families Development Work: Update

Julia Dover reflects on the other activities in which she has engaged so far this year as part of her role (her report has been edited for space):

Wonder Days, one of my first OSAM events, seem a long time ago! [...] If there is a shining thread through the many opportunities I have co-created since then, it is that cross-generational connection is core to seed thriving spaces for children, young people and grown-ups. I highlight my most recent activities for your interest, as we collectively move into the final year of the post.

‘Winter Glow’ dance and song Spiritual Nurture Friends across OSAM have rich creative talents and enthusiasms: what would an all-age afternoon look like that harnesses such talent for a time of dance and song as spiritual nurture? What does glow feel like? These questions prompted my call to Friends interested in planning and holding the spiritual nurture session at January’s Area Meeting in Oxford. My role was producer:

encouraging, weaving, sparking; and grounding the practicals through the autumn. I met with the incoming OSAM clerk to explore ways MfWfB minutes can reflect the language and spirit of children when they are present or participating (I encourage Friends to experiment with this further). On the day, from late morning, families made glow-art to decorate the Meeting House; afterwards, a large number of Friends enjoyed the shared lunch. The session was in two parts: first, circle dances called by two Friends for a crowd of all ages (Friends from across the Area provided musical accompaniment). Afterwards, the room settled into stillness through songs that gently flowed into worship. By the end, the room was aglow with soft warmth.

‘A true all-age event’ — Oxford Friend

‘I don’t ever want this to end!’ — Young child.



Forest Foxes woodland socials for 11–14 year olds at Hill End

Like all lively ecosystems, Forest Foxes constantly evolves. A bonded cohort from across the region gathers in the woods for exploration, connection with nature and each other, with games, fire and snacks. It is amazing how organically spaces of stillness and quiet surface amongst them; how they arrive at the beginning as separate but bid adieu after a couple of hours as a single band of friends. Each is strikingly their own person, and I always end sessions with Foxes feeling privileged to be a part. Every time in the woods is an experiment which the young people make their own.

From early days of Tea, Cake and Play, when it was clear that parents and carers sorely need their own focused TLC, I have started to offer Foxes’ parents a fireside time together at the far side of Hill End — with a hamper of snacks, firewood, a Kelly kettle and a conversation game to spark exchange. Early days, but this is proving popular.

At the end of the afternoon, when young people and their grown-ups tumble into the car park to reunite, the scene is pretty special. We are very fortunate that a team of three volunteer Friends from across OSAM hold the space for Foxes, each drawn by their outdoor expertise, love of nature,

and enjoyment of young people. In theory, the ages of the group will expand as the young people grow.

‘I had forgotten how beautiful the forest is’ — Forest Foxes participant.

Starting youth groups from scratch requires dogged patience over time, but ultimately they take root. If circumstances were different, now would be time to plan the first regional young people’s link group for the autumn.

Pastoral element of the post

A key part of my job is to support parents and volunteers in their nurturing roles, both explicitly and informally. I make space and find ways for parents to relax, share, reflect and be, whether around a fire together or at 43 for tea one-to-one. It matters to celebrate the heartfelt care that grown-ups bring to spaces for children and young people. In this spirit, in the spring I offered a gathering for Forest Foxes volunteers at Shotover Country Park. We spent a morning on a secret hillside where the deer go to rest. We enjoyed worship together. Each shared an activity that reflects how we connect with the woods; by the end, it really felt like we had come to know each other wordlessly, more deeply. A great way to gel into belonging together when we run Forest Foxes.

Abingdon Quaker Matters

Business Meeting: Sunday 30th August

Please note the earlier date. Items for the agenda items should be notified to our Clerk, Jenny Carr, by Wednesday 26th August: abingdonquakers@gmail.com.

Pastoral Care in Our Meeting

Jenny Carr writes:

Care for each other is the responsibility of everyone in Meeting. We would all want to be part of a community in which everyone finds acceptance, loving care and opportunities for service. The Spiritual and Pastoral Care Group (SPCG) also has a role in signposting if someone needs assistance in some way — be it practical, spiritual, emotional or someone with time to listen. It is an issue that we explore at every meeting. To try and enhance the ability of our Meeting to meet pastoral care needs, the SPCG is introducing a couple of new initiatives.

One of these is to assign each person in the list of members to a member of SPCG to contact and keep a friendly eye on. This, of course, does not mean that they cannot talk to anyone else! The need has arisen because, as the Meeting has grown, not everyone knows each other. We are not publishing a list, which might seem somewhat intrusive, so please do ask anyone from the SPCG to find out who your contact person is. The members of the SPCG in 2026 are Judith Baker, Jenny Carr, Judy Goodall, Alan Pearmain, Sally Reynolds, Madeleine Trivasse and Anne Webber.

Another way to try and keep in touch is for the contact person from the SPCG to send the Friend a supportive postcard expressing warm wishes and holding them in the Light. The purpose of the card is simply to let that person know we are thinking about them without their feeling that any pressure is being put on them. This has been used at other Meetings, such as Oxford, and has been well received as a reminder that that person has not been forgotten.

If anyone has any questions about this or any suggestions, please speak to someone from SPCG.

Learning Sunday: Sunday 6th September

Our next Learning Sunday will take place on Sunday 6th September after Meeting for Worship. The topic will be 'How it all Works'. We will look in a relaxed way at various roles in our Meeting which might not be known about. These include Clerk, OSAM Trustees, Spiritual and Pastoral Care Group, Church in Abingdon representative and the Nominations Group. We hope that others may be there to answer any questions about their roles such as the Treasurer, Newsletter Editor, Safeguarding Officer and OSAM Nominations. Our discussion will be followed by a bring-and-share lunch.

Summer Outing: Sunday 20th September

1—4pm, Nature Discovery Centre, Muddy Lane, Lower Way, Thatcham, RG19 3FU.

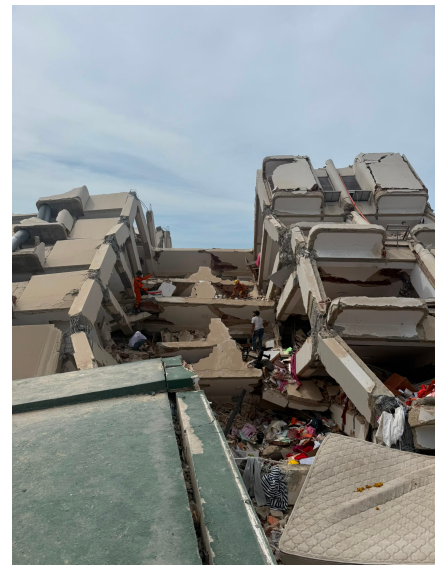
Preparations are now under way. The organising team will ask us in due course to let them know if we plan to come. Lifts to the venue will be available. Meanwhile, to find out what's on offer at the Centre, visit <https://www.bbowt.org.uk/nature-reserves/nature-discovery-centre>.

Monthly Appeal: Mi Casa Es Tu Casa

Marcela Teran has asked us to raise funds to support Mi Casa Es Tu Casa, a community-led fund run by Venezuelans for Venezuelans, giving emergency grants to families severely affected by the earthquakes. She writes:

Weeks after the devastating earthquakes in Venezuela, 50,000 people are estimated to be missing, 5,000 dead and over 21,000 are living in shelters. Humanitarian aid has focused on providing urgent assistance to meet basic needs: non-perishable food, prepared meals, water and hygiene supplies, and primary health care. But there are many more daily needs that are not being met: needs that are wide-ranging, critical, personal, and that people could address themselves if they had access to some funds.

We are therefore focusing on providing one-off emergency grants to families heavily impacted by the earthquakes. Our objective is that each household can solve their most urgent needs and can be in a better position to sustain themselves. Financial aid also has the added benefit of stimulating the local economy.



How it works:

The grants are being distributed by organisers on the ground in Venezuela who have direct links with the affected communities through their work with news agencies and NGOs. They are identifying families in vulnerable situations for whom this support could be of great assistance, and assessing them according to established priority criteria. If families meet the criteria they are given a direct grant of US\$150–200.

One grant recipient said to us:

'I thank you, and primarily to God, for people like you helping us in this very hard situation. With this money you are donating to me, I will buy food for my kids, I will buy medicines ... buy at least some clothes for my children because as you know, I lost everything ... Thank you from the bottom of my heart.'

About us:

Mi Casa Es Tu Casa is an initiative to respond to the earthquakes created by Rebuilding Hope, a multi-disciplinary organisation consisting of Venezuelan local organisers, journalists, artists and citizens in Venezuela and abroad. Rebuilding Hope is being supported by Apoyo Comunitario, a Latin American organisation based in the UK. We have partnered with Rebuilding Hope for this post-earthquake relief initiative, providing administrative support and a means of raising and banking funds. Apoyo Comunitario is experienced at raising, managing and redistributing funds. During the COVID-19 pandemic we raised more than £30,000 which was distributed directly to over 70 families.

I am a member of Rebuilding Hope and Treasurer of Apoyo Comunitario.

We believe that direct solidarity support is essential, and we hope that Abingdon Meeting can help deliver it to survivors of the earthquake in Venezuela. As community-led groups, both organisations have no overhead costs, so every pound raised goes directly to supporting people.

You can donate in these ways:

- **Cash** when the appeal is made after Meeting for Worship on 2nd August and a further Sunday in the month. We are not registered for Gift Aid.
- **By direct transfer (online banking)** to the UK (sterling) bank account of Apoyo Comunitario:
Sort code: 60-16-16 (NatWest)
Account number: 85015040 APOYO COMUNITARIO SU
Reference: Quaker donation
- **Online** via GoFundMe: gofund.me/1e6e7ab4d. Note that if you use this method a transaction fee will be deducted from your donation, so it's preferable to send the money directly to Apoyo Comunitario's bank account if you can.

Other ways in which you can help:

- Follow the campaign on Instagram: [instagram.com/micasa.es.tucasa.venezuela](https://www.instagram.com/micasa.es.tucasa.venezuela).
- Share our GoFundMe campaign: gofund.me/1e6e7ab4d.
- Help us find an accountant. Rebuilding Hope is a community group set up as an unincorporated association, but we are working on registering as a Community Interest Company (CIC). We are in need of some professional advice with this process.

Thank you.



Around the Area and Region

Talk: Eyewitness Stories from Israel and the West Bank

Saturday 22nd August 7pm, Swindon Meeting House.

Swindon Quakers have arranged for **Brad Baker** to give a presentation about his experiences as an ecumenical accompanier with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI).

Friends from other Local Meetings are most welcome to come. It would be helpful if you could register your interest in attending through a brief message (text, email or phone) to Elspeth Wollen in advance. Elspeth can also ensure there will be space to park at Swindon Meeting House if it's needed.

Local Events of Quaker Interest

Hiroshima Exhibition, Ceremony and Lantern Floating

Thursday 6th August 7pm onwards, St Ethelwold's House.

Abingdon Peace Group invites you to their annual commemoration, which comprises an exhibition in the Garden Room from 7pm, a ceremony around the Peace Pole at 7:30pm and a procession to the river at 8pm to float the lanterns. The lanterns were painted by students at Seishikan High School in Hiroshima and have been given to us by Hiroshima Coventry Club, a friendship group between the two cities.



Film: People's Emergency Briefing

Wednesday 16th September 7:30pm, Abingdon Baptist Church, 35 Ock Street.

In November 2025, the National Emergency Briefing brought together leading experts to present the latest evidence on the climate and nature crisis to politicians and other influential people in Westminster. This film sets out the risks facing the nation and the credible, positive responses available based on authoritative scientific content from the 2025 meeting.

The film is being shown at the September meeting of Abingdon Carbon Cutters. Please register for the event at <https://buytickets.at/abingdoncarboncutters>.

Handel's *Messiah*: A Free Performance in Oxford

Monday 7th September 7pm, Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford.

The Messiah Festival Choir, a group of 50 amateur singers from Japan, performs the work annually in different locations worldwide. At this performance in Oxford they will be supported by the Oxford Community Choir (including Judith and Johan) and accompanied by the Oxford Sinfonia. Ticket are free and there will be a retiring collection.



For further information, and to book tickets, visit <https://www.oxfordsinfonia.co.uk/event/handels-messiah/>.

Among Abingdon Friends

Poem of the Month

From the Poetry Group

July's theme, summer (appropriately!) Included word pictures of countryside and seaside, poems in which the poet looks back to their childhood summers, and poems that take us back to our own childhoods — whether poems (the annoyances vividly captured by Robert Louis Stevenson in 'Bed in Summer') or hymns ('Summer suns are glowing over land and sea'). Poem of the Month was penned by Roger Baker in an early-morning burst of inspiration:

Summerising (summarising summer)

The tranquility of dawn
Unadulterated by human ways.
Intense heat and light;
Exams and holidays.

Bare legs and sandals;
Sun glasses, sun hats, sun cream;
Smell of cut grass;
Sound of mowing machine.

Runner beans with butter;
Open windows, flies and wasps;
Sweaty, tanned bodies;
Butterflies; ice cream; flip flops.

Hazy heat, a mirage;
Wet sand between the toes;
Late evenings on the patio
Chirping grasshoppers; swooping swallows.

Roger Baker



Opening Up at the Abbey Centre: August Rota

5th	Chris	Esther
12th	Alan	Eryl
19th	Anne	Clark
30th	Auriel	Richard

Next Month...

Please send your contributions for the September issue (in words and/or pictures) to the editors at newsletter@abingdonquakers.org.uk by **Tuesday 25th August**.

Abingdon Local Quaker Meeting

<https://abingdonquakers.org.uk> | <https://www.facebook.com/AbingdonQuakers/>

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