



Nontheist Friends Newsletter

<https://nontheist-quakers.org.uk/> - a Quaker Recognised Body

April 2020

Dear Friends...

The NFN Steering group sends heartfelt, loving greetings to all its members and friends during these difficult times.

As you know we have postponed our annual conference and the AGM until better days, and we hope that those of you who were going to attend will have the opportunity at a future date to join with us. The Steering Group will continue unchanged for the time being, except that Roger Warren Evans will take over responsibility for membership from David Parlett.

To simplify administration, membership will be rolled over until the future AGM and free membership will be offered to any new applicants meanwhile.

We wanted to reassure you that the Steering Group is in good spirits. During these uncertain times we will do our best to stay in touch mainly through our website, by telephone and email. We welcome all your thoughts, reflections, suggestions and questions and are looking forward to a lively exchange of thoughts and experience. Trevor Bending invites us all warmly to contribute to the website.

With your moral support we will keep the network ticking over for now. We might even try to Zoom!

Stay safe and well,

Gisela Creed, clerk

Virus cancels conference

At time of writing Friends House is closed, as is most of London, and all bookings have been cancelled. As you will remember, we were due to hold our usual annual conference over the weekend of 28-29 March at Friends House instead of at Woodbrooke. Roger Warren Evans, our booking clerk, writes:

I was new to the Network and to the Steering Group when I volunteered to act as Bookings Clerk, late in 2019. I had discovered the existence of the Network earlier in 2019 - so the booking process was my own rapid introduction to the character of the Network itself.

We had no money for serious advertising, and had to rely on our own Website (Editor Trevor Bending) and a round-robin Notice to Area Meeting Clerks, informing them of the Conference theme, title, and leading speakers. It soon became clear that the Conference title - *That's the Spirit!: Dimensions of Spirituality* - had had immediate resonance for a much wider range of those who heard about it.

Many of the bookings were from Attendees, rather than Members. They seemed to be the keenest Inquirers, at early stages of their spiritual journey, and often expressed their eagerness to attend our Conference. I was deeply impressed that our theme, promoted by the Nontheist Friends Network, had had such a thought-provoking and galvanizing effect among so many Attendees.

If we have the chance to re-convene the Conference, it is clear to me that our most receptive audience will be found among the Attendees, and we should find a way of communicating more effectively with them. Our Treasurer Piers Maddox and I are now working on the complex process of repaying the BACS Booking Fees!

Roger Warren Evans

Message from Marcus Aurelius

It was a huge disappointment to have to postpone our conference, not least because it was promising to be a full house with a substantial number of attendees who had never been to an

NFN conference before. Clearly the theme, *That's the spirit! Dimensions of spirituality*, was a big attraction, as was our line-up of keynote speakers. All three of them have expressed their disappointment at the necessary postponement and told us they look forward to joining us when we are able to rearrange it.

Andrew Copson sent a message to Humanists which is worth quoting in full: 'This week marked the death of Marcus Aurelius and we shared on social media one of his best lines on stoic resistance: *"Peer deeply into yourself. There is a source of strength that will spring up inside you, if only you look.* This isn't supernatural nonsense or sententious twaddle - it is based on solid observation of the human capacity for sacrifice and courage in a crisis. We all have that in our nature. And we will depend on it now just as we depend on each other'.

David Boulton

Membership update

Yearly membership subscriptions to the Nontheist Friends Network now run (for accounting purposes) from 01 April.

To simplify administration whilst the AGM is postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic, **membership from 1 April 2020 will be rolled over until the future AGM and FREE membership will be offered to any new applicants meanwhile (ie. until the AGM which may be next year).**

To join, please email the Membership Clerk together with full contact details:

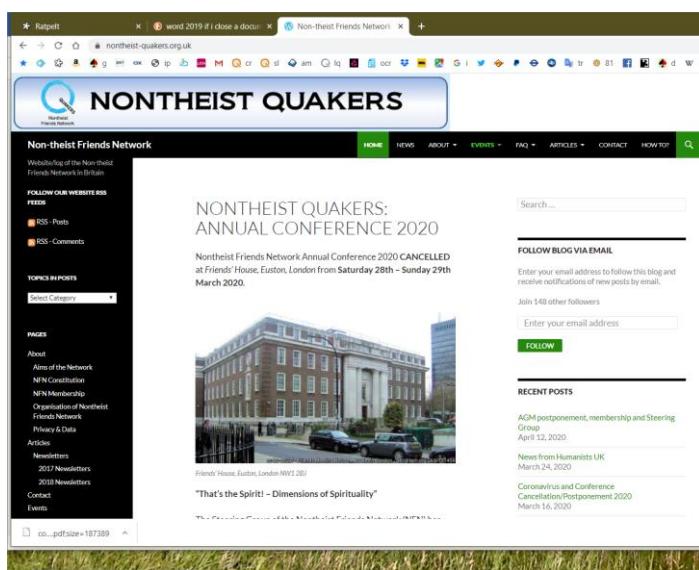
NFN Membership Clerk
Roger Warren Evans

(email/roger at warrenevans.net. Replace the ' at ' with the usual @ (no spaces) in your mail program – this is to give our email addresses some protection from harvesting by spammers).

We recommend reading the NFN Constitution before completing your membership application:
<https://nontheistquakers.files.wordpress.com/2016/08/nfn-constitution-2016.pdf>

To comply with GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations) we ought not to keep for too long contact details of Friends whose membership has lapsed, so if you are in any doubt about your current status please contact the treasurer or membership secretary. (For further details see our Privacy page at
<https://nontheist-quakers.org.uk/about/privacy-data/>

On the web



The website continues to serve its purpose well by providing a basic reference point for all our news, forthcoming events and archives of articles, newsletters and other materials created over the last eight years. (The current website has been running for almost five years but older archive material, much of it archived by Brian Wardrop on the previous website, has been retained).

It also serves well for booking for our conferences and for the now cancelled 2020 conference, for which a total of 87 application forms were downloaded in 2020.

In 2019 the website, according to its host WordPress, attracted 8880 'views', 3269 'visitors', 23 'likes' and 59 'comments'.

The 'likes' may not be particularly significant, but the 59 comments perhaps illustrate a shortcoming of the website - too few people choose to engage with it by making comments. This may be because all the world and his dog are signed up to Facebook and not enough will make

the effort to visit the website repeatedly. I would like to encourage those 'members and attenders' to comment on any page or post (including past articles. For pages and posts there is a comment box at the foot of almost every page. To comment on an article, use the Contact page and I'll engineer it onto the website, probably as a post) You can 'like' any page or post if you like!

In terms of virtual connection whilst our present troubles continue, we could have Group Skype chats (or other software), or would anyone be interested in joining an NFN Whatsapp Group?

Trevor Bending

Quotes from contributors to our website

Arising from *Towards A Nontheist View Of Discernment*

Those of us not using the word 'God' as vital to our devotion to Quakerism and Quaker practice need this site and access to discernment. *Lisa Bateman*

What weighs us down is not our baggage, but the decision to carry it. *Jules*

Discernment does not lose its distinctive Quaker quality because one is a non-theist. In meeting I try to think good thoughts and how I can do better with my life – it tempers the bad stuff in the world. I do not sit there worrying about whether it is God, or simply my conscience bringing these thoughts out. But it does. For me Quakers is about what you do, not whether you believe in God or not. *E.W.*

News from Spain

Trevor and his wife Georgina live in Spain, from where Trevor recently wrote:

We have stayed on our 'hillside' in Spain for the time being. Our Easyjet flight from Seville to Gatwick was cancelled on 16 March and substitute flights offered were not acceptable. We booked a Ryanair from Faro to Manchester on 30 March, and that was cancelled shortly after. We think EasyJet are trying to cash in (before they go bust?) and Ryanair have our money paid a week ago but no flight!

Dominic Raab's advice came too late. With three governments (UK belatedly) telling us to stay at home, we decided we would be safer here than travelling - but...? (a friend from Germany who arrived back eight days ago thinks he has the virus). The UK government give the impression of running after the train when it has already left the station. Parts of the UK public appear to be mad.

No problems with shopping in Spain except tightly restricted movement (only one person in a car, unless one 'elderly' in which case one sitting in the back and both wearing masks - which we don't have.)

Went to Lidl last Wednesday - only one allowed in store, all staff masked, customers given gloves, alcohol to clean hands, no panic buying!

We may have to go shopping again tomorrow. (Very few cases in our area - yet).

Georgina's latest news (and pictures and poem): <https://navasolanature.wordpress.com>

Hope this finds everyone else well and taking great care. Roger's early advice to cancel was quite prescient.

Trevor Bending

Boom in Zoom and hike in Skype

With the country effectively in lockdown, though perhaps not as effectively as some of us might wish, there has been a great – and for their providers no doubt profitable – increase in the number of friends, families and affinity groups learning to make online face-to face-contact via video. Only in the past week have I got round to mastering Skype from my splendid isolation. (Needs must when the nontheist devil drives.) And Zoom turned out to be a blessing when I zoomed in last Sunday morning to the online meeting for worship facilitated by Woodbrooke (<https://zoom.us/j/4432735264>), especially as about 200 were taking part by the time I joined. Indeed, shortly afterwards I received an email from a board-games enthusiast Quaker in Brussels who had been participating at the same time and who knew me by repute, saying he was pleased

to meet me, if only in cyberspace. Next Sunday we at Croydon will for the first time be holding a Zoomed local meeting for worship, though I doubt we'll have more than half a dozen participants able to log in. I must next explore the idea of expanding it to area meeting level. - DP

Helen's dilemma : To Zoom or not to Zoom

Reprinted from the April newsletter of Croydon LQM

I know I belong to an ancient generation; after all, my favourite singer by a country mile is Ella Fitzgerald. Furthermore, this period of social isolation has given time to explore the lives and work of Miles Davies and Bill Evans. So, we're talking about a focus on the late 1950s, which is a long time ago, even for me. And a lot of things have happened between then and now.

Apart from musical tastes, one of the symptoms of being such an age is that I'm starting to choose whether or not I bother to keep up. My bank is clearly annoyed that I don't use online banking because of what I regard as legitimate security issues. Additionally, I have been known to even write the occasional cheque. However, recently, I've given in to the expectations of friends to use bank transfers to pay for theatre and other shared expenses.

Clearly the reluctance to change, with all its rationalisations, is a sign of age but sometimes there is a wider discussion to engage in. I'm afraid my first reaction to the idea of Quaker meetings on Zoom was to be somewhat bemused. All these individuals sitting alone at home and sitting in (almost) silence. In many ways, after the reluctance to join *any* group is got over, it does seem the total introvert experience. You don't even have to leave the house. Hands up, to be honest, I was more than slightly intimidated by the technical and experiential issues – how does it work, how can I get in and participate – and what will the meeting be like? There is something about sitting with others together in a circle in the meeting-house. Something *does* happen. Will a Zoom meeting be remotely the same?

However, I'd enjoyed the What's App group. So amazingly enough, I gave the Zoom meeting a go. Laura kindly helped me get in and, after that, it was a piece of cake (the only piece of cake I was going to get - though Cathy did give a wave on screen from her house). Was it a deep spiritual experience? No, it wasn't for me as a first-timer but, somehow, I realised that this new type of meeting cannot be dismissed and ignored. (A step-by-step handout – perhaps even written on a piece of paper - explaining quite how to get in and what to do might be helpful). Perhaps, the Zoom meeting is not the entire future but it is certainly going to be part of it. It was the first meeting of this type, I guess, that many of us had experienced. I realised that this is a change – out of pure necessity and technological advance – that has to be supported and given time to develop spiritually. After all, we do have to keep in touch and in sight of each other.

Helen Johnson

'About...'

The aim of the Nontheist Friends Network is to provide a forum and supportive framework for Friends who regard religion as a human creation. We want to ensure that our Religious Society of Friends is an inclusive rather than an exclusive Society. We seek to explore theological and spiritual diversity and their practical implications, in respectful acceptance of different views, experiences and journeys.

NFN Steering Group members:

Trevor Bending (website), David Boulton, Gisela Creed (Clerk), Piers Maddox (Treasurer), David Parlett (Newsletter), Tim Regan, Keith Rycroft, Sarah Siddle, Roger Warren Evans (membership). Proposed changes to Members of the Steering Group are normally brought before the AGM for approval, but this year's conference cancellation means that the Group's current members need to remain in post until another opportunity presents itself.

The Newsletter appears irregularly three or four times a year. Contributions are always welcome.

Please send them by email to quakers@parlett.eu or to David Parlett at 1 Churchmore Road, London SW16 5UY