

Begin to become aware of the sounds around you in the room. Notice how the air feels on your skin.... The chair under you... the floor under your feet... Notice your breathing. And when you're ready, open your eyes.

### ***Individual reflection and response (5-10 mins)***

Invite participants to spend a few minutes reflecting on what happened for them in the visualisation – whether they actually “saw” anything or not: what ideas, feelings, images, insights came to them? If they fell asleep, that's fine. What do they know now about their vision of the way they would like the world to be?

Make paper and pens/pencils available – tell participants that they can record any words or images, either for themselves or to share with others.

Move on when the group seems ready.

### ***Worship sharing (20 minutes)***

Invite participants to share about their experience. If they drew something, they might like to show it to the group. Remind participants of worship sharing format:

- The session is in the spirit of worship, grounded in silence.
- Participants should speak when they are ready, from their own experience.
- Others should focus on listening, upholding the speaker, letting go of any desire to react or respond.
- Leave some silence between contributions so that the group remains centred.

- Participants should not speak more than once, at least before everyone has spoken.

You could place a stone or talking stick in the centre of the group for participants to hold when they speak. Let the group know how long is available for each contribution plus silence.

When everyone who wants to has shared, tell the group that you are moving on to closing worship.

### ***Closing worship (5 min, close by holding hands)***

things that are familiar. How does it look, this place? What do you feel? What can you smell? Hear?.... [*pause 1 min*]

Begin to explore this planet earth, subtly changed. Visit some of the places that you visited in your imagination before you left.... Notice how they are different, how they have changed....[*pause 2 min*]

In this world of your hopes and dreams, you have a part. How do you fit in? Perhaps you've helped it to become this way... What is your part in making it this way? However you see it, what is your part in it?... [*pause 1 min*]

How do you relate to other people, how do you treat the animals, nature, how do you fit into the cities or towns, if there are any?...[*pause 1 min*]

This world of your dreams, whatever sort of world it is, I wonder what sort of qualities of character like courage, or patience, or strength, or gentleness, what sort of characteristics, what sort of qualities you feel you need to live in that world, or to help make the world, that we live in now, the sort of world that you would like to live in.... Perhaps courage, anger, determination, persistence. Just try and think of one quality, a characteristic that you feel you need, and when you find one, hold that quality, that characteristic in your mind, and just think about it for a moment or two. Patience, love, joy, spontaneity, or whatever.... [*pause 1 min*]

Now, just notice what has come up for you... What was different in your dream world? What was your part in it?... What was the essential quality that you felt you needed to play your part?....[*pause 1 min*]

In a moment, I'm going to ask you to come back into the room and when you do, you might like to write or draw something to record what you've found.

And now imagine yourself leaving the surface of the earth. Perhaps taking off in an aircraft, or in some other way, away from the surface of the earth, seeing more and more of it, seeing the roads, the cars, the towns, the villages, seeing the fields becoming smaller and smaller,... and in your imagination you continue to leave the earth until you can no longer distinguish the details.... You can see the sea, the clouds, and the land, and the colours of the land,... and you continue, in your imagination, to move away from the earth until you begin to see it as a large sphere, filling the whole of your vision, the continents, the oceans,... and as you continue to move away from it, the world, the sphere becomes smaller, and you begin to see it as that rather beautiful blue and green, brown and white globe; our planet earth as we view it from space.... Just enjoy seeing, and being aware of that beautiful blue, green, brown, white planet: our home....[pause 1 min]

And now in your imagination, begin to return slowly towards the planet. It becomes larger... You begin to see more detail again. Outlines of the continents, and the islands,... and as you come nearer, you begin to realise that, somehow or other, it has changed. It's not quite the same. It looks the same, but you sense, it isn't.... And as you come nearer still, you can see more of the details, the mountains, the hills, the deserts, the towns, the cities, you realise how it has changed, it has become somehow or other the earth of your hopes, of your imagination, the sort of planet, the sort of world that you would always have liked to live in, for yourself. The sort of earth, the sort of planet that you would always hope that your children, your grandchildren, would be able to live in. The world of your hopes, your dreams....

And so you return to some place that's familiar, yet different, on the surface of the earth... Notice how it's different, notice how it has changed, notice the things that are the same, the

## **SESSION FOUR: WITNESSING TO OUR VALUES**

This session aims to help individuals in the group identify specific actions they can take to witness to their values and move towards their vision for the world.

### **Time guide**

Opening worship	10 min
Introduction	5 min
Whole group discussion	10 min
Small group discussion	30 min
Sharing small group outcomes	20 min
Personal next steps	15 min
Closing worship	5 min
Total	90 min approx

### **Resources**

Large sheet of paper or flipchart and several coloured pens. Paper and pens/pencils for participants to make notes, draw etc.

### **Before the session**

Prepare the diagram of spheres of action.

Prepare sheets of paper for small group discussions.

Prepare the facilitator's introduction.

Make copies for participants of text of Part 2 of booklet (available in A4 format from LWP – see contact details on back of booklet).

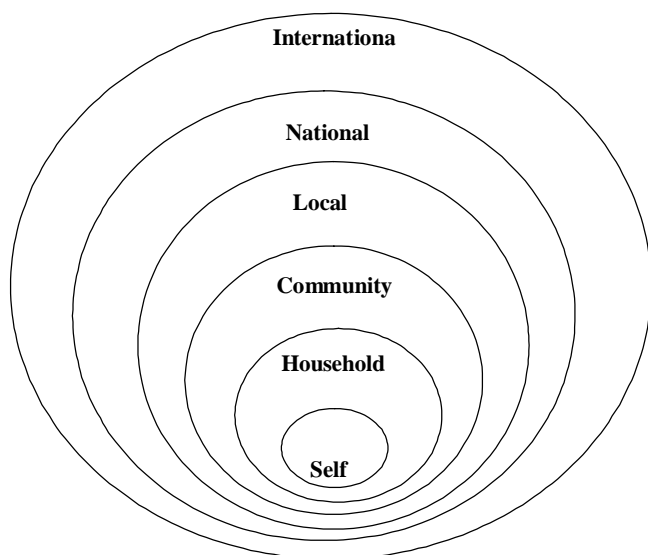
Write up the session plan on a large sheet of paper or flipchart.

## Session plan

### Opening worship (10 min)

#### Introduction (10 min)

In moving towards our vision, one of the major challenges is discerning the right steps for ourselves, given the huge range of possible starting points. You might find it helpful to consider the range of different people and organisations that could play a role in bringing about your vision. They might be in any of the spheres shown on the following diagram – from household to international.



**Taking Action: Multiple Spheres**

thoughts. But even if they are not comfortable visualising, it might be worth taking part in the process and seeing what comes up for them.

The following should be read at a relaxed pace, in a calm voice with good modulation. Leave silent spaces of 20-30 seconds (marked by dots....) or longer where marked, for participants to follow the instructions in their minds.

Start by making yourself as comfortable and relaxed as you can – just take a moment to that. You might want to put your feet flat on the floor. Move if you need to.... Listen for a moment to the sounds you can hear outside the room.... Be aware of how you're sitting on the chair.... Just let yourself relax.... Let the feeling of relaxation spread through your body.... Be aware of your toes – let those relax.... your ankles.... your calves.... your knees and thighs.... Let the feeling of relaxation spread up through your fingers.... up through your arms.... your shoulders.... and your neck.... Let the muscles of your face relax.... And if you're comfortable with it, let your eyes close.

I'd like you to imagine yourself in some place that you know well. Just be aware of it, notice it.... Notice the things you like about it, that you dislike. Notice what you can see; hear; smell; feel.... [pause 1 min]

Now think of some other place where you really enjoy being – at home, on a warm beach, the top of a mountain, wherever. Somewhere you enjoy being.... [pause 1 min]

Now think of a town or city that you know, its traffic, its buildings, shops, factories, factory chimneys.... [pause 1 min]

Now, just for a minute or two explore in your imagination different places around the country, around the world.... [pause 2 min]

Write up the session plan on a large sheet of paper or flipchart.

## Session plan

### **Opening worship (10 min)**

#### **Facilitator's introduction (5-10 min)**

Visions of a changed world have long been part of Jewish and Christian spirituality. From Micah 4:3: "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nether shall they make war any more" to Revelation 21:3-4 "He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more." Early Quakers took up this heritage, looking forward to an imminent transformation that would bring about the Kingdom of God. The Quaker Testimonies emerge from a sense of being on the threshold of The Kingdom. By living the life of The Kingdom, we make the transformation possible.

We might have a vision of 1) the kind of life we would like as individuals; 2) the kind of society we would like to live in; 3) our environment, and the kind of relationship we would like to have with the Earth. We might also have a vision for the way the Spirit connects with these three spheres, and connects them to each other. People are likely to place their emphasis in different places.

#### **Discussion in pairs (10 mins)**

What are the key aspects of my vision for a changed world?

#### **Visualisation (30 min)**

Explain that while many people respond well to visualisations, some do not. Participants always have the option of sitting out the session – or just listening or making notes of their own

The huge range of possible actions can lead to indecision or even despair, especially on complex and difficult issues such as sustainability. It can be hard to choose priorities for a group such as a Quaker meeting. But one of the advantages of looking at our priorities together is that we don't all have to do everything. Some of us may be called to change our own lives and households, while others are called to engage with national or international government or business. Very often, if we start with action in the sphere that feels easiest or most important for us, we are later drawn to action in other spheres.

#### **Whole group discussion (10 min)**

Draw the diagram on a flipchart or large piece of paper. Ask the group for ideas about people and organisations they might wish to influence in each of the spheres. Write each idea in as it is offered.

#### **Small group discussion (30 min)**

Ask the group to divide into threes or fours. Give each small group a large sheet of paper divided into four quadrants as shown, with titles for each quadrant as shown. Also give each group a different coloured pen.

Our values	Challenges
Our visions	Possible actions

Ask participants to draw on the previous two sessions, and on their reflections since, to fill in the quadrants. Emphasise:

- 1) that they should try and note everybody's ideas – don't try to come to unity at this point
- 2) that possible actions may be in their own lives, in the meeting, or possibly some other group or situation in which they are involved

Tell them how much time they have for the exercise.

If you plan to share outcomes in a plenary session, ask groups to decide who will report back.

Give time warnings throughout the exercise – tell them when they have had one quarter, one half, three quarters of the time. Remind them to make sure everyone is heard. Make sure they are all finishing off a couple of minutes before reconvening the whole group.

### ***Sharing small group outcomes (15 min)***

This could be a refreshment break during which participants can look at the flipchart sheets produced by the other small groups. Alternatively, run as a whole group session (in which case, groups need to have chosen who will speak for them).

### ***Personal next steps (20 min)***

Put out paper and pens for participants.

Ask participants to reflect for 5 minutes on their personal next steps in living their values; ask them to write down one “next step”; then invite them to share (using creative listening), either going around the group or allowing each person to speak when they feel ready. Warn the group how much time is available for each contribution.

### ***Homework***

Hand out copies of the text of Part 2 of this booklet and ask participants to read them if possible in preparation for the next session.

### ***Closing worship (5 min)***

## **SESSION THREE: VISIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE WORLD**

This session encourages participants to find ways of expressing their sense of the way the world ought to be, and of the paths that might lead there.

### **Time guide**

Opening worship	10 min
Introduction	5-10 min
Discussion in pairs	10 min
Visualisation	30 min
Individual reflection and response	10 min
Worship sharing	20 min
Closing worship	5 min
Total	90 min approx

### **Resources**

Large sheet of paper or flipchart and several coloured pens. Paper and pens/pencils for participants to make notes, draw etc.

Visualisation script. The visualisation may be available later on CD.

### **Before the session**

Practise reading the visualisation script. Make sure you are leaving long enough gaps for participants to follow your instructions. It should take about 30 minutes.

Prepare your introduction.

They should split the group time equally and follow the practice of creative listening (this involves focused, reflective listening without interruption or comment: see glossary in Appendix A).

### ***Feedback and discussion (20 min)***

Invite participants to share what came up for them in the small groups. Remind them not to repeat what others have said but to speak from their own experience. This time could be taken as worship sharing or free-flowing discussion. If you do decide on worship sharing, remind participants of the following guidelines:

- The session is in the spirit of worship, grounded in silence.
- Participants should speak when they are ready, from their own experience.
- Others should focus on listening, upholding the speaker, letting go of any desire to react or respond.
- Leave some silence between contributions so that the group remains centred.
- Participants should not speak more than once, at least before everyone has spoken.

You could place a stone or talking stick in the centre of the group for participants to hold when they speak. Let the group know how long is available for each contribution plus silence.

When everyone who wants to has shared, tell the group that you are moving on to closing worship.

### ***Closing worship (5 min, close by holding hands)***

## **SESSION FIVE: DEVELOPING A WITNESS COMMUNITY**

This session enables participants to think about the ways in which they can support each other in their witness, and develop and maintain a stronger sense of being a witnessing community.

### **Time guide**

Opening worship	10 min
Introduction	10 min
Reflections on community	15 min
Developing a witness community	25 min
Moving forward as a group	25 min
Closing worship	5 min
Total	90 min approx

### **Resources**

Large sheet of paper or flipchart and several coloured pens. Paper and pens/pencils for participants to make notes, draw etc.

### **Before the session**

Write up the session plan on a large sheet of paper or flipchart.

Write up the questions for reflections on community on another sheet.

## Session plan

### ***Introduction (10 min)***

Community participation is in decline. Reasons include busy lives, dispersed families, a focus on home entertainment, and more generally a shift in the “spirit of the age” towards individualism. Most of us would not want to live in a traditional, convention-bound community. On the other hand, many have glimpsed the treasure that is to be found in vibrant community life, perhaps on a spiritual retreat or at some other gathering.

Can we find some way of building stronger communities while retaining our sense of individuality? Can we experience the tension between our inner leadings and the “sense of the meeting” as something constructive, a source of empowering spiritual energy?

### ***Reflections on community (15 min)***

Ask participants to reflect for about 5 minutes on their own experiences of being part of one particular community – perhaps at school or in a religious organisation. Display the following questions and read them out:

- What was positive and what was negative?
- What worked for you as individuals and what was difficult?
- Was this a good community?

Invite participants to share their thoughts in pairs, allowing 5 minutes each.

### ***Developing a witness community (25 min)***

Ask participants to write down the ways in which they feel a community could support them in their witness to their values.

Take participants responses in the form of a thought shower (see glossary in Appendix A): ask participants to call out their thoughts; to be brief; to make sure everyone has a chance to speak; to refrain from commenting on each other’s thoughts at this stage: there will be time for discussion later. One facilitator should write the thoughts up on the flipchart using language as close as possible to that offered.

Participants could be prompted to identify values that they would like to see reflected 1) in their own lives; 2) in their relationships with others and in their community, Quaker or otherwise; and 3) in the wider world.

### ***Individual reflection (5-10 mins) followed by small group discussion of values (20 mins)***

Display the questions to be asked prominently:

1. How do I live out my values? What helps me?
2. What values would I like to live better? What stops me?

In introducing this activity, it may be helpful for a facilitator to model the type of response being sought, by briefly and frankly describing one way in which they live out their values, and an area where they would like to live closer to their values.

Follow the general guidance in the introduction on working with small groups. Make notepaper and pens/pencils available for participants to write down or draw their thoughts.

Ask the group divide into groups of three, and to start with a period of silent reflection. It is probably best for you to tell them when the time for reflection is up – allow 5-10 minutes. Then ask them to take turns addressing the two questions.

Write up the session plan on a large sheet of paper or flipchart.

Write out the questions for individual reflection on a large sheet of paper or flipchart.

## **Session plan**

### ***Opening worship (10 min)***

#### ***Facilitator's introduction (5-10 min)***

While Quakers do not have a single shared theology or belief system, we do tend to share a range of values, in particular those expressed in the testimonies to simplicity, truth, integrity, equality, justice and peace. We also emphasise the values central to the Christian tradition – such as love, compassion and forgiveness. We share an understanding that our lives should speak for our values.

Even when we do share values, often they come from very different sources. We are all influenced by our own psychological make-up, our childhood and later experiences, our spirituality, theology, the ideas we have been exposed to and our personal circumstances.

In this session we aim to gain a better understanding of each other's values, and perhaps a little of their foundations. We will ask which values are reflected in our lives, and which we find hard to measure up to. This is not about guilt: above all we aim to affirm each other in the way we are living our values, and to understand where the challenges lie.

#### ***Thought shower on values (15 mins)***

Introduce the questions for this part of the session: what values are important to us, as individuals and as Quakers? the Testimonies; other values?

Some might like to draw images or diagrams. Allow 5-10 minutes.

When everyone is ready, invite them to share their thoughts with the group (either a go-round, or in no particular order, when ready).

### ***Moving forward as a group (25 min)***

Display and briefly introduce the three ideas for ongoing groups from Part 2 of the booklet:

1. Meetings for eating – regular sessions with a bring-and-share meal, including listening and support for each others' concerns and projects, and a variety of themed sessions.
2. Action learning groups – small groups, committing to meet over a limited period to reflect together in a relatively tight structure on the development of concerns and projects.
3. Spiritual journey groups – small groups, committing to meet over a limited period, using a relatively tight structure to reflect together on the way the spirit is moving in participants' lives.

Bear in mind that some participants may have read the descriptions of the three approaches, others may not. Invite questions to clarify the approaches. Allow responses to come from participants who have done the reading.

Invite participants to share their thoughts:

- Would they like to be part of an ongoing group?

- What kind of group would they like – would one of these formats work for them or would they like to try something else?

If appropriate, arrange a time for a future meeting for more detailed planning.

***Closing worship (5 min)***

**SESSION TWO. OUR VALUES, OUR LIVES**

This session explores our values, the way we live them in our lives, and their links to the Quaker Testimonies. It seeks to affirm Friends in the values they are living, and to begin to empower them to live more congruently with their ideals.

**Time guide**

Opening worship	10 min
Facilitator's introduction	5-10 min
Thought-shower on values	15 min
Individual reflection	5-10 min
Small group discussion of values	20 min
Feedback and discussion	20 min
Closing worship	5 min
Total	90 min approx

**Resources**

Large sheets of paper or flipchart and several coloured pens

Paper and pens/pencils for participants to make notes, draw etc.

**Before the session**

If possible, contact members of the group to make sure they are coming. It may seem unnecessary but it really can make a difference if they feel that their presence matters to the group!

Prepare the facilitator's introduction – 500 to 1000 words or one to two sides of typed A4.

Where you would most like to meet – in the meeting house? In somebody's home?

Would you like to have a meal together each time you meet?  
Will it be on a bring-and-share basis?

*Closing worship* (5 min., close by holding hands)

## **Part 2. Maintaining an ongoing community process**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Scott Peck, in *The Different Drum*, writes of four stages in the development of a community:

1. Pseudocommunity. People with different worldviews coexist by avoiding controversy. Such a group is not able to achieve much. Its assumptions are implicit and unexpressed. It is an unconscious community.
2. Chaos. Conflicting views, opinions, needs and judgements are expressed but not heard. Participants attempt to heal or convert each other. This phase is very painful and usually results in retreat to pseudocommunity.
3. Emptiness. Participants let go of their own preconceptions. This is a phase of silent listening.
4. Community. Differing views are expressed, listened to and valued. Conflict occurs but a collective effort is made to find creative ways through. The sense of community is expressed through a shared story or "myth".

Quaker traditions place particular emphasis on the skills underlying stages 3 and 4, although we do not always practice them and often slip back to stages 1 and 2. One of the major barriers in reaching true community is our sense of busyness and lack of time. Another is the habit that we have developed of thinking of ourselves as separate individuals, free of the traditional ties of a community.

There is no sense in trying to rebuild the communities of the past – where individuals had well-defined roles and traditions were carried on without reflection. We need to find a new form of community where we acknowledge our diverse truths and

paths, and yet can find the Truth – the shared meaning – that binds us together. Such a community might provide the support for individuals in discerning the spirit at work in their lives, and paths along which it is leading them. It might also provide a safe space in which individuals can dig the foundations for their spiritual life by exploring sources of difficulty and conflict.

The following pages offer three suggestions for developing groups for mutual listening and discernment. These approaches are drawn both from our own experience within the Living Witness Project, and from the practices of other Quaker groups and non-Quaker organisations. They include:

1. Meetings for eating: regular gatherings to share experiences, questions and learning over a shared meal. This is the approach adopted by Oxford Friends' Group on Sustainable Living (GOSLings).
2. Action learning groups: more structured meetings for a small number of people, addressing set questions about their work for a better world in a context of creative listening. This approach has been developed in co-counselling and the British Permaculture Association.
3. Worship-sharing sessions where participants reflect together on their spiritual journeys and ministry. This approach is currently being used by Cotteridge Friends. The guidelines suggested here draw on their approach, and also on Rose Mary Dougherty's book, *Group Spiritual Direction*.

### **MEETINGS FOR EATING**

Perhaps the most attractive approach for Friends developing a witness group of some kind is to have regular shared meals. Oxford meeting has a Group on Sustainable Living

### ***Paired listening on concerns (10 min)***

Ask participants to pair up with someone they don't know particularly well. Ask them two questions:

- What would you like to see changed in the world?
- What do you hope might come from this course that might help in bringing about that change?

Ask them to spend a couple of minutes reflecting, and then take about three minutes each to respond to both questions. Again, ask them to listen without interruption or comment. Allow a couple of minutes at the end for them to discuss what has come up. Give them time checks to make sure everyone gets a chance to speak.

### ***Feedback: mapping our concerns (15 min)***

Bring the group back together. Hand out a post-it note to each person. Make sure everyone has a pen. Ask them to write one concern on the post-it. Go round the group, asking each person to read out what they've written and give you their post-it.

Stick the post-its to a large sheet of paper or flip-chart. Try to cluster them around similar themes. Ask the group to suggest better ways of clustering them.

Repeat the process (perhaps with a different colour post-it) for hopes for the course.

### ***Planning future sessions (15 min)***

Remind participants that they will get most out of the course, and that the group has the best chance of developing a strong sense of community, if they can attend all sessions. Try to identify together times and dates for the rest of the meetings that all participants can manage. Explore with the group:

Write up the session plan on a large sheet of paper or flipchart – keep visible throughout the session.

Write up the course plan another sheet, alternatively make photocopies for participants.

Prepare what you want to say for the facilitator's introduction and check that it will not take more than 10 minutes. You might like to make copies of the facilitator's introduction above available to participants (to be included in resource pack).

## **Session plan**

### ***Opening worship (10 min)***

#### ***Facilitator's introduction (10 min)***

You might like to draw on the introduction to Part One, above, including telling participants about the structure of the course as a whole, the content of the five sessions.

#### ***Participant introductions (20 min)***

Ask participants to take turns introducing themselves, going around the group. Unless all are well-known to each other, they should start with their name. Ask them to explain briefly what has brought them to this group. They might like to talk about their own needs and hopes, their hopes for the group or your Quaker meeting, and/or their concerns for the world.

Ask them to refrain from interrupting each other or commenting on others' contributions. You might find it helpful to provide a talking stick or stone that can be placed in the middle of the group and picked up and held by whoever is speaking. This helps to focus listeners' attention on that person and discourage interruptions and comments.

Make sure the group knows beforehand how much time is available for each contribution.

(GOSLings) which meets once a month. Each meeting starts with a shared meal (from about 7.15 to 8.15) followed by a themed discussion, worship sharing session or presentation from an outside speaker. But the meal is the centre of the event.

Typically, about 10-15 Friends attend the meetings. They always sit around a square of tables and start with silence. Then, once everyone has helped themselves to food and they've had a bit of time to chat, they move into a sharing session. People around the table take turns to speak briefly. They might share news about projects or events they are involved in, make suggestions for the future activities of the group, or raise concerns about developments in local transport or planning. Initially, the group used an egg timer to limit contributions to four minutes, but they have become more relaxed about timing.

The group tries to provide food for the mind, heart, spirit and soul, as well as for the body. They find that it is important to vary the approach from month to month. Friends have a variety of interests and preferred approaches for exploring the issues. One meeting might include a practical discussion – e.g. of changes being planned in the meeting house, or of a tree-planting project. Another might have an invited speaker on climate change. Another might be a celebration of spring or summer. From time to time the group has a sharing session where participants bring readings, music or other contributions. They sometimes explore the spiritual foundations of an issue, through worship sharing. On one occasion, an outside facilitator organised the group to cook together and then take turns around the table to share about their relationships with food.

While one person usually leads the sessions, GOSLings have found it helpful to have an organising group of three who share

the planning. They can then help to keep an eye on time and, when necessary, encourage more articulate Friends to curtail their contributions.

If you would like to know more about the activities of our group, the way it has worked, and ways it has overcome difficulties, please do get in touch with Laurie Michaelis, 01865 308306 or [laurie@livingwitness.org.uk](mailto:laurie@livingwitness.org.uk).

## **SESSION ONE: TAKING STOCK**

This session is an introduction to the course. It is an opportunity for the group to meet, get to know one another a little better, and identify participants' concerns for building a better world.

### **Time guide**

Opening worship	10 min
Facilitators' introduction	10 min
Participant introductions	20 min
Pair discussion of concerns	10 min
Feedback to group: mapping our concerns	15 min
Planning future sessions	15 min
Closing worship	5 min
Total	90 min approx

### **Resources**

Large sheet of paper and several coloured pens

Paper and pens/pencils for participants to make notes, draw etc.

A pad of post-it notes. You might like to find ones in pastel colours and shapes such as flowers.

### **Before the session**

Get in touch with all participants and make sure they know the time and venue of the session. Ask them to bring their diaries.

The five sessions in this course are designed to lead Friends through a series of steps:

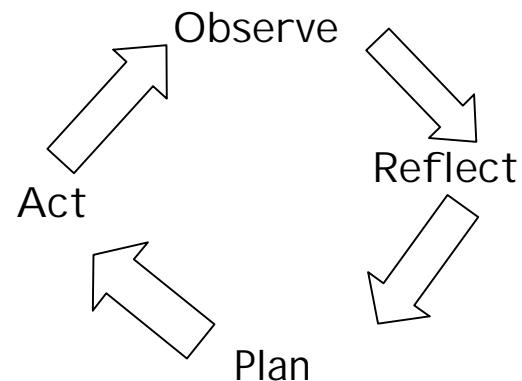
1. In the first session, we aim to begin to come together as a group, and to identify our concerns: ways in which we would like the world to be different.
2. In session two, we begin to share our personal values, the way we currently express them in our lives, and their links to the Quaker testimonies.
3. In session three, we express our visions for a changed world (or for “improving the Kingdom”)
4. In session four, we identify actions that we can take in our own lives, our meetings, and in the wider world, to further our Quaker values
5. And in session five, we consider what we have learned, and whether we would like to commit to a further process to support our witness.

This first session is an opportunity to start listening to the voice within and to each other

## **ACTION LEARNING GROUPS**

Action learning is an approach that has developed in a number of settings. At its simplest, it entails a cycle of action and reflection (see figure below). This cycle is a discipline that can enable a development in consciousness and in the quality of our action or witness. It can be applied, for example, in our individual lives through the use of a spiritual journal, and in our relationships, communities and workplaces through regular review meetings. The approach has been used in different forms for community empowerment by human development organisations, for personal learning in co-counselling, and in the development of better practices in health and education.

### **The Action Learning Cycle**



Action learning groups are designed to support people in working through this cycle. For our purposes, the kind of action we are concerned with is our witness to our values and visions – whether we describe them as “sustainable living”, the Quaker testimonies, or anything else.

The approach suggested here is based on that used in Living Witness Project Link Group meetings, developed by Lizz Roe. The process is designed to let each person in the group work

through three of the steps in the action learning cycle: observe, reflect and plan. Action has to take place between sessions.

In one action learning group session, each person should have time to work through the steps. Groups should be small (3-4 members) so that everyone has a turn without anyone becoming too tired. It is suggested that the group commit to at least four sessions initially.

Our suggested session format is as follows:

Choose initial roles (these will rotate during the session)

- One of you should be the first focus person, answering the questions.
- One of you should be the timekeeper, who asks the questions.
- One person takes notes, which will be given to the focus person at the end as their record of what has been said.

Start with a period of worship (10-15 min).

The timekeeper should then check that the focus person is ready, and ask the first question: *What is going on in your witness at present?*

The rest of the group should listen attentively, without interruption or comment. Positive and open body language, nods, smiles etc. are useful, but no words.

After five minutes, ask the next question: *What is going well and what has been difficult?*

After a further five minutes, ask *What is your long term vision?*

And after five more minutes: *What are your next achievable steps?*

Tell them when the final five minutes is up.

If the focus person doesn't need the full five minutes for one of the questions, maintain silence: something may come up. If

## Part 1. Stepping Stones: Finding our Ministry

### INTRODUCTION

When Friends come together to talk about environmental issues, we are usually clear that we share a deep concern. We aspire to a world where our Quaker testimonies to simplicity, truth, equality and peace are lived out. There is also a growing sense that we have a testimony to the environment. We agree that we must heal or amend our relationship with the Earth. But Friends are not in agreement about exactly what should be done, who should do it, or what would work.

The central theme of this course is exploring and developing our **corporate** Quaker witness to our values. This means finding a way past the confusion of priorities and worldviews, our feelings of guilt or inadequacy, and the expectation that somebody else will find the solution. We must dip deep into our well of spiritual resources, and ask what it is that we as Quakers bring to the challenge of building a sustainable society.

Perhaps we are called to “wrestle with the angel” – the spirit of the age whose values and assumptions permeate and shape our individual and collective life. Angel-wrestling is a complex art in which Friends have considerable experience. It requires careful preparation – listening to the leadings of the spirit within and in our worshipping communities. It involves being the change we wish to see – for our own integrity and sanity and to show others a possible way forward. And it involves speaking the truth in love – to each other, to others in our local community, to those in power nationally.

they haven't finished, tell them it's time to move on. It is important that you keep the time discipline so that each person has an equal share of the group's attention.

If the focus person wants, the group can spend 5-10 minutes giving feedback in worship-sharing mode. Otherwise, have 5-10 minutes silent worship before rotating roles, so that someone else becomes the focus person.

Close with a few minutes silent worship.

Before starting work with an action learning group, it is most important that you agree on the format and ground rules. Lizz recommends the following minimum rules:

**Double confidentiality:** anything shared by a focus person in the sessions should not be spoken about outside by other members of the group, even to each other or the focus person. If they want to speak about it, it is up to them to raise the issue outside the confidentiality boundary of the group.

**No "rescuing":** If someone is going through difficulties, let them talk through it without offering help, during the session *or afterwards*. If they want your help, they must ask for it outside the session. Your role in the action learning group is simply to support them in their own reflection process.

**No "tagging along":** If a focus person describes something they are doing that sounds really exciting, do not ask if you can get involved, during the session *or afterwards*. If they want to involve you, it is up to them to invite you outside the session.

For more detailed guidance on running an action learning group, and to hear about other people's experience, contact Lizz Roe: [lizz@britpost.com](mailto:lizz@britpost.com); 01865 767060.

The sessions use a variety of approaches, including thought showers, silent reflection, guided visualisation, worship sharing, paired listening and creative listening. These approaches are explained in Appendix A. Although some members of your group may be uncomfortable with one or more of these approaches, the mix is important in addressing the needs of different people. A varied approach can also help to maintain interest and support a learning process.

Several of the sessions include some kind of work in small groups. Friends who have been involved in Hearts and Minds Prepared will be used to the format. Others may be uncomfortable with the approach, or they may think it better for everybody's contribution to be heard by the whole group. However, some Friends are much more comfortable speaking one-to-one or in a small group, and their voices will rarely be heard in the full group. Friends who are vocal about their dislike of small groups are sometimes the ones who speak most easily in larger groups.

In order for small groups to work well it is important that facilitators:

- Remind participants to be aware of confidentiality: unless otherwise agreed, what is shared should not be repeated beyond the small groups.
- Remind them that participation is voluntary: they are free not to speak during their share of the time.
- Give appropriate time warnings to make sure the groups share the time available.
- If possible, provide space for some groups outside the main meeting room, especially if any participants have difficulty hearing when several conversations are going on at once.

cover). *LWP on the Road* offers a range of event programmes, listed in Appendix B, which can be adapted to your needs.

## **Guidance for facilitators**

The sessions in this booklet are designed to take participants through a process, and it is best if all are able to commit to attending throughout.

The sessions are likely to work best with a facilitator or two co-facilitators with some prior experience, e.g. from running a Hearts and Minds Prepared course. No prior experience is required of the participants.

The recommended group size is in the region of 8 to 10. Facilitators can participate in most of the exercises.

Each session is designed to last about 90 minutes, but it could be extended with time at the beginning for participants to share about whatever is going on for them at the moment. Sessions could also include refreshment breaks, which provide useful opportunities for informal conversation.

It is a good idea to prepare well – make sure you are comfortable with the session plan. Adapt the timing and other details if necessary for your group.

Sessions should take place in a room where interruptions are unlikely. Make sure the temperature is about right for participants. Set chairs out in a circle with comfortable legroom but close enough to hold hands.

The main resources required for the sessions are paper and pens or pencils. The facilitators will need something to write on that everyone can see – whether this is a whiteboard, flipchart, or simply a large piece of paper laid out on a table.

## **SPIRITUAL JOURNEY GROUPS**

A further option for a mutual support group, focused less on practical action and more on our spiritual path, is the use of spiritual journey groups. The suggestions here are based on an approach developed by Cotteridge Friends, and also on Rose Mary Doherty's book *Group Spiritual Direction*.

Cotteridge Friends suggest the following principles:

1. Participants provide trusting focused reflective listening for one another as in "Creative Listening" or "worship sharing". As such the proceedings are confidential to the group themselves and should not be spoken about elsewhere.
2. Each group is self-managing (responsible for itself) making a contract at the first session to run for 4-6 sessions on mutually agreed dates. Group members are expected to attend every session in order to develop real confidence in one another and build relationship.
3. Each group is expected to be of about 5-6 people – kept small to encourage close trusting relationships. (Partners will not normally be in the same group so that all can relate to each other in a similar way.)
4. Each group will agree their own time parameters for meetings. The norm suggested is 90 minutes in session together with opportunity either before or after for more social exchange over a drink.
5. At the end of each session an agreement would be made about who will open the next session and the approach to be used.
6. At the end of each sequence the group may choose together to run for another season or may dissolve with options of different groups being formed.

7. Each group will have a convenor, who will monitor for the group – the process, time and contract management only.

The group will need to decide whether the convenorship should rotate among members from session to session.

It is probably most helpful to divide the time equally among group members – i.e. 15-20 minutes each.

The group will probably want to start with a period of worship, and it may wish to close with a period of open worship sharing.

Members will probably find it helpful to have 2-4 questions to answer. e.g. drawn from the following:

- How is the spirit moving in my life at present? Or What are the blessings in my life at present?
- What has been difficult?
- Where do I feel the spirit is leading me now?
- Where are my current areas of learning and growth?

The group may wish to allocate a set time for comment or feedback following each person's turn, or it may wish to leave it to the person to decide whether they want feedback. If so, this should be offered in a spirit of worship sharing, or the form of supportive questioning adopted in meetings for clearness.

## Be the Change

### Introduction

This booklet draws on the experience of the Living Witness Project over the last three years. From mid-2002, the project has brought together a growing network of meetings, exploring and developing our corporate witness to sustainable living. We have held a number of workshops and retreats in meetings around Britain. The study group suggestions in the booklet are based on approaches that have been tried with several groups.

Although the Living Witness Project focuses on “sustainability”, we understand that term very broadly. It brings together Quaker concerns about, and testimonies on, peace and non-violence, justice and equality, truth and simplicity. This course may be useful for Quaker groups with a wide range of social and peace concerns.

The first part of the booklet provides stepping stones to finding our particular contribution or ministry. In a course of five study group sessions, it offers ways of listening to each other's concerns, values and visions, and of developing strategies that can support practical action by individuals and groups.

The second part of the booklet suggests some approaches to maintaining and developing groups in our meetings as communities of Quaker witness. It offers three possible formats for ongoing meetings where Friends can share their spiritual journeys and develop their ministry.

While this is a “do-it-yourself” guide, there is plenty of support available from Quaker Green Action and the Living Witness Project. If you would like experienced facilitators to come and lead an event in your area – whether for an afternoon or a weekend – please do get in touch (see contact details on back

## **Appendix A. Glossary of key terms**

### **Creative listening**

Listening focused on the speaker – without interruption or comment, but providing positive visual cues such as nods and smiles.

### **Paired Listening**

One-to-one listening, as creative listening.

### **Talking stick**

An object such as a wooden stick or stone that can be placed in the centre of the group and picked up by anyone wishing to speak. Alternatively it can be passed around the group. Only the person holding the talking stick should speak – others should listen without interruption or comment.

### **Thought shower**

This is sometimes called a “brainstorm”. The group calls out ideas which the facilitator writes up on a flipchart or board. Ideas should be short and easy to write up. There should be no comment on any idea that has been called out.

### **Worship sharing**

This is a bit like a Quaker version of creative listening. The format is a meeting for worship in which participants are encouraged to minister on a theme. It starts with a period of silence during which the group centres down. Participants should only speak once, at least until everyone has spoken or indicated that they do not intend to speak. Silence should be left between contributions. As in a normal meeting for worship, contributions may build on what comes before, but they should not be direct replies.

# Be the Change

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## **Appendix B. LWP on the Road**

If you would like a day or weekend event for Friends in your meeting or area, please contact LWP (details on back cover). Here are some ideas. We can also create an event to suit your needs.

### ***Walk Cheerfully – Step Lightly***

Starts from values and visions of participants to explore how we can build a sustainable world. We learn how sustainability can be fun, connecting quality of life, strong communities, and reverence for the world around us, grounded in the spirit.

### ***Quakers and Climate Change***

Mainstream responses to climate change focus on clean technology and market measures. This workshop explores what our testimonies to simplicity, social justice, and peace imply for our lifestyles and practical actions we can take.

### ***Quakers and Permaculture***

Permaculture is a world movement for the regeneration of land, communities and people. This course explores the many potential synergies between the Permaculture movement and Quakers.

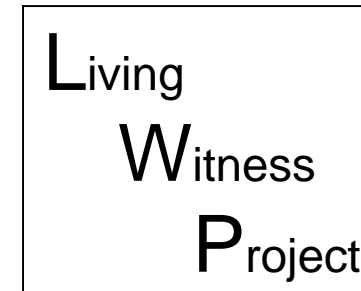
### ***Meetings for Eating***

For a special event in your meeting. Experience a meeting for worship for eating, using shared food as an opportunity for community building. If appropriate kitchen facilities are available, it could include cooking creatively together.

### ***Foundations for Sustainability: Three Spiritualities***

Explore differences and similarities in our spiritual paths. We experiment with various forms of individual, collective and green spirituality and connect it to our practical witness to the testimonies.

The Living Witness Project is a growing network of Quaker meetings and groups in Britain, exploring our corporate witness to sustainable living. We have a regular newsletter and a Link Group which meets twice yearly. Do join us!



If you would like:

- further copies of this booklet
- support materials such as sheets to photocopy
- to arrange a LWP on the Road event
- further information about the Living Witness Project, Quaker Green Action and the resources they can provide

please contact:

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# Be the Change

**Five study group sessions exploring  
Quaker witness to our values**

**Draft for testing and comment**

**Laurie Michaelis**

**(contact details on back cover)**

**April 2005**