



Visit with Philip Corrie-Hawes

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1. Introduction

At the request of Southeast Scotland Area Meeting, Laura and Henry met with Philip at his home to discuss his application for membership. After a pleasant lunch prepared by Philip's husband [name here please, sorry for bad memory!], we settled in to worship, during which some excerpts from QF&P 11.1 were read. Philip then shared with us his background and the ways in which his involvement with Friends had developed.

2. Philip's journey towards membership

Philip went to CofE schools, but let go of any idea of religion on leaving school. He considered staunchly that he was an atheist, while recognising that that was a belief in itself. He now sees that ever since then there's been a pattern of moving towards faith, stepping back, looking for faith, something that was missing, not finding it, trying again. Looking for a way to make a contribution to people's lives, a key step came when he took a job as support worker in a mental health setting, after years in financial services. But after 3 years or so he burned out, and realised that he had taken on more than he could manage. Counselling helped him understand what he needed as an individual, and that he was a 'highly sensitive person' (HSP). Digging deeper, looking back at how hiding his sexuality had meant always being on guard, wearing a mask, enabled Philip to look more deeply at his own unmet needs. 'Non-violent communication' (NVC), introduced by his new boss, also helped. HSP and NVC have helped Philip understand his yearning to contribute, to participate. Realising this made sense of things he had done in the past without quite realising why, for example a year as a Samaritan, and time as a citizen advocate.

But there was still something missing. Philip began, privately and tentatively, to explore faith. He recognised that because of the environment he grew up in he was culturally Christian, but he doesn't take Christian doctrine or the Bible literally. The Bible has stories about how to live, without being historically true. He began looking for a religious context that was consistent with that, *and* that wouldn't find his sexuality a problem. He experimented with local churches, read about them extensively online, then contacted someone online asking them "This is me, a gay man, what can you say to me?" First-time response was always positive, but beyond that there was usually some vagueness, along with some explicit negatives. He had looked at Quakers quite early on, along with Humanism, Buddhism and meditation. It took a long time to get to the point of attending a MfW, needed to be hopeful it was going to work, and would be OK with his husband. He was supportive, and Philip got a positive response to an email to Laurie Naumann.

So, he went to his first Meeting for Worship in Kirkcaldy. On the day it was good, supportive, "I felt quite held". There was no quaking, but an atmosphere he could tap in to. He was welcomed, and asked to introduce himself, which he wasn't expecting, but despite some anxiety he was able to do so. Drove home smiling: "I've found something I want to go back to". That was two years ago, and he's been attending regularly since then. He feels that he's now reached the foundation of where he needs to be. He's not done, but he has the basis for exploring further from what is now his spiritual home.

2.1. Where Philip is now

He's very engaged with Friends in a practical sense: he's the Central Fife LM treasurer, he goes to Area Meeting when he can, he's organising the new monthly MfW in Dunfermline. Being in the meeting has become an important strand of what keeps him well. He does still struggle to define simply what it is, what I get from it, but he's getting better at living with being unable to do that. He feels fortunate that Britain Yearly Meeting is part of the 'liberal' Quaker tradition. Sitting in silence *and* going regularly to the discussion groups are both part of what has become a very big piece of the jigsaw which makes him who he is.

He did feel the need need to check one last time, it seemed, about whether Quakers were the right answer for him, and so went to the local Episcopal service, and realised halfway through that this was not for him. He is at home in the Meeting, with people who accept him for who he is. All views are heard. He doesn't feel any expectation to say something clever. When ministry comes, it will be given to him.

For him, membership is an outward symbol of commitment, a pledge. It is a kind of label, but the symbolism of offering himself to this part of his life is in making a deeper commitment. And, that he has something to offer, as he's already begun to do.

He sometimes regrets our inability as Quakers to broadcast what we have to offer more effectively. You don't have to adhere to a set of rules, which is so refreshing. He's loving that he's found a community he can be a part of and where he can feel safe. What binds us together is the style of worship, the way we agree on business, viewing what people say without blame or criticism.

He couldn't fit himself to the mode of all the other churches he looked at, whereas Quakerism offered a place to just be, without signing a declaration that you believe certain things.

When asked about Meeting for Worship for Business, Philip noted that we didn't seek consensus, nor did we vote, but looked for where the spirit leads. Not "this is right, this is wrong", but being in the moment, being led to take a particular path at this time. We all take responsibility.

The visitors let Philip know that they were touched by the sense of journey from a base that he had expressed, and grateful that they had shared it with him. We closed with a comfortable silence, in no doubt that Philip's membership in our Society was already a reality, now ready for recognition by Area Meeting.