

Quaker Concern

Seeing the Light even in the people we disagree with

By Matthew Legge



Mel Burns, CFSC's new Peace Program Coordinator

I recently had the chance to talk about life and service work with our newest staff member—Peace Program Coordinator, Mel Burns. The topics ranged from light reading and podcasts to seeing the Light in people we disagree with or find challenging.

Matt: What has it been like joining the CFSC staff?

Mel: I've been delighted by the incredible depth of knowledge and experience on the staff team. I've remarked to many of my friends that it feels like I'm working with my heroes everyday, and those heroes are equally (and strangely) excited to work with me too. The sense of excitement among all the staff to see the work of CFSC flourish is tangible, and infectious.

Matt: What is your connection to Quakerism?

Mel: I first discovered Quakers while living in New Zealand through a 12-step group hosted at the Meeting House in Auckland. I remember feeling very at "peace" there, and intrigued by the style of worship/sharing. It reminded me greatly of how many Indigenous communities use the shape of a circle to create safety and equity. I didn't start intentionally exploring Quakerism until just before the pandemic. I was excited to find a small worship group in my city and found the group a much needed balm during a rough period of transition in my life. As a queer person, it was one of the few faith-based spaces where I felt safe and nurtured.

Following that first venture into Meetings, I've been a regular, and a fully "convinced" Quaker since 2020.

Matt: What drew you to working for CFSC?

Mel: I was actually a CFSC member when this staff position became available. I had recently quit my previous job to focus on completing my master's degree and thesis work, which is related to Quaker decision-making processes. I thought this role at CFSC would fit beautifully with that goal.

"It feels like I'm working with my heroes. The sense of excitement... is tangible, and infectious."

Quaker decision-making seeks unity rather than a simple majority. The emphasis is on reaching a decision that everyone can support (or at least accept as what the Meeting has decided, even if it's not their preferred outcome). Members present are encouraged to participate and share their perspectives. There is no hierarchy, and everyone's voice is valued.

Quakers also believe that decisions should be guided by the Inner Light or Spirit. Silence and reflection play a crucial role in discerning this guidance and building unity until a decision can be reached. When a decision is reached, it is considered to be the "sense of the Meeting."

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Latest actions on situation in Israel/Palestine

CFSC joined many civil society groups calling on Canada to implement an arms embargo on Israel in keeping with the United Nations Human Rights Council's urging all countries to immediately "cease the sale, transfer and diversion of arms, munitions, and other military equipment to Israel."

<https://QuakerService.ca/ArmsEmbargo>

We joined a huge list of legal experts and others asking Canada to unequivocally support and cooperate with the International Criminal Court as it issued arrest warrants for three Hamas and two Israeli officials suspected of extensive war crimes:

<https://QuakerService.ca/ICC>

CFSC promoted a Gaza ceasefire pilgrimage, which many Friends across the country took part in. CFSC's Sandra Wiens then joined church leaders in meetings with Members of Parliament when the pilgrimage arrived in Ottawa. Our Associate Clerk Ro Fife wrote about and shared some photos from Friends' participation:

<https://QuakerService.ca/GazaPilgrimage>

You can still donate to support relief work in Gaza being implemented by American Friends Service Committee: <https://QuakerService.ca/Gaza>

Reconciliation reports

In 2016, Canadian Friends came to a collective decision to take six actions in support of Indigenous peoples' human rights and reconciliation. One of these actions was for local Quaker Meetings to report back to CFSC on the reconciliation work they do each year. This reporting process was disrupted by the pandemic. We're pleased to share two reports now as well as a short video for Friends seeking to make land acknowledgments (a topic that came up often in the reports we received):

<https://QuakerService.ca/ReconciliationReports>

Two campaigns shine a light on deep problems with prisons

Did you know that Canada plans to expand the use of federal prisons to detain some migrants? 85

groups, including CFSC, have called on Canada to stop using federal prisons for immigrant detention. As Alberta's public safety minister, Mike Ellis, stated, "People who come to Canada for a fresh start and a new life deserve a better welcome than a jail cell while paperwork is sorted out." Read the open letter: <https://QuakerService.ca/WelcomeToCanada>

If so led, take action via Amnesty International Canada: <https://QuakerService.ca/WelcomeToCanadaCampaign>

WriteOn! a volunteer-run organization that CFSC has supported financially and done events with, notes having received, "hundreds of letters from incarcerated people across Canada who request all kinds of information, including general legal information, educational resources, and information about supports and programs that can benefit them in preparation for their release."

Many are hoping to get an education to improve their chances of finding work when released. But courses today are almost all online and Canada doesn't let incarcerated people have access to the Internet! WriteOn! has started a petition you can sign calling for this to be changed:

<https://QuakerService.ca/WriteOnPetition>

Quaker Concern

Quaker Concern is the newsletter of Canadian Friends Service Committee, the peace and social justice agency of Quakers in Canada. Since 1931, CFSC has worked for a world where peace and justice prevail.

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Justice: transformative, restorative, punitive —what’s the difference?

By Karen Ridd

As a small child I had night terrors. One recurring fear was about prison: I was petrified that I might accidentally commit some harm and be put behind bars. Reflecting on my childhood anxiety, I notice that, while I might have had a shaky grasp on Canada’s legal system, I absolutely grasped the heart of the punishment. Humans are relational. To use Desmond Tutu’s explanation of the Zulu word ubuntu: “I exist because you exist.” To rip us from the ones we love, to deny contact between us, is to cut at the very heart of what it means to be human. So maybe I was born to be an abolitionist.

Despite understanding intuitively a central problem with our carceral system (that we somehow expect people to become better when we isolate them from love) it was years before it dawned on me that prisons might not be an unchangeable “fact of life.”

I remember the “ah ha!” moment well. A family friend, Neil Webster, was sitting at our dinner table. I was a teen, and in a somewhat surly stage. But I really looked up to Neil (having volunteered internationally, he demonstrated to me the ideal of putting beliefs into action. He was also the first openly gay man that I knew) and so was hanging on his words. Neil worked as a teacher inside Stony Mountain federal penitentiary. And in the course of that dinner table conversation he said: “I have come to realize that we could completely stop incarcerating people and if we did that we’d all be safer.”

I was floored—too shy to say anything, but utterly puzzled by what this hero of mine had said. How could that be in any way true?!

I had met my first abolitionist... and his words have

What Would a World Without Prisons Look like?

We already have many examples of what an alternative to prisons would look like. Here are some that are already working in our society to reduce crime, increase community safety, rehabilitate people, and address the conditions that result in people going to prisons.

HEALING LODGES



Healing Lodges are currently used by Indigenous people in the justice system. By connecting to Indigenous culture, values, traditions, and beliefs, Indigenous people who have been involved in criminalized behaviour can heal from their own trauma and shift

Cover of CFSC’s double-sided handout Alternatives to Prison (available on our website or contact us for print copies).

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE ‘DANGEROUS FEW’?



The ‘dangerous few’ in the words of Quaker prison abolitionist Ruth Morris, are the very few individuals who do need to be separated from our society to keep us safe. We can do that in ways that do not rely on

stayed with me as a legacy for the rest of my life. Working in El Salvador with Peace Brigades International (PBI, a not-for-profit organization that has deep ties to Friends) my understanding of prison abolition deepened, and my awareness of restorative justice began. Our work led us to visit political prisoners, and I remember vividly the terror in the eyes of some of them, the sounds of the locks and doors, the unpleasant smells, the lack of light and air. There was no disguising the fact that this was a cage that people were being held in.

I was also learning about the need for conflict transformation and restorative justice.

Working with PBI involved being an “unarmed bodyguard” of sorts. That meant being inside the workings of social justice organizations—sitting through meetings, attending events, travelling in cars, being a presence in offices. This insider perspective allowed me to see the ways that internal conflicts break social change groups. I started to look for resources that might help resolve these destructive conflicts. I eventually found myself reading about mediation.

To use a Quaker phrase that’s relatively new to me, I see that “way” has been opening in my life: first regarding prison abolition, then restorative justice, and now more recently penal abolition and transformative justice.

What do these various terms mean?

Quakers are still famous in abolitionist circles for the 1981 minute on prison abolition that reads, in part:

Today, Friends are becoming aware that prisons are a destructive and expensive failure as a response to

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Justice: transformative, restorative, punitive continued

crime. We are, therefore, turning our efforts to reform prisons to efforts to replace them with non-punitive, life-affirming, and reconciling responses.

It was a bold statement, ahead of its time. (For more on this minute see our 2021 article:

<https://QuakerService.ca/1981Minute>) While prison abolition names the need to do away with carceral institutions (a long-term process), Quakers realized that that wasn't enough, and went on to expand on the 1981 minute, with a declaration in support of penal abolition.

While prison abolition focuses on getting rid of prisons and jails, penal abolition invites us to move from a punitive system to centering healing and accountability in all of the ways that we respond to wrong-doing—in our families, our schools, and our communities.

“To deny contact between us is to cut at the very heart of what it means to be human. So maybe I was born to be an abolitionist.”

Acknowledging that our current punitive system is a recent colonial imposition—and indeed a recent blip even in European nations—one way that prison abolition movements focused energy was on creating alternatives to the criminal justice system, many of which were based on traditional Indigenous justice-making practices that centred those who had been harmed, and those who had done harm.

Professor Howard Zehr suggests that the colonial criminal justice system (or retributive system) asks these three questions: What law was broken? Who did it? What punishment do they deserve?

A restorative approach asks very different questions: Who has been harmed? What do they need? Who is responsible for fulfilling those needs?

Restorative justice is now firmly embedded in the Canadian justice system and does offer alternatives. For instance, mediation can bring people together and offers those who've done harm a chance to make amends. It offers people who've been harmed a voice to ask questions and speak about the impacts on their lives. Mark Umbreit and other researchers have

shown solid evidence that restorative approaches can be significantly more effective than the mainstream criminal justice system.

There are critiques of restorative justice as well. Some criticize it for having become professionalized, to the exclusion of the community. Others observe that it's had a history of being practiced in very culturally exclusive ways. And it's critiqued for being overly focused on involved individuals and not considering context enough.

As early as 2000, Friend Ruth Morris had coined another term, one that is only recently venturing into mainstream discourse about justice, and one that CFSC fully embraces in our work: transformative justice.

Onashowewin—an Indigenous organization in Winnipeg—embodies transformative justice. At Onashowewin, workers observe that the harm someone did, or the “crime” that someone committed, may not be the biggest problem in that person's life. So Onashowewin focuses on the context that led to a person committing that crime. Transformative justice, therefore, seeks to go beyond restorative justice, and not just “restore” a situation (that might actually have been unhealthy or harmful) but transform it.

At CFSC, this term calls to us because not only is it imbued with Quaker values of peace and justice, but it seeks to go to the root of structural and social issues that underlie many instances of “wrong doing.” Moreover, transformative justice describes not what we don't want, such as a carceral world, but the world that we do want to create. To borrow from James Nayler (1616-1660), transformative justice invites us to a “new creation, new heavens, and new earth, and new heart and mind, and a new law, a new man [sic] to walk therein with his [sic] Maker with cheerfulness, and the old bonds are broken by the Spirit's leading, and to serve in newness of spirit.”

For more information on transformative justice, I'd invite you to watch *What is Transformative Justice*, by Mariame Kaba et al: <https://QuakerService.ca/WhatIsTransformativeJustice>



Karen Ridd is CFSC's Transformative Justice Program Coordinator.

Paddling alongside the Tsleil-Waututh Nation

By Rob Hughes



Interfaith Water Ceremony organised by Tsleil-Waututh Sacred Trust at Whey-ah-Wichen to show continued opposition to the TransMountain Pipeline. Photo: Mary Paquet.

Canadian Friends Service Committee’s vital work supporting Indigenous peoples’ human rights is rooted in building respectful relationships. As a Quaker peace and social justice organization, CFSC endeavours to ensure that its decisions and actions are grounded in Spirit. Many of our Indigenous partners are similarly guided by Spirit. Article 25 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* affirms:

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied lands, territories, waters, coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.

The Tsleil-Waututh Nation (TWN)—a Coast Salish people—are stewards of Seliwet (Burrard Inlet, British Columbia) where they have lived since time immemorial. In 2013, a project to twin the existing Trans Mountain Pipeline and tanker expansion (TMX) to triple its carrying capacity was proposed to Canada’s National Energy Board. In 2015 the TWN launched its comprehensive independent assessment of TMX, drawing on scientific analyses and their traditional knowledge of Seliwet to assess the impacts TMX would pose to their lands and waters, including their rights, title, and interests.

In April 2016, through the connection with a Quaker biologist working for the TWN, I, CFSC staff Jennifer Preston, and others from CFSC met with TWN leaders at their band office. They informed us about their work to protect, monitor, and restore their lands and waters. We learned of their Sacred Trust Initiative to oppose TMX and offered our support. They invited us to attend their Honouring Our Elders ceremony the following month. Although other CFSC members had to return home, my

husband Allen and I went. We were privileged to witness sacred dances never performed in public. We enjoyed a feast that included the best clam chowder I’ve ever tasted.

In June of this year I was invited to speak at the Interfaith-Water Ceremony at Whey-ah-Wichen (Cates Park) on the north shore of Seliwet in North Vancouver. The ceremony was organised by TWN to show their continued opposition to the recently completed TMX. We started early on a sunny morning with Reuben George, Sundance Chief and the Manager of the Sacred Trust Initiative, encouraging us on before we boarded canoes. Ruben is a gifted leader and inspirational speaker.

“Faith and spiritual leaders shared prayers and offerings on the water.”

Somehow I ended up in the prow of one of the canoes and was told I was responsible for steering! Despite not having canoed for 50 years, I followed the lead canoe and miraculously managed to avoid steering us in a circle. The water was calm and we paddled to the opposite side of the inlet where a large oil tanker was moored and surrounded by barbed wire. Eagles soared overhead. We stopped while faith and spiritual leaders shared prayers and offerings on the water.

Ruth Walmsley—a member of Vancouver Meeting—offered a prayer. Ruth was then accompanied by the Allouette Sisters. This name was adopted after they were jailed in Allouette Prison for nonviolent civil disobedience to TMX. (For background you can see this video from a 2021 CFSC event where Ruth explained her involvement in nonviolent civil disobedience against TMX: <https://QuakerService.ca/PeacefulProtest>)

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Paddling alongside continued

Afterwards, we gathered on the shore. Our numbers had swelled by then from a few dozen to several hundred. Faith and spiritual leaders shared teachings while everyone was served delicious traditional food, including salmon and bannock.

I spoke on behalf of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), identifying myself as wearing two hats—Clerk of Vancouver Meeting and a member of CFSC. I was moved that directly across the waters from us we could see the hill and neighbourhood called “Capitol Hill” in Burnaby. I lived the first 20 years of my life there and my youngest sister still lives in that same house. I realized how my family home—and many others—were threatened by TMX.

I recalled that meeting we had with TWN in 2016. I showed the silver bracelet I was wearing on my left wrist that Allen had given me a couple of weeks earlier for my birthday. It was carved by our nephew—Heiltsuk artist Dean Hunt—featuring a unique octopus design. I remarked that it reminded me of what amazing and intelligent creatures octopuses are and how catastrophic it would be for them and all the life in these waters if there was an oil spill. I ended by thanking TWN for their faithfulness in protecting these waters for all of us.

TWN has built up relationships with many other Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations to strengthen their work. I am happy that Vancouver Friends and CFSC are part of that network.



Rob Hughes is a long-time member of CFSC supporting our Indigenous rights work.

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It reflects the collective discernment and wisdom of the group.

I’m studying this unity-based decision-making in the Religious Society of Friends globally. I hope to create a new theory of change model for peacebuilding that centers on unity as opposed to consensus, clarifies the differences, and clearly speaks to the behavioural science around psychological safety as a key element required for changes of opinion/ideology to occur in a lasting manner.

Seeing the Light continued

I’m very passionate about the need for peace education to be more “mainstream” in Canada, and this opportunity to live out the academic work through real-world engagement at CFSC was one I couldn’t pass up!

Matt: What initiatives are you currently working on?

Mel: Right now, CFSC’s peace work has a few key areas of focus. One is launching a new conflict-transformation tool based off the content found in the book *Are We Done Fighting?*. We plan to provide a series of simple tips for high-quality conflict as short videos released weekly for a whole year. This is an exciting project because the content will be accessible to both Quakers and non-Quakers alike and requires no prior knowledge of conflict resolution or Nonviolent Communication.

“The Divine can appear in unexpected ways in every human we encounter. It can be really hard to see that image from far away. We have to get real close.”

Additionally, we want to refocus some of our efforts on a coherent and regular peace education offering for people who have various levels of knowledge. This will take some time to build, but I’m excited for the outcome and for a wider audience of people to be exposed to our peace testimony.

Matt: What are you reading these days?

Mel: Honestly, mostly academic papers/articles and books related to my thesis—such is the life of a student. But when I’m walking, I will often listen to podcasts and audiobooks, with some of my current favourites being some CBC offerings such as *Ideas*, *Quirks and Quarks*, and *What on Earth*. I also enjoy listening to the *Ologies* podcast by Alie Ward and also recently finished the audio-book version of *Are We Done Fighting?* (yes, that is a blatant plug as many may not know it’s available in that format!). Finally, when my brain is tired of learning, I enjoy digging into a Brandon Sanderson novel before bed.

Matt: What do you do outside of work and study?

Mel: I walk for at least an hour every day, both for the

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benefit of being outside in nature with my favourite tree-friends and to appease the demands of my Australian Shepard (Rosie). My toddler is currently very into playgrounds, and we are lucky enough to live in a city with lots to choose from. Many weekends are spent exploring them and playing in Rockwood Park (acres and acres of trails and parkland in the center of St John, New Brunswick). I also enjoy the local music and food scene, and can be found with the whole family every Friday after working hours at our favourite local music hall (it's toddler approved).

Matt: If you could ask people reading this article to take action on something today, what would that be?

Mel: I'd like to ask people to stop some of the low-consciousness "actions" they might be taking (e.g. forwarding emails/newsletters, sharing clickable but low-complexity articles/pictures/memes on social media, signing letters to government without any other engagement on the issue, etc.).

Instead, I'd urge them to get very local, and to build deep, respectful, and reciprocal relationships with the people around them, who might appear to be on the "other end" of the political or life-experience spectrum.

Quakers believe there is "that of God/Light/Spirit" in everyone—even the people we disagree with the most. If we are also each unique, then that image of the Divine can appear in unexpected ways in every human we encounter. It can be really hard to see that image from far away. We have to get real close, and to do that, we have to make time for relationship over action. We have to be generous with giving our time and attention to those who can appear as "other," daring to learn from them and, perhaps, be changed by the image of the Divine we encounter. Then our action can become one of love and service, rooted in relationships.



Matthew Legge is CFSC's Communications Coordinator.

In between issues of *Quaker Concern* you can stay up to date with social justice news, actions, and events. Subscribe to our email list at the bottom of any page on our website:

QuakerService.ca



I've had the chance to talk to thousands of people about conflicts, and not one has ever said to me, "I'm the primary driver of the problem. Why am I so difficult?" Instead, they invariably ask how to change other people's beliefs or bad behaviour. And a lot of the time, they feel like they already know the answer: that other person will never change. They're unreachable. They're awful. They're the problem. What's fascinating is that all sides can find ways to think this.

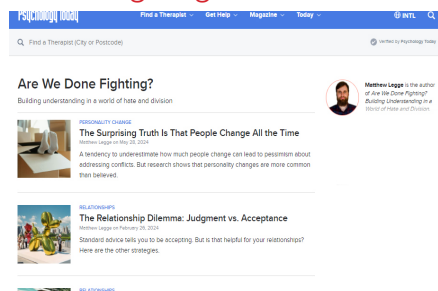
Picture this common scene: You meet up with a friend for coffee and soon they're explaining to you in detail why their co-worker is so impossible to work with. In that moment have you ever wondered what that co-worker is telling *their* friends?

When you see the other side as "the problem," that can preserve destructive conflict patterns. The conflict feels fated to continue, you imagine, because people don't change. Except they do. All the time.

Daniel Aires began dreaming of a career as a soldier when he was 10. He joined the Canadian Armed Forces at 16. One day, he was given a book about peace issues:

I remember reading the book and being absolutely enraged. How could anyone be so peaceful? How could they live their life where everyone is their brother and everyone is their sister?... I'm thinking, "This is complete lunacy!" And I took the book and I threw it in the bottom of the vehicle and drove around and it got all full of gunpowder and gasoline and I read it again, and again, and again and it wore a hole in my side pocket. I had it on me all the time. And within six months I was out of the military.

Somehow, what seemed impossible happened, and a single book changed Daniel's life. But he had to go through a months-long invisible process first... Keep reading this post and others from our blog for *Psychology Today*: <https://PsychologyToday.com/intl/blog/are-we-done-fighting>



Friends on the move



IN MAY OUR GOVERNMENT RELATIONS representative **Sandra Wiens** attended Western Half Yearly Meeting in Sorrento, British Columbia. She delivered a talk—*Weaving Change: Engaging Friends with CFSC Advocacy*—about her work in Ottawa.

JENNIFER PRESTON, JEREMY VANDER HOEK, and **Rachel Singleton-Polster** were in Geneva, Switzerland in July for the in-person session of the United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Throughout the week they were able to host a quiet diplomacy dinner between states and Indigenous peoples' human rights experts, support partners on delivering statements from the floor, and help facilitate a side event on the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* in Canada.

Jennifer stayed in Geneva for a second week to attend an intersessional meeting of the UN Human Rights Council focused on enhancing the participation of Indigenous peoples in the UN. CFSC and many of our partners have been following this subject for several

years. This intersessional meeting—along with the upcoming one in October—is an exciting step in this effort, as it will result in concrete recommendations being put forward to the UN Human Rights Council.

PROGRAM COORDINATOR KAREN RIDD HAS BEEN busy with public talks. She led a session on transformative justice and penal abolition for the student encampment in support of Palestine at the University of Winnipeg.



She also gave presentations at the Annual General Meetings of the Manitoba Association of Rights and Liberties and the Alternative Dispute Resolution Institute of Manitoba. Additionally, Karen attended the Abolitionist Intimacies Symposium in Halifax, where she stayed with CFSC member **Jocelyne Tranquilla**.

Karen, Jeremy, Jennifer, CFSC Clerk **Vince Zelazny**, and out-going

Treasurer **Pete Cross** enjoyed their time representing CFSC at Canadian Yearly Meeting in session at Camp NeeKauNis. (Many more CFSC members were present virtually.) At camp Jennifer gave a presentation about her work in support of Indigenous peoples' human rights and how it has paved the way for other effective CFSC advocacy work on peace and social justice issues.

WE WELCOME NEW CFSC MEMBERS KATHY **Bickmore** (transformative justice work), **Geoffreyjen Edwards** (peace work), **Derek Nice** (Treasurer), **Siân Bowen-Cole** (peace work), and **Laurens van Esch** (Indigenous rights work).

COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR MATT Legge facilitated a workshop at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario. Later one participant wrote to thank us when a conflict she'd been experiencing, which had been causing great stress, was positively transformed using the listening skills she'd practiced! You can practice these skills too. We're happy to facilitate a free workshop for groups of 10 or more, or you can join a group by getting on the wait list at: <https://QuakerService.ca/Register>