



Quaker House Belfast

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Dear Friends,

Tim and Olive started work in June this year at Quaker House Belfast, on the fourth floor at number forty Linenhall Street. Tim travels to work from Portadown, “where I live with my wife, Rachel, and two young sons. Growing up in Cork, I trained as a minister in before joining the Mennonites in 1997. Since moving to Northern Ireland in 2003 I have worked in church, youth and mediation work. Olive also travels to work from Portadown, “where I have lived for twenty one years with my husband David. Both of us are members of the Religious Society of Friends and we have four grown-up children. I left teaching in 1998 to train in mediation and conflict resolution. I am passionate about peacemaking as a part of my ongoing faith journey.” In September Nicola Bowerman, originally from York and a peaceworker from Quaker Peace and Social Witness, also joined the Quaker House team. This is a new experience for Nicola, who is a Quaker attender. She is completing an MA in Critical and Cultural Theory at Cardiff University and has previously taught in a University in China. She is excited to be working in Northern Ireland and has finally found a flat!

We have started work at QHB in a time of transition as political structures have changed radically within the last six months. Unionists and Republicans have now entered into a fragile power-sharing government. For many people in Northern Ireland this has come as a shock. Nothing in the last thirty years of conflict has truly prepared the people for such a momentous change in thinking. Change is more difficult than maintaining the status quo; to lift a gun or to withdraw is less painful than finding a way to work with the enemy. Here in QHB we have been supporting people through this transition. We have been meeting with people from both sides, sharing their stories, bringing them together to talk and to listen to one another. We encourage perseverance and we support people in their quest for a just and peaceful society in the hope that our children will never go through the same ordeal as previous generations. The reason we do this is so that people can understand one another, to prevent hurts from festering and so to create a just and peaceful society where swords can be turned into ploughshares.

QHB continues to be involved in advancing good relations between people from different faith, ethnic and political backgrounds. Churches are becoming more open to reconciliation work and we are beginning to help to train ministers and lay-people in basic peace skills and encourage a positive response to migrant workers and minority ethnic groups. The new government-appointed ‘Consultative Group on the Past’ is an attempt to deal with the painful, violent and complex past of the last forty years and QH will be making a submission in collaboration with Irish Quakers. The Loyalist community is experiencing significant difficulty during the present transition to a more stable and peaceful shared society. While maintaining a balance and impartiality we have made some effort to establish relations with Loyalist community leaders in order to offer training and support towards peace.

We envisage that an increasing amount of our current and future work will provide the space for people to reflect, learn from within themselves and from one another, and move toward a true and lasting peace. We cannot be complacent in our efforts to work for peace in what remains a very divided society. This is where we believe our efforts on your behalf need to be focussed. All of us as Friends can work creatively as peacebuilders for the common good of all so that our children can live in a society which loves mercy, walks humbly and acts justly.

Many thanks for your prayerful and financial support.

Olive, Tim & Nicola