



# Faringdon Quaker Meeting

NEWSLETTER 140 October to November 25

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## **Meeting Affairs**

Shared Lunch  
Sunday 5th October

Meeting for Worship for Business  
Sunday 2nd November

## **Area Meeting for Church Affairs**

Swindon Friends Meeting House  
Saturday 8th November 2025, 10:30am  
Refreshments will be provided. Please bring your own lunch.

## **Regional Meeting**

Swindon Friends Meeting House  
Saturday 18th October  
Arrivals at 10:30am; session from 11am to 4:30pm  
Ben Pink Dandelion will lead a day course on:  
'The Heart of the Quaker Way'

## **Study Group**

### **Next Study Session Sunday 19th October**

Andrea will speak about her work with Lifelines, an organisation that corresponds with individuals on death row in the United States.

## **Prayer for Peace**

We will be continuing Praying for Peace the last Saturday of the month from 10 to 12- worship from 10:30 to 11:15

The 25<sup>th</sup> of October and the 29<sup>th</sup> of November hopefully to be joined from protestors from the Market Square

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## **Recent Events**

### **Book, Cake & Play Day – 30th August**

Held at Friends Meeting House in aid of Lend with Care, which provides microloans to small businesses in the global south to help fight poverty.

Over £197 has been raised so far, with additional funds expected from further book sales. The money has been sent to the charity, with each £15 loan funding a new project.

### **Ride and Stride – Plus Heritage day Saturday 13th September**

A successful day. Special thanks to Emma for her contributions.

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## **Readings for Meeting for Worship**

October

- 5th – Chris
- 12th – Jenny
- 19th – Janie
- 26th – Geoff

November

- 2nd – Shirley
  - 9th – Mark
  - 16th – Andrea
  - 23rd – Sue
  - 30th – Emma
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## Monthly Collections

### **October – Phoenix Prison Trust [Donate to make a difference](#) | [Prison Phoenix Trust](#)**

The Prison Phoenix Trust offers hope and healing through meditation and yoga in over 200 prisons and secure institutions in the UK and Ireland.

Based in Oxford, they support over 100 trained volunteer yoga teachers and provide books, letters, and support to prisoners and prison staff.

### **November – Quaker Mental Health Fund (UK) [Quaker Mental Health Fund \(UK\) - Donate now](#)**

Formerly The Retreat York Benevolent Fund, the fund supports mental health ministry within the Quaker community, provides grants for individual care, and funds Quaker-led mental health projects.

Open to Quakers and those closely connected with Friends.

Please speak with the Treasurer if you have suggestions for future collection recipients.

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## LIFELINES

**“I miss the stars. You know I haven’t seen the stars in years and years. I miss the rain. I miss food. I miss all these things. But what it comes down to the most – and this is the thing that will scar me the most – and I’ll carry with me as a scar for the longest, the thing I miss the most is being treated like a human being”**

### **CNN INTERVIEW WITH DAMIEN ECHOLS ON ARKANSAS DEATH ROW SINCE 1993 SPOKEN ON JANUARY 13<sup>TH</sup> 2011 RELEASED AUGUST 2011**

#### *THE FOUNDING OF BEFRIENDERS DEATH ROW USA*

Jan Arriens, a familiar inspiration throughout BYM, established Lifelines with twelve members in Cambridge, in 1988. Now there are more than 1,000 worldwide. Lifelines support and befriend people on death row in the United States through letter writing and e mail. It was the first established organisation of its kind. Jan was inspired to do this by watching the 1987 BBC documentary “Fourteen Days in May”. The programme followed the attempts of Clive Stafford Smith to save Edward Earl Johnson’s life in the days before Edward’s execution. Clive Stafford Smith is a renowned human rights lawyer and Lifelines Patron and founder of the charity “Relieve”.

#### *WHO ON EARTH CHOOSES TO WALK INTO SUCH DARKNESS?*

Within Lifelines I was not surprised to meet a large thread of compassionate and well-informed Quakers. They pop up everywhere to protect those sparks of light within humanity. Lifelines have members within OSAM too. Lifelines itself does not campaign against the death penalty however it is inevitable that writers learn about its dark application despite little information coming from within the prisons, except about how our friends feel.

Writers are from diverse backgrounds and professions but appear united in their awareness of need amongst those who are part of a forgotten world, confined in undignified isolation on death row. Such conditions are permitted by the wealthiest nation on earth and cultivated by the enormous misconception that capital punishment is a deterrent. Some politicians thrive on this.

Noah Mayo has been writing for two years from Chicago, having heard about Lifelines while studying in Oxford on an international exchange. Most writers see no ethical dilemma in upholding the humanity of friends who have been denied it.

Initially, writers are encouraged to make boundaries clear. Intrusive questions are dismissed. Courtesy must be maintained, while being aware that friends' isolation creates a desperate need to find links with normal daily life. I have never experienced discourtesy or manipulation. We write about walks, sport, music, television, past experiences, funny anecdotes, beliefs if initiated by our friend. Bible classes seem everywhere in prisons. One beautiful friend had converted to Islam. He was studying to be an Imam before his death. I learned a lot through his experience of racism and rejection of Christianity.

### *THE DEATH PENALTY*

Twenty-seven states have the death penalty, but twenty-three states do not, although federal law can over-ride this. Indeed, Amnesty International has gathered pressure towards abolition in the last two years from over one million worldwide. As a result, last December Jo Biden and Kamala Harris commuted the death penalties of 37 federal prisoners to life without parole. Repeatedly well researched evidence has reported that life without parole pleas is less expensive in hours and money.

Death penalty drugs and procedures are excessively expensive although South Carolina has a law of e secrecy on this. This state requires the condemned who have exhausted their appeals, and been given

an execution date, to choose between lethal injection, firing squads and the newly renovated electric chair. Choices must be given through lawyers within two weeks of receiving a date, otherwise electrocution is the default position. Postmortems suggest the quality and reliability of lethal injection drugs are doubtful. (sources prismreports.org)

The United States death row population has declined over the past twenty years to roughly 2,067. This includes 47 women as well as United States Military death sentences. Sentence reversals, executions, deaths through other causes have, until recently, been outpacing new death sentences

Much has been learned from research by "Equal Justice" and the "US Death Penalty Information

Centre" as well as from reputable universities that the major license for injustice is poverty and racial

fear. "Equal Justice" was founded by Brian Stephenson, the famously influential black lawyer initially based in Birmingham Alabama. He is a courageous person who is unafraid to face the darkest forces preying on souls and their societies. Brian has faced these many times and multiple situations. Very recently his charity has become one of many in the United States and

elsewhere to face obliteration through staggering cuts in grants. It is doubtful if recovery will be quick, however I have no doubt that their courage will triumph.

A DNA loophole does not give equal access to consideration of DNA evidence. If sentencing took place too long ago, this becomes a point of order. This controversy has occupied much time in supreme courts. Dale Balch, a defence attorney from Ohio said on “World Anti Death Penalty Day Webinar 10/10/ 24, that “the death penalty must be abolished due to technicalities overbearing substance”

### *CONDITIONS ON DEATH ROW*

Death Row prisoners are typically incarcerated in solitary confinement, subject to much more deprivation and harsher conditions than other prisoners. Their rectangular cells are tiny: often less than 6’ by 5’. There are a metal WC, washbasin and bed. Some states provide a desk and chair. Tall

People cannot stretch out to sleep. The steel beds are reputed to be shorter than the height of an average US male. Rapid deteriorations in mental and physical health occur. A small wire window is for the guards to make sudden checks. Another window to the outside world in some cells is available, but vision is obscured. A hatch allows food (frequently unappetizing) to

be passed, three times a day. Friends on the row have called it “slop”. One friend’s breakfast in Alabama was served at 03.00. Eat it or leave it. Flies and maggots have been reported in some prisons.

It is extremely expensive for those on the row, especially if they are from poor families. Essential items must be bought writing paper, postage & E mail stamps, pens, soap, shampoo, shower gels, and all other toiletries. Family and friends may send parcels of these (commissaries) but recently this process hasn’t been as efficient as in the past. It is reported that many prisoners have abused this system and drugs have been found. Sources are unclear. Penalties are very harsh. There is a disproportionate ratio of black and white prisoners. Raw figures disguise the imbalance until it is compared with racial percentages in the population.

The former Warden of Texas Polunsky Unit, in one of the most harsh and active death penalty states, has recently selected some prisoners for increased exercise and recreation. Improvements in mental health and behaviour appeared to come as a surprise to some.

### *IMPROVEMENTS IN COMMUNICATION?*

Some prisons issue tablets for emailing, but these can be hard won and easily lost. Even “geeks” can encounter problems! E mail systems can be closed without warning for maintenance. All letters and e mails are scrutinised. Letters are invariably out of date by the time they reach their destinations, but both provide a priceless and welcome interlude.

Prisons in the two states for which I coordinate letter writing and support (South Carolina & Missouri) do not permit any gifts of writing paper, stamps, toiletries or artistic equipment. Books may be sent as gifts, but these must be specified by the prison and be sent straight from the publisher. Electronic greeting cards may be sent but the design must be approved. Lifelines does not expect writers to send money, but some choose to do this. They are strongly advised to use systems permitted by the prison.

The prison websites appear to be compassionate and enabling when explaining access to their communication systems. They refer to inmates as “your loved ones”. Some prisoners are rejected by their families.

### *LIFELINES CONFERENCES*

Lifelines hold conferences in the autumn and springtime. These are not sentimental affairs. They are well planned, inclusive and informative. Uncomfortable subjects and themes emerge such as forgiveness, poverty, racism, and unemployment. Further subjects such as poor education, housing, parental exhaustion and absence through long underpaid work hours all contribute to children “being brought up by other kids on the block”. Guns are considered safe and necessary. Drug peddling and drug use are often quick fixes out of poverty, pain and unemployment, especially where health insurance premiums are unaffordable. Egregious murders can follow. This knowledge paints graphic pictures of neglect and exploitation.

An exonerated friend, Ray Hinton, gave a moving example of his journey towards forgiveness, after his wrongful conviction and imprisonment of thirty-three years. He is very clear that such horrific confinement gave him compelling reasons forgive racial and legal injustice before it consumed his faith and soul. Ray is now part of “The Innocence Project”. He also works with Brian Stephenson of Equal Justice.

Ray reported in one of his post release lectures, that the corrupt police official in Alabama who arrested him withdrew sound evidence that Ray was at work on the date and time of the murder which occurred elsewhere, He was found guilty. He told Ray “You will die for this murder, evidence or not, because you are poor and you are black” The policeman was almost right. Ray nearly died in the hands of the state.

In support of the corrupt evidence, police found a gun in the house in which law-abiding Ray shared safely with his mother. The gun had not been fired for years. A forensic “expert” at Ray’s first trial deemed to be the gun used for the murder. Brian Stephenson’s team disproved this at Ray’s retrial almost thirty years after his sentence. The bullets and the gun did not match.

Once incarcerated, Ray lay curled in foetal position for three years and didn’t speak to a soul. At times he could smell burning flesh from the electric chair in the execution chamber next to his cell. Ray reluctantly mowed the lawn on the day of his arrest. His mother died while he was on death row.

Ray says that after his mother died, he could almost hear her telling him not to give in to injustice and mental torture because Christ’s example of facing, understanding and overcoming evil would give him unbreakable spiritual courage. This experience began to move him forward in his inspirational understanding of forgiveness. Ray has never received financial compensation. Not many exonerates in the US receive it. Calculations by the United States Death Penalty Information Centre say that at least 8 -9% of death penalties carried out are of innocent people. Both Ray Hinton and Brian Stephenson were broadcast on Radio 4 last November 10<sup>th</sup> speaking about Ray’s book “The Sun Does Shine”.

## HOPE WITHIN BROKEN SYSTEMS

Despite so many examples of injustice and cruelty, I feel that Ray's title is evident in many ways.

There are numerous organizations within the United States which are, far in advance in spirit, compared with those seeking vengeance. Egregious crime exists. Causes are ignored. Voluntary charities have tended to ameliorate suffering and disadvantages despite the withholding of funds and research evidence. Many states have "Alternatives to the Death Penalty" movements which are faithfully coordinated throughout the United States. State leaders are spiritually resourceful, well informed and articulate. Their communication can be profound.

Since the reintroduction of the death penalty in 1973, realisations of dangers embedded within vengeful propaganda have begun to filter towards brave and enlightened souls. This year vigils and demonstrations outside prisons where death penalties are taking place have also included some prolife fundamentalists. Many murder victims are present. I feel that we need not always look at statistical evidence to demonstrate the power of humane behaviour. We may never know where such influences may reach or when. I think that this is part of our witness.

Rick Halperin, Professor of Human Rights at Southern Methodist University in Texas said in his address to the Autumn Lifelines Conference 2018 that Lifelines' recognition of the humanity in ALL those who become dehumanised, is the most important human rights issue around which all others revolve. He said that he would go back home buoyed and encouraged by Lifelines'

love and humanity. This is why Lifelines chime so strongly with many Quakers and multiple faiths. In return Rick left us with a single task: don't lose faith.

There is so much entangled in vengeful dehumanisation: political propaganda, racism, poverty, exploitation, self-deceit, fear, bribery, jingoism, and distortion, followed by degradation of all involved. Well intentioned prison guards, sometimes recruited to offset their own poverty, become traumatized. Much of the population does not understand that death penalty sentencing and imprisonments are spoken of in their name. "We the people of the state of ....., sentence you to ....."

Jan Arriens, Ray Hinton, Brian Stephenson, Rick Halperin, Lifelines writers have unlocked and Sustained a quiet spiritual courage was ever present to prompt and inspire

Proverbs 2:9, read during a vigil upholds a clear moral message:

*"Listen carefully my child .....incline the ear of your heart and embrace wisdom. Understanding is a most precious treasure. A treasure which needs to be diligently sought". It requires an active disposition making our ears and hearts attentive."*

*Thank you, Andrea,*

*Andrea Hughes June 2025*

## **Meeting for Worship in Grendon Underwood prison**

Simon Clark has recommenced attending a meeting with prisoners the first Wednesday of the month.

Bill Hughes expresses his concern about Climate Change

## **Climate Change**

### **Ticking Timebomb?**

We have just “enjoyed” a very hot summer. The UK Met office reported on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August 2025 that this summer has been “the hottest ever recorded” in the UK. The Radcliffe Observatory at Oxford University, who have the longest weather records in the country, have found that average temperatures have already reached 1.5c degrees above pre-industrial levels (the period 1851 – 1901). The UN COP 21 Paris Agreement in 2015, was agreed by 195 parties (countries) - almost every country in the world. This is a “legally binding international treaty on climate change”.

The International Panel on Climate Change the IPCC, has stated that “crossing the 1.5c threshold risks unleashing far more severe climate change impacts including more frequent and severe droughts, heatwaves and rainfall.

The critical factor causing climate change/global heating is the concentration of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in the atmosphere which contributes to the greenhouse effect that retains more heat from the sun on Earth than that which goes back into space again. The pre-industrial concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> was 278 parts per million. In 2007 it was 385ppm and now it 427ppm. The critical tipping point for climate break down is 500ppm and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are still rising!

Oxfordshire and most of the UK has experienced the driest spring for over a century. The summer has seen no or very little rainfall in places, threatening water shortages despite hose pipe bans. The Cumnor reservoir serving this area has become “notably low” and will need extensive rainfall to replenish it to a safe level as the aquifers in the Cotswolds are drying up. Crops and harvest have come early this year, and yields reduced. The area is also vulnerable to flooding, the highest risk wards being in Abingdon, Witney and Oxford.

Oxfordshire County Council have produced a document - Oxfordshire Climate Change Route Map. This is a comprehensive set of proposals/policies to mitigate and adapt to climate change. This includes priority actions in sectors such as energy, health and wellbeing, transport, food security, soils, agriculture, forestry, flooding, social care, education, employee productivity and supply chains. The county has been awarded the honour of being the best climate aware local authority in the country. However, looking at the various charts monitoring progress on all these sectors the comment boxes are mainly filled with “more action needed” or “further investigation needed”. It seems that progress is being held back by the general reduction in government and local government expenditure due to the austerity cuts. It seems

that “balancing the books” is more important than the funding required for our and the planet’s very survival.

Pam Lunn gave the Swarthmore Lecture for Britain Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends in 2011 entitled: Costing not less than everything, Sustainability and spirituality in challenging times. She stated that “History has presented us with a choice: we have a planetary emergency, and we therefore need the generations who are alive now to have a true sense of mission, of leading, of concern in the Quaker sense. Earlier generations worked against slavery, for instance, or for democracy: this matter is our work to do. We, who are alive now, are truly powerful – it is our moment now. We have the knowledge, and we have the technology, and after us it is too late. Can we find joy and gratitude for the challenge that faces us”.

Thank you, Bill,

Thanks to all have contributed to the Newsletter and indeed the meeting.

