



Newsletter – January 2017

Diary: January 2017

Sunday 8 January	Preparative Meeting – 11.15 am after Meeting for Worship
Saturday 14 January	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House
Sunday 15 January	Area Meeting – 2.00 pm, Stratford Meeting House
Saturday 28 January	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House
Sunday 29 January	Themed Meeting for Worship, 10.30 am

Welcome to our first themed Worship

Our first themed fifth Sunday Meeting for Worship will be held on 29 January, and at Preparative Meeting in December we decided that its theme would be “Welcome”.

Following the success of the themed Meeting for Worship on Peacemaking Sunday 18 September, we decided to try a themed approach to Meeting for Worship during 2017 whenever we have a fifth Sunday in the month. How will this work? We will be invited in advance to share a reading or thought through ministry on the chosen theme. The Meeting will begin in silence as usual, and then after about 20 minutes, people will be invited to share their readings and ministry. On Peacemaking Sunday, everyone brought a reading and Meeting eventually ended five minutes over the hour!



Welcome seemed an appropriate focus for this first themed Meeting for Worship. Welcome is about beginning, about belonging, about relationships both between people but also with God. In his book *Meeting God in Paul*, Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, talks about Paul’s “disturbing idea of a universal welcome”. No matter who you are, says Paul, you can belong to the people of God. And this is very much what Jesus himself had stressed: “Jesus refuses to accept that in order to belong to the people of God you have to start with a bundle of qualifications ... Jesus extends the dignity of fully belonging to the people of God to all kinds of people in whose company the respectable and pious emphatically did not want to be.”

And this belonging involves a welcome, says Williams, “because the principle, the energy behind this new kind of belonging, comes from God’s initiative rather than ours. It is God who has provided the means of entry into this community. It is God’s welcome.” So alongside the idea of welcome lies the idea of inclusion, of being part of the community no matter who you are.

Welcome is also a particularly appropriate theme in Stratford at this time because the town is welcoming refugee families from Syria. So bring your readings and thoughts on welcome to Meeting for Worship on Sunday 29 January: extend a welcome to others and accept a welcome yourself.

Experiment with Light

As usual, there will be Experiment with Light meetings at Stratford Meeting House on the second and fourth Saturdays of the month, 10.00 am for a 10.30 start. But for those who have not tried the Experiment with Light, there will be a longer workshop at Warwick Meeting House on Saturday 21 January, running from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm. This will provide an introduction to the practice as well as a chance to experience an Experiment with Light session. If you want to attend, please bring some lunch to share. Contact Beryl Colloff at b.colloff2012@gmail.com for more information.

Experiment with Light is a Quaker practice which is based on early Friends' discoveries. It was devised in 1996 by Quaker and theologian Rex Ambler, following his study of early Friends' writings. For more background information, see <http://www.experiment-with-light.org.uk/>.

The Syrian families begin to settle in

Both the Syrian families coming to Stratford under the Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement scheme are now in their new homes in the town.

As reported last month, the Welcome Here group helped to get the families' new homes ready for them before arrival, and it has subsequently organised a welcome tea party, which was held at The Other Place thanks to the kind hospitality of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. This went very well and was enjoyed by both families.

Welcome Here group volunteers with experience of teaching English as a second language have also visited both families to help them improve their English. Stratford College is to provide formal English lessons when term starts in early January, but the Welcome Here volunteers have been able to make an initial assessment of the adults' English and begin to provide some early practice. As might be expected, there is a big variation – some speak no English whatsoever while others have basic English. For the most advanced, Welcome Here is helping them to join Stratford library so that they can borrow books to practice their reading and develop their vocabulary.

Welcome Here volunteers have also taken the second family for a short tour of the town, which they found useful, and both families will be going to the Christmas Day lunch being organised by Stratford Methodist Church. The families have expressed their gratitude for the sense of love and welcome that people in Stratford have given them.

Welcome Here will be continuing to support these two families over the next few months – and preparing for the next arrivals, which are currently scheduled to come to Stratford in March/April. In the meantime contact Roger Matthews at roger.matthews@phonecoop.coop for more details.