

The Difference between *good* and *great*

I like to think I do a reasonable job in your name as Youth Development Worker for Yorkshire. Over the few years I and the volunteers have developed a robust and interesting range of youthwork offering and have engaged many young people. This is good, not great. *Great* has a scale that exists beyond the ending of my role. *Great* has a group of people not directly employed who own and carry the work of engaging young people in all things Quaker. *Great* is a model that can be replicated with success in different places.

This means that my work must focus on training volunteers to hold and grow this work... perhaps...

Is “volunteering” the right word?

After much effort, I think I can now reliably say that no one in Yorkshire is interested in “volunteer training”—especially not over Zoom! No one has booked on, and no one has reached out.

One implication of “volunteering” is that it suggests offering yourself to a system outside and beyond you. But that’s not Quakerism. We offer what was already inside you all along.

Henri Nouwen’s book on fund-raising, I think, could just as easily have been a book about volunteering. He writes: “*Fund-raising is proclaiming what we believe in such a way that we offer other people an opportunity to participate with us in our vision and mission.*”

So then, the question turns: **What is the Quaker vision and mission?**

It can’t simply be *what Quakers are doing*, as this implies a one-time revelation or fixed direction. But we don’t believe that. We believe we are constantly led and guided by the ongoing revelation of Spirit. Many non-Quakers also believe in peace, simplicity, truth, equality, and sustainability. It’s not our testimony that these are eternal absolutes or exclusively ours. Rather, our testimonies are *where we are being led now*, or tools to help us discern that leading.

So, the Quaker vision and mission are less about a fixed goal and more about how we position ourselves to work out what we should be doing. We know this happens:

- in equal communities,
- when we support and nourish the gifts of individuals,
- when we engage in deep listening, and
- when we put aside artifice and guile to speak truth, no matter how costly.

In this context, “*volunteering*” is definitely the wrong word. Whatever we’re talking about here is much more than just helping out in something external to us.

I don’t yet know what the right word is—but I strongly suspect that if we started talking about fostering and **supporting the spiritual lives of those involved in Quaker youth ministry**, rather than “training volunteers,” we’d be on better ground.

Don’t ask me exactly how that’s done! I have some clues and leadings, and these need to be tested. But for now, here are some bits from the ever-growing *Big Questions?* quote book that may help:

“The silence doesn’t try to shut the world out—it’s more about bringing the world in.”

“For an epiphany to be an epiphany, I think it needs to keep epiphanising.”

“Why won’t God just let me be a coward?”

“It’s Quaker Faith and Practice! You practice and you get better at it.”

“Do we do Ministry, or does Ministry do us?”