



Photo: Friends School Lisburn.

Meeting for learning: Denise Gabuzda attends Ireland Yearly Meeting

‘True learning should be transformative.’

by Denise Gabuzda 6th June 2025



More than 100 Friends attended Ireland Yearly Meeting 2025 to explore the theme ‘A Learning Community’. It was appropriate to meet at Friends School Lisburn, which recently celebrated its 250th anniversary. Representatives of Quaker schools brought us up to date on their activities, and helped us understand how we can support them.

We heard about the charitable work of Quaker Service in North Belfast, and projects supported by Irish Quaker Faith in Action. Describing a recent visit to Ramallah Friends School, Michael Eccles (of the Europe and Middle East Section of Friends World Committee for Consultation) emphasised the importance of listening in building trust.

Loretta O’Brien brought us up to date on the Quaker Council for European Affairs, and Sophie Naeye and Lindsey Fielder-Cook told us about work at the Quaker United Nations Office. Alison Tarpey-Black described the local development worker programme being run by Britain Yearly Meeting. Alison related stories of Meetings that had become more vibrant by having the confidence to innovate. Our Meeting communities are encouraged to remain open to new Light, from wherever it may come.

Emily Provance of New York Yearly Meeting provides an inspiring example of a modern-day Quaker travelling in the ministry in a way very similar to early Friends, her only baggage a rucksack. Her sojourns have given Emily a unique perspective on Meetings, some called to shrink, some to grow, and some to do both. She called on us to ‘only do separately what we cannot in conscience do together’. Emily made a plea for Irish Friends to consider how to support US Quakers in these troubled times, drawing from the unique history, peacebuilding experience and diverse theologies within Ireland Yearly Meeting.

The Public Lecture was given by James Nelson, on ‘Quakers, learning and education – using the future to rethink the present’. James discussed different ways of thinking about the future and how they impact the present. We have a responsibility to help each other to learn to discern the Truth. James referred to mystery and wisdom as two precious embers that keep our fire alight. True learning should be transformative, and we must seek the courage to step through a doorway into a new way of being.

Creative sessions organised and led by young Friends fostered a companionable, light-hearted, informal atmosphere that enabled Friends to discuss complex topics in an open and non-confrontational fashion. A sustainability policy was adopted, which will have an impact across a wide range of areas.

Like other Quakers around the world, Irish Friends are challenged by the conflicts taking place in the Middle East, Europe, and other parts of the world. Special discussions are planned for later this year, in which we will work together to discern what we are called to do, ensuring that our actions manifest a love that embraces all involved.

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‘Those of you who find us difficult might not have thought about how difficult we find you.’

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