



# A MEETING FOR NOURISHMENT IN A TIME OF CLIMATE CRISIS

A guide to hosting a meal and  
conversation with your Quaker  
community

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# THE RESEARCH

This booklet comes out of research exploring using food as a way to invite conversations about the climate crisis that can feel inclusive and nourishing rather than overwhelming. I will outline some suggestions and considerations that have come out of the learnings and experience throughout this project. During my research I hosted different kinds of meals: A planned set menu and process to guide people through different questions and themes connected to the dishes they were eating, also experimenting with using the already established context of a Quaker sharing lunch where I could more 'lightly' facilitate conversations by placing small dishes and questions on different tables as an addition to an already existing event. I found that both formats had their benefits and challenges. The more curated and hosted meal with a smaller group allowed for a deeper collective experience, whereas using a sharing lunch with a much larger group meant that most conversations happened in pairs or small groups rather than with everybody involved. It was harder to gain a sense of how the experience was landing overall but feedback suggested that people found meaningful conversations themselves without the necessity of a large amount of guidance and facilitation. I found that using a sharing lunch in some sense allowed for people to engage more quickly with the questions and topics as there was an already established community built around the practise of sharing food and that people were ready for a different kind of conversation. Ultimately, these different experiments showed that there is not a specific formula and that the best invitations are highly contextual and designed with an understanding of the needs and expectations of a group. What follows I hope will be useful prompts and offer tools for reflection and exploration. Ultimately sitting down to share food and begin a conversation will always build relationships and I perceive that building and nourishing our connections and communities forms a large part of cultivating and sustaining our individual and collective responses to the climate crisis.



# QUAKERS, FOOD AND EARTH

How do we centre community and relationship in times of crisis? Given the urgency of this issue, what does it mean to slow down and take time for nourishment? Traditionally rituals happen in 'set aside' spaces and times outside of the 'mundane'. Given Quaker's testimony that 'every day is sacred' how might we hold something as sacred, even and especially when it is mundane or everyday. Food sits at the intersection of sacred and profane, personal and universal and compels us to reconsider these dichotomies. As Quakers we are committed to creating spaces which are equitable and within which all voices are heard. However, that ideal is not always a reality. Placing food at the centre of a Quaker practise might offer an implicit reminder of the necessity of body and place and inclusion in our work. When we sit and eat together we might find different ways of being together that cultivate belonging; food is inherently welcoming. Our togetherness is something physical and time-bound on Earth; eating together can remind us of this. When we bridge 'natural' and 'social' ecologies we can take better account of the ethics of mutuality (the recognition that we are all interconnected and the responsibilities that this carries). What does our testimony to sustainability demand of us? What are the spiritual and practical implications of this? What is our role; how are we in or out of 'right relationship' with ourselves, one another and the wider Earth?





# THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY

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## Building the foundations for conversations



To begin to have open and generative conversations about topics that can be as overwhelming as the climate crisis is hard. In order to feel able to participate in such conversations there needs to be a level of trust and comfort, in order to step into the discomfort of not knowing.

To begin to address a wider concern that touches us all personally and differently it can be helpful to already have some shared experience or group cohesion. Shared faith (being part of a Quaker community) is a start but perhaps you may consider establishing a group that meets to share food and company and builds a level of companionship before introducing larger topics. This might mean that when you do introduce challenging conversations, people are more receptive and able to attend to big questions as their fundamental need to feel safe and secure in a group is already met.

It is important to recognise the importance of this work of preparing the ground. It can be tempting to launch straight in to a conversation and to wish to seek solutions and answers. The problem with that is, this is the same outcome oriented mindset that has contributed to the crisis we seek to address. When we shift our perspective to set our goal as that of building relationships and committing to staying with the discomfort together rather than trying to find concrete outcomes and solutions, we are approaching from a different place and might find different possibilities presenting themselves.

It's hard to measure or make visible this kind of work, as it exists in an intangible way. It's important work though, and you might wish to find ways to visualise and celebrate the connections and shifts that are going on.

The art of welcoming invitations:

# INCLUSIVITY AND CREATIVITY



## Consider all ages

If you plan to welcome all ages to your meals, consider ensuring that there are activities for all to participate in. Perhaps offer separate activities for young friends, or consider how you share questions, food and discussions that are appealing and accessible to both young and old.

## What food are you serving?

Food is universal, but tastes, practices and relationships to food are highly personal. Consider how foods can challenge people and try to ensure there is a variety of things to eat. Having sharing plates which people can help themselves to can be easier than a set menu as it affords more personal freedom within a collective experience.

## Have different 'ways in'

For some people, talking is not their most natural way to communicate and explore ideas. Sometimes offering different ways into a conversation can be helpful. Maybe have some art materials on the table so that people can write or draw responses, or invite people to contribute their own food, music or stories as ways of joining in and creating something together.

## How do you invite people?

A compelling invitation needs to be clear and concise. How will you publicise your event in a way that people know what they are signing up for and so can feel welcome and comfortable to participate?

# QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK:

- 1 IF DIVERSITY MAKES US RESILIENT, HOW MIGHT WE PROMOTE IT?
- 2 HOW MIGHT EATING SEASONALLY AND LOCALLY CONNECT US TO PLACE AND THE EARTH?
- 3 THE CLIMATE CRISIS ASKS US TO GIVE SOME THINGS UP- WHAT NEW WAYS OF BEING MIGHT WE DISCOVER INSTEAD?
- 4 IF EVERY DAY IS SACRED, WHAT DO OUR DAILY PRACTICES (SUCH AS THE WAY WE EAT) MEAN TO US?
- 5 WHAT DO WE VALUE AND HOW DO WE SHOW OUR VALUE FOR THE EARTH AND ONE ANOTHER?
- 6 WHAT IS THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY IN FACING THE CLIMATE CRISIS?
- 7 HOW DO WE COPE WITH THE UNKNOWN? HOW DO WE FIND A PATH WITHOUT CLEAR ANSWERS?
- 8 WHAT CAN WE DO HERE AND NOW?
- 9 WHAT SUPPORTS AND SUSTAINS US?
- 10 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE IN 'RIGHT RELATIONSHIP' WITH LIFE ON EARTH?



## MOVING FORWARD NEXT STEPS

### KEEPING THE CONVERSATION ALIVE

You might consider hosting regular meals and conversations, perhaps exploring different topics. Try to share the responsibility of organising and hosting so that people can feel shared ownership and the work does not all fall to one person.

### CARING FOR COMMUNITY

Building shared responses to the climate crisis is work that takes time and commitment to accompany one another through difficult times. Prioritising the health of your meeting and community will always be a necessary part of this.

### COMMIT TO JOY

Nourishment is something that goes beyond the physical and touches the emotional, mental and spiritual health of individuals and communities. Having practices that prioritise connection and joy without avoiding or ignoring grief and challenge is important. They form part of committing to a long term engagement with an issue like climate change that is genuinely sustainable for those participating.





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