

## **News Release**

**19<sup>th</sup> July 2018**

### **Ride for Equality and the Common Good - from Swarthmoor Hall, Cumbria to 10 Downing Street Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> July to Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2018**

A group of Quakers has decided to literally “get on their bikes” or on alternative transport: mobility scooters as well as buses and trains, to make their way to Downing Street to “speak truth to power”.

They want to give witness to their concern about the dismantling of the welfare state – including our NHS and Social Care Systems - and draw attention to the suffering and distress resulting from recent welfare changes and rising inequality in society. They wish to challenge the promoted narrative that we cannot afford to care.

They are following in the footsteps of an early founding member of Quakers, Margaret Fell. In the spring of 1660 in a spirit of non-violence, she rode on horseback from Swarthmoor Hall, in Cumbria, to London with a declaration to appeal to King Charles II to end the persecution and suffering of Quakers. At that time Quakers stood ‘outside the protection’ of the State, which echoes the plight of many people today.

Nearly 360 years later, and in the year that the NHS celebrates its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, today’s Quakers are travelling around 360 miles over 12 days starting at Margaret Fell’s Swarthmoor Hall and supported along the way by fellow Quakers.

In London they will present a Declaration to Downing Street written in the style of Margaret Fell’s, along with compelling evidence supporting and validating their concern. They are appealing to the government:

- to end the dismantling of the welfare state and the suffering of those who are victims of the changes
- to renew the welfare state ensuring a safety net for us all
- to commit themselves to act for equality and the Common Good.

In addition they will carry the stories of those affected by welfare cuts on postcards. These will be presented to MPs. Their postcard campaign has been inspired by the book by Hans Fallada, “Alone in Berlin,” the story of an ordinary German couple who engaged in peaceful social action to try to make a difference.

Their action is based on the belief in the right of all to dignity and affirms their testimonies on equality and social justice. This “ride” is following in a long tradition of Quakers of challenging social injustices – from opposing slavery to seeking prison reform. It arises out of their belief in putting faith into action.

The Quakers say “The Welfare State grew out of a vision 75 years ago to reduce poverty, disease and lack of education and provide care for each of us when ill or unemployed or old. Our welfare system protects all of us against life’s contingencies.

Despite the debts after the Second World War we chose to afford it. We believe we can choose to afford it now and we must: The social cost of not affording it is incalculable”.

“We should not stand by and watch the most vulnerable suffering, and our most valuable social asset, our welfare system, admired throughout the world, being dismantled. We have a moral responsibility to uphold it”.

The “riders” will set off on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> July following a short meeting for worship which will frame each day. They will travel through villages: Yealand and Bentham; towns such as Settle, Skipton, Keighley, Bakewell, Loughborough. Milton Keynes and Leighton Buzzard; and cities, including Bradford, Huddersfield, Sheffield, Derby, Leicester, Northampton and Watford where they will be welcomed and hosted by fellow Quakers. They welcome all those with shared values to join them at any point on the “ride” as long or as little as they choose and can manage.

Information about the “ride” and postcard campaign can be found on <http://www.kendal-and-sedbergh-quakers.org.uk> and on the Facebook page on <https://www.facebook.com/rideforequality>.

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## NOTES TO THE EDITOR(S)

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Photos to be available during the week of the “ride”.

## Who are the Quakers?

Quakers are known formally as the Religious Society of Friends and believe that we all share a common humanity.

They are a group who emerged in Cumbria 365 years ago; Briggflatts and Sedbergh were among the birthplaces of the movement, a movement for whom equality, justice and peace are integral to their faith.

Around 23,000 people attend about 475 Quaker Meetings in Britain. Their commitment to peace, equality, social justice, truth and simplicity challenges them to seek positive social and legislative change.

The itinerary for the fortnight is attached.