

Jesus chose 12 disciples—all men, but from very different walks of life  
Fishermen, business owners in the fishing industry, tax collector, and a zealot  
Scripture records some of their discussions  
—who is the greatest among them?  
—James and John ask who will sit on the right hand of Jesus  
I think there were many discussions throughout their time together  
Subjects of disagreement about the best way to do things, or how to do something  
But I'm guessing none were as heated as the political discussions  
Jesus was not careful to choose followers that were all of one political persuasion  
Matthew was a tax collector who worked for Rome and was well paid for it  
Simon the Zealot was part of a political group that wanted to overthrow Romans  
Their arguments could have been very heated  
Colin Saxton suggested that there were nights Jesus had to sleep between them  
Humanly we have our differences—yet we are called to something greater—the Kingdom of God

*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.  
2 Corinthians 5:18 NRSV*

Having spent time in Palestine/Israel, I grew acutely aware of the conflict between Palestinian and Jew  
The Parents Circle – Families Forum (PCFF) is a joint Israeli-Palestinian organization of over 600 families, all of whom have lost an immediate family member to the ongoing conflict.  
Moreover, the PCFF has concluded that the process of reconciliation between nations is a prerequisite to achieving a sustainable peace. The organization thus utilizes all resources available in education, public meetings and the media, to spread these ideas.  
Bushra Awad tells the story of her son, Mahmoud who was killed by Israeli occupation forces  
Devastated, she withdraws, until...

*One day, a friend suggested I join the Families Forum (PCFF). I refused adamantly and asked her how could I shake the hand of the Israeli side that killed my son? A little while afterwards that same friend invited me for coffee in her house. When I arrived, I met an Israeli woman called Robi in the living room, and I immediately turned to leave. I didn't want to meet her or talk to her, but then the woman got up and asked me to stay. She said she would like to hear the story of my son, Mahmoud. I sat down and began to tell her. When I showed her his photograph she burst out in tears. She later told me her story and the story of her son, who was killed by a young Palestinian man in 2002.*

*After my meeting with Robi, I understood that our tears are the same tears. Our pain is the same pain. As mothers who lost their sons, we could share our emotions with each other. I later participated in a joint meeting of Palestinian and Israeli mothers who have lost their children. The atmosphere in the meeting was different, appeasing and honest. We talked about the suffering of both sides and about the fact that we all agreed that the bloodshed must be stopped, that peace must be made between the nations, and that the occupation must be ended. I joined the Forum believing in its message, and I am a prominently active member still. ([http://theparentscircle.org/en/stories/bushra-awad\\_eng/](http://theparentscircle.org/en/stories/bushra-awad_eng/))*

Quakers are active in Palestine through Ramallah Friends School, Ramallah Friends Meeting  
Friends from the northwest like Elizabeth Todd, the American Friends Service Committee  
North Carolina Quaker Max Carter is there now with a group showing them Palestine  
All working to cross the divides that separate and isolate the Palestinian

Quakers are all over Ireland—Ireland and Northern Ireland—in one united Yearly Meeting

My friend Margaret Fraser writes of Irish Quakers and tells me that the border is an annoyance—working with 2 currencies and 2 legal systems, but their mindset is of the island of Ireland Without a divisive mindset, even strong theological differences don't separate or divide them

Irish Friends during the Troubles—the ethno-nationalist conflict in Ireland in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Irish Friends had experience of meeting an emergency through effective organization and communication during the Great Hunger of the 1840s, so they were used to practical, experimental and flexible responses - supporting leadings, trying out new things, and laying them down if more effective use of resources seemed appropriate.

When people were bombed out of their homes during the Troubles, they were sheltered in some of the meetinghouses. There were public prayer meetings in affected areas during the marching season. Young Friends set up work camps to provide recreation opportunities for children in housing estates. Caravans (mobile homes) were acquired to offer respite breaks by the sea for families in the inner city.

Because of segregation and isolation, Quaker Cottage, outside Belfast, was acquired for meetings of mothers and toddlers from both communities. The children played under supervision while the mothers talked. A small group set up a tearoom and later a playgroup for visitors at Long Kesh (later the Maze) Prison when internment without trial began. It was a tribute to Quakers' high standing that the authorities agreed to this. Later, pre-release groups were organized until the work was transferred to the Probation Service.

They were also used to reflecting on the ways that their faith informed the building of a better society, and some were already deeply concerned about the discrimination in Northern Ireland. In 1982, Quaker House, Belfast was set up as a place of 'quiet diplomacy' - a neutral territory where off-the record conversations could take place, and where paramilitary leaders could meet informally with political officials in ways that could not happen publicly. Such relationship building paved the way to the challenges but also successes of the power-sharing administrations of today. This work was laid down after the peace agreement.

During the Troubles, Friends used their particular gifts to volunteer at different levels. Each level was important in addressing the urgent needs that arose, in improving community relations and in providing a framework for new political initiatives:

- **Level 1** was work with top-level decision-makers (politicians and officials.) This included Quaker House, Belfast, and also personal and family connections.
- **Level 2** was cooperation with inter-church- and peace bodies.
- **Level 3** was with local people in areas of conflict.

Finally, I've asked Patty to tell about her experience of reconciliation in Burundi

At Patty's invitation, a Twa woman was teaching the new class of quilters

Hutu and Tutsi women in the class said they could not learn from a Twa they considered unworthy  
Patty chose to do nothing about the "problem"

In the end, the Hutu and Tutsi women recognized that they could learn from the Twa

White South African woman abandoned apartheid when she discovered she could learn from her Black peers  
Realizing that they were equal, she was compelled to work against apartheid in support of Blacks