

Faith, spirituality and the role of a Councillor



Only a week or so ago, I sat down at our Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Annual Meeting. I sat thinking whether I did the right thing. I sat wondering whether, after a six years gap, it was the right decision to stand again.

One of the Labour Councillors, a really decent guy, said to me: "Michal, you've done it before. You really wanted to do it again? You are crazy."

There were a few moments before the meeting, when I was reflecting on sacrifices that many of the councillors have to make. Most of us have to work, full or part-time. There are plenty of evening meetings and our presence at home, or lack of it, will be felt. In my case, with three school-aged daughters, my conscience was searching for an answer for this question.

The beginning of the meeting was really powerful. The Full Council meeting is the only meeting of the Annual Calendar which begins with the prayer. A short prayer, read out at the beginning of the meeting, had such a huge impact on me. I felt once again a "calling" to public life and that I am not alone in fulfilling my duties as a Councillor. Moreover, our prayer reminded me about my most important part of my role as a Councillor; being at the service for others.

I must admit that when I decided to stand, I promised myself that I will do my best not to be passive and complacent but pro-active, driven and creative. Since being elected, I've been trying to initiate a number of meetings with local groups and organisations. A number of these meetings are already set up and our diaries (there are two Liberal Democrat Cllrs in my ward) are getting busy!

This morning (Sunday, 29th May), we were invited to a meeting of Quakers (Religious Society of Friends). I had an opportunity to work with Quakers before; we've organised two events to mark the International Peace Day. Before the meeting, one of my friends was teasing me a bit and said: "You can't be a Quaker; you don't like silence!" This morning, when I walked into the

Quakers Meeting House in Welwyn Garden City, I was invited to take part in a moment of reflection. We were sitting in silence for 45 minutes. Only one member of the congregation felt compelled to say something. I must admit that I don't remember when I was last sitting in silence for such a long time. It was simple, and yet so profound and enriching. For me, it was an opportunity to reflect on my own journey but more importantly, it was a moment, which enabled me to look beyond my town, city, country, or continent. It was a moment of feeling grateful for what I am. Equally, it was also important to embrace the suffering of our global family; war in Ukraine, poverty, injustice. It was so clear to me that because of the pace of life, constant bombardment of information, detachment from the latest news; we rarely have the opportunity TO BE in the moment. Do we at all question ourselves? I also wondered about my journey and the legacy that I might want to leave behind me.

I know that I didn't have to be elected to visit Quakers. However, being elected gives me additional encouragement to see opportunities to learn, listen and build dialogue with other people. After 45-min long reflection, we sat down, had a delicious breakfast and continued to talk; this time about local and global issues. The subject which came up a lot was the war in Ukraine and much needed support for Ukrainian refugees, which started arriving in Welwyn Hatfield. We talked about democracy, the importance of voting and being part of civic life, in all its shapes and forms. It was nice to receive positive feedback; "you sound passionate and genuine". It was an important reminder. Politics is often not about "scoring points" but more about being real and authentic. I look forward to many more similar meetings, which will help me to grow as a person and as a fellow human being. Thank you Quakers; I will be back; for my own sake and wellbeing.

P.S: Toast and tea were delicious!

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