

D: Continuing our work on Quaker structures – discerning the future for Yearly Meeting

Summary of proposals

Yearly Meeting will be asked to decide whether it is right to move to a continuing Yearly Meeting. This short summary is intended to help Friends prepare for that discernment. Friends who want to see more details can read a longer report at www.quaker.org.uk/documents/gryym-appendix-yearly-meeting-2024.

Background

Work to review Yearly Meeting started in 2019 with meetings and consultations. This work expanded to include a review of Meeting for Sufferings. In 2023 Yearly Meeting asked for proposals for change that were:

Spirit-led: continue to place spirit-led discernment at the heart of all decision-making across BYM.

Simpler: ensure our structures and processes are agile and capable of translating our discernment into action.

Less work: release energy within our Quaker community.

Clearer: clarify the lines of accountability; explain clearly the roles and responsibilities of the different bodies; meet the requirements of charity law, good governance practice and Quaker Gospel order.

More inclusive: promote greater diversity and wider participation in our decision-making.

Better for communications: improve communication between all Friends involved in our meetings and all the different parts of our structures.

What is proposed?

A continuing Yearly Meeting (YM) would meet four times a year – three short meetings and one longer one, including residentials from time to time.

All Friends would be able to come.

Area meetings and other meetings currently represented at Meeting for Sufferings would appoint representatives to continuing YM to ensure continuity of attendance and communication among Friends.

Meeting for Sufferings would no longer meet. Its functions would be carried out by YM or by another committee.

There would be one clerking team for YM and a single committee to plan the agenda for all the sessions.

BYM Trustees would remain accountable to continuing YM and would report to it. None of the current functions of Meeting for Sufferings would be given to Trustees.

New funding arrangements would be put in place so that area meetings would not be prevented from

sending representatives because of financial burden and so that individuals can access bursary support more easily.

Some North American Yearly Meetings (including Philadelphia YM, Baltimore YM and New York YM) already hold continuing YM sessions.

How do these proposals fit the criteria set by YM 2023?

Spirit-led – yes. All Friends will be able to take part in discernment. Although there will be less session time than the current amount for YM and MfS combined, this will be balanced by less need for duplication as the same items would not have to go to both bodies for discernment as they do now. The time allocated to continuing sessions could be flexible to meet the requirements of the business. With more frequent meetings, continuing YM would be able to return to business more quickly without having to ask a smaller group to look at it. An item could be threshed at one session, then considered again at another session a few months later.

Simpler – yes. The system would be clear and easy to explain as it mirrors the way area meetings work.

Less work – in part. Area meetings will still need to find representatives, but as everyone can go to Yearly Meeting the role should be clearer for Friends. Less duplication would mean that the work leads to more impact.

Clearer – yes. There would be two organisations rather than three and a continuing YM would have a clear relationship with trustees.

More inclusive – yes. A continuing YM would be open to all. Important decisions will only be made by an inclusive body with a better chance of it being representative of Quakers today. There will always be a programme for children, young people and families so that everyone can participate.

Better for communications – hopefully. Area meetings would be represented and would receive reports from their representatives and other Friends attending. Any interested Friend can attend YM and those not able to attend could choose to participate in preparation beforehand as well as receiving reports afterwards. Area meetings would still be able to send their minutes to YM as they currently do to Meeting for Sufferings.