



Yearly Meeting of the
Religious Society of Friends
(Quakers) in Britain

Book of Discipline Revision Committee

Book of Discipline Revision Committee: Second report to Meeting for Sufferings

Introduction

1. Following Minute 31 of Yearly Meeting 2018, Meeting for Sufferings established the Book of Discipline Revision Committee with Terms of Reference approved in July 2018, to bring to Yearly Meeting draft text for adoption as BYM's book of discipline, together with proposals for its publication. The appointment of our initial membership of 24, including two co-clerks and an assistant clerk, was completed by February 2019 and we first met in May 2019.

2. We first reported to Meeting for Sufferings in October 2020. This is our second progress report.

Who we are

3. We are a diverse committee reflecting the breadth of Britain Yearly Meeting, as required by our Terms of Reference. Since our initial appointment, 4 of our members have been released at their request, and 5 new members have been appointed. Two of our members have temporarily stepped back from the work for personal reasons, and hope to resume in due course. Of our current 25:

- geographically, 16% live in Scotland and Wales; 28% in northern areas of England; 28% in central areas; and 28% in southern areas
- two-thirds are female
- our ages range from teens to over 70
- the lengths and nature of our Quaker backgrounds vary just as widely, as do our life and employment experiences
- several of us face particular challenges, which reminds us all of our role in enabling everyone to take part fully.

Our work so far

4. We have now met as a full committee 12 times, the first five as residential weekends face-to-face, and the remainder – during the coronavirus pandemic – virtually by part-weekend zoom videoconferences. During 2021 our four shortened weekend virtual meetings have been interspersed with short weekday zoom meetings for routine business, to ease extended screen fatigue. We have experimented with zoom social evenings to keep in touch with one another away from business sessions. We have also continued to work intensively in various subgroups on specific tasks, and held regular check-in zoom committee meetings to keep track of these. These efforts to maintain coordination and progress of our work, and to stay in touch with one another in the absence of face-to-face opportunities, have however proved too onerous. So for 2022 we are scaling back to a more sustainable volume of activity. We hope to meet mainly on three weekends as a full committee, two of these by zoom only and one as a face-to-face residential gathering with blended zoom facilities for those unable to attend in-person, and with other work continuing between times individually and in groups.

5. Our **previous report** described our initial steps to

- **get to know each other** as committee members in the things that are eternal, and to learn **how best to work together**
- document a set of principles for (a) our **committee processes** focussing on inclusivity, accessibility and good Quaker practice; and (b) our work in **developing content** – including spiritual underpinnings; reflecting the diversity of our community; and the language, tone and voice of the “book” as a whole
- develop a working understanding that the **purpose of the book of discipline** is to reflect who we are as a community and where we might be going; to share our Quaker story of where we have come from in order to explain why we have reached where we are; to give guidance on what it means to be Quakers in BYM, reflecting and expressing and nurturing our spiritual life and our Quaker way; and to act as a testimony to the grace of God as shown in the lived experience
- identify a range of different **audiences** for it, their expectations of it and how they might use it
- articulate seven key **interlinked common themes** that will need to be reflected in it, and five **key insights describing the unity of our Quaker way** which will run as threads through it
- clarify that the “**book**” **will need to appear in a variety of formats and platforms** – printed, electronic, audio-visual and more, with different ways of accessing it. We have not yet decided whether there should be one or more printed volumes, nor how they should be titled, nor whether church government and anthology material should be integrated together or separated
- experiment with **exploring initial sample material** on eldership and oversight and on marriage, to test the distinction between “core” (what Quakers do and why – the

spiritual basis) and “supplementary” (detail on how we do it) material in church government, and to tease out issues such as language, tone and voice

- **engage with Friends generally** to encourage interest in our work, through activities with Woodbrooke, leading sessions at area meetings and other gatherings, setting up an online creative project, publishing “Frequently Asked Questions” and key messages, and having a presence on social media.

6. Since then, we have

- moved on from developing processes and principles and structures, to **preparing text**
- drawn up a **provisional list of 26 main topics** to be covered in the new book
- prepared substantive **first drafts on five of these: discernment, nominations, community, outreach (retitled “sharing the Quaker experience”), and trusteeship & charitable status (incorporating elements of resources/stewardship)**
- [started drafting on two more: **testimony** and **meeting for worship for business**]
- [began to identify **areas which may need discernment by yearly meeting structures** before we can produce definitive content for adoption – among possible examples are **membership** and **eldership and oversight**, including terminology to be used – where we are currently keeping a “watching brief”]
- [launched over-arching work to **review all these drafts for consistency, coherence, accessibility, and choices of language and voice** to reflect inclusivity and Quaker spiritual experience; and **to compile a glossary**]
- set up a system for **tagging contributions and comments received from Friends** across the yearly meeting, so that these can be considered when drafting relevant text
- run six **special interest sessions at Yearly Meeting Gathering in 2021** (including one in the Welsh language), some offering creative opportunities to engage with aspects of the revision, and others giving briefings on areas of our work and updates on progress – all well attended
- continued to receive **invitations from area and local meetings and other groups** to run sessions (often by zoom) to explain our work: 22 to date (7 in Scotland, 1 in Wales, and the rest in England or GB-wide).

Our next steps

7. During the period ahead, we hope to

- ❖ start drafting **text on some of the remaining main topics** not yet covered
- ❖ continue to **review drafts for consistency, coherence, accessibility, language and voice**
- ❖ consider how and when to consult expert Friends, central and other standing committees on **issues arising** as this work progresses; and how and when to come

back to Meeting for Sufferings and Yearly Meeting on major matters of principle requiring further corporate discernment before drafting can be completed

- ❖ accept more **invitations from area meetings and others**, by zoom or otherwise, so far as our people resources allow, and find other ways of **engaging Friends** throughout the yearly meeting.

How can Friends get involved?

8. You can:

- pray for and uphold the Committee
- look at our webpage at <https://www.quaker.org.uk/resources/quaker-faith-and-practice/revising-quaker-faith-practice>
- contribute to our online creative project “Open to New Light” <https://padlet.com/bdrc/OpenToNewLight>
- share ideas for the new book, including telling us of inspirational and helpful pieces of writing. These can be offered using an online form <https://forms.quaker.org.uk/qfp-idea/> or by contacting the Committee Secretary, Michael Booth, at qfp@quaker.org.uk or writing to Friends House.
- engage with our social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (search for revisingqfp)

9. We remain immensely grateful to our Secretary and other BYM staff for all their work and support for us.

10. Our task continues to challenge us while enthusing and filling us with joy. We welcome the upholding of Meeting for Sufferings and Friends generally.

Rosie Carnall, Catherine Brewer, Michael Phipps: Co-Clerks and Assistant Clerk

Michael Booth: Secretary

Meeting for Sufferings minute

Held online 4 December by video conference

MfS/21/12/04 Book of Discipline Revision Committee

Further to minute MfS/20/10/17, we have been joined by Catherine Brewer and Rosie Carnall, co-clerks, together with Michael Phipps, assistant clerk, to introduce the Committee's second report to Meeting for Sufferings (MfS 2021 12 05).

The Committee has identified a provisional list of 26 main topics, prepared substantive first drafts on five of these and started work on two more. It has also begun to identify areas requiring discernment by the Yearly Meeting prior to producing content for adoption. A process for reviewing drafts for consistency, coherence, accessibility and choices of language and voice to reflect inclusivity and different experiences has begun. We have sought greater clarity on the principles underlying the choice of language.

We recognise that we are at an early stage of the process but are confident that the Committee is proceeding well and are very grateful to the Friends involved for their work and for their clear report.

Margaret Bryan, Clerk