

Follow up letter



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

13 October 2023

To members of Meeting for Sufferings

Meeting for Sufferings 6–8 October 2023

Dear Friends,

We met over a weekend in Leeds and online, giving additional time for discernment and, for those of us at the residential venue, valuable opportunities for informal conversations and the sharing of meals, fellowship and worship.

I think this was a very good and profound meeting showing Meeting for Sufferings at its best, and I hope that it was so for you as well. I'm aware that we faced some technical challenges as well and we hope that future meetings will benefit from our experience. Feedback is welcome via our email address, sufferings@quaker.org.uk

One topic requiring particular attention was the meaning of membership. This had been precipitated by a review last year of whether non-members could be nominated by Central Nominations Committee to serve on some central committees. Area meetings and other bodies have been threshing questions from Meeting for Sufferings on what membership means to us today and how we think it is still relevant. We considered over 40 minutes and concluded that Quaker Life Central Committee and Meeting for Sufferings need to lead further discernment across the yearly meeting for the matter to reach Yearly Meeting in due course. We also determined that we should trust our nominations process to bring forward the right Friends for service not necessarily being dependent on membership in its current form.

We heard from the group reviewing Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings. We agreed with their proposed way forwards – that Meeting for Sufferings might become part of a 'continuing Yearly Meeting' – enabling the group to work on a detailed proposal for our future consideration.

An entire session was devoted to sustainability and the climate emergency. We received an annual report from our Sustainability Monitoring Group which told us how we are meeting the commitments we made at Yearly Meeting in Canterbury 2011 to become a low-carbon, sustainable community. We also received minutes from area meetings on Ecocide. We asked Quaker Peace & Social Witness to remain alive to developments and we gave our support to local Friends on their work on ecocide law and encouraged them to work with the QPSW Faith in Action team.

We also received minutes from area meetings regarding the situation in Sudan, modern-day slavery and imprisonment for public protection sentences. Meeting for Sufferings called

individual Friends and meetings to take action and I hope you will refer to our minutes and share these with Friends in your meetings.

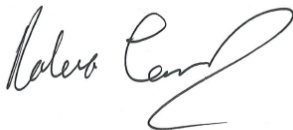
We heard from Crynwyr Cymru–Quakers in Wales and were inspired by their report on how Friends in Wales are living out their faith. Their written report is in the papers and I commend it to all Friends.

BYM Trustees shared matters that are currently under their care and we heard an update on the presentation of the Yearly Meeting accounts for 2022. These will be presented to Friends at an online meeting on 29 November at 7pm – this meeting will be open to all and further details will follow. Trustees have also been working alongside Friends for a while on drafting a memorandum of understanding between the constituent charities making up our yearly meeting. This has now come to fruition and helps to clarify existing relationships and our responsibilities to each other. Following a final check, Meeting for Sufferings recommend all area meetings, general meetings and BYM trustees adopt it.

We got quite a bit done, but the important thing is that we met as a faithful community seeking to be obedient to the promptings of love and truth as best we could.

Finally Friends, a few words about our next meeting in Friends House and online on 2 December. Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group is excited to share that the Quaker Life staff team for Youth, Children and Families will be running a programme for pre-school children, primary school ages and young people (11-18) at Friends House alongside our meeting. Would you like to bring a child or grandchild under the age of 18? Or encourage and facilitate children and young people from your meetings to attend? Children and young people will have their own spaces at Friends House to consider themes parallel to Meeting for Sufferings. We will bring all ages together for worship and lunch. If you have any queries on this particular point do get in touch with Jude Acton, Team Leader: Youth, Children and Families, on judea@quaker.org.uk.

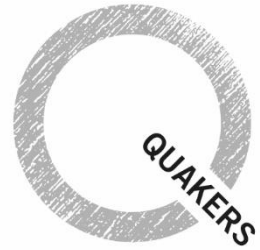
In Truth,



Robert Card
Clerk, Meeting for Sufferings

The following papers are included in this mailing:

- MfS minutes October 2023
- Functions checklist
- Introduction given by Quaker Life Central Committee at Meeting for Sufferings on new ways of belonging
- Poem shared during ministry



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

At a meeting of

Meeting for Sufferings

Held at Hinsley Hall, Leeds and by video conference 6–8 October 2023

Minutes

MfS/23/10/01 Opening Worship and welcome

We have begun our Meeting in worship during which the poem *Between two fields*, by Waldo Williams (*Quaker faith & practice* 21.33); translated by Rowan Williams was read.

MfS/23/10/02 Agenda

The Clerk has introduced the draft agenda, and we have agreed to this.

MfS/23/10/03 Membership of Meeting for Sufferings

Since our last meeting we have received the following nominations and requests for release for Meeting for Sufferings until the rise of Yearly Meeting 2024:

Release requests received:

Catherine Brown – Hampshire & Islands AM alternate
Alexandra Boliver-Brown – Young Friends General Meeting representative
Rachael Booth – Young Friends General Meeting alternate
Kim Hope – West Weald AM representative
Mariu Hurriaga – West Weald AM alternate
Jon Martin – Lancashire Central & North AM representative

Nominated:

Ruth Anderson – Worcestershire & Shropshire AM alternate
Beverley Eastwood – Hampshire & Islands AM alternate
Sarah Eilbeck – Gloucestershire AM representative
Lucy Faulkner-Gawlinski – Norfolk & Waveney AM representative
John Manfield – West Weald AM representative
Tim Rouse – Young Friends General Meeting representative
Hannah Stranex – Young Friends General Meeting alternate
Jenny Tipping – Bournemouth Coastal Area Meeting representative

We agree to these changes.

Visitors invited to represent area meetings/committees in the absence of the appointed representative or alternate:

Avril Dawson – Ipswich & Diss AM AM
David Lewis – Leicester AM

Martin Pennock – Ipswich & Diss AM AM
Anne Seilly – Luton & Leighton AM
Mark Waistell – Devon AM
Anne Wilkinson – South London AM

Apologies:

Lancashire Central & North AM, Wirral & Chester AM

Other visitors:

Michael Booth – BYM staff, Church Government Advisor
Alistair Fuller – BYM staff, Quaker Community Team Leader
Max Kirk – Quaker Life Central Committee
Carina Mundle-Garratt – Crynywr Cymru-Quakers in Wales
Vipan Narang – BYM staff, Finance Director
Cato Pedder – BYM staff, Media Officer
Lesley Richards – Group to Review YM, YMG and MfS
Chris Skidmore – Group to Review YM, YMG and MfS

MfS/23/10/04 Crynwyr Cymru–Quakers in Wales

We receive a report from Crynwyr Cymru–Quakers in Wales setting out their current work and priorities.

We have heard that, as with Friends in Scotland, Quakers in Wales operate in a socio-political context that is significantly different from that of Friends in England. In particular, there is a legal requirement for taking into consideration the long-term effects of the policies and initiatives of public bodies and an integral awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity.

We note particularly work on sustainability and with refugees and asylum seekers, and several exciting initiatives exploring peace issues. These build on and feed into projects in civic society. Many in Wales are supporting asylum seekers and refugees. The development of Peace Education in Wales is a significant contribution to the society.

We are pleased to hear of the efforts of Crynwyr Cymru–Quakers in Wales to pick up the call to become an anti-racist church, including opportunities for personal and corporate reflection and more academic efforts.

Further to our minute MfS/23/03/10, we have heard something of the experience of the Symud Ymlaen (Moving Forward) process to amalgamate the various separate Quaker charities representing Friends in Wales in a single charity.

We are thankful for this inspiring report on how Friends in Wales are living out their faith. *Our Faith in the Future* looks to a future where Quakers work collaboratively, and we can see how much of the important activity in Wales is amplified through working in partnership with others.

“Rydym yn ymwybodol iawn na allwn roi'r byd yn ei le ar ein pen ein hunain. Gwerthfawrogwn waith pwysig pobl eraill. Drwy ymwneud â hwy rydym eisoes yn newid y byd.” (“We are well aware that we can't put the world to rights all by ourselves. We value the important work of others. By engaging with them we are already changing the world”.) *Our Faith in the Future*

MfS/23/10/05 Quaker Recognised Bodies

We agree to register the following body as Quaker Recognised Bodies for a period of two years:

- Quaker Voices on Mental Health (QVMH)

The following four Quaker Recognised Bodies have been reviewed and we agree to re-register them for a period of five years:

- Claridge House
- Quaker Africa Interest Group
- Quaker Congo Partnership UK
- Quaker Social Action

MfS/23/10/06 Membership

Last year, Meeting for Sufferings asked (minute MfS/22/12/10) area meetings and others to consider these questions: Why do we have membership? What is it for? Is it still necessary? If yes, what form(s) could it take?

Today we receive over forty minutes from area meetings and other bodies, and we are grateful for the care that Friends have taken to respond to these questions. We have also heard an interim report from the small group appointed by Quaker Life Central Committee to look at the issue of new ways of belonging.

We are reminded that membership is an expression of the reciprocal commitment between the individual and the community. That relationship need not be realised by belonging to a traditional area meeting but may be found where any community commits to supporting those who participate, and the participating individuals commit to observing the discipline, including education, of the community. This relationship is necessary but may not be best described by the word "membership". We have heard that the current system distinguished different ways of belonging to our Quaker communities that are unhelpful, and we would like to ensure that these distinctions are not perpetuated. We understand that the current membership arrangements are not a necessary basis for our administrative processes and that we should trust our nominations process to identify the right person for any corporate responsibility that may be assigned. Administrative belonging is not identical with spiritual alignment: "the old labels we once used to identify ourselves... are no longer useful. We need something larger, more comprehensive." (1 Cor. 12 v13)

Having in principle discerned that nominations need not be dependent on formal membership as it currently exists; we ask that this matter returns to us as a formal proposal at a future meeting.

We have started a conversation on this matter and ask Quaker Life Central Committee to work with Meeting for Sufferings in facilitating further opportunities for this to be continued with Friends throughout our yearly meeting, hoping that this can come to Yearly Meeting in session in due course.

MfS/23/10/07 Appointments

Central Nominations Committee brings forward the following names for service or release as indicated:

Yearly Meeting Pastoral Care Group

Nominate to serve with immediate effect until Yearly Meeting 2026:
Doreen Osborne, West Scotland AM

Yearly Meeting Nominating Group brings forward the following names for service or release as indicated:

Central Nominations Committee

Release from service with immediate effect:
Keith Braithwaite, East Cheshire AM

MfS/23/10/08 Report from BYM Trustees

We have heard from the Clerk of Trustees, Caroline Nursey, and Paul Whitehouse, Yearly Meeting Treasurer. Caroline has introduced the main points from recent meetings of the trustees and Paul has told us about plans for finalising the annual accounts.

MfS/23/10/09 Dates of Meeting for Sufferings for next triennium

We agree to hold Meeting for Sufferings in the next triennium (from Yearly Meeting 2024 to Yearly Meeting 2027) on the following dates:

2024

- 5 October
- 7 December

2025

- 28 February to 2 March (residential)
- 5 July
- 4 October
- 6 December

2026 (provisional)

- 7 March
- 4 July
- 2 to 4 October (residential)
- 5 December

2027 (provisional)

- 6 March
- 5 June

MfS/23/10/10 Review of Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings

We receive a report from the Group appointed to review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings.

It proposes that Meeting for Sufferings becomes a part of a continuing Yearly Meeting.

We agree that this is the right way forward and ask the group to work up this option, planning to bring a detailed proposal to us for Yearly Meeting in session in 2024.

MfS/23/10/11 Sustainability Monitoring Group's annual report

We receive the annual report from our Sustainability Monitoring Group (SMG) which is asked to review how Quakers in Britain, including our centrally managed work, are living up to our commitments to become a low-carbon, sustainable community. We note that since its inception the yearly meeting's commitment to environmental action has developed and diversified and the Group may need to change to reflect this.

We thank the Group for a rich and detailed report covering many areas.

MfS/23/10/12 Ecocide

We considered minutes from area meetings on the campaign to make ecocide an international crime at our meeting in July. The Clerks of Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee (QPSW CC) gave an oral report at that meeting, and this is provided as a paper at this meeting (paper MfS 2023 10 14a). We now receive further minutes from Gloucestershire, Devon, and Hardshaw & Mann area meetings regarding criminalisation of ecocide.

We have heard that there is widespread and varied engagement with the issue of ecocide from Friends around the country.

We support the work of local Friends on the issue of ecocide law and encourage them to develop it with support from the QPSW Faith in Action team. We ask QPSWCC to maintain a watching brief open to new ideas and links ready to take the matter forward as opportunities may arise.

MfS/23/10/13 Memorandum of understanding between the constituent charities of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain

We receive a report outlining the work that has been undertaken over the past couple of years in bringing together a draft memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the constituent charitable bodies of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain. We note its purpose is to clarify existing relationships so that we can share the same understanding of our duties to, and expectations of, each other.

Meeting for Sufferings is content with the Memorandum of Understanding as amended in light of this meeting and, subject to legal review, we ask that it to be sent with our recommendation to all area meetings, general meetings and BYM trustees for adoption and signature.

MfS/23/10/14 Slavery

We have received a minute from Surrey & Hampshire Border Area Meeting expressing concern about modern day slavery.

We reaffirm our commitment to addressing the inequities arising from the historic slave trade and forward this minute to the Reparations Working Group for information. We also share the concern to address the issue of contemporary slavery and encourage representatives to share the minute and template letter with Friends in their area meetings in the hope that individuals and meetings will write to members of Parliament.

MfS/23/10/15 Sudan

We have heard from Friends in Sheffield & Balby Area Meeting about their concern over the situation in Sudan; particularly for those most affected by the conflict

including refugees and asylum seekers. We uphold Friends in the Area Meeting who have called on church leaders in their area and beyond to show public support for the large Sudanese Community in Doncaster and as a whole. We pray for all Sudanese people, particularly those suffering as a consequence of the current conflict.

MfS/23/10/16 Imprisonment for Public Protection sentences

Central England Area Meeting sends us their minute expressing their hope that Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences be ended at the earliest opportunity since the legislation under which they were imposed has been repealed.

We ask our clerks to liaise with Quakers in Criminal Justice so that a letter can be sent to members of Parliament and other elected representatives as appropriate asking for a 'resentencing exercise' to be undertaken at the earliest opportunity for all IPP prisoners. We ask that other means of communicating this concern be considered.

Friends throughout the yearly meeting are encouraged to write in support of review of these indeterminate sentences.

We understand that there is separate Scottish legislation which has not been repealed. We send this minute to General Meeting for Scotland and encourage them to work with those working in community justice in Scotland to consider whether they could engage with this issue.

MfS/23/10/17 Closing worship

As we have met this weekend, we have been conscious of the many evils prevalent in the world beyond our relatively privileged bubble. In particular we have been aware of escalating conflict in the Middle East. Even in these times glimmers of Light are not absent. In faith we look for the redemptive power of the Spirit to bring good news to all those suffering under the principalities and powers of this world.

Robert Card
Clerk

Meeting for Sufferings: Functions Checklist (*Quaker faith & practice* Chapter 7.02)

	Requirement	October 23
A	To set the priorities for the centrally managed work	
B	To issue public statements in the name of BYM	
C	To receive regular interim reports from BYM trustees	8
D	To receive the BYM trustees' annual report & accounts for information	
E	To make a report on its own activities to YM	
F	To determine the dates of YM	
G	To deliberate on how best to support the spiritual life of the yearly meeting and to further the development of its visionary and prophetic role	6, 10, 11
H	To keep under review and to test as appropriate the existing and new concerns referred to it by AMs and others	4, 12, 14, 15, 16
I	To foster communication throughout the yearly meeting	11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16
J	To receive minutes from area meetings	12, 14, 15, 16
K	To make appropriate entries in the prison and court register	
L	To appoint representatives to attend other Yearly Meetings	
M	To receive information about changes in the composition or status of general meetings and gatherings	4, 10
N	To make changes in the composition of area meetings	4
O	To give assistance to area meetings in the amicable settlement of disputes	
P	To hear appeals against area meeting decisions	
Q	To give guidance on policy matters referred to it by the BYM trustees from time to time	
R	To authorise action and minute as required under other sections of <i>Quaker faith & practice</i>	
S	To set up an arrangements group and support and working groups to assist its own work as it sees fit	

Quaker Life Central Committee New Ways of Belonging Group report to Meeting for Sufferings October 2023

Meeting for Sufferings received a spoken report from Max Kirk, a member of the Quaker Life Central Committee group on New Ways of Belonging, when it was considering the meaning of membership. These notes have been kindly shared by Max.

Background

- The New Ways of Belonging working group was formed following Quaker Life Central Committee's minute 22.26 to consider:
 - Ways to fully include people whose belonging and connection is not chiefly within a geographic location, such as a local or area meeting
 - Inclusion in Britain Yearly Meeting of Quaker worship communities which are not defined by geographic location
 - Encouragement and support of models of community and worship which are identifiably Quaker, but may not 'look' like most existing Quaker worshipping communities in 2023
- Group consists of two Quaker Life Central Committee members and a member of BYM staff – the team leader for Quaker Community. We undertook consultations as widely as possible, with friends from Woodbrooke, Young Friends General Meeting, young Quakers, Quaker Life Representative Council, Quakers in Wales, and more.
- Conscious that the very nature of this exploration means that many of the groups and individuals we have wanted to meet with are 'under our radar' and our conversations have given us a better sense of the needs, challenges and experiences of those involved.
- We have often found ourselves drawn into conversations that, while relevant, are outside our terms of reference – such as the concept of membership as a whole. This can sometimes hinder the ongoing thought process.
- At the moment, lots of people might be in parts of our yearly meeting in groups more on the fringe, not part of an Area Meeting - want to feel that sense of connection with BYM as a valued part of a great whole.

- Some people hold this idea of what a 'proper member' might be, want to ensure that everyone who wants to be is recognised by everybody else as equal members, equal parts of the whole

Interim update on our work

- Conversations with the range of groups have raised various questions, such as:
 - How might we enable and encourage a wider understanding and range of possibilities around community and belonging? How might we better recognise and support the involvement and experience of those whose belonging is not within our current structures?
- Conscious of considering what good pastoral care and spiritual nurture might look like in emerging and non-geographic communities
- Clear need to adapt and expand our current structures to enable and embrace a wider range of possibilities around types of community (including styles of worship) and ways of belonging. This needs to be more than simply 'acknowledging' or 'allowing' and should have a sense of embracing, celebrating, and learning from.
- It is clear that the current structure of recognized belonging solely through area and local meetings no longer feels adequate or appropriate in relation to the life patterns of an increasing number of people. We've thought about this before, as the nature of relationships between belonging and community has changed significantly over the past 30 – 40 years, but this has felt even more timely and important in the last few years especially.
- We as a Society are in new place of how we meet and how we are in community together, and so we are making suggestions/proposals in light of these new realities
- All of our ideas/suggestions/recommendations centre ideas around the need for more flexibility in membership, which might result in something that looks rather radically different from how membership is currently structured.
- Historically been some reticence around reshaping membership structures, but we want to provide some reassurance, both that we are at a point where our current structure is simply not fit for purpose, and that none of our suggestions involve splitting into multiple yearly meetings within Britain.
- It is clear that there won't be one simple answer to meet the spectrum of needs and overcome the many barriers faced in our current structure.
- haven't decided yet on the overall structure - might still facilitate membership through addition of groups beside Area Meetings, virtual Area Meetings, or just being a member of Britain Yearly Meeting like with Friends World Committee for Consultation – we are doing more thinking and discernment on

- We are thinking about and exploring the practicalities of our ideas and will be bringing recommendations for concrete opportunities for ways forward back to Quaker Life Central Committee soon.
- Overall our goal is to create something that is more inclusive, welcoming, accessible, modern, that reflects the wide range of types of community encompassed within Quakers in Britain, which involves some questioning and reevaluating of what we mean by community.
- We are clear that this is not about moulding people to fit our structures but about remoulding our structures to fit people.

Max Kirk
October 2023

David Bunney, Representative from Central Yorkshire Area Meeting, read out this poem during Meeting for Sufferings and some Friends asked for a copy.

This poem was read during Quakers in Yorkshire quarterly meeting in April 2023 which had the theme of peace and considering the consequences of a breakdown in peace. The poet is one of a group of asylum seekers and refugees who receive valuable and essential support and care from the Conversation Club in Doncaster, which receives support from Balby local meeting.

Litany

To live my life
I risk my life
To live my life
I leave my life
To live my life
I leave my love

I am person
full of love
I am here
my loves are there
There is love

I am lie down
They lie me down
Like animal, rape
cold like robot
No-one love

Men bring me
Beat me
Hot water burn me
Scars
No love touch

No eating
No drinking
No bed
No human
No love

I am here now
Safe?
But they are there
Still. Still

Far away love
Here I dream fear
Here I remember
Mind shackled
Alone. Different
No love

Here safe
But emptiness
But missing
But longing
for Love.