

Follow up letter



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

8 March 2024

To members of Meeting for Sufferings

Meeting for Sufferings 2 March 2024

Dear Friends,

It was, as ever, a delight to worship with you at Meeting for Sufferings, and to welcome to the table Elizabeth Allen as Assistant Clerk.

As a practical point, I should remind you to encourage your area meetings to ensure that nominations for the next triennium starting after Yearly Meeting this year, should be sent to sufferings@quaker.org.uk as soon as possible. Similarly, we were asked by Central Nominations Committee to encourage Friends to complete one of the forms offering service available at <https://quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/give-time>

I found it particularly humbling that we recorded six Friends who have appeared in court or been imprisoned as a result of acting under concern.

Marisa Johnson, the new Clerk of Britain Yearly Meeting trustees spoke to the trustees' report and challenged us to uphold trustees in their service. Marisa also spoke about the particular issue that has arisen over the delivery of the Salter lecture this year. *Quaker faith & practice* (4.11) reminds us in relation to the appointments made by area meetings that we should “give full and prayerful support to everyone who is appointed to serve... This is particularly important when the post to be filled involves heavy and perhaps lonely responsibility.” While it is right to hold trustees to account, I fear that we have become too accustomed to permitting destructive criticism in the case of our trustees.

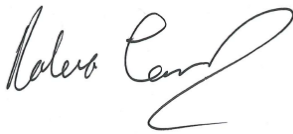
The bulk of our meeting was devoted to receiving the report of the Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering, and Meeting for Sufferings (GRYYM). The group brought a very clear proposal that Meeting for Sufferings should be laid down and replaced by a “continuing Yearly Meeting”. We heard of the sadness felt at laying down such an historic institution and the privilege that many Friends felt it had been to serve on the body. Nevertheless, I think the sense of the meeting was clear that this was the right way forward – we endorsed the report to Yearly Meeting where a final decision will be made in July. As *Quaker faith & practice* 8.24 reminds us, “Each committee has arisen and developed in response to a particular need. Each generation of Friends has been faced with a structure in some respects untidy, and

we may be thankful for the clear-minded among us who help us, from time to time, to set our house in better order. But order without life does not work, and our continual task is to ensure that our structures are in harmony with the changing tides of life in Britain Yearly Meeting.”

We were reminded at various points through our meeting that discerning together, led by the Spirit, is at the core of our faith and deepens the life of our community. I feel that Meeting for Sufferings this month made that aspiration a living reality.

Arrangements Committee will be reviewing the meeting shortly and will welcome any feedback on what might need to be taken forward, or how the meeting might be improved. You can contact them by emailing sufferings@quaker.org.uk

In Truth,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Card', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert Card
Clerk, Meeting for Sufferings

The following papers are included in this mailing:

- MfS minutes March 2024
- Functions checklist



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

At a meeting of

Meeting for Sufferings

Held at Friends House and by video conference 2 March 2024

Minutes

MfS/24/03/01 Opening Worship and welcome

We have begun our Meeting in worship during which a passage from Thomas Kelly's *Testament of devotion* was read:

Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto Itself. Yielding to these persuasions, gladly committing ourselves in body and soul, utterly and completely, to the Light Within, is the beginning of true life. It is a dynamic center, a creative Life that presses to birth within us. It is a Light Within which illumines the face of God and casts new shadows and new glories upon the face of men. It is a seed stirring to life if we do not choke it. It is the Shekhinah of the soul, the Presence in the midst.¹

MfS/24/03/02 Agenda

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

MfS/24/03/03 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:

Danny Chesterman – East Kent AM representative
Simon Colbeck – Luton & Leighton AM alternate
Beverley Eastwood – Hampshire & Islands AM alternate
Mark Frankel – Kingston & Wandsworth AM alternate
Caroline Howden – East Kent AM alternate
Michael Hutchinson – West Scotland AM representative
Steven Johnson – Manchester & Warrington AM alternate
David Jones – Mid-Wales AM representative
Elaine Millar – West Scotland AM alternate
Lynne Richardson – Banbury & Evesham AM representative

¹ Kelly, Thomas R. *A testament of devotion* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 9.

Carol Satterthwaite – Mid-Wales AM alternate
Pip Swancott – Pendle Hill AM representative
Susie Tombs – Banbury & Evesham AM alternate

Nominated:

Kim Boyd – Kingston & Wandsworth AM alternate
George Coyne – East Kent AM alternate
Damian Entwistle – Pendle Hill AM representative
David Heathfield – Hampshire & Islands AM alternate
Caroline Howden – East Kent AM representative
Michael Hutchinson – West Scotland AM alternate
Elaine Millar – West Scotland AM representative
Carol Satterthwaite – Mid-Wales AM representative
Anne Seilly – Luton & Leighton AM alternate
Chris Tombs – Banbury & Evesham AM representative
Julie Tucker – Banbury & Evesham AM alternate

We agree to these changes.

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

David Lewis – Leicester AM

Apologies:

East Kent AM, West Wiltshire & East Somerset AM

Other visitors:

Michael Booth – BYM staff, Church Government Adviser
Sarah Donaldson – BYM staff, Quaker Church Affairs consultant
Yvonne Estop – Yearly Meeting Agenda committee
Cato Pedder – BYM staff, Media Officer
Lesley Richards – Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings (GRYYM)
Carolyn Sansom – GRYYM
Chris Skidmore – GRYYM

MfS/24/03/04 Appointments

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

Book of Discipline Revision Committee

To serve with immediate effect until the work is complete, nominate:
Antonia Swinson, Kingston & Wandsworth AM

Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees

To serve with immediate effect until 31 December 2026, nominate:
Elizabeth Redfern, Leicester AM

Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group

To serve with immediate effect for a triennium, nominate:
Lex Ryder, North Scotland AM
Mary Savage, Cumberland AM

Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee

To serve with immediate effect until 31 December 2026, nominate:
Lesley Grahame, Norfolk & Waveney AM
Margo Lunnon, Teesdale & Cleveland AM

Representatives to other European Yearly Meetings

To serve as the BYM representative to Finland Yearly Meeting 2024, renominate:
Mary Woodward, South East Scotland AM

To serve as the BYM representative to Sweden Yearly Meeting 2024, renominate:
John Phillips, South East Scotland AM

To serve as the BYM representative to Norway Yearly Meeting 2024, nominate:
Sigurd Reimers, West Somerset AM

To serve as the BYM representative to Ireland Yearly Meeting 2024, nominate:
Gordon Benson, Pendle Hill AM
Kate Arnot, South East Scotland AM, General Meeting for Scotland nominee

For information the following between-meeting appointments were discerned:

Book of Discipline Revision Committee

Appointed to serve with immediate effect until the work is complete:
Michael Long, Northumbria AM
Lucy Faulkner-Gawlinski, Norfolk & Waveney AM
Marcie Winstanley, Northumbria AM (reappointment)
Pearl Johns, Bristol AM (reappointment to 31 December 2026)

Pendle Hill Friend in Residence

Appointed to serve as the Friend in Residence for 2024:
Jennifer Kavanagh, London West AM

Quaker Life Central Committee

Appointed to serve with immediate effect until 31 December 2025:
Elizabeth Backhouse, Brighouse West Yorkshire AM

Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee

Appointed to serve with immediate effect until 31 December 2026:
Hannah Larn, Hardshaw & Mann AM
Mathew Guest, Northumbria AM

Quaker United Nations Committee, Geneva

Appointed to serve as co-clerk with immediate effect for one year:
Helen Drewery, South London AM

Quaker World Relations Committee

Appointed to serve with immediate effect until 31 December 2024:
James Eddington, Bristol AM

b) Meeting for Sufferings nominations. For information the following between-meeting appointments were discerned:

Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings

Released from the group and role of convener:
Sarah Donaldson, Manchester & Warrington AM

Appointed from the group's members to serve as co-conveners until the work is complete:

Ann Kerr, West Scotland AM
Carolyn Sansom, South Wales AM

We appoint and release the Friends named accordingly, and thank them for their service.

MfS/24/03/05 Quaker Recognised Bodies

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

- Peacemakers (West Midlands Quaker Peace Education Project)

The following Quaker Recognised Body has been reviewed and we agree to re-register it for a period of five years:

- Quakers Uniting in Publications

We agree to remove from the list of Quaker Recognised Bodies Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture (Q-CAT), as the charity has been wound up, and Friends in Tune, which we have been unable to contact for some time.

MfS/24/03/06 Prison and Court Register

Meeting for Sufferings records the names of Friends who have appeared in court or been imprisoned as a result of their faith and acting under concern.

At this meeting we agree to include the following Friends with a summary of their circumstances:

Sue Bennet, Northumbria Area Meeting, who appeared in court after participating in a non-violent climate protest. She was sentenced to a conditional discharge of not committing another offence for 9 months and to pay costs of £336.

Helena Norval, North West London Area Meeting, was convicted of wilfully obstructing the highway in support of the Just Stop Oil campaign. She was sentenced to a conditional discharge and costs of £800.

Jacob Arthur Solomon Bourne (known as Sol), Leeds Area Meeting, was arrested for aggravated trespass as part of a Just Stop Oil protest at Lords Cricket Ground. At trial he was found guilty and sentence to 60 hours of community service and ordered to pay costs of £444.

Adrian Cook, London West Area Meeting, Phil Laurie, East Kent Area Meeting, and Alison Meaton, Cornwall Area Meeting, were arrested at the Defence and Security

Equipment International (DSEI) arms fair in London in September 2023. They have been charged under the Public Order Act 1986.

We uphold our Friends.

MfS/24/03/07 Area Meeting minutes on review of Meeting for Sufferings

We receive minutes from Central England and Chilterns Area Meetings (paper MfS 2024 03 16) expressing concern about the Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering, and Meeting for Sufferings (GRYYM) proposals for the future of Meeting for Sufferings. We will consider GRYYM's final report and proposals this afternoon.

MfS/24/03/08 Term 'overseer' in *Quaker faith & practice*

In December 2022 Meeting for Sufferings agreed for all area meetings to cease using the term overseer and to select another suitable term in its place. The Church Government Advisory Group (CGAG) was asked to consider how *Quaker faith & practice* should be updated.

In 2023 Meeting for Sufferings agreed to CGAG's proposed approach to add one paragraph to explain the change rather than attempting to remove every instance of the word.

CGAG brings us the following paragraph for inserting above section 12.05 'Eldership and oversight'.

The word "overseer" has traditionally been used by Quakers to describe Friends who are responsible for pastoral care. After consultation, in 2022 Meeting for Sufferings asked all area meetings to use another word or phrase because the traditional one has often been associated with the transatlantic slave trade, slavery and other forms of oppression.

In this edition of *Quaker faith & practice*, there are many references to "overseer" and "oversight". *Quaker faith & practice* is currently being revised and, while we wait for it, we trust that readers will bear in mind our firm intention to remove the word as soon as we can. Older quotations may need some explanatory text where editing would be inappropriate.

We agree to this and we accept CGAG's recommendation that this is a change that Meeting for Sufferings has the authority to make.

MfS/24/03/09 Letter of Greeting to Yearly Meetings in Europe

Quaker World Relations Committee has provided draft text (MfS 2024 03 09) for a letter of greeting to be signed by the Clerk of Meeting for Sufferings.

We agree to this as amended at the meeting and after final checks by staff.

MfS/24/03/10 Annual report on Meeting for Sufferings' activity to Yearly Meeting

Our Clerk has provided a draft report on Meeting for Sufferings in 2023 which we accept. This report will be presented to Yearly Meeting in July.

MfS/24/03/11 Report from BYM trustees

We have heard from the Clerk of Trustees and Yearly Meeting Treasurer, and we have received minutes from the meeting of trustees on 10 February. We thank them for this detailed and clear presentation.

We are pleased to hear that the 2022 Britain Yearly Meeting accounts were submitted to the Charity Commission on 14 November 2023 and that it is anticipated that the 2023 accounts should be available for Yearly Meeting in session in July.

We have heard of the painstaking work being done on implementing the Yearly Meeting's commitments to becoming an inclusive and anti-racist community, including the designation of £150,000 over four years for the Reparations Working Group to undertake research and other activities to inform our thinking on this matter.

We note that minute BYMT/24/02/10 was distributed as a confidential minute and we have been informed of the content of the minute, which relates to the holding of the Salter Lecture. This will now be made public.

We thank trustees for their work on our behalf and uphold them in their service. After almost two decades of working with a yearly meeting trustee body, we have heard of the distrust from some people in our community faced by trustees. Let us acknowledge the faithful stewardship they have offered us over that time.

MfS/24/03/12 Central Nominations Committee

We have heard from a Clerk of Central Nominations Committee (CNC) on some of the challenges they face in finding Friends to serve on our central committees.

We have been reminded of the 'Give Time' section on BYM's website:

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/give-time>

These pages set out the different kinds of service Friends can offer as well as making available short forms for completion to give information to CNC about your experience and wishes. It is our way to find the truth by hearing many voices. CNC can only bring better representation to our central committees if it has a bigger pool of Friends to draw from.

All of us have been asked to encourage Friends in our area meetings to consider how they may get involved and support our Society in this vital service.

MfS/24/03/13 Review of Meeting for Sufferings

The Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings (GRYYM) has brought a final report on the future of Meeting for Sufferings. We note that minutes on this matter received earlier in this meeting have also been before us.

GRYYM's report recommends we move to 'a continuing Yearly Meeting' and sets out what this means, how it might address some of the concerns we have with our present arrangements and how a continuing Yearly Meeting could work. We have been reminded that at the heart of this proposal is our belief that it will strengthen spirit-led discernment within our Religious Society. By bringing both Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings together in a single continuing Yearly Meeting we can

reduce duplication and increase accountability and participation. In particular it clarifies the role of trustees in the yearly meeting.

We welcome the proposals, although some reservations have been expressed. In particular, some Friends have expressed concern that accepting the proposals would mean there is less time for Friends in general to discern together, which deepens the worship and life of the community. We note that the proposals include the recommendation that we retain the practice of appointed area meeting representatives attending the meeting.

We have heard that other yearly meetings have already adopted the practice of a continuing yearly meeting. We have also heard enthusiasm on the part of children, youth and families staff for more frequent opportunities for national gatherings and recognition that a more flexible structure could assist with maintaining the participation of young people if anticipated changes to the school year in England and Wales are realised.

We note that some of the recommendations do not need to wait for structural changes to take effect.

We agree to endorse these proposals and send the report to Yearly Meeting for its discernment in July. We note that, if adopted, this would mean the laying down of the venerable institution of Meeting for Sufferings, which is a sadness for many, and we have heard testimony on the privilege that service on this body has meant to many Friends.

We thank the Friends involved in this process for their care in bringing this report and uphold them in bringing it to Yearly Meeting.

We have been reminded that sometimes we need to experience something before we can appreciate it, and that it will take some years to implement these changes. We recommend that we should hold a review of any changes after a fixed period. Let us live adventurously!

MfS/24/03/14 Planning and delivering Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings

Meeting for Sufferings set up a review group (the Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings (GRYYM)) in response to Yearly Meeting's wish to see these meetings reviewed.

The report (paper MfS 2024 03 14) addresses the questions the group was set in part 3 of its terms of reference. It outlines 21 findings and recommendations some of which we have already considered in our review of Meeting for Sufferings. However, the report highlights some additional recommendations which could be taken forward immediately²

We agree to forward the report to Agenda Committee, BYM Trustees, and Church Government Advisory Group, noting that additional support may be required to enable the proposals to be adopted.

² The report's additional recommendations which can be taken forward immediately are attached to these minutes.

MfS/24/03/15 Closing worship

During the course of this meeting, we have heard much of the value of meeting together for discernment, and are reminded of the words of Isaac Pennington (*Quaker faith & practice* 10.01):

“Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand.”

Robert Card
Clerk

Additional recommendations from the Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings on planning and delivery

Minute MfS/24/03/14 refers

Recommendation	Forward to whom?
MfS continue experimenting with formats, preparation, open sessions etc.	MfS Arrangements Group
Work on community building	MfS Arrangements Group YM Agenda Committee
YMAC & MfS Arrangements Group work more closely together	MfS Arrangements Group YM Agenda Committee
Appoint MfS reps on a rolling basis	MfS Arrangements Group YM Agenda Committee
Change YMAC clerking arrangements	YM Agenda Committee
Open up process for contributing to YM	YM Agenda Committee
Make scheduling of residential events more flexible, dependent on agenda need	YM Agenda Committee
Use term 'residential YM' not YMG	YM Agenda Committee
Clarify processes for QRB participation at YM	YM Agenda Committee
More staff involvement in practical arrangements	YM Agenda Committee BYM Trustees
Possible dedicated staff team for large events	BYM Trustees
Create & maintain a rolling events calendar	BYM Trustees
Greater openness about cost	BYM Trustees
Ensure planning cycle works to support follow up from YM decisions	BYM Trustees
YM, YMG/residential YM, and MfS continue to offer options for in person and on-line attendance. Further experimentation should be encouraged.	

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

	Requirement	March 24
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	11
D	To receive the BYM trustees' annual report & accounts for information	11
E	To make a report on its own activities to YM	10, 13
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	12, 13, 14
H	To keep under review and to test as appropriate the existing and new concerns referred to it by AMs and others	7, 8
I	To foster communication throughout the yearly meeting	12
J	To receive minutes from area meetings	7, 13
K	To make appropriate entries in the prison and court register	6
I	To appoint representatives to attend other Yearly Meetings	4, 9
M	To receive information about changes in the composition or status of general meetings and gatherings	
N	To make changes in the composition of area meetings	
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	4