

# Calling letter



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

22 November 2024

## To members of Meeting for Sufferings

I look forward to seeing you again on 7<sup>th</sup> December for our final session of Meeting for Sufferings in this calendar year.

Much of our business on this occasion will be necessary administrative items that are important but should not be too involved.

Beyond this, we will expect to lay down the Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering, and Meeting for Sufferings (GRYYM) and some business to smooth the transition to the new continuing Yearly Meeting.

Our December meeting is one where we receive reports from a number of groups. In addition to our usual update from Trustees, we will hear from Quaker World Relations Committee (QWRC), the Book of Discipline Revision Committee (BDRC) and Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA).

At our June meeting we set up a small group to look at the possibility of reviewing the process for registering Quaker Recognised Bodies, and we expect them to report back to us now.

We have ongoing business regarding the possible appointment of Friends not in formal membership to local and area meeting roles, and to roles defined by civil legislation, and we should receive the advice of the Church Government Advisory Group (CGAG).

We will also be receiving minutes from a number of area meetings.

As is often the case, the papers in advance of Meeting for Sufferings are substantial. If it feels too overwhelming, you may wish to prioritise the papers supporting the items marked on your agenda as being “for decision”. Those that are marked “for information” are important, but do not necessarily have to be considered in detail prior to the meeting.

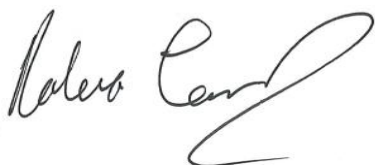
We will hold a Preparation Session on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> December, which will be an opportunity for us to share our experience of Meeting for Sufferings and of the

process of reporting to our Area Meetings. There will also be an opportunity to ask questions about matters due to come before us at our formal session.

It is easy to be discouraged contemplating the current challenges in the world but, approaching the season that the world calls Advent, I am heartened by the words of J. Duncan Wood reported in *Quaker faith & practice* 24.43:

*We cannot but regret the tribulation, the nakedness, the peril and the sword, but we cannot forget that 'in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us', and that the Christian message is to be proclaimed in all circumstances, even when hell itself seems to have broken loose. Such was the experience of Rendel Harris when, after his ship had been torpedoed in the Mediterranean, he landed with others at Alexandria in a state of 'Apostolic one-stage-from-nudity', to be met at the Customs House with the irrelevant, political question, 'Have you anything to declare?'; he felt that the only possible answer in the circumstances was, 'We declare unto you glad tidings'. All too often, the question put to us by politics cannot be answered in any other way.*

In Truth,



Robert Card  
Clerk, Meeting for Sufferings

### **Papers enclosed with this mailing**

Agenda

Minutes from MfS Arrangements Group

**MfS 2024 12 06** Prison and Court Register

**MfS 2024 12 07** Spirit-led employment practices

**MfS 2024 12 08** Quaker Recognised Bodies

**MfS 2024 12 09** Process for Quaker Recognised Bodies

**MfS 2024 12 10** Book of Discipline Revision Committee report

**MfS 2024 12 12** Agenda Committee for a continuing Yearly Meeting

**MfS 2024 12 14** Appointment of non-members for Quaker service

**MfS 2024 12 15a** Quaker World Relations Committee report

**MfS 2024 12 15b** Reports and epistles from other European YMs in 2024

**MfS 2024 12 16** Quaker Committee for European Affairs report

### **A reminder of how you can prepare for the meeting**

- Read the agenda and papers in good time
- Contact the other representative/alternate from your area meeting or body
- Send any comments or questions to the clerks ([sufferings@quaker.org.uk](mailto:sufferings@quaker.org.uk)), before the meeting to be received by morning of **4 December**.



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

## Agenda

### Meeting for Sufferings – 7 December 2024

At Friends House and by video conference,  
open for arrivals from 9.30am for 10am start

	Item	Paper
<b>10am</b>	<b>Session 1</b>	
<b>1</b>	<b>Opening worship</b>	
<b>2</b>	<b>Welcome and introductions</b>	
<b>3</b>	<b>Agenda</b> Adoption and acceptance of the agenda	
<b>4–8</b>	<b>Items to be taken on draft minute:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Membership (to follow) <b>(04</b> for decision)</li> <li>• Appointments (to follow) <b>(05</b> for decision)</li> <li>• Prison and Court Register <b>(06</b> for decision)</li> <li>• Spirit-led employment practices <b>(07</b> for information)</li> <li>• Quaker Recognised Bodies <b>(08</b> for decision)</li> </ul>	<b>MfS 2024 12 04</b> to <b>MfS 2024 12 08</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Process for Quaker Recognised Bodies</b> Recommendation to review the registration process and associated guidelines	<b>MfS 2024 12 09</b> For decision
<b>10</b>	<b>Book of Discipline Revision Committee</b> To receive an annual report on the progress to create a new book of discipline	<b>MfS 2024 12 10</b> For information
	<b>Shuffle break</b>	
<b>11</b>	<b>BYM Trustees</b> Report from Trustees on their recent work	Oral report

	Item	Paper
<b>12</b>	<b>Agenda Committee for a continuing Yearly Meeting</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To receive a working draft of the terms of reference</li> <li>To lay down Group to Review Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings</li> </ul>	<b>MfS 2024 12 12</b> For decision
<b>12.45pm</b>	<b>End of Session 1</b>	

**12:45pm to 2pm Lunch break**

	Item	Paper
<b>2pm</b>	<b>Session 2</b>	
<b>13</b>	<b>Appointment of Meeting for Sufferings Clerks</b>	<b>MfS 2024 12 13</b> For decision (To follow)
<b>14</b>	<b>Appointment of non-members for Quaker service</b> A report from Church Government Advisory Group (CGAG) on appointment of non-members to certain area meeting roles	<b>MfS 2024 12 14</b> For decision
<b>15</b>	<b>Quaker World Relations Committee annual report</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To receive the committee's annual report to Meeting for Sufferings <b>(15a)</b></li> <li>To receive reports from BYM's representatives to other European Yearly Meetings in 2023 <b>(15b)</b></li> </ul>	<b>MfS 2024 12 15</b> For information
	<b>Shuffle break</b>	
<b>16</b>	<b>Quaker Committee for European Affairs</b> To receive a triennial report on QCEA's work	<b>MfS 2024 10 16</b> For information
<b>4pm</b>	<b>End of Meeting</b>	



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

At a meeting of

## **Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group**

Held online 14 October 2024

### **Minutes**

**Present:** Elizabeth Allen (Clerk), Robert Card, Charles Phillips, Lex Ryder, Mary Savage

**In attendance:** Neil Jarvis, Siobhan Haire

We began our meeting with a short period of worship.

#### **1. Meetings attended by the Clerks and others**

We note that Mary Savage attended Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee on 14<sup>th</sup> September.

#### **2. Review of Meeting for Sufferings in October**

We have reviewed the minutes from Meeting for Sufferings in October.

We record minute 9 Our Work in Palestine and Israel as a Gold Minute.

We note that minutes 6 New Ways of Belonging, 10 Reparations Working Group, and 11 Marriage Declaration are continuing minutes. New Ways of Belonging and the Marriage Declaration will be added to our Forward Plan.

Minute 10 asks MfSAG to nominate a new member of the Reparations Working Group. We have brought forward the name of a Friend to serve in this role, subject to consent.

We thank the Support Group for their report. We have considered their comments and suggestions, in particular their views on the use of the Benjamin Lay rooms for MfS, and the need for a quiet room. We are mindful that the Group still needs new members and we ask staff to approach representatives and bring suggestions to the clerks of MfSAG, for our discernment.

### **3. Continuing business of Meeting for Sufferings**

We have reflected on our Forward Plan particularly considering what business might need to be brought to Meeting for Sufferings ahead of the meeting being laid down.

In the first half of 2025, we expect to return to an item on appointing non-members to certain local meeting and area meeting roles, and roles defined by legislation. To take this forward, we need to confer with the Church Government Advisory Group. We understand that this matter overlaps with considering the meaning of membership. Light of this might come from The Future of Quakers in Britain Conference.

We would like to explore our experience of how the spirit moves amongst us at blended meetings. We think we might invite some prepared ministry to help us consider this. We might take this item at our residential meeting in 2025.

We would also like to consider the Relationship Between Church and State. We think it would be helpful to approach Stuart Masters to speak to this item.

### **4. Any other matters**

There being no further business to conduct, we part planning to meet again on 6 November to plan Meeting for Sufferings on 7 December 2024.

Signed in and on behalf of the meeting,

Elizabeth Allen  
Clerk



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

At a meeting of

## **Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group**

Held online 6 November 2024

### **Minutes**

**Present:** Elizabeth Allen, Robert Card, Charles Philips, Mary Savage

**Prevented:** Lex Ryder

**In attendance:** Siobhán Haire, Neil Jarvis

We began our meeting with a short period of worship.

#### **1. Meetings attended by the Clerks and others**

We note that on 18 October Robert Card and Elizabeth Allen attended a meeting of the Group to Review Central Structures, held at Yarnfield Park Conference Centre.

Robert Card and Elizabeth Allen attended the Woodrooke Conference on the Future of British Quakerism, held at Yarnfield Park Conference Centre from 18 to 20 October.

#### **2. Forward plan**

We have reviewed our Forward Plan.

We note that the item on our work on sustainability and climate justice will be ready to come to MfS in March 2025.

We agree to discuss with YMAC how reporting on the progress of our trans and non-binary affirmation and welcome, and anti-racism work will be heard within our new structures.

We have heard that a report from Quaker Housing Trust will now not be available until 2025.

We ask our secretary to update the plan accordingly.

### **3. Meeting for Sufferings in December**

We have considered potential business for Meeting for Sufferings in December.

In addition to routine required business, we will be laying down the Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering, and Meeting for Sufferings, and there will be business in relation to the transition to a continuing Yearly Meeting.

We will receive reports from BYM Trustees, Quaker World Relations Committee, Book of Discipline Revision Committee and Quaker Council for European Affairs.

In June, Meeting for Sufferings considered the need for a review of Quaker Recognised Bodies and set up a small group of representatives to look into this. The group has met and is likely to recommend that a review would be helpful. If so, the report of this group, including suggested terms of reference for a review, will be coming to Meeting for Sufferings in December for consideration.

We will hear the Church Government Advisory Group's response to Meeting for Sufferings' request for guidance with discernment on the appointment of non-members for Quaker service in roles at local and area meeting level, and roles defined by legislation.

We have received the following minutes:

#### **A. Concern about the viability of struggling Area Meetings (Swarthmoor and West Weald Area Meetings)**

We have considered both of these minutes and agree to send them to BYM Trustees and Quaker Life Central Committee, for their attention. We wish to return to the vexing question of how to help our struggling area meetings, and we will do this sometime in 2025.

#### **B. Regarding Palestine (West Wiltshire and East Somerset Area Meeting)**

We agree to circulate the West Wiltshire and East Somerset Area Meeting minute with the papers for the December Meeting for Sufferings, for information.

#### **C. Concern for the right to protest (Leeds and Southern Marches Area Meetings)**

We agree to receive these area meeting minutes as part of our court and prison register item. We will return to the issue of the right to protest in the first half of 2025.

We ask the clerks to finalise the agenda in consultation with staff.

#### **Online Preparation Session, 3rd December**

We agree to use this Preparation Session to allow representatives to share experiences of their first Meeting for Sufferings, and how they reported back to their area meeting. We will follow this with a question and answer session about items on the December Meeting for Sufferings agenda.



#### **4. Spirit-led employment practices**

Meeting for Sufferings encouraged Friends in Lancashire Central and North Area Meeting to do more work on spirit-led employment practices, building on earlier work done by the area meeting. They have sent us the outcome of this work – a set of Advices and Queries for reflection and discussion by all those who seek to incorporate Quaker testimony into their employment practice.

We will receive the Advices and Queries paper at Meeting for Sufferings. It will be circulated with the papers in advance of the December Meeting for Sufferings and Friends who wish to comment on the Advices and Queries will be asked to do so by contacting Meeting for Sufferings.

#### **5. Any other matters**

There being no further business to conduct, we part planning to meet again on 18 December to review Meeting for Sufferings in December.

Signed in and on behalf of the meeting,

Elizabeth Allen, Clerk

## Record of minutes received by Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group

This is a record of all minutes received by Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group since the last Meeting for Sufferings with information about any decisions that have been taken. It also includes minutes received in the past where there are updates. If representatives wish to see a copy of a minute, or wish to contact the Clerks, please email [sufferings@quaker.org.uk](mailto:sufferings@quaker.org.uk).

### Minutes received since last Meeting for Sufferings

Body sending minute	Minute	Initial steps and decisions	Subsequent steps (if any)	Status
Swarthmoor AM	7 Crossing Boundaries [concern over viability]	<b>09/09/24 Minute received</b>  <b>6/11/24 Tabled at MfSAG</b> Decided to forward to BYMT and QLCC for possible action and advice before bringing to MfS.		With BYMT and QLCC
West Weald AM	24/71 Way forward for West Weald AM	<b>16/09/24 Minute received</b>  <b>6/11/24 Tabled at MfSAG</b> Decided to forward to BYMT and QLCC for possible action and advice before bringing to MfS. Appointment of non-members for Quaker service would be at MfS in December.		With BYMT and QLCC.  Element concerning appointment of non-members for Quaker service would be at MfS in December.
West Wilts & East Somerset AM	24-48 events in Palestine	<b>09/09/24 Minute received</b>  <b>6/11/24 Tabled at MfSAG</b> Decided request for changes in speaking out had been considered by MfS in October. Minute to be		To MfS in December for information

Body sending minute	Minute	Initial steps and decisions	Subsequent steps (if any)	Status
		shared for information with MfS in December.		
Church Government Advisory Group	CGAG 2024-03-07 and CGAG 2024-09-04 Appointment of non-members for Quaker service	<b>11/09/24 Minute received</b> <b>6/11/24 Tabled at MfSAG</b> To be taken at MfS in December		At MfS in December
Leeds AM	2024/09/08 Concern for the climate and the right to protest	<b>22/09/24 Minute received</b> <b>6/11/24 Tabled at MfSAG</b> To be shared for information at MfS in December and to return as business item at MfS in 2025		At MfS in December, initially for information
Southern Marches AM	AM 24/62 Arrest of Sarah Wilkinson	<b>30/09/24 Minute received</b> <b>6/11/24 Tabled at MfSAG</b> To be shared for information at MfS in December and to return as business item at MfS in 2025		At MfS in December, initially for information
York AM	2024/71 Clun Valley LM minute [arrest of Sarah Wilkinson]	<b>11/09/24 Minute received</b> <b>11/09/24 MfS Clerks</b> Agreed to share this along with minute AM 24/62 from Southern Marches AM on the same topic		At MfS in December, initially for information

## **Prison and Court Register**

Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) was established in 1676, to consider the sufferings experienced by Quakers for their faith. Gradually the practice of recording Friends' names in the 'Great book of Sufferings' lapsed; but in 1997 MfS decided to maintain a register of Friends before the courts or imprisoned for matters of conscience.

This enables us to record events, as well as to uphold the Friends concerned and to share information about their witness.

The purposes of recording an entry in the register are:

1. To enter the details of the matter into the permanent records of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), acknowledging Friends' witness and their willingness to face its consequences;
2. To remind ourselves that being a Quaker does not come without cost;
3. To record the Society's prayerful upholding of Friends who are suffering for their faith;
4. To serve as a record of the actions of the State in restricting our freedom to worship and witness.

Normally, area meetings are responsible for establishing the facts, and that Friends are or were acting under concern and wish the matter to be recorded in publicly-available documents. Including information in the register doesn't imply that MfS itself has tested the Friend's concern and necessarily agrees with or condones their action.

### **a) Under consideration this time**

Meeting for Sufferings has been alerted to the following Friends who have appeared in court or have been imprisoned and is asked to consider adding a summary of these details to the Prison and Court Register.

#### **1) Viv Shah, Leicester Area Meeting**

In September 2022 Viv Shah, an attender at Leicester Local Meeting for some years, was involved in non-violent Just Stop Oil protest at Kingsbury Oil Terminal. The Area Meeting says this was in accordance with their conscience in the hope that the protest would inhibit fossil fuel companies from transporting fossil fuels to and from the terminal. The action was sanctioned by Roger Hallam founder of Just Stop Oil, and other Quakers were involved. The protesters blocked the entrance to the terminal and prevented tankers from gaining access. Viv Shah was held on remand at HMP Foston Hall for nine days, fined, and given a two-year suspended sentence. Viv spoke movingly to the Area Meeting about the extreme and repressive sentences handed to their fellow demonstrators and the Meeting minuted a request to add Viv to the Prison and Court Register.

## **2) Pasha Bell, Devon Area Meeting**

Devon Area Meeting asks for Pasha Bell, a young Friend from Exeter Meeting, to be included in the register. Pasha Bell was found guilty and sentenced to 22 months on 1 August at Basildon Crown Court because of their faithful witness as part of non-violent action organised by Just Stop Oil. This was agreed at Devon Area Meeting in session on 19 October 2024. The Area Meeting expressed its gratitude for the faithful witness of Pasha Bell who is acting for all of us who care about the destruction of the earth.

### **b) Concern for the right to protest**

In October 2019, Meeting for Sufferings clarified the parameters for inclusion in the Prison and Court register as “Friends who have been before the courts for matters of conscience” (minute MfS/19/10/09).

Meeting for Sufferings has been sent three area meeting minutes regarding two recent incidents against Friends and others involved in non-violent action. Neither case makes the threshold for inclusion in the register yet, but Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group decided to share these minutes with representatives now for information. This will enable Friends to uphold those involved. The Arrangements Group is exploring, with staff who support faith in action, how to bring the impact of recent legislative changes on the right to protest to a future Meeting for Sufferings.

### **i) Arrest of Friends from Carlton Hill Local Meeting**

Meeting for Sufferings has been sent a minute from Leeds Area Meeting held on 22 September 2024.

#### **Minute 2024/09/08 Concern for the climate and the right to protest**

We receive the following minute from Carlton Hill Local Meeting, about the arrest of several Carlton Hill Friends on their way to a Climate Camp near Drax Power Station.

A number of Friends from our meeting were intending to be involved in the Reclaim the Power climate camp at Drax 8 August 2024.

Reclaim the Power describe themselves as “a UK based direct action network fighting for social, environmental and economic justice. We aim to build a broad based movement, working in solidarity with frontline communities to effectively confront environmentally destructive industries and the social and economic forces driving climate change. Reclaim the Power holds large action camps in solidarity with frontline communities affected by fracking and fossil fuel extraction. We also support our movement allies working on fuel poverty, anti-racism, tax justice as well as opposing unjust trade deals such as TTIP (the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership).

“Drax Power Station, near Selby, is the world’s biggest woody biomass power station and the UK’s single largest carbon emitter. Drax sources from around the world, primarily the US, Canada, and the Baltic States. Drax’s wood pellet production sites, predominantly located in environmental justice communities, emit large amounts of pollutants, such as PM10, PM2.5 and VOCs which are linked to respiratory and pulmonary health impacts. Woody biomass is counted as carbon neutral by the UK Government, allowing Drax to receive renewable energy subsidies (CfDs and ROCs).”

Several Friends of our meeting were arrested on the way to the climate camp, as part of a very large scale policing operation. We are concerned about the scale of this police action, particularly when our friends were aiming at an action which was to be joyful, peaceful and creative. Vehicles were impounded and intimidatory tactics were used to frighten them in the hours of darkness.

We are concerned about the way the police operation (Operation Infusion) was conducted and the lengths that were taken to stop ordinary people not just protesting but having a joyful time, learning and connecting with each other. The concern is not only about this action being stopped (especially at a time when police resources were needed to deal with the far-right disruption) but generally the way our right to protest is being squashed.

The meeting’s regular ‘Potluck and Learn’ session reflected deeply about the event in Worship Sharing mode, before eating together. Members of this group feel supported by one another and by accompanying Elders, emotionally and spiritually.

As a meeting we wish to uphold the group who were arrested.

We encourage individual Friends to contribute financially to support those arrested with their costs. Information about how to do this will be in the newsletter.

We agree to write to our elected representatives expressing our concern about the planning and policing of this incident. Elders and members of the potluck and learn will work together to draft this letter.

We hope to explore ways to tell these stories, so that more people are aware of the powers of the police, justice system and politicians and the right to protest.

We have been in touch with the Faith in Action team and other staff from BYM about this issue, to link with others affected by similar policing actions. We hope to raise awareness and gather support by making these links with other Quakers across Britain.

We forward this minute to Meeting for Sufferings, for information and asking Friends widely to uphold the people involved.

## **ii) Arrest of Sarah Wilkinson**

Meeting for Sufferings has received minutes from two area meetings concerning the arrest of Sarah Wilkinson. (Please note: Sarah Wilkinson is not a Quaker but is known by some Friends from Clun Valley Local Meeting (part of Southern Marches Area Meeting).) Southern Marches Area Meeting (held on 29 September) sent a minute including Clun Valley Local Meeting's minute regarding the incident. Subsequently, York Area Meeting (held on 9 November) expressed their concern in relation to Clun Valley Local Meeting's minute.

### **Southern Marches Area Meeting Minute: AM 24/62 Arrest of Sarah Wilkinson**

We have received from Clun Local Meeting horrifying details of the intimidating treatment of Sarah Wilkinson, a resident of Bishop's Castle, by the police and security services. We have heard further details in the meeting.

We feel that this is not an isolated incident and wish to express our deep concern to Meeting for Sufferings, that legitimate activities are increasingly under threat from the unaccountable power of the police. The intention seems to be to intimidate and deter people like us from activism.

We send this minute to Meeting for Sufferings with the minute from Clun that contains the details.

#### From Clun Valley Local Meeting minutes, 8 September 2024

##### Arrest of Sarah Wilkinson

We have been deeply concerned to learn of the circumstances surrounding the arrest of Sarah Wilkinson in Bishop's Castle on 28 August. Sarah is a pro-Palestinian activist and journalist, known to some members of our meeting, who was arrested by a 16-member counter-terrorism squad on suspicion of supporting a terrorist organisation.

As far as we understand it, Sarah's main activities in relation to Palestine have been to relay information coming out of Gaza and involvement in charitable work to construct wells for drinking water in Gaza. This has entailed working with Palestinians on the ground.

A number of highly disquieting features of the arrest emerge from an [online interview](#) Sarah managed to give after the event. These include heavy-handed treatment, excessive tightening of handcuffs, cutting off the blood supply to her hands, denial of access to essential Crohn's disease medication, deprivation of her phone and electronic devices, and the scattering of her mother's ashes in the loft after the urn had been overturned. The atmosphere of intimidation was heightened by the wearing of balaclavas by the squad and the fact that what should have been a straightforward journey to Shrewsbury police station took two hours instead of 40 minutes after the squad inexplicably took off in the wrong direction. The local police appeared not to know what to do with Sarah after the counter-terrorism police had left.

Two members of our meeting have spoken with Sarah in her home. As a result of our individual representations, the local MP, Stuart Anderson, has referred the case to the Home Office as a formal MP enquiry. We note also that the Shropshire Star carried a lead item on the subject on 7 September.

In addition, Sarah learned on 6 September that her bail conditions had been lifted.

While we do not have a full picture, we cannot but help feel that this calls the whole exercise into question, while equally as concerningly the manner of the arrest would appear to have been highly excessive and irregular. For local residents this has been a frightening incident, creating a sense of what it must feel like to be in a police state. Should this be happening in our country? Would this mean that Friends be deterred from demonstrating, e.g. at the Telford Arms Fair?

Combined with the progressive tightening in this country of the legislation concerning freedom of expression and the right to protest, we feel a sense of deep unease at what is happening. We are aware that Quakers have recently been detained and indeed imprisoned in this context. We note and welcome the action that Britain Yearly Meeting has been taking to protest at the repressive climate and see this as standing in a lengthy tradition going back to the origins of Quakerism.

Apart from contacting our MP, we have been in touch as individuals with the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia, Netpol, the Shropshire Star, the Guardian, and Jeremy Corbyn. We also agree as a Meeting to express our concern to the Police and Crime Commissioner. We agree to write to the Friend and Quake about our concern.

We agree to forward this minute to Area Meeting and hope that our concern will be referred to Meeting for Sufferings.

#### **York Area Meeting minute 2024/71**

##### **Minute from Clun Valley Local Business Meeting 8.9.2024**

This was read at our last Area Meeting and was circulated with the minutes. Southern Marches AM have sent a minute to Meeting for Sufferings in support of Sarah Wilkinson and raising concerns about the police action. This was read to Friends by the Assistant Clerk. Friends expressed concern about what they heard of the intimidating way in which Sarah Wilkinson was treated by the police and security services. We felt that the methods used were a threat to legitimate protest and wish this minute to be sent to Meeting for Sufferings.



## **Spirit-led employment practices**

In 2021, Friends in Lancashire Central & North AM sent a minute to Meeting for Sufferings regarding employment practices. This led to a group being formed in the area meeting which brought a short report to Meeting for Sufferings in March 2023 (paper MfS 2023 03 13). Meeting for Sufferings received the report and heard from Friends in the area meeting on this matter. Meeting for Sufferings minuted:

We have welcomed our Friends Jon Martin and Lisa Whistlecroft from Lancashire Central and North Area Meeting who have shared their reflections on ethical employment practices and how these might be realised in Quaker workplaces, as first communicated to Meeting for Sufferings via minute 21.9.1 Employment Practices in BYM. The group appointed by the Area Meeting to take this concern forward is planning to produce some resources to help Friends and employers consider spirit-led practice.

We have heard in particular that issues of confidentiality are important and we need to engage with and manage conflicts well.

We wish the group well and look forward to hearing more as appropriate.

(Minute MfS/23/03/12)

The group has now produced a resource (in the form of Advices and Queries) and asks for this to be shared in the yearly meeting. The group notes:

We're now at a point where we can offer some advices and queries around spirit-led, ethical employment practice for Friends' consideration. They are not intended to be a complete list or a replacement for professional expertise and guidance. We expect them to change over time. We hope that they can be used as prompts for reflection and discussion by all those who aspire to incorporate Quaker testimony into their employment practice.

Kathy Chandler, Lisa Whistlecroft, Jon Martin and Phil Chandler  
Lancashire Central and North Area Meeting

The group invites feedback which can be sent via [sufferings@quaker.org.uk](mailto:sufferings@quaker.org.uk)

# **Spirit-led, ethical employment practice: Advices & queries**

## **Introduction**

In 2021, a concern arose within Lancashire Central and North Area Meeting about whether, or how, Quaker organisations, of all types and sizes, integrate the spiritual insights of our tradition into our practice as employers. It was felt that merely following 'the law' or, indeed, what secular organisations identify as 'best practice', didn't necessarily guarantee that the result was in line with our testimony.

A working group was nominated by the area meeting. With the help of the Deputy Recording Clerk, the concern was taken to Meeting for Sufferings, where it was agreed that it would be a useful endeavour for the area meeting to take a lead in exploring what Friends felt would constitute spirit-led, ethical employment practice and to use the responses to produce a practical resource. Meeting for Sufferings encouraged interested Friends across Britain Yearly Meeting to help with its development.

After much discernment and support from Friends with extensive experience as employers and employees across multiple contexts, we offer the following advices and queries for Friends' consideration. They are not intended to be a complete list or a replacement for professional expertise and guidance. We expect them to change over time. We hope that they will be used as prompts for reflection and discussion by all those who seek to incorporate Quaker testimony into their employment practice.

September 2024

## **Livelihoods**

*Spirit-led employment practice nurtures staff and creates an open and trusting relationship between employer and employees. This relationship acknowledges employees' needs for financial and emotional security, both for themselves and for any dependents. If colleagues feel secure and valued, work relations flourish and employee contributions to the organisation are optimised.*

### **Do you offer contracts that consider the wellbeing of the employee as well as the needs of the employer?**

We offer permanent and secure contracts of employment as the norm. We do not use freelance or agency staff to meet ongoing core organisational commitments. Rates of pay take account of work additional to contracted hours, work completed at unsocial hours, and the work's location.

### **Are your pay scales and job grading schemes transparent and the pay differential in your organisation regularly reviewed?**

Grades and pay within the organisation are appropriate to the responsibilities of each employee. We recognise that percentage pay increases preferentially reward the highest paid and have a scheme for annual pay increases designed to minimise pay differentials across the organisation whilst maintaining financial incentives for internal promotion.

### **Are your arrangements for employee leave flexible and generous?**

Maternity, paternity and parental leave periods are well above the legal minimum. Arrangements for annual leave, sick leave, compassionate leave and emergency leave are similarly flexible and generous. Phased returns to work are the norm after extended absence. Employee rights are clearly stated in employment contracts and are the same for all staff, regardless of grade.

### **Do you plan for employees' financial security in retirement?**

We offer an ethical pension scheme in line with Quaker values and encourage all employees to join. Our employer contributions to the scheme are commensurate with the wealth and financial stability of our organisation.

### **Are you aware of the need for timely action when requests for information are made?**

We recognise that UK law often requires information from employers at short notice and that employees with family overseas may have specific needs that require a sensitive and timely response. We prioritise the fulfilment of these requests whether they come from government or from the employee.

### **In times of organisational change or crisis, is your concern for employees' livelihoods and wellbeing prioritised?**

We recognise that organisational change is stressful and should not be undertaken lightly. When restructuring, we are open with all employees about the purpose, methods and likely outcomes of the process. We actively invite employee input to the process from the outset and involve them sensitively throughout. If circumstances force us to reduce staffing levels or salaries, even temporarily, we consult employees about the means that this can best be achieved and make every effort to reinstate employees at the earliest opportunity.

### **Useful resources**

[Living Wage Foundation](#)

## Wellbeing

*Spirit-led employment practice recognises that for work to flourish, employees need space and opportunity for refreshment and nourishment, appropriate work environments, and high-quality support.*

### **How do you support employees to maintain a healthy balance between work, rest and relaxation?**

We ensure sufficient time for employees to complete the work expected of them. We respect and protect their non-working time and space, including for those who live on-site. When staff are Quakers, there is a clear separation of employment and Quaker service. We have a flexible approach to hours and place of work wherever possible. We discourage overworking and model this ourselves. More than one person knows how to perform essential tasks so that no individual is anxious that systems will not work without them. Anyone feeling overburdened feels able to share this so that resolution becomes everyone's responsibility. Staff can take a wellbeing day – a bookable day, separate from annual leave, to focus on an activity to improve their wellbeing and reduce risk of burnout – up to three times a year.

### **Are working environments safe, healthy and pleasant to spend time in?**

The workplace, including the home if that is where the work happens, is regularly assessed for hazards, including psychological ones. We recognise that employees are diverse and will have a variety of individual needs. Any issues are quickly addressed. The workplace feels safe and provides a pleasant, comfortable space for work and for rest breaks. We provide the equipment needed to work safely and healthily. There is appropriate space and time for rest, and for feeding babies or expressing breast milk.

### **Are you as concerned for the wellbeing of the employees and their dependents as you are for the task, product or smooth running of your organisation?**

We signpost employees to professional, high-quality services that support their health and wellbeing and that of their dependents. We recognise that caring, compassionate managers and colleagues, who take time to enquire, listen and respond, are important in times of illness or personal difficulty too. We have a health and wellbeing plan and arrange regular training for all managers in supporting health and wellbeing. If appropriate to the size of the organisation, we have trained first aiders, including mental health first aiders. We respect employees' confidentiality. There is effective support on return from sick leave and maternity or paternity leave, including phased returns.

### **Useful resources**

[The Mental Health Foundation](#)

[MIND](#)

[Health and Safety Executive](#)

[Mental Health in Quaker Communities](#)

## Conflict

*'Conflict' covers a range of situations, from people struggling to agree through to a dense, knotty situation with a complex history and long catalogue of hurts. Spirit-led employment practice recognises that conflict is a natural part of being in relationship with other people and that we all carry our own past hurts and experiences with us.*

### **Do you recognise that active building of a trusting community is the single most important factor in mitigating and limiting the damaging impact of conflict?**

We provide an employment structure in which dialogue between employer and employees is built to establish trust, enabling the views of each to be valued by the other, so that difficulties may be overcome through co-operation. We make time and opportunities to know one another in more than just work and task. We understand what helps employees to flourish and what gives them joy, as well as the pressures and stresses they face.

### **How well do you listen in the workplace?**

A listening space is where all can speak truth without fear of judgement and where all are encouraged to listen with kindness and an assumption of good intent. We take seriously the challenges of imbalances of power. Sometimes, the approach needs to be one of equity, rather than simply equality. Tried and trusted Quaker approaches – Meetings for Listening; Threshing; Meetings for Clearness; Worship Sharing – can be modified and applied to lots of situations. Like all Quaker processes, they must be well held and elderled and have clear 'ground rules' or ways of being together. Employers and employees can access trusted third party 'mediation' by an independent person before problems have escalated.

### **Do you effectively address disrespect, bullying and harassment in the workplace?**

Disrespect, bullying and harassment are clearly defined in policies and called out at whatever level they occur. Careful and compassionate inquiry follows. There is a clear process to follow in the event of an issue or problem. Employees are listened to, supported to understand how they might change unacceptable behaviour and are always encouraged and expected to bring an accompanying, supportive friend or trade union representative to any meetings.

### **When conflict arises, do you use a transformational approach?**

We recognise that naming and acknowledging conflict at an early stage is essential in responding to it in a healthy way. Blame and fault are the least helpful ideas to take into a conflict situation, but we appreciate that these will often be the starting place for those involved. Only when there is a willingness to engage is it possible to begin any process. The same approach will not fit every situation and not every conflict can be resolved. The state of heart and mind with which we approach a conflict is just as, or even more important than the process we use. In any conflict situation, we try to think about what 'success' might look like. Managers are self-aware and we arrange training in transformational and trauma-informed approaches, which is refreshed regularly.

### **Useful resources**

[St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace](#)

[Bridge Builders training and mediation](#)

[Restoring Relations](#)

## Organisation

*Being an employer is complex. This section offers queries and advice around the organisation of employment whilst considering Quaker values.*

### **Do you feel equipped for your responsibilities as an employer? What do you do to ensure you are supported pastorally, practically and legally in this role?**

We actively support all those who lead and manage the organisation, including trustees. When someone is appointed or promoted to a leadership role, we ensure appropriate induction and training. We allocate space and time for updates around best practice. We don't assume we always know best. We are honest about what we don't know and when we need to get advice and support. We are open to the large body of law and codified good practice from professional organisations, whilst recognising that it constantly changes and may not always be in line with Quaker principles. We consider it carefully.

### **Do all colleagues have clear and accurate job descriptions?**

Everyone who works within the organisation, including trustees and volunteers, knows what they are expected to do. Roles have clear job descriptions which outline what each role involves, how it should be carried out and what support is available. Job descriptions are accessible, up to date and available to all in the organisation. We value each colleague's expertise and trust them to do their job without micromangement.

### **Have you considered multiple avenues for staff feedback, which are accessible?**

We encourage staff feedback, which can take place one-to-one with managers but also via truly anonymous processes, such as a feedback box or online surveys. We recognise that unions and staff groups have roles to play in feedback to management and seriously consider their feedback as part of a clear and open relationship.

### **How effective are your complaints and whistleblowing procedures?**

We have clear and accessible policies. They are viewed positively by staff and not as a last resort. They take account of how power is distributed throughout the organisation in order to prevent one individual filtering or blocking the raising of an issue. Our processes enable staff to use the policies without fear of negative repercussions. Managers encourage their use and avoid using informal channels for issues that require formal processes. These policies are regularly reviewed and their use is evaluated. Employees say that they feel comfortable to use them if necessary.

### **Are you honest about the structure of your organisation and the lines of authority within it?**

Historically, Quaker testimony values equal structures and the avoidance of hierarchy. This can make it challenging to acknowledge the need for hierarchy and accountability in the workplace. We aim to be honest and transparent about the structures we have. Staff know where authority and responsibility lie, so that their psychological safety isn't compromised by the unexpected removal of autonomy or an unwarranted assumption of responsibility.

### **Do you have clear, open and transparent channels of information sharing?**

We have considered how best to communicate decisions, taking account of the context in which staff are employed and their individual needs, so that they are always aware of any information that is pertinent to their work in good time. We have varied and transparent lines of two-way communication, which foster honesty, integrity and consistency. Difficult decisions are communicated with care and compassion.

## Culture

*Organisational culture is the unique set of values, beliefs, attitudes, systems, and rules that outline and influence behaviour within an organisation. We seek to foster a positive culture in line with Quaker values.*

### **Do you foster a culture where mistakes are seen as opportunities for growth and everyone can easily request help?**

We see asking for help as a strength. All staff feel comfortable flagging when they have concerns or have made mistakes. Feedback is framed thoughtfully and sensitively. Leaders and managers model this culture of not fearing mistakes and are not expected to be omniscient. We do not always get everything right and we are not afraid to admit our mistakes and apologise. We move forward together.

### **Do you value all employees equally as people?**

We acknowledge that our employees are people with their own different challenges, needs and motivations. We treat all colleagues with respect and kindness, regardless of grade, role, the nature of their contract, length of service or any connection to the Quaker community. We take time to get to know them and learn their names and pronouns. Our policies and benefits are applied equitably.

### **What do you do to build an inclusive workplace? Do you recognise the advantages that a diverse workplace can bring, acknowledging that changes in practice may be needed to enable everyone to thrive?**

Everyone within the organisation understands the diverse backgrounds and needs of colleagues and the people we serve, and receives regular training in relation to supporting equity, diversity and inclusion. We're mindful of our commitments to becoming actively anti-racist, acknowledging and affirming trans and gender diverse colleagues, and considering what love requires of us in the workplace.

### **How do you cultivate respect across the organisation?**

All staff understand and value the roles of colleagues across the organisation, ensuring each individual's expertise is trusted, utilised and respected. We avoid creating an 'us and them' mentality and jumping to conclusions. We cultivate respect and understanding as our starting point for engagement, acknowledging people may approach issues from different places and may carry past hurt. We see generosity of spirit as a virtue.

### **Are everyone's contributions acknowledged, valued and appreciated?**

We thank colleagues for their work, celebrate their achievement and acknowledge their contribution when this work is subsequently used by others. We are aware of the risks associated with award schemes, recognising that if only some staff are rewarded they may feel uncomfortable, whilst others may feel discouraged and unappreciated.

### **Do you have a publicly accessible document about the culture of the organisation?**

Together as an organisation we have drawn up a document that reflects our unique culture and our aspirations for a better workplace. We work collaboratively to ensure it is reflective of where we want to go collectively. We are committed to working towards this positive culture, embedding it throughout our work. We revisit this statement regularly to reflect on our progress.

## Management

*Within a Quaker context, we think of leadership as service. This section offers advice and queries to those in management or leadership roles.*

### **Are you willing to acknowledge mistakes, and apologise?**

Humility and honesty build respect and trust. By acknowledging mistakes we encourage everyone to come forward with their struggles so that leaders and managers are aware of problems and we can move forward together.

### **Do you meet the staff you line manage regularly? Do you give them space to share and acknowledge their progress, discuss queries and any challenges/barriers?**

We meet regularly and create space during line management to listen to our staff. We recognise that employees at all levels need this support.

### **Do you understand that employees have different gifts and needs?**

We appreciate that individuals respond to different styles of management; some need more structured meetings with agenda and minutes, some need more informal space, some regular shorter catch ups and others longer spaced-out meetings. We find ways of managing meetings and support in ways that work best for the role, staff member and manager.

### **Are you consistent with how you treat staff?**

While recognising that all people are unique, we ensure that all employees have access to the same support and we apply formal processes equitably. We ensure that processes don't advantage or disadvantage any individual disproportionately.

### **How do you manage innovation and change?**

We see innovation as an opportunity to grow together, not as a threat. We are mindful that often there is more than one right way forward. We acknowledge that the best decisions are informed decisions. Decision makers take time to understand how any proposed change will affect each individual's work and its associated challenges. We recognise that imposed changes to structures and practices are unsettling and we avoid making changes without good reasons. When we do make changes, we explain our rationale and listen carefully to everyone's ideas.

### **Do you engage productively with unions?**

We understand that unions have a constructive and collaborative role to play. We seek to meet with unions regularly and appropriately, understanding our respective roles and interests, and seek to create effective and harmonious working relations within the organisation.

### **Are you willing to make difficult decisions to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all who work in the organisation or whom you serve?**

As employers we understand that sometimes leadership requires difficult decisions. As Quakers, we look for good in everyone but when anyone's behaviour puts others' safety or wellbeing at risk, we take action.



## **Recruitment, training, development and moving on**

*Attention to recruitment, training and staff development is essential so that employees join, progress and eventually leave the organisation well equipped and empowered for their next steps, whatever they are.*

### **How do you promote fair recruitment?**

We try to ensure that a wide pool of people apply for vacancies. Our recruitment process is transparent. The rate of pay is always specified in the job advertisement. We are flexible and creative in finding ways to enable candidates who may otherwise have been excluded to apply. We have accurate job descriptions, which are regularly reviewed. We avoid forcing staff to unnecessarily apply for roles in which they are already employed. We ensure that interview panels are balanced and fair. We anonymise applications and remove people from the recruitment panel who may have conflicts of interest. We are mindful of conscious and unconscious bias and may buy in expertise to ensure panels are diverse and make informed decisions. We offer unsuccessful interview candidates support and feedback, aware that this outcome may change their relationship with the organisation and take time to process.

### **Do you recognise the full cost of employment and equitably allocate resources for employee training and support?**

We budget generously for high quality induction, training and support and have processes to ensure that the funding is allocated equitably and transparently. We provide mentoring, supervision or buddying and encourage employees to form peer support groups. We have an effective staff-development programme making use of both internal and external training and expertise.

### **Are staff development and team building events inclusive, worthwhile and enjoyable?**

We invest in nurturing the workplace community and in building and strengthening collaborative relationships. We invite all levels of staff to be involved in planning and leading team events and ensure that staff can attend within their working hours. The timing, location and activities planned take account of diverse individual needs.

### **Do you support your employees to progress and achieve personal and career goals, as well as those which benefit the organisation?**

All staff regularly review their progress towards their goals with the support of a trained and trusted colleague in a supportive, unhurried environment. This two-way discussion prioritises listening, care and encouragement and is also an opportunity for the employee to provide feedback to the employer. We respect confidentiality in this process. Records, which are accurate and not onerous, are securely kept. We invest in personalised learning plans that focus on the development needs of the individuals as well as the organisation. When colleagues progress to a new role in another organisation we view this as a success.

### **Do you support employees at the end of their employment, regardless of their reason for leaving their role?**

When people progress within or beyond the organisation, are made redundant or retire, we always sensitively support them to prepare for this change, both emotionally and practically. We thank departing colleagues for their contribution and celebrate their achievements. We offer all those leaving an exit interview, taking the time and opportunity to listen and learn about what the organisation is doing well and where it might improve. The staff member who is leaving their role is consulted about who takes part in this conversation and, like any other formal meeting, can be accompanied by a friend or union representative. An accurate written record is agreed at the end of the interview and used to inform future practice.

## **Quaker recognised bodies (QRB)**

### **Introduction**

This paper covers:

- **Part A**: a review of an existing QRB for continuing registration
- **Part B**: the laying down of one existing QRB.

### **Background**

The guidelines for groups that would like to be a Quaker recognised body are on the BYM website [www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/quaker-groups](http://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/quaker-groups). That page also contains a list of current QRBs with their contact details and brief description.

A QRB is an independent group where concerned Friends explore a common interest, seek affirmation, or carry out witness. It wishes to be recognised as a Quaker body because its Quaker roots are an important part of its identity or constitution.

Each QRB is allocated a BYM link staff member.

There are no new applications to be considered at this meeting.

### **A. Review of a Quaker recognised body**

When Meeting for Sufferings grants QRB status, it asks for each organisation to be reviewed in due course.

For each of review an update from the staff link about recent activities and key information from the original application to Meeting for Sufferings is included.

There is one review submitted this time:

#### **Dabane Support Fund**

##### **Action required**

Meeting for Sufferings is asked to renew the registration of this organisation as a Quaker recognised body to be reviewed during 2029 (that is in five years' time).

#### **Dabane Support Group**

Initial recognition 2019, review due 2024, linked group.

**Staff link** Neil Jarvis.

**Staff link report:** I have regular, but not frequent, contact with the Fund – normally once a year. I receive their newsletters and have met the convener during Yearly Meeting. I have encouraged my own local meeting to support the fund in its charitable giving.

Dabane Support Fund is still active and providing much-needed resources to Dabane Trust's valuable work in Zimbabwe. Money raised is directly contributing to projects providing clean water to some of the world's most vulnerable people – Dabane works through enabling and supporting communities to put solutions into

action. The work also extends to food security, empowerment of women and community development, and sanitation. In recent years, the work is significant challenges. Folk in Zimbabwe face huge difficulties with Government administrators enforcing new laws controlling NGOs and financial contributions from the Quaker community have dropped sharply.

Many international funders have become more cautious about funding work in Zimbabwe, however, for Dabane, international funding has been maintained – for example grants from USAid, DIFID, German Help and Irish Churches – seen by the Fund as recognition of the Trust's excellent field work.

**Details from the original registration which have been checked and updated where necessary**

**Governance;** Dabane Support Fund is a committee within Mid-Somerset Area Meeting (MSAM) and has no legal identity of its own. Finances are the responsibility of MSAM Trustees.

**Type of Group;** Linked (to Mid-Somerset AM; which is a charity currently excepted from registering with the Charity Commission).

**Finance;** Donations from Quaker meetings, individuals and trusts. Varies year to year (approximately £4,500-£10,500 per annum in recent years). The annual accounts of the committee form part of the AM accounts and appear as a restricted fund.

**Current contact details;** Convenor: Sara Harcourt, Shellay, High Street, Aller Langport TA10 0bonnienfly@gmail.com 01458 25 1012

## **B. Winding up of a Quaker recognised body**

### **Action required**

Meeting for Sufferings is asked to agree to remove the Friend's Therapeutic Community Trust from the list of Quaker recognised bodies, as the trustees are closing the charity.

Michael S Booth  
Church Government Advisor  
Quaker Church Affairs  
November 2024

## **Process for registering Quaker Recognised Bodies**

### **Background**

The current practice of registering Quaker Recognised Bodies was agreed by Meeting for Sufferings in December 2015. Since then, over 70 Quaker Recognised Bodies (QRBs) have been registered (a full list is available on BYM's website [here](#)). Registration is normally for a period of five years (or two years for emerging bodies) and so a process of re-registration has recently begun alongside new applications.

In a nutshell, bodies wishing to register and which believe they meet the criteria, complete a short application form which is administered by staff. Staff create a summarised report including core information which comes to Meeting for Sufferings for its discernment and decision.

Over the past year or so, questions have been raised by Meeting for Sufferings representatives on two applications – most recently at Meeting for Sufferings in June 2024. Representatives wondered whether our current process, criteria for registration and associated guidelines are serving us well:

...We see that it may be appropriate to review how we determine Quaker Registered Bodies and agree to ask Arrangements Group to organize three to four Friends to explore the issues prior to our meeting in October. (Minute MfS/24/06/07)

We were asked by Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group to explore the issues and we are now reporting back to you (in December and not in October as hoped).

### **Our views and recommendations**

We have met three times and we have reviewed the documentation for registering as a QRB. BYM staff – namely Michael S Booth, who currently manages the QRB process, Neil Jarvis and Isobel Cockburn – have supported and guided our work and we are grateful to them for their contributions.

To be clear, we have not been asked to do an in-depth review but simply to determine, through a short assessment of the process, if a full review is necessary.

We have concluded that a full review of the process would be helpful, for the following reasons – grouped into three areas:

#### Registration guidelines:

- The guidelines in some areas could be improved by further clarity or explanation, and perhaps revision in light of the experience of the past 8 or 9 years. For instance, there are some areas that perhaps assume a shared

understanding of the applicant and of those making decisions on their registration of Quaker terms and language. (See next point for one explicit example which is a key element to registration.)

- The current guidelines require QRBs to uphold “core Quaker ways and values”. It might be helpful to give further detail in the guidelines for clarity – particularly as there might not be a shared understanding of core ways and values.

#### Application form and process:

- The application form does not ask bodies to give a response to how their body meets all the registration criteria – for instance, on how Quaker values and witness are upheld through its objectives, governance and arrangements.
- Could the application process be improved if it was a more discursive process? Does the current completion of a form make it too ‘tick-box’? Should the process also include a short meeting? We considered the involvement of Friends (in addition to staff) in the application process and recognised there are merits and drawbacks to this – a full review might consider this in depth.

#### Decision making:

- The reports provided to Meeting for Sufferings based on information given in the application process could include further information to help with discernment (for example, on how bodies feel they meet Quaker values).
- In recent times, most QRB applications are taken on draft minute at Meeting for Sufferings and the group questioned whether in some circumstances this might not enable constructive discernment. We also noted the current difficulty in rejecting applications and re-registrations and it is not clear what happens in a dispute.
- Meeting for Sufferings will be laid down in March 2026 and new arrangements will need to be clarified so they can be included in a new iteration of the guidelines and process. Any review would need to consult with staff who are helping Friends act on Minute 37 from Yearly Meeting 2024.

#### **Further matters for consideration**

As well as the matters noted above relating to the registration process, we discussed broader issues that might benefit for exploration:

- Is the purpose of being a QRB and the value QRBs add to the yearly meeting clear? Is this something that has changed, or could change in the future?
- At Meeting for Sufferings in October 2024, Quaker Life Central Committee brought a proposal that some QRBs may be able to grant membership to the yearly meeting and they have been asked to develop this idea for further discernment.

- As part of ongoing consideration of our central structures, there are suggestions that QRBs could be invited to contribute more formally in discernment at yearly-meeting level (for instance, whether they might send representatives to a continuing yearly meeting).
- Within the constraints of what's possible, does the current system of QRBs provide the right level of support to QRBs? For instance, are the current guidelines clear about what can be expected of staff links?

As most of these points relate to changes that might result from discussions which are still at an early stage, we felt on balance it might be best not to include these elements to an immediate review but a future review might also be needed.

### **Recommendation**

Even though we recognise future changes may be on the way – perhaps within two years – we felt that the current process of registration and the associated guidelines would still benefit from a review now for the reasons given. It is therefore our recommendation that a review is carried out in 2025. We asked staff to draft the attached terms of reference if Meeting for Sufferings agrees.

Andrew Bird, Magnus Ramage and Tim Rouse \*  
November 2024

\* We are grateful for the service of Lex Ryder who was initially part of our group but unfortunately needed to be released before our report was produced.

## **MEETING FOR SUFFERINGS**

### **Group to review the process for Quaker Recognised Bodies**

#### **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

#### **1 SUMMARY OF PURPOSE**

1.1 The Group to Review the Process for Quaker Recognised Bodies (the 'Review Group') is a time-limited group of, and accountable to, Meeting for Sufferings.

1.2 The Review Group is asked to:

- consider the purpose of registration and the system of Quaker Recognised Bodies (QRBs);
- review the guidelines and criteria for registration and re-registration as a QRB;
- review the application form;
- review the information provided to Meeting for Sufferings to aid its discernment;

and make recommendations for any changes.

1.3 The Review Group is also asked to clarify any approval process after Meeting for Sufferings is laid down in 2026 in conjunction with staff supporting the transition from Meeting for Sufferings to a continuing Yearly Meeting.

1.4 The Review Group will be laid down when it returns with its final report for consideration by Meeting for Sufferings.

#### **2 MEMBERSHIP**

2.1 The Review Group will comprise up to four or five members:

- Up to three representatives of Meeting for Sufferings
- One Friend currently holding, or who has held in the past two years, a governance role of a QRB, who is also a member or attender of the yearly meeting but not a member of Meeting for Sufferings
- One additional Friend (being either a member or attender of the yearly meeting) could be appointed if the group would benefit from particular experience or expertise.

- 2.2 The Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group will bring forward nominations to Meeting for Sufferings for appointment.
- 2.3 The Review Group may invite members of BYM staff or other visitors to attend for specific agenda items at its meetings.
- 2.4 The Review Group will chose its own Convener or Clerk at its first meeting.
- 2.5 The Review Group will be supported by a BYM staff member if appropriate with the agreement of the Deputy Recording Clerk.

### **3 FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS AND METHODS OF WORKING**

- 3.1 The Review Group will agree on the frequency of its meetings to undertake and complete its objectives set out in points 1.2 and 1.3. Meetings can be in person or remotely.
- 3.2 It is likely the Review Group will want to follow a three-stage process: information gathering; reviewing the current process in light of information it receives; and, making recommendations and preparing a final report.
- 3.3 The Review Group is expected to engage and consult with all stakeholders – particularly QRBs – perhaps through a questionnaire to gather information on their experience of the current system. The Review Group will need to draw on the experience and guidance of BYM staff – particularly those responsible for the administration of the QRB system and those working to support the transition to a continuing Yearly Meeting.
- 3.4 This review is not being asked to consider broader changes to the status of QRBs that may result from consideration on changes to membership or developments on participation in the yearly meeting.
- 3.5 Any minutes or notes of Review Group meetings will be sent to the Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group.

### **5 REPORTING AND TIMING**

- 5.1 The Review Group will report directly to Meeting for Sufferings.
- 5.2 The Review Group should aim to bring its final report to Meeting for Sufferings in December 2025. If the Review Group anticipates it will not meet this deadline, or if it wishes to clarify any point in its terms of reference, it should seek guidance from the Clerks of Meeting for Sufferings who are authorised to agree to minor changes.



## **Book of Discipline Revision Committee**

### **Fifth report to Meeting for Sufferings**

#### **Introduction**

1. Following Minute 31 of Yearly Meeting 2018, Meeting for Sufferings established the Book of Discipline Revision Committee, to bring to Yearly Meeting draft text for adoption as BYM's book of discipline, together with proposals for its publication. We first met in May 2019. This is our fifth progress report, following those in 2020 to 2023.

#### **Our work so far**

2. BDRC is a diverse committee of 26 members now (listed towards the end of this report), reflecting the breadth of Britain Yearly Meeting, as required by our Terms of Reference. To date we have held 21 meetings (some spread over several days) of the full committee. In 2024 two of these have been residential weekend meetings face-to-face, by special permission; the others online. We have also continued to work hard individually and in various subgroups on specific topics, and held check-in zoom committee meetings to keep track of these. Some of us are struggling with this demanding work alongside other calls on our time and energy, and some have needed to step back from our work for a while for health or other reasons.
3. We had earlier identified around 30 discrete major topics to be included as core material in the new book of discipline. Not all of them equate to chapters in the present Quaker faith & practice, and some include a range of sub-topics.
4. The main topics are listed in Annex A, broadly in the order in which we have worked on them, and with provisional titles. For two of these – Marriage and Nominations – we had shared sample draft texts (including audio versions) with Friends through Meeting for Sufferings in 2023, and received useful feedback. After careful consideration, we have decided not to share further sample draft texts widely with Friends before issuing a complete first draft of the new book in 2026. Sharing sample drafts and considering feedback involves you and us in a lot of work. We do not think it is the best way to engage Friends with our task, or the best use of the Committee's time and energy, at this stage. We are looking instead at other possible ways of engaging Friends with our work and our approach to the new book before 2026.
5. By the end of 2024 or early 2025, we hope to have "banked", as good enough for now, substantive drafts on some 25 topics. We are also continuing to work

on the overall structure and shape and sequencing of the book, and on engaging with and capturing the voices of children and young people. We have adopted detailed project plans and timelines for the phases of work up to 2030 – see paragraphs 6 and 7 below.

### **Our immediate next steps**

6. During 2025, we hope to
  - draft text on the remaining main topics not yet covered, aiming at completion by around the end of the year
  - update the material we have prepared on Quaker meeting structures in Britain (which already takes account of YM 2024 decisions on a continuing yearly meeting) to reflect the outcomes of the further detailed work that YM 2024 asked to be brought back to YM 2025 – we are liaising closely with Church Government Advisory Group on some parts of this, and we ask to be kept in touch with other parts being done by YM Agenda Committee, Meeting for Sufferings and BYM Trustees
  - resume drafting text on membership, depending on the outcome of the exploration initiated by Meeting for Sufferings and any decisions by Yearly Meeting on this
  - start the substantial process of bringing the topic texts together as a coherent and consistent whole; auditing for any gaps in material; writing introductions and linking passages; editing for consistency, coherence, accessibility, language and voice; putting into BYM's house style; checking quotations and copyright; cross-referencing and indexing; and identifying the supplementary material needed. We are working with the BYM content and publications staff team on who will do what, when and how.

### **Our longer-term timetable**

7. We are confident that we are on track to present:
  - a. to a YM in 2027 a complete first draft text of the new Book of Discipline for the start of the process of familiarisation and initial discernment, engaging Friends with the text and our approach to the book – an extended “meeting for learning” – resulting in clear guidance to BDRC on the next steps; and
  - b. (after a period of further learning and consultation with Friends throughout Britain, any revision required, and further familiarisation), to a YM in 2030 a complete final text for adoption.
8. We hope that the complete first draft can be made available to Friends throughout Britain before the end of 2026 to allow for thorough reading and discussion in preparation for a YM in 2027. We will be working with YM Agenda Committee and others on how this should be supported, which might

entail providing various resources, study guides, webinars etc. The text itself should be accompanied by explanatory material on why the book is as it is, the processes for familiarisation and eventual decision, and proposed arrangements for the separate preparation and authorisation of supplementary material. We envisage that the complete first draft might initially be made available in versions that can be accessed by computer or mobile device, on paper, and to be listened to. Work is in hand on the details of how to achieve this at reasonable cost.

9. We would like YM in 2027 to give BDRC clear guidance on the voice of the book, its accessibility, the balance between core and supplementary material, any gaps needing to be filled or unnecessary material to be removed. We would then hope to work with YM Agenda Committee and others on managing the further consultation and revision process after YM in 2027, leading up to preparation of revised text for preparatory consideration by Friends throughout Britain, and eventual presentation of a complete final text to a YM in 2030 for adoption and publication. At this point we expect the final version to be available as a website, as a printed book, as a downloadable pdf or ebook, and as an audio version.

## How can Friends get involved?

10. 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 by email ([qfp@quaker.org.uk](mailto:qfp@quaker.org.uk)) or writing to Friends House
- engage with our social media accounts via Revising Quaker faith & practice pages on
  - facebook – <https://www.facebook.com/revisingqfp/>
  - instagram - <https://www.instagram.com/revisingqfp>
  - twitter – <https://www.twitter.com/revisingqfp>

## Conclusion

11. As always, we are hugely grateful to our Secretary and other BYM staff for all their work and support for us. We ask Meeting for Sufferings and Friends generally to continue to uphold us.

Rosie Carnall and Catherine Brewer (Co-Clerks), Michael Phipps (Assistant Clerk)  
Michael S Booth: Committee Secretary

**Other members of the Committee:** Tas Cooper, Ben Pink Dandelion, Joycelin Dawes, Lucy Faulkner-Gawlinski, Rhiannon Grant, Jessica Hubbard-Bailey, Catherine James, Pearl Johns, Jennifer Kavanagh, Sally Kikaya, Stevie Kraye, Michael Long, Matt Moore, Rachel Muers, Anya Nanning Ramamurthy, Finola O'Sullivan, Alastair Reid, Antonia Swinson, Judith Thompson, Nuala Watt, Marcie White (formerly Winstanley), Andrew Williams, Mary Woodward

## **Annex A**

### List of main topics for the new Book of Discipline

These are listed below, broadly in the order of starting work on them, and with their provisional titles:

- Discernment
- Meeting for worship for church affairs
- Nominations
- Spiritual and pastoral care
- Concern
- Sharing the Quaker experience (outreach)
- Marriage
- Trusteeship & charitable status
- Community
- Conflict
- Spiritual experience
- Worship
- Testimony
- Service
- Witness
- Personal journey
- Quaker approaches to dying and death
- Diversity and inclusion
- Close relationships
- Quaker theology
- Quaker meeting structures in Britain
- Stewardship of our resources
- Friends and other churches/faiths
- Quakers and secular bodies
- World family of Friends/Quakers in the world
- Quaker history
- Where are we going?
- Introductions to sections
- Advices & queries
- Membership

## **Draft Terms of Reference for a new Agenda Committee for Yearly Meeting**

### **Background**

In 2024 Yearly Meeting (YM) decided to merge Meeting for Sufferings and YM and to hold continuing sessions of YM from 2026 onwards. Minute 37 of YM 2024 sets out steps that need to be taken to implement that decision.

The following extract from minute 37 covers issues relating to agenda planning for continuing YM:

*We expect to appoint a new single agenda committee to arrange all Yearly Meeting sessions to be held after May 2026. We recognise that this body will need time to prepare, develop new processes and ways of working, and therefore agree that it will need to start work after Yearly Meeting 2025 ahead of the new arrangements to begin in summer 2026. For a time, therefore, we will have two agenda committees working in parallel: the existing Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee, and a new single agenda committee.*

*We ask the Recording Clerk to prepare and lay before Meeting for Sufferings in December 2024 terms of reference for the new single agenda committee to take responsibility after Yearly Meeting in May 2026. Drawing on the experience of recent and current clerks of Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings, these terms of reference should also propose a mechanism for the appointment of a clerking team for the new single agenda committee and the continuing Yearly Meeting in a way which will not place an excessive burden on those we ask to take responsibility for these tasks.*

*We ask Meeting for Sufferings to adopt these draft terms of reference in principle so that nominations may be sought before the terms of reference are finally laid before Yearly Meeting in session in 2025 for adoption.*

*We ask Central Nominations Committee to add nominations to the new single agenda committee to the Schedule of Nominations already agreed by minute 10 of this Yearly Meeting and to bring nominations in line with the draft terms of reference to Yearly Meeting in 2025, bearing in mind that some continuity with the existing Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee will be helpful. This will allow the necessary preparatory work in planning future Yearly Meeting sessions to be undertaken.*

### **Draft Terms of Reference (ToR)**

Draft ToR for a new Agenda Committee for YM are included with these papers. YM 2025 will make the final decisions on the detail of the ToR, but at this stage Meeting

for Sufferings needs to accept the draft as good enough in relation to things like the summary of purpose of the committee (section 1), the number of members and their standard term of service (section 2), its duties and responsibilities (section 3), etc. That will allow our Central Nominations Committee (CNC) to approach Friends to serve as committee members.

### **Clerking team for Agenda Committee and Yearly Meeting**

When YM is meeting four times a year we will no longer ask the YM clerks to be responsible for clerking Agenda Committee as well. Agenda Committee will have its own clerk and assistant clerk who will be nominated by CNC and appointed by YM.

The roles of YM and Agenda Committee clerks would be separate, but they would need to work closely together. To aid communication the group of clerks should not be too large. Instead of having three YM clerks, we would have two YM clerks (a clerk and an assistant) and two Agenda Committee clerks (a clerk and an assistant). This would give a group of four clerks in total.

YM clerks would attend Agenda Committee to participate in the discernment of the agenda. Agenda Committee clerks would be available to support the YM clerks during YM sessions. Agenda Committee clerks would not normally be asked to work on minutes or to discern the sense of the meeting, but one of them could sit at the table and take notes of the ministry, give notices, etc.

To assist with planning and to be more transparent we would move to a system where we truly appoint YM clerks in advance (rather than noting who is expected to be nominated). The normal term of service would move to run with the calendar year, and clerks will be appointed during the calendar year before they are to start their service.

In this spirit, we expect to bring the names for the clerks of Yearly Meeting from 2026 to Yearly Meeting 2025, so that they can work alongside the new Agenda Committee in the formation of its processes.

### **What is Meeting for Sufferings being asked to do?**

YM needs the support of Meeting for Sufferings to ensure that proper arrangements are put in place to allow for continuing sessions of YM to start being held in the second half of 2026. Although YM will return to these issues in May 2025, Meeting for Sufferings is asked to look at them now so that necessary preparations can begin.

Members of Meeting for Sufferings are therefore asked to consider this paper and the draft ToR and to discern whether they are good enough to be used between now and May 2025, principally for the purpose of seeking nominations.

Finalised ToR will then be laid before Yearly Meeting 2025 for acceptance.

If you have significant points to raise about the draft ToR then it would be very helpful to hear your concerns before the meeting – please send them to [sufferings@quaker.org.uk](mailto:sufferings@quaker.org.uk)

If you have 'dots & commas' or small points of detail, please also send them in to [sufferings@quaker.org.uk](mailto:sufferings@quaker.org.uk) All such points will be considered and may be incorporated into the finalised ToR that are sent to Yearly Meeting for acceptance.

Paul Parker  
Recording Clerk  
November 2024



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

## **Terms of reference for the Agenda Committee of Yearly Meeting**

### **1. Summary of purpose**

Agenda Committee:

- receives minutes and other communications from meetings, Quaker communities and other bodies;
- pays attention to the spirit moving through Britain Yearly Meeting, noting what issues may need discernment by the Yearly Meeting in session;
- liaises with committees and other groups to understand their work and how it may relate to current or potential Yearly Meeting business;
- tests potential items of business to discern whether they are ready to come to Yearly Meeting and suggests further testing if they are not yet ready;
- discerns and plans the agenda for every session of Yearly Meeting;
- ensures appropriate information about Yearly Meeting sessions is made available to Friends in advance;
- recommends dates & venues for Yearly Meeting sessions, including residential sessions, to Yearly Meeting (which will make the final decision);
- supports the right holding of Yearly Meeting sessions, including by ensuring that there are adequate arrangements for eldership and pastoral care;
- does anything that Yearly Meeting in session may from time to time ask it to do.

### **2. Membership**

2.1 Agenda Committee shall consist of the following members appointed by Yearly Meeting on the nomination of Central Nominations Committee:

- a clerk
- an assistant clerk
- 9 other members

In addition, all serving and nominate clerks and assistant clerks of Yearly Meeting may attend Agenda Committee. The clerks of Yearly Meeting shall between them ensure that at least one of their number is present for each meeting of Agenda Committee.

The normal term of service for the clerks of Agenda Committee shall be three years. The maximum possible total term of service as clerk and/or assistant clerk without a break shall be six years.

The normal term of service for appointed members of Agenda Committee shall be two years. Reappointment up to two times is possible, giving a maximum possible total term of service of six years.

2.2 Agenda Committee may invite representatives of other committees, or other Friends, to attend meetings.

2.3 The clerk to Britain Yearly Meeting trustees, or another trustee designated by the clerk, shall be permitted to attend meetings of Agenda Committee as required.

2.4 The Recording Clerk shall appoint a member of staff to act as secretary to Agenda Committee.

2.5 The Recording Clerk or their designate shall normally attend every meeting of Agenda Committee.

2.6 A member of staff with responsibility for the Yearly Meeting programmes for children and young people shall normally attend every meeting of Agenda Committee.

2.7 Other members of staff may be asked to attend by invitation of the clerk of Agenda Committee.

### **3. Duties and responsibilities**

3.1 Agenda Committee discerns and plans the overall agenda for Yearly Meeting.

3.2 For each session of Yearly Meeting, Agenda Committee will prepare a draft agenda for acceptance by the meeting.

3.2.1 In considering items for the agenda, Agenda Committee will consider:

- required business notified to it, e.g. by the Recording Clerk;
- continued business from previous Yearly Meeting sessions;
- any minutes of Yearly Meeting;
- any minutes received from area meetings, general meetings, central and standing committees, BYM trustees, Quaker Recognised Bodies or other bodies permitted to communicate by minute with Agenda Committee;
- suggestions made during Agenda Committee meetings.

3.2.2 In addition to considering what items might be suitable for inclusion in a Yearly Meeting agenda, Agenda Committee will consider what time the Yearly Meeting has available, and how possible items might fit into that time.

3.2.3 The agenda for a Yearly Meeting session should usually involve a mix of business sessions (being meetings for worship for business where Friends may be invited to hear reports, explore topics and/or to make decisions), other worship time (where business items are not under direct consideration), and time spent in community with others (for example in discussion groups, activities or having fun together).

3.2.4 Agenda Committee will at any one time aim to keep an overview of the next few years, looking beyond the immediately upcoming Yearly Meeting and noting in outline what might come to future sessions of Yearly Meeting.

3.3 Agenda Committee will agree a process to be followed upon receipt of any minute from a Quaker meeting, committee or other body. This agreed process will include a process for testing and seasoning any business that the sending body has proposed as suitable for exploration in a Yearly Meeting session. Agenda Committee will report on its agreed process to Yearly Meeting in May 2026. Following such a report a description of the process will be appended to these terms of reference.

3.4 Agenda Committee will arrange for appropriate Friends to introduce items in business sessions, including Friends from committees or groups already working on the issue in question. It should aim for a diversity of voices to be heard. Agenda Committee will ensure introducers have adequate support.

3.5 Agenda Committee will ensure that appropriate information about Yearly Meeting sessions is made available to Friends in advance. This will include information forming part of the formal proceedings of the Yearly Meeting (published as 'documents in advance'), and may include other information e.g. pages for the website, explanatory videos etc. Agenda Committee will agree deadlines with staff for the sharing of such information. Where appropriate Agenda Committee will work with staff and with existing committees or groups who have been involved in the development of the issue in question.

3.6 Agenda Committee will work with the staff and volunteers co-ordinating the programmes for children and young people to ensure that the agendas for all ages are appropriately integrated. Opportunities for all-age sessions should be sought, while recognising that not all age groups will have the same needs or interests.

3.7 Agenda Committee will work with staff to ensure that Yearly Meeting sessions are accessible for as many Friends as possible.

3.8 Agenda Committee will promote attendance at Yearly Meeting sessions and will monitor patterns of attendance, including of representatives. If appropriate, Agenda Committee will propose changes to the arrangements for Yearly Meeting and/or the system of representation for decision by Yearly Meeting.

3.9 Agenda Committee may permit any suitable activities (such as public lectures or organised vigils) to take place at the time of Yearly Meeting. If any such activities are

organised then Agenda Committee will liaise with the organisers and give clear instructions for their holding.

3.10 Agenda Committee will delegate practical arrangements for Yearly Meeting (such as the provision of rooms, catering, accommodation etc.) to staff. The secretary will ensure that relevant information is shared with Agenda Committee as they plan and develop the Yearly Meeting agenda.

3.11 Agenda Committee will have the power to delegate any aspect of the implementation of its decisions to the Recording Clerk, the secretary to Agenda Committee, or other members of staff suggested by them.

3.12 Agenda Committee will ensure that there is an evaluation after every Yearly Meeting. Each evaluation will specifically include questions relating to accessibility and to inclusion. All feedback received through the evaluations will be noted and considered. Where feedback is contradictory then consideration will be given to how to balance different needs.

3.13 Agenda Committee will liaise as required, normally through the Recording Clerk, with Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees, who will ensure an appropriate budget for Yearly Meeting is in place and who will address and be responsible for all aspects of legal compliance (including safeguarding, health and safety, employment issues and reputational risk).

#### **4. Frequency of meetings**

Agenda Committee shall meet as frequently as needed, with meetings fitting in the calendar agreed with the Recording Clerk. In general, it shall meet at least once between every Yearly Meeting session.

#### **5. Subsidiary bodies**

Agenda Committee may set up and lay down subcommittees and working groups, which shall report to Agenda Committee regularly and shall have terms of reference and membership determined by Agenda Committee. Where appropriate, Agenda Committee may appoint Friends from outside its own membership to serve on such groups.

#### **6. Authority & accountability**

6.1 Agenda Committee shall work within these terms of reference under the authority of minute xx of Yearly Meeting 2025.

6.2 Agenda Committee is accountable to Yearly Meeting in session.

6.3 Agenda Committee shall report to Yearly Meeting at least once during the calendar year.

## **7. Mechanism for the appointment of a clerking team for Yearly Meeting & Agenda Committee**

### 7.1 Number of clerks

7.1.1 From 2026 onwards there be two clerks of Yearly Meeting, the clerk and assistant clerk, appointed by Yearly Meeting on the nomination of Central Nominations Committee.

7.1.2 There will be two clerks of Agenda Committee, the clerk and assistant clerk, appointed by Yearly Meeting on the nomination of Central Nominations Committee.

7.1.3 At least one clerk of Yearly Meeting will be present at all meetings of Agenda Committee and at least one clerk of Agenda Committee will be present at all sessions of Yearly Meeting.

7.1.4 The clerk and/or assistant clerk of Agenda Committee may assist the clerks of Yearly Meeting by sitting at the clerks' table during sessions of Yearly Meeting and making notes, giving notices, or doing such other tasks as shall be agreed between them.

### 7.2 Appointment of clerks of Yearly Meeting and Agenda Committee

7.2.1 Clerks will normally be appointed to serve for three calendar years at a time.

7.2.2 Clerks will normally be appointed to terms that start and end with the calendar year.

7.2.3 Clerks will normally be appointed at a Yearly Meeting session during the calendar year before their term of service is due to start.

## **8. Review**

These terms of reference will be reviewed as needed and by no later than 31 December 2031.

## **Appointment of attenders for Quaker service – Potential changes to *Quaker faith & practice***

### **Introduction**

1. Meeting for Sufferings minute 23/12/09 records their decision that nominations need not be dependent on formal membership and authorising Central Nominations Committee, and other nominating committees in the central structure, to bring names of members and attenders to all roles appointed by Meeting for Sufferings. This does not concern the appointment of attenders to serve as BYM Trustees.
2. For roles at local and area level and roles defined by legislation the meeting was unable to reach unity on the way forward. To guide their discernment, MfS asked the Church Government Advisory Group, supported by staff, to prepare materials for a session of Meeting for Sufferings which would allow them to consider what changes to *Quaker faith & practice* enabling these appointments would look like in practice.

### **Current text of *Quaker faith & practice* – Paragraph 3.24**

3. 3.24 *The following suggestions for good practice are intended to apply to all our meetings and committees and to the appointment of Friends and, where appropriate, attenders...*
  - i. Those nominated to serve as clerk of a meeting, elder, overseer, treasurer, registering officer or as a member of any nominations committee should be in membership. Those nominated to serve as a trustee must be in membership. In case of difficulty the Recording Clerk may be consulted.*

### **Consideration**

4. There is increasing evidence of meetings appointing attenders to some of these roles, particularly pastoral roles, which suggests that our current Book of Discipline no longer fully reflects our yearly meeting's current practice.
5. We have rejected the possibility of simply deleting present paragraph 3.24i without replacing it with alternative wording, on the basis that Meeting for Sufferings was seeking a new form of words.
6. There exists advice (drafted by Michael Hutchinson and slightly expanded in June 2023) which is passed on to Meetings who ask about appointing attenders to certain roles. The advice of the Recording Clerk ('keeper and interpreter... of our church government' – *Quaker faith & practice* 8.21.) is quite clear: we should follow the advice set out in section 3.24 (i) of *Quaker*

faith & practice. Sections 12.07 and 12.09 on the appointments of elders and overseers assume that those appointed will be in membership. The advice which is currently passed on to meetings affirms that appointees into these roles should be in membership. However, the advice to meetings is also to “trust your discernment if it is tested”.

7. It may be helpful to quote the last two paragraphs of the advice (the full advice is attached as Annex 1).

*The wording of Quaker faith & practice 15.10 makes it clear that only members can be appointed as trustees. For other roles, if a meeting, having considered the advice placed in Quaker faith & practice 3.24i, discerns that they wish to appoint an attender to the role, then the appointing meeting should follow its leadings and make the appointment. (Do note that Elders and Overseers are Area Meeting, not Local Meeting appointments.) It needs to be made clear to the appointing body that the nomination is of a non-member to a role that usually requires membership.*

*It may be, as so often we get in a tangle and can't move, that Area Meeting might come from this from a different tack: perhaps appoint elders to talk to those most closely involved and report back in the spirit of the above advice. Our outward forms can sometimes act as barriers, but if we ignore our own regulations without good cause we lessen our corporate Society. But where is the Spirit in this and what is it saying? If membership is a recognition of a spiritual state, does it always have to be formally recognised? Your Area Meeting will have to discern the way in the light of its common experience and advice available. We as Quakers have to do our own work.*

8. It seems to us that this advice might provide a useful starting point when considering how the present wording of paragraph 3.24 might be revised.
9. Alternative wording could perhaps be along the lines of (new text in **bold**, deleted text struck through, variations in square brackets):

10. **Option a) – simplified**

*3.24i: i. Those nominated to serve as clerk of a meeting, elder, pastoral friend, treasurer, registering officer or as a member of any nominations committee ~~should~~**will ordinarily** be in membership. **In any case where an attender is nominated for appointment, it must be made clear to the appointing body that the nomination is of an attender to a role that would ordinarily be filled by a member and the fact that the appointee is an attender must be minuted.** Those nominated to serve as a trustee must be in membership. In case of difficulty the Recording Clerk may be consulted.*

- Option b) – amplified**

*3.24i: i. Those nominated to serve as clerk of a meeting, elder, pastoral friend,*

treasurer, registering officer or as a member of any nominations committee ~~should~~ **will ordinarily** be in membership. **This does not exclude the possibility that an attender who is clearly part of the worshipping community of Friends and has been discerned as having the requisite understanding and experience of Quaker life and practices to fulfil the role may be nominated and appointed. In any case where an attender is nominated for appointment, it must be made clear to the appointing body that the nomination is of an attender to a role that would ordinarily be filled by a member and the fact that the appointee is an attender must be minuted.** Those nominated to serve as a trustee must be in membership. In case of difficulty the Recording Clerk may be consulted.

11. Meeting for Sufferings may consider that it would be helpful to include more detail from the advice to meetings that is appended as an Annex to this paper, e.g., particular considerations relating to the appointment of attenders to specific roles. However, this would add significantly to the length (and complexity) of paragraph 3.24. It may be better for 3.24 to continue to refer meetings to consult the Recording Clerk in case of difficulty, whereupon the full advice could be provided.

### **Paragraphs 12.07 and 12.09**

12. These paragraphs imply that persons appointed into the above roles will be in membership. In particular, 12.09 states, *“A Friend whose membership is transferred from the area meeting that made the appointment shall cease upon transfer to be an elder or overseer.”*
13. If the principle that attenders can be appointed into these roles were to be accepted, consequential amendments would be needed to paragraph 12.09, and possibly to paragraph 12.07 also. These amendments might be along the following lines:
  - a. 12.07: Appointment as elder or overseer does not imply that ~~the Friends~~ those concerned are elevated to a higher position...
  - b. 12.09: ~~A Friend whose membership is transferred from the area meeting that made the appointment shall cease upon transfer to be an elder or overseer.~~ **Any appointment as elder or overseer shall automatically cease if the Friend's membership is transferred from the area meeting or if the role holder ceases to be recognised as an attender within the area meeting.**

### **Trustees**

14. Charity law allows BYM to appoint whoever it wishes to serve as a Trustee. However, the yearly meeting Governing Document requires Trustees to be in membership, and relates this requirement to *Quaker faith & practice*. To enable the appointment of attenders as BYM Trustees, Yearly Meeting would



need to change the Governing Document of the national charity to remove the requirement, and notify the Charity Commission accordingly (as a formality). Similar constraints would apply at area meeting level. Area meetings have a similar Governing Document, based on a model document agreed by Yearly Meeting. To lift the membership requirement would require area meetings to update their governing documents to remove the requirement for membership or to include a power to co-opt attenders, in line with a standard text provided by BYM.

15. If a decision were to be taken to amend the Governing Document to no longer require Trustees to be in membership, then 3.24i would need to be updated so that the revised Governing Document is in line with it. Such an update (building on the update proposed above which covers the other roles under discussion) could read something like:

3.24i: i. *Those nominated to serve as clerk of a meeting, elder, pastoral friend, treasurer, registering officer, **trustee**, or as a member of any nominations committee ~~should~~ **will ordinarily** be in membership. **This does not exclude the possibility that an attender who is clearly part of the worshipping community of Friends and has been discerned as having the requisite understanding and experience of Quaker life and practices to fulfil the role may be nominated and appointed. In any case where an attender is nominated for appointment, it must be made clear to the appointing body that the nomination is of an attender to a role that would ordinarily be filled by a member and the fact that the appointee is an attender must be minuted. Those nominated to serve as a trustee must be in membership. In case of difficulty the Recording Clerk may be consulted.***

Church Government Advisory Group  
20 November 2024

## Annex

This is the (slightly updated) advice Michael Hutchinson passed on to Meetings who ask about appointing non-members to certain roles.

***Quaker faith & practice*, in section 3.24i, restricts the ability of a meeting to appoint non-members to certain roles. It reads:**

*Those nominated to serve as clerk of a meeting, elder, overseer, treasurer, registering officer or as a member of any nominations committee should be in membership. Those nominated to serve as a trustee must be in membership. In case of difficulty the Recording Clerk may be consulted. (For further guidance on the appointment of elders and overseers see 12.07–12.09.)*

We very much recognise the problems concerning appointments of non-members to posts normally regarded as being appropriate only to those in membership. This situation not only applies to overseers<sup>1</sup> but for a range of posts, including trustees, treasurers, clerks, elders and so on, but perhaps is most frequently raised in relation to overseers.

This answer is a little long and involved, but I hope identifies the principles from which our understanding of right order come. Our Quaker experience leads us to act on the basis of what we have collectively learned about being a religious society: that all our actions come from simple principles that we go back to when there are problems. Trust your discernment if it is tested.

The advice of the Recording Clerk ('keeper and interpreter... of our church government – *Quaker faith & practice* 8.21.) is quite clear: we should follow the advice set out in section 3.24 (i) of *Quaker faith & practice*. Sections 12.07 and 12.09 on the appointments of elders and overseers assume that those appointed will be in membership.

*Quaker faith & practice* was agreed by our Yearly Meeting, in session, as staff we cannot step away from the discernment of the Yearly Meeting.

Thus our advice remains that clerks, who have responsibility for recording the decisions of a meeting for church affairs (business meeting) should be themselves in membership, as should treasurers, who are custodians of our finances.

Overseers, who have responsibility for helping attenders into membership should be themselves in membership. An attender being responsible for membership encouragement potentially causes difficulty.

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<sup>1</sup> *Meeting for Sufferings asked that area meetings stop using the term overseer in December 2022. We continue to use the term in this document for the time being. Please read the word as referring to those who are appointed to the role previously described as overseer in each meeting.*

The care that we expect overseers to be able to offer is not a skill or gift that only members have, but some of the information to which overseers will have access, might rightly be normally restricted to members.

As Elders are responsible for upholding our discipline, and potentially having to speak to Friends about their behaviour in Meeting for Worship, their authority might be rightly questioned if they are not in membership.

As Elders and Overseers are area meeting appointments, and they have some area meeting responsibilities, it is not just local responsibilities that need to be considered. If a non-member was appointed to serve, then they may be asked to become involved in particular situations in other meetings. The area meeting would need to consider this aspect, even if a local meeting felt that the person could undertake the duties required within the local meeting

This reflects the discernment of Yearly Meeting in 2001 which restated its commitment to a membership system and all that implies. Our Discipline flounders if sections of the Society decide that it no longer applies to them.

However, these comments, as does all our church government, need to be interpreted in the context of the postscript to an epistle from the elders of Balby (*Quaker faith & practice* 1.01):

*Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all, with the measure of light which is pure and holy, may be guided; and so in the light walking and abiding, these may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.*

This, of course, does not mean that anything goes, but that we go back to first principles in making decisions, using the guidance of our continuing experience of what works and of our collective discernment. We do not take a narrow, legalistic approach. At times we may even have to be pragmatic (read section 12.08 of *Quaker faith & practice* 12.08: 'My dear, we have to take what we can get').

Yearly Meeting, through wide discernment, has agreed we retain membership. If that is so then the first question is what does this mean? It is summarised in *Quaker faith & practice* 11.01 and seems to be to do with mutual recognition of commitment - the individual to the meeting and through it to the wider understanding of Quaker insights and experience. If this is so then there may be occasions when formal 'outward' membership may not be needed, as it is the 'inward' membership that we recognise in those who 'walk with us' spiritually. The recent review of membership application process has recognised this more strongly in seeking simpler ways of formalising this recognition that an individual is one of us. Judgement can, and has, been made, when certain individuals not formally in membership have been asked to serve in a membership capacity. These are exceptions, however, perhaps where the

appointment is actually the area meeting's way of saying 'we think you are a member' and often the attender then decides to join anyway.

Thus it is possible that a long-standing attender could in the right circumstances be part of a nominations team as long as that team were primarily members. Such a judgement must be made from our first principles and with care as to the implications. Any decision should be carefully minuted.

In many circumstances a long-standing attender could be a local meeting treasurer, recording the income and expenses, making payments that have been properly authorised, maintaining and reconciling the bank accounts. However, some consideration would need to be given to how the Local Meeting and indeed the Area Meeting trustees would be able to satisfy themselves that the accounts were being dealt with correctly. Although it may be a non-member who is looking after the funds, the responsibility for the funds remains in the first case with the meeting and ultimately with the AM Trustees. Are the Trustees content for a non-member to be appointed as treasurer?

As an area meeting treasurer is effectively the area meeting trustee with specific responsibility for finance, then they have to be in membership. *Quaker faith & practice* 15.10 starts:

*Those appointed to serve as trustees must be members or sojourning members of Britain Yearly Meeting (4.04). Appointments should be made by the area meeting and the dates of service recorded by minute.*

Do note that this does not require the treasurer to undertake every bookkeeping responsibility. Tasks can be delegated to an assistant treasurer, or even paid for: however, this does not remove the overall responsibility for financial affairs from the treasurer specifically and the trustees in general.

The qualities required of a clerk will not only be found in members, but also in non-members. Perhaps that is why they are involved with Friends and are seen by the nominations committee as a potential clerk.

A clerk has a certain amount of authority by virtue of their service. Will a non-member clerk be able to rely on the authority of the post? If a difficult, complex or sensitive decision is being made, might a Friend decide that as a member they had a better ability to decide what to do than a non-member clerk. Could a non-member clerk maintain the discipline during a business meeting if their authority to carry out the post was being questioned?

Such a judgement to appoint a non-member must be made from our first principles and with care as to the implications. Any decision should be carefully minuted. The meeting should make the decision in the knowledge of the wording of section 3.24(i) of *Quaker faith & practice*.

This point is emphasised because it is our experience that we need to discern where we are coming from rather than checking off a formal list of criteria. The area meeting has to wrestle with the question, and if necessary take this wrestling further in a way which helps wider discernment in the yearly meeting. Nonetheless, there are questions. How can a non-member advise other non-members on applying for membership, which is a role of overseers? Are we doing this out of convenience, or of a mis-placed wish not to offend? How can a non-member Clerk hold members of the Society to our discipline of the Quaker business process? How can non-members decide which members to nominate to which roles? We have to take the responsibility for the consequences of our decisions, not just brush aside current practice. It is not easy because it reflects the wider issues, problems and opportunities facing a religious society in the present social situation. Who can do the tasks we need, how do we balance insights about recognising worth inwardly rather than outwardly within a formal membership system? We need to answer these sorts of questions, and if we don't then these problems will continue to occur.

We do have other experience to help us - clearness processes, ensuring people nominated understand the tasks, etc., but in cases like this we have to address the underlying questions as well. Our advice reflects what we have collectively said - in general, membership is needed to perform certain named roles, but it is open for area meetings to make exceptions in special circumstances if they so discern, and for local meetings to make exceptions provided that the area meeting is content.

The wording of *Quaker faith & practice* 15.10 makes it clear that only members can be appointed as trustees. For other roles, if a meeting, having considered the advice placed in *Quaker faith & practice* 3.24i, discerns that they wish to appoint an attender to the role, then the appointing meeting should follow its leadings and make the appointment. (Do note that Elders and Overseers are Area Meeting, not Local Meeting appointments.) It needs to be made clear to the appointing body that the nomination is of a non-member to a role that usually requires membership.

It may be, as so often we get in a tangle and can't move, that Area Meeting might come from this from a different tack: perhaps appoint elders to talk to those most closely involved and report back in the spirit of the above advice. Our outward forms can sometimes act as barriers, but if we ignore our own regulations without good cause we lessen our corporate Society. But where is the Spirit in this and what is it saying? If membership is a recognition of a spiritual state, does it always have to be formally recognised? Your Area Meeting will have to discern the way in the light of its common experience and advice available. We as Quakers have to do our own work.

Michael Hutchinson, expanded by Michael Booth and subsequently updated  
June 2023

## **Quaker World Relations Committee (QWRC) annual report to Meeting for Sufferings**

Quaker World Relations Committee (QWRC) works within and across the world family of Quakers. We are charged with a dual remit:

- Enriching understanding between British Friends and Friends worldwide.
- Engaging Quakers in Britain with Quaker issues and concerns around the globe.

QWRC committee members are also appointed as BYM representatives to Friends World Committee for Consultation – European and Middle East Section (FWCC-EMES). We meet four times a year, three times online and for a single weekend in person meeting. One member serves on the BYM Reparations Working Group and one on Meeting for Sufferings.

### **A. Overview**

In 2024 we have focused in particular on the FWCC World Plenary Meeting (WPM) that was held in South Africa and online in August. We worked on raising awareness of Friends from BYM about this in advance, preparing ourselves and others ahead of the August meeting. We remain active in following up on its outcomes for British Friends alongside others across EMES and BYM.

We have also continued our active participation in events and activities hosted within FWCC's Europe and the Middle East Section this year.

### **B. QWRC in 2024**

Our activities included:

#### **a. Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) World Plenary Meeting (WPM)**

QWRC co-operated with EMES, Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA), and Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) staff in encouraging the participation of Friends in Britain in the World Plenary Meeting in August. We offered three online QWRC WPM preparatory sessions ourselves. At the one on the evening of 21 May, at which we had three breakout rooms, each of them concentrating on one of the three WPM themes: Ubuntu, Care for Creation, and Healing Historical Injustices. Participants included British Friends travelling in person to South Africa in August, and others who had registered for WPM online. Another part of the preparation was to offer a session explaining the current work of QCEA and QPSW, this was open to all participants from throughout the EMES area. A further preparatory session was offered as part of Britain Yearly Meeting on 9 July, with input from Tim Gee, General Secretary to FWCC. We tried to encourage the participation of

groups of British Friends remotely with WPM by way of Hubs within meeting houses. Following the World Plenary Meeting, we hosted a follow up evening online session on 3 September and supported a similar event hosted by EMES in the same week. We continue to build on new relationships formed as part of WPM both at home and with Friends from other yearly meeting.

See:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qD2aLwTGla8&list=PLQnET8HvIED\\_xKZuOFhK4AMsapDG37pDW&pp=iAQB](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qD2aLwTGla8&list=PLQnET8HvIED_xKZuOFhK4AMsapDG37pDW&pp=iAQB)

<https://fwccemes.org/news/world-plenary-meeting-epistle-and-weaving-document>

[Towards Our Future – Strategic Directions for FWCC – FWCC](#)

- b. Representation on European and Middle East Section (EMES-FWCC)**  
We continue to interact online with Friends from EMES-FWCC and other Sections through regular events such as EMES representatives' meetings, EMES peace & service network meetings, and through online worship opportunities.

This year EMES held its annual meeting online from 26-28 April 2024, with the theme of Living the Spirit of Ubuntu and several QWRC members participated. See <https://fwccemes.org/news/emes-annual-meeting-2024-epistle>

One of our co-clerks represented BYM at the first ever Central European Yearly Meeting (CEYM) held in Budapest in Hungary from 16-19 May 2024. CEYM aims to 'serve Friends in the area between the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black seas.' See <https://thefriend.org/article/country-pursuits-finola-osullivan-visits-central-european-yearly-meeting>

- c. Guests and worship at Britain Yearly Meeting 2024 in July 2024**  
We provided an online welcome session for Quakers from other yearly meetings and an informal get together at Friends House in person on the Saturday.
- We also facilitated two semi-programmed Epilogue worship sessions during Yearly Meeting, the first led by Robert Wafula and Nancy Wafula, Friends from Kenya. The second one was led by Amy Cooke and Chamba Cooke, resident Friends (amis-résidents) at Congénies Quaker centre in France – see [Quaker Centre of Congénies - Maison Quaker de Congénies](#)
- d. Supporting BYM representatives to European Yearly Meetings**  
We provided an online session for representatives in Britain who were preparing to attend Yearly Meetings across Europe.

**e. Co-operation with other BYM Committees and Quaker Agencies in Europe**

One of our members, Tracey Martin, continues to update us about the priorities of Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) in Brussels in Belgium.

Another of our members, Susan Seymour, sits on BYM's Reparations Working Group (RWG) and we have a standing agenda item about their work at every QWRC committee meeting.

QWRC's Terms of Reference includes an aim that we interact with the Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations (QCCIR) in relation to how international developments impact on interfaith dialogue here. In September QCCIR's Clerk, Elaine Green, joined us for part of our committee meeting and gave a stimulating presentation on their current priorities and challenges.

We have also enjoyed a similar session at our November meeting from Jonathan Lingham, Clerk to Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW).

**Opportunities and challenges in 2025**

As already outlined, we are keenly aware that the ripple effects of the World Plenary Meeting will continue for some years ahead. In this regard, QWRC will work to maintain and extend the engagement of Friends in Britain with its thematic strands.

In May 2025, we hope to welcome four Young Adult Friends from other Yearly Meetings to Britain. These invitations have been issued in consultation with Young Friends General Meeting, and the budgeting and itinerary planning is already underway in conjunction with the FWCC World Office.

**Queries for Meeting for Sufferings**

How can we encourage Friends and meetings to respond to the spiritual call from the World Plenary Meeting 2024, and engage further with its three themes: Ubuntu, Care for Creation, and Healing Historical Injustices?

Ruth Homer and Finola O'Sullivan  
Co-clerks to Quaker World Relations Committee  
November 2024



## **Epistles and reports from BYM representatives attending other European Yearly Meetings in 2024**

- Finland YM – Mary Woodward, South East Scotland AM
- France YM – Joe Warren, Luton & Leighton AM
- German YM – Martin Harnor, Cambridgeshire AM
- Ireland YM – Gordon Benson, Pendle Hill AM and Kate Arnot, South East Scotland AM
- Netherlands YM – BYM's representative was prevented from attending and so only the Epistle is provided in this paper
- Norway YM – Sigurd Reimers, West Somerset AM
- Sweden YM – John Phillips, South East Scotland AM
- Switzerland YM – Eleanor Beswick, Oxford & Swindon AM

In addition there is a report from Central European Yearly Meeting. BYM did not appoint a representative to attend but Finola O'Sullivan attended and wrote an article for *the Friend*.

### **Central European YM 16–19 May 2024**

#### **Report**

#### **Country pursuits**

(reproduced with permission from *the Friend* 13 June 2024)

'This story is about us, the youngest Quaker Yearly Meeting in Europe.'



'Stories accompany us during our whole life, we are living history at this very moment.' Photo courtesy Êvi Tóth-Bumberák

First anniversaries are always special. Following a minute at what was then the twenty-sixth Central European Gathering (CEG) in May 2023, the youngest Yearly Meeting (YM) in Europe came together again recently, in Budapest, for the first time as Central European Yearly Meeting (CEYM).



CEYM First Anniversary Birthday Cake. Photo courtesy of Évi Tóth-Bumberák

The seeds of this Meeting go back much further than one year, however. In around 1995/6, Friends received a request for a visit to Budapest, for people there to learn more about Quakers. These visits turned into annual gatherings, which continued to grow. An annual CEG in-person gathering has been a permanent fixture in recent years, with a spring and autumn preparative Meeting, usually in Prague.

In preparing for my own visit to CEYM, to represent Quakers in Britain, I made the mistake of asking for a fixed map of the countries that make up the new) Yearly Meeting. I was reminded that it operates within a more-loosely-defined sense of geography and aims to 'serve Friends in the area between the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black Seas and welcome f/Friends and visitors from further afield'. In practice, most CEYM Friends are ' from the Czech Republic, Poland, Austria, and Hungary but some are from other countries such as Ukraine, Latvia, Slovenia, and Germany. There is contact with Friends from Slovakia, Estonia and other Balkan countries. Some live in Portugal or the UK, but have strong connections with CEYM. Other Friends are international members, or members of German YM or All Poland Gathering.

In effect, CEYM runs in parallel to other gatherings, and is open to anyone who wishes to participate in its Meetings. I was reminded that 'at the beginning of this community was the idea of a gathering for Friends from all areas because of the small number of Friends in each country, and we are here today.'

During worship in Budapest, one Friend ministered that 'The tendency to violence is nurtured through nationalism. 'Territorial claims lie at the heart of the two wars currently raging in Russia/Ukraine and Israel/Gaza. The letter of greeting to CEYM from Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) Europe and Middle East Section (EMES) reminded us that there is 'a complete disregard for human rights in [these] two wars'.

The same ease in working across porous borders was again reflected in CEYM's imaginative approach to membership. Its Business Meeting discerned the future processes for new applications for membership, and for transfers-in. In June, thirteen Friends who formally held international membership will be formally transferred and become the first CEYM members. Overall CEYM has perhaps over thirty Friends today, many of them young, and there is an ambition to double this in coming years. New ground was broken in Budapest in the additional minuting of a how Friends in membership with another YM can apply to hold dual membership, and become a member of CEYM without giving up membership of their other YM. This is surely timely as we review our own patterns of membership (including our identifying with new online worshipping groups) in Britain.

Joy in being together was evident from the first Thursday evening when we gathered together at Hotel Budapest, Train journeys of more than nine hours were common in reaching here, but I heard no complaints - such was the happiness at gathering in person again. The food was vegetarian. CEYM has no Meeting houses, no staff, and its bank account is in Prague. In this multi-lingual YM, the working language is English.

I admired the concentration of Friends in all sessions, & everything was conducted in what was often their second language. CEYM worships on Sundays online, and also offers an additional Friday evening Meeting for Worship online for those who attend other churches on Sunday.

Pawel Milka, recently appointed as record clerk, will represent CEYM at Britain Yearly Meeting in London in July.

Finola is co-clerk to Quaker World Relations Committee.

## **Epistle**

Dear Friends all around the world,

Let me tell you a story about 50 Friends from 11 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia, Ukraine, United Kingdom) and Australia. They met in the city of Budapest, Hungary and online to celebrate the first time they gathered from start to finish as the Central European Yearly Meeting. They even enjoyed some vegan birthday cake.

This story is about us, the youngest Quaker Yearly Meeting in Europe. We are basically newborns so we have the difficult task (and also the privilege) to define ourselves including membership procedures.

Ben Pink Dandelion gave a lecture about the key threads of the Quaker way and described what has changed over time and what has stayed the same. The following day we were encouraged to find answers in ourselves about what drew us to

Quakerism, what could we do to deepen our spiritual life and what practical steps could lead us in this direction.

Kasia Kaczmarkiewicz shared with us a moving excerpt of her work regarding the archiving project about the nearly 30 year old history of Central European Gathering accompanied by a slideshow of photos from over the years. Tracey Martin from the Quaker Council for European Affairs gave us an interactive presentation about how they work, Irena Marušincová told us about her thesis regarding Feuerstein's method and we also had an interest group about the Image and Likeness of God. We did not forget to call attention to the climate emergency thanks to Arne Springorum and Pavel Marušinec.

We gathered for a two hour long Meeting for Worship, we had a silent walking worship and as every year we enjoyed singing together. One night a storyteller enchanted us with tales of Hungarian and other folklore.

We received greetings from Europe and Middle East Section of Friends World Committee for Consultation and Britain Yearly Meeting, Scotland General Meeting, Ireland Yearly Meeting, German Yearly Meeting as well as from distant individual Friends. We felt held in the Light by Friends spiritually supporting us from afar. We welcomed representatives from German Yearly Meeting and Britain Yearly Meeting. We are looking forward to seeing each other again next year in the Czech Republic (Litoměřice or Litomyšl), but even before that some of us will meet in Prague at our World Plenary Meeting Hub.

Stories accompany us during our whole life, we are living history at this very moment. CEYM started and grew strong as Border Meeting, Quaker Spring Regional Gathering, and Central European Gathering and we are grateful to the Friends who came before us. Now it is up to us to continue gathering and growing as Central European Yearly Meeting.

## **Finland YM**

### **3–5 May 2024, AitO Centre, outside Tampere**

#### **Report**

#### **Visiting Finnish and Estonian Friends May 2024**

Finland Yearly Meeting has two gatherings each year, in spring and in the autumn. I was delighted to be appointed to represent Britain YM at the Finnish gathering at AitO centre this May.

Finnish Quakers began worshipping together via Zoom during lockdown. Helsinki and Tampere worship groups now meet in person each Sunday. The continuing twice-monthly Zoom meetings are attended both by more isolated Friends and some of those who are also able to join in person worship. I join the Zoom meetings when I am able, as do others who live outside Finland. The numbers vary each time – rarely less than three, sometimes nearer ten. We are always delighted to be joined by Elke

in Sweden, who is at most meetings along with her partner Johan and their young daughter Oona.

We had hoped to meet Oona in person at AitO this May, but circumstances prevented her and her parents from joining us. A representative from Ireland YM was also prevented at the last minute, but Sue Glover Frykman represented Sweden YM and Ethel Livermore, Clerk to EMES section of FWCC, also joined the gathering. Some Finnish Friends came for the whole weekend, while others either came for the Saturday, or arrived on the Friday but left on Saturday. In all about twenty Friends were present for all or part of the weekend.

I'd arrived in Helsinki a couple of days early and was delighted to spend time there with Sakari and his wife and Susanne. Sakari offered me a lift to AitO centre, the leisurely journey enabling us to get to know each other much better. Once arrived at AitO, there were old friends to greet and new ones to get to know, including Taina who'd recently started attending on-line worship and had decided to come to the Gathering to widen her Quaker experience. It was lovely to meet her in person and be able to engage in longer conversations than are possible in the general friendly chat surrounding the Zoom worship sessions.

Antti, one of the Tampere Friends, offered us a Friday night Playback Theatre session, in which someone told a short story from their own experience which his group of three actors and one musician played back to us. This was a fascinating way to get to know more about each other while really enjoying the actors' skill in listening to and then improvising the playback of the story, always checking with each participant that they had told it correctly. As an ex-musician myself, I was particularly impressed by the multi-talented musician who used a wide range of instruments and styles instantly to create a mood from which the actors could start their playback.

Most of the Saturday was taken up with the necessary business of the Yearly meeting, which is conducted in Finnish, with whispered translations to assist those of us whose Finnish isn't up to the task. Greetings from the visitors' YMs, the accounts, the progress of the translation of Thomas Kelly's A Testament of Devotion into Finnish, the annual report and appointing representatives to events in Finland and abroad were all dealt with. There was discussion about the current newsletter situation – one Friend has been doing it for some time, and feels the need to lay that down/. What is the purpose of a newsletter? How can news be circulated? What about the Friends who don't 'do' social media, and are not part of the FaceBook and WhatsApp groups? An informal 'strategy working group' offered itself: the subject will be revisited at the Autumn Gathering.

We were joined for part of the day by two members of the Ecumenical Council of Finland. Established in 1917, it's a forum for co-operation between Finnish Christian communities on social issues – peace and human rights, sustainable future,

international responsibility, freedom of religion and belief, and refugees and integrations. I found myself hoping that the slowly-emerging Scottish Christian Forum would develop and grow into something as active and positive.

I was honoured to have been asked to join with Sue Glover Frykman in presenting a session on “How does Eldership support our Quaker community?”. At present, the two worship groups don't have appointed Elders and, while someone might be appointed Elder for the business sessions, their function is principally to uphold the clerk and the sessions.

Sue and I had asked Jane Rose to be our accompanying Elder, and she helped us design a session which would introduce the concept of Eldership to those Friends who might not know much about it and show its relevance to Finland YM. I gave a brief outline of the history of eldership and pastoral care within early Friends and how these now function in BYM. Sue talked about the practical aspects of eldership, bringing in the concept of ubuntu and focusing on the nurturing of individuals and meetings and the supporting of sessions such as the one we were currently giving.

There was a space for questions. A reference to Meeting for Sufferings prompted “why did early Quakers suffer?” “What happens in Africa?” meant a lightning trip through the different ‘types’ of Quakers around the world. “What happens in Sweden?” – Sue told us of her long experience of Sweden YM.

Friends divided into small groups, one Finnish- and three English-speaking. They were asked to act as if they were at the local worship group Elders’ meeting to worshipfully consider various situations and bring a minute outlining their conclusions to the feedback session. Situations included disturbance (of many kinds) in the Meeting; too little (or too much) spoken ministry; newcomers who appear once but never return; one person always ministering on the same topic in the last ten minutes of Meeting.

The feedback session was really interesting, with everyone who took part feeling that they ‘really were Elders’, and that the process was really good. The ‘solutions’ were thoughtful and caring. Friends were heartened to be reassured that these sorts of issues are a problem everywhere – “you are not alone”. How do you deal with these things if there's no-one appointed and thus able to start the process? Helsinki and Tampere worship groups have grown organically, and don't have clerks, so there's no authority or mechanism to take action. One Friend at the Tampere worship group gives a brief outline of what's expected at the start of their Meeting.

The session was designed to invite consideration of the whole topic of Eldership as it relates to Finland Yearly Meeting, not to make any decisions. This topic will be returned to in the autumn.

The theme of the whole weekend was ubuntu, in the light of the World Gathering of Friends in South Africa later this year. There is much preparatory material on the

FWCC website. It was proposed that zoom preparation and discussion groups be held. Mention was made of additional resources, including a study guide, available on the EMES website, and a suggestion was made of an EMES-wide group joining together on the Sunday. Time zones might make joining some sessions difficult. “We want to give more time and depth as a community, not just receive the epistle and that’s it”.

Saturday night was the opportunity for sauna, swimming pool, and social time for those who wanted: always for me one of the highlights of the weekend!

Sunday morning began with Meeting for Worship, after which we went outside to sit in and listen to Aino introducing our next session. It was a joy to be in the sunshine, surrounded by trees and gazing at the lake, after long sessions indoors the previous day. The session was designed for us to reflect inwardly in the company of another ihminen [human being, person] who would be a silent witness to what we were telling ourself. We found a partner, and went somewhere quiet, taking it in turns to speak and listen. The first question we were given was fairly simple – tell something about what’s happening in me right now: not just what’s in my head, but what my body’s feeling too. The second question went deeper – tell something about what the sentence *mina olen koska sinä olet* [I am because you are] brings up in me right now. We then came back together, and shared anything we felt we wanted to, again focused on myself rather than the person witnessing us. Ubuntu extends beyond ‘me’ and ‘you’ to all humans, and to the world in which we live: we are because nature is – we are an integral part of nature, however much we may think we exercise our free will to cut the ties binding us together.

After lunch it was time for the final feedback session – How was it, Friends? For me it was another joyful weekend with my Finnish Quaker family, whom I told I truly am because you are – coming here has changed and continues to change me: I would not be who I am now without you all.

Sadly, once again it was time to depart, hoping to meet again in September. I then travelled north to visit my niece and her partner in Jyväskylä, but had time before my train left to go to the pub in Tampere with Leena, Toni and Ethel and experience Finnish beer and karaoke, both essential parts of Finnish culture...

Through Jane Rose, I had made contact with Roland Rand, an Estonian Friend, and was hoping to meet up with him and other Quakers in Tallinn. Unfortunately, things didn’t quite work out that way. I stayed overnight in Helsinki and got the ferry the following morning. Roland met me at the ferry terminal and escorted me to the Lutheran Theological Institute in the heart of the Old Town, but had to go back to work. I met him briefly the following day too, and heard about his voluntary work with Ukrainian refugees, of whom there are very many in Estonia: but there wasn’t time to have an in-depth Quaker conversation. My ferry back was on the Saturday, so I wasn’t able to meet any other Tallinn Friends, who meet most Sundays, either in

person or on line. Tallin Old Town is very beautiful, and I was happy to explore it while wishing I could have had Friendly company some of the time.

I had arranged with Gwyndaf that he would once again meet me at my hotel and pilot me to Meeting which he duly did. There we were joined by Synnove, whose company I'd also enjoyed on my last visit to Helsinki. It was Finnish Mothers' Day, so other Friends were somewhere else: I was very glad to be part of Meeting and the conversation afterwards, which continued over lunch in my first Filipino restaurant in a nearby shopping mall.

I had a little time to myself in Helsinki, for which I was grateful after nearly two weeks of moving on every couple of days. I was also delighted to coincide with one of the free admission days to the Ateneum, Finland's national gallery! And then, sadly, I made my way back to Scotland, hoping to be able to attend the Autumn Gathering in September.

I am very grateful both to Britain Yearly Meeting for appointing me to attend Finland YM, and also to the Francis Camfield Trust for supporting me financially. Because of the BYM appointment, which funds much of my travel costs, I still have some Trust money, which I will use for my next Finnish trip.

In addition to the formal letter of greeting from Quakers in Britain, our General Meeting for Scotland Clerk Michael Hutchinson wrote a letter loving greetings to Finnish Friends on behalf of Friends in Scotland. In reply, their Clerk, Toni Hämäläinen, wrote

*Dear Michael and Friends in Scotland,*

*We value very much our connections to a wider Quaker family. It was so nice to have Mary with us again. Together we explored the themes of ubuntu and eldership in our communities. It was a rich and spirit led weekend on the shore of lake Näsijärvi.*

In Friendship  
Toni Hämäläinen, Clerk FYM

Mary Woodward

## **France YM / Assemblée Annuelle de Quakers en France 1–3 November 2024, La Solitude, Martillac, Nouvelle Aquitaine**

### **Report**

**Theme: Inner peace: going towards others in a spirit of peace and reconciliation**

**a) Was there anything that struck you about the manner of business or other activities at the YM, whether familiar or different?**



About 50 quakers came together for France Yearly Meeting, both physically at La Solitude, a spiritual community near Bordeaux, and online. I was struck by the very friendly welcome which I received from Friends in France. The spiritual experience of worshipping together in meeting for worship, in worship sharing sessions and other periods of quiet was immediately familiar! The structure of workshops and the close community feel provided the opportunity to form new friendships and to share our experiences of Quakerism.

French Quakers share very familiar concerns to those in Britain Yearly Meeting and are led to do lots of the same sorts of activities as we do in Britain. There is a strong programme of, and concern for, peace work among French quakers for example. There is also ecumenical work in Paris in holding silent vigils, the activities of the Stop Fuelling War organisation, links to peace building activities in the Congo and through talks of the lived experience of Quakers who have done peace building work. Peace within and reconciliation without was the central theme explored in workshops during the weekend. Other Quaker concerns are also shared, for example, the environment and climate change, and LGBTQ+ rights.

There are of course some differences. The number of Quakers in France is around 120. The structure is necessarily much simpler than Britain Yearly Meeting and with a simpler history. Somehow the structure seemed more pragmatic and fitting to the number of quakers than some of the more complicated structures that we have inherited in the UK (and are in the process of changing). Because of the smaller numbers, and geographically much bigger country, I felt there was more pragmatism about online meetings. Several of the constituent meetings are fully online. “Les amies isolés”, or “online friends” meet fully online including in their business meetings and people join from all over France. The Nouvelle Aquitaine region friends also meet online. People seemed to be relaxed about belonging to a geographically bound meeting or an online meeting, something I’m not sure we have fully achieved in Britain.

The event had more workshops and fewer business sessions – probably in part because there is less business. While I enjoy BYM, the workshop format of this weekend in France really helped me to get to know the other Quakers. This can be more of a challenge at BYM.

**b) What particular items or activities on or off the programme stood out for you?**

I enjoyed the worship sharing and workshops on the theme of inner peace and going towards others in a spirit of peace and reconciliation. I felt the workshops did a great job of thoroughly exploring the theme over a couple of days.

We started with a worship sharing on the topic of looking for peace within: Peace can be hard to find. Sometimes it appears when we aren’t seeking it. It can be helpful to “let go”, to slow down and really notice the world around us in the present moment. When we worship together with others we can find peace in the silence. However,

sometimes being with others can make it harder. If we can accept others as they are, we can hopefully create a safe and peaceful space around us. It struck me how silence transcends language and opens the opportunity for a shared experience of peace.

A second workshop considered the question of reconciliation. We worked in teams to outline and explore a number of challenging interpersonal situations needing reconciliation. We considered factors supporting reconciliation, including the willingness of the parties to engage; the roles of proximity but also giving people space; and that others can play an important role in reconciliation. We considered the differences between conflict resolution, reconciliation and forgiveness.

We heard moving accounts of peace work in Burundi and of the work of Stop Fuelling War and other inspiring peace activism in France. It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the scale of conflict in the world so we considered what practical steps we could take to address international peace issues in a further workshop. We thought working with others was key – from engaging with elected representatives, working with other grassroots groups and using social media appropriately. While the legal and social structures are different in Europe I was struck by similarities in the concerns facing Quakers on the continent – including militarisation and the disruption of the right to protest.

It was interesting to hear of outreach work adapted to French culture where it is more of a taboo to talk about religion, other than to close friends and family. A beautiful Quakers in France pin-badge had been created, with an advice leaflet on how to explain Quakers to those who ask. One challenge to outreach is the limited amount of francophone Quaker literature. For this reason a podcast is being created, starting with episodes about quaker roots and quakers in France, and then going on to include interviews with French Quakers today. I think it will be very interesting.

There were several more business-related meetings. These included a statutory annual general meeting required for French law but held more according to Quaker practice. The finances are on an even keel. Significant funds are raised from a relatively small number of quakers. Legal structures to facilitate legacies were discussed. A new meeting house has been purchased in Paris and is being renovated. Early investigations are under way to consider the creation of a Quaker retirement home somewhere in France.

I enjoyed giving my report and hearing the reports from the other representatives from Belgium and Switzerland, and each of the local meetings, talking about their activities and challenges. This reinforced the sense of shared Quaker values and concerns across France and other European countries more widely.

**c) Have you had, or do you plan to have, follow up contact of any kind?**

I had several contacts in France Yearly Meeting before this event from attending other Quaker events in the UK. I hope to be able to travel to France in again to meet

with French Friends. During my trip I found out about the French Quaker Centre in Congénies where there has been a young people's gathering. It would be nice to visit Paris Meeting when renovation of its new meeting house is completed. I hope to meet a French Friend when they next visit the UK. I hope to return to France Yearly Meeting next year as representative of Britain Yearly Meeting to deepen the relationships that were kindled this year.

**d) How have you shared your experience with your community of Friends?**

I hope to talk to my local meeting and perhaps area meeting about my trip to France Yearly Meeting.

**e) What is your overall experience as a BYM representative at this YM?**

I feel so lucky to have attended the French Yearly Meeting. I am grateful for the warm welcome from the friendly and energised community. I made new friendships and look forward to deepening these international relationships in the future. I left feeling more peaceful and motivated than when I arrived. I did get to know French Quakers in "the things that are eternal". Our shared spiritual experience and our concern and witness for the world's problems shone through despite some language and cultural differences. Of course, there are also some things we do differently. Visiting "from the outside" has given me a new perspective and highlighted new ways of working. I hope that bringing some of these ideas back home to share and consider might enrich my local, area and national meetings.

Joe Warren

## **Epistle**

To Friends from around the world

France Yearly Meeting 2024 gathered in the Domaine de la Solitude (but not in solitude) in Martillac. To be welcomed into a religious community provided a setting that fostered a calm atmosphere, in an area of trees and vines with their autumnal colours. Our theme for this meeting was "Inner peace: going towards others in a spirit of peace and reconciliation." Some 50 Friends came from all over France, but also from Switzerland, Belgium and the UK. Some Friends also joined us on Zoom. Sadly, there were no children present at the meeting because they needed to get back to school.

The meeting for worship which opened the meeting allowed us to apprehend this inner peace and to feel that it is the same experience of peace that we all have, and which links us together, even if this experience may be described in different terms. This experience of worship sharing gave us room to put into action the Quaker method of discernment, based on listening to others and to the Inner Light. We were able to see the extension of this worship sharing during the weekend, subsequent ministry being enriched by our discussions.

This inner peace is not a state, but a process which is not always easy to attain, but which can be cultivated. We were able to feel this peace in the words used during meeting for worship, a welcoming attitude to what everyone contributes but also in the body language, the calm voices which spoke distinctly, in turn.

The workshops about reconciliation and conflict resolution provided tools for bringing this peace to other people. For example, we were asked to reflect about what a Quaker can do during wartime. These workshops made us feel the difficulties we encounter when we get involved. They also helped us to discover how the collective enables solutions to emerge and to transform the world. We feel that there is a continuity between inner and outer peace, between individuals or between groups. These workshops showed just how indispensable communication, guided by love, is in resolving conflicts.

Even if attaining peace is a process in which we cannot control everything, to attain it we must make a commitment. Peace should not only be a feeling; it is also about taking action to help build this peace. These actions need not be perfect nor fully achieved, because peace can come as a surprise, like an unexpected consequence of our involvement. However, it doesn't always occur, despite our actions.

These moments of shared peace bring hope and light in these troubled times. Like the pieces of a puzzle which don't apparently fit together, we can construct a unified image, common ground based on shared values and discernment. We also became aware just how much we inspired each other, whether it was during meeting for worship, the workshops, listening to everyone's experiences, but also during the impromptu worship at the end of our fête.

We hope that every Friend who reads this epistle and those Friends who were present during this Yearly Meeting may find while reading this an inner peace that they can bring to their entourage.

## **German YM 31 October to 3 November 2024, Bonn**

### **Report**

Theme: "What Moves Us"

I, Martin Harnor, travelled as the representative of Britain Yearly Meeting. I am a member of Cambridge Jesus Lane Local Meeting and Cambridgeshire Area Meeting. I will share this experience with Cambridge Friends and also with Cambridgeshire Area Meeting.

Approximately 208 Adult Friends from Germany and Austria met on 31 October at Bonn with more than 10 attendees joining online. Those attending included delegates from other Yearly Meetings. There were also 20 "Young Friends" and a

similar number of accompanying children. Some Yearly Meetings in Europe and the Americas sent greetings.

The Theme of this Yearly Meeting was “What Moves Us” with the strap-line “Let’s set off on this Journey together”. The “German Young Friends” (15-30 years) had planned the programme and the structure of the weekend which gave this Yearly Meetings a distinctive flavour. On the first evening, their introduction to the theme asked us to engage with this theme in a conscious way. Examples of their planning included Vegan food, short breaks for movement during Business Meetings and Meetings for Worship and an “Awareness Room” with time allocated in the programme to share emotionally stressful things. The Young Friends held their own Business Meeting (open to all) within the overall Yearly Meeting timetable.

There were Worship sessions each day for Friends to consider the spiritual aspects of this “journey”. This included some very helpful ministry, mostly in German but with some in English.

A centrepiece of this Gathering was the Richard Cary Lecture given by two Friends (Martin Höfflin-Glünkin and Dieter Müller-Nöhring) and entitled “When the whole world is at Stake - Journeying as friends into an uncertain future.” In this speech they charted their respective journeys towards a greater awareness and increasing involvement in activities to mitigate the effects of climate change.

A Reports of Gatherings session included the monthly meetings of FWCC EMES, plus a report on QCEA and also on the Gathering of Young Friends where they undertook detailed planning of the programme for this Yearly Meeting. There was also a family gathering that took place near Berlin.

In the Yearly Meeting Business Sessions, the newly formed Central European Yearly Meeting was recognised and a report on the refurbishment of “Quaker Haus” in Bad Pyrmont was presented. The 2024 Finances were discussed and their 2025 Budget was agreed. In later Business Sessions, they considered how to strengthen the “Peace Committee”, also spiritual support for a project which rescues migrants crossing the Mediterranean when their boats are in dire distress (already receiving practical support from Quaker Life). A report of Friends House Moscow was also received. The draft Epistle was considered and this is attached to this report. In the final Business Session, the issue of Gaza was discussed and a minute produced supporting the request from other organisations for a ceasefire.

Interest Group sessions in the programme included further information about the project Compass-Collective and how it provides practical help to those crossing the Mediterranean in small boats and their interventions to save lives. Another Interest Group focused on Gaza.

On the Social side there was a singing session each morning and many opportunities to engage with Adult and Young Friends during breaks and meal times.

On Saturday evening, Young Friends organised a superb entertainment with contributions from all ages. This featured a “shadow play” from the youngest children and “Younger Friends”, together with performances of music, poetry and comedy, greatly appreciated by the audience and followed by folk dancing.

Overall it was a very positive and precious experience spending this time with German and Austrian Friends. This included great friendliness and courtesy extended to me personally and to all those attending and this made me feel really welcome. There was a powerful feeling of community that extended throughout the weekend from Friends who were really pleased to meet and catch up with each other during the precious time in this residential setting.

The next German Yearly Meeting will take place on 16-19 October 2025 in Bad Pyrmont. This Meeting will celebrate 100 years of existence of this YM with other celebrations to be held in Berlin and elsewhere during 2025. I plan to follow up with Earthcare Witness who had many attending from their group to encourage us to develop and continue our efforts to do things that help to mitigate the effects of “Climate Change” and also with the representative supporting Friends House Moscow.

## **Ireland YM 17–21 July 2024: Cork**

### **Report**

I was very pleased to be invited to attend Ireland Yearly Meeting and was even more delighted by being present. The event began, as it continued, by Cork Meeting offering to pick me up from the airport and take me to the accommodation. This was totally unexpected and so kind. To continue with practical matters, the accommodation in a shared student flat was fine and it was good to have the same 3 Friends to connect with (one from Eire and a couple from Northern Ireland). Again Cork Meeting had been very kind and had provided us with basics for breakfast and it all worked out between the four of us ensuring there was enough for breakfasts. Lunches were soup, sandwiches and wraps. The main meal at night was a main course but it was very easy to supplement this from nearby shops.

I asked how many Friends there are in Ireland YM and was told about 1,400 but I don't know if this is all those in “the book”, both members and attenders (General Meeting for Scotland is comparable in numbers). The final minute recorded attendance at each session which was around 80 with about 140 registered to attend some or all of the Yearly Meeting. A very high proportion of those attending were serving in different roles – on registration, welcoming, book stalls, microphones, base group facilitators, serving meals, clearing tables, washing up,

The theme of Yearly Meeting was the Spirit of Ubuntu (in line with the World Plenary). “Live in love with one another as commanded by Christ, watching over one

another for good, bearing with each other's failings, upholding one another prayerfully in times of difficulty and sorrow, and sharing with other's joys." (IYM General Christian Counsel, Organisation & Christian Discipline).

There was a full programme, beginning at 8.30 and ending at 21.50 (the janitors were clear the building had to be empty by 22.00 and what janitors want happens).

My two favourite sessions were the 2 most interactive: Tracey Martin from Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) and Exploring Our Relationship to Conflict: A Practical Toolkit, IYM Peace Committee. Tracey Martin explained that QCEA works with the European Union and the Council of Europe. They sent postcards to each MEP after the recent elections, with stitching and textiles, welcoming them to the European Parliament. They are a very small organisation with a reduced staff (more funding is needed) so have to focus with 3 priorities and collaborative working. Due to the decision by England and Wales (not Scotland nor Northern Ireland) to leave the European Union, now it is mainly Irish MEPs who have prior knowledge of Quakers. Tracey invited us to stitch postcards and several Friends took up this invitation.

Ireland Yearly Meeting's Peace Committee began from the assumption that there is that of God in everyone (good, wise and powerful) and everyone has something to bring to the table. Conflict is an opportunity for growth. We turned our chairs around, in the same room, to share, as much as we wanted, of a ongoing conflict. Returning to the facilitator, we were given examples of different conflict handling styles – turtle, shark, dog/teddy, fox and owl – all of which have advantages and disadvantages.

The Saturday night lecture on the University campus, was given by Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge on the theme of Ubuntu: A Profound Universal Value and our Hope for World Peace. This had been preceded on the previous afternoon by a talk on theological issues relevant to Ubuntu by Madeleine Pennington (by zoom) and was also preceded on Saturday morning by a session "Meet the Public Lecturer" which I had to miss as I wasn't feeling well.

As well as these significant sessions, there were many report backs and news of initiatives, plus financial matters, the epistle, 4 base groups. There were several representatives and visitors from out with Ireland and several ecumenical and inter faith visitors, some of whom were with us for most of the weekend.

4 special interest groups were held before YM. I managed to attend the final one and was just about to attend the second when my son unexpectedly arrived to fix and repair things in my flat. Since he's so busy, I had to abandon the special interest group which I regretted as it was by a former EAPPI, and I was interested to know of her experience, coming from a country which hadn't had colonies but had had to struggle for independence within recent history.

I found a real sense of community in Ireland Yearly Meeting, helped by its smaller scale. Those on zoom were never more than one screen so it was easy to feel part of a whole community (impossible for me at BYM where there are hundreds on zoom, and almost always hidden so there's no knowledge of who is present on zoom). There was a deep sense of the Holy Spirit being a presence and of being rooted in Christianity. Both of these speak to me. The smaller size of IYM (a larger body as BYM has advantages) means that many Friends are known to each other over years but there were also those for whom this was their first IYM and several younger Friends were present. Young Friends in Ireland meet together when numbers permit. IYM employs a worker for 6 hours a week who supports those who are supporting children and young people.

In conclusion I greatly enjoyed and benefitted from my attendance at IYM and will continue, by zoom, to participate where possible in what they provide as it is really helpful for spiritual growth.

Kate Arnot

## **Report**

### *The Spirit of Ubuntu*

“Live love with one another as commanded by Christ, watching over one another for good, bearing with each other's failings, upholding one another prayerfully in times of difficulty and sorrow, and sharing each other's joys”

The 2024 Ireland Yearly Meeting (IYM) was extended over five days and the theme was Ubuntu which can be expressed as ‘I am because you are’.

The meeting was held at Cork College of Further Education with the main accommodation in student flats, a 15-minute walk away.

Ireland is the second largest meeting in Europe after Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) but still small with approximately 1400 members of which 140 registered for the Meeting with an average of 80 attending in each session.

The Yearly Meeting began with a welcome to visitors from other Yearly Meetings, Quaker Bodies and local Ecumenical visitors.

Each day started with sharing a Bible reading and worship sharing and ended with candle-lit worship. The business of the meeting was conducted as a plenary with breakout rooms for groups.

The IYM treasurer presented the financial report to the Meeting. The finances are in a healthy position. A budget has been set for 2025 prioritizing youth support, spiritual growth, outreach and communications. There has been discussion on whether IYM should incorporate as a company limited by guarantee. However, it has been



decided not to but instead to bring in revised policies and a risk register which should give the society the protection it seeks.

Dublin Monthly Meeting has developed a vision for the future which will repurpose the structures of the Monthly Meeting. This has been done with the help of a facilitator, which has proved successful. I think the way Dublin has approached looking at the future could help BYM Area Meetings look to the future.

The Eco Quakers Ireland committee reported on activities during the last year including working with the eco congregation. IYM has produced a booklet "Regenerating our Common Home" which contains practical guidelines and advice on sustainability.

The theme of the Yearly Meeting was the spirit of Ubuntu. Madeline Pennington, of Theos Think Tank, spoke on how Quakers' spirituality can inform our approach to the philosophy of Ubuntu. Sylvia Wigham of Churchtown Meeting spoke of her experience befriending those seeking protection in Ireland as an example of Ubuntu.

Tracy Martin, director of Quaker Council for European affairs (QCEA), gave a presentation on the activities of the last year and how they are being proactive and not reactive in their work. Loretta O'Brien urged friends to financially support them.

Members of Ministry and Oversight gave a presentation on exploring the health of our meetings. Three things should not bother us: the number of attendees, the ageing profile of members and the proportion of birthright to convinced friends. There were questions on what makes a healthy meeting, considering that every meeting is different. The questions are: Are the spiritual aspect, a strong sense of community and service important to your meeting?

Johnny Corry of the Trussell Trust gave a presentation on food poverty.

Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) world plenary in South Africa was held soon after IYM and BYM. Simon Lamb, who has been Clerk to FWCC, spoke about the hopes and challenges of the plenary in South Africa - the three themes of the meeting: concern about creation, Ubuntu and dealing with historical injustices.

As part of Ireland Yearly Meeting Peace Committee's (IYMPC) support for the Alternatives to Violence Project, a workshop on exploring our relationship to conflict, a practical toolkit, was given by Aoife Reaper-Reynolds from IYMPC. She introduced the topic of dealing with conflict to shift our focus from blame to ownership and then we broke into smaller groups to do several exercises using tools that she gave us.

This year's public lecture was given by Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, a South African Quaker, who was recently Director of the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva. She joined us via Zoom. For 15 years Nozizwe was a member of the South African Parliament and held various portfolios including health and defence and was deputy

speaker of the national assembly. She was also involved in the transition from apartheid.

"Her talk considered the theme of Ubuntu, an African philosophy based on the responsibility to strive towards collective well-being, while promoting belonging and inclusivity.

She highlighted several examples of Ubuntu in action from an Irish perspective, amongst others Niall Mellon and his Township Trust which has worked to build houses in areas of Cape town over the past 22 years. ...

She also introduced a powerful video from Dr Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, a psychologist and scholar who was awarded the Templeton Prize for her work into trauma and forgiveness in post-apartheid South Africa, which has created a globally recognized model for social healing.

As we move forward Nozizwe asked us to consider how we can practise Ubuntu in our daily lives and communities."

From Minute 24 Ireland Yearly Meeting held 17th - 21st July 2024

Young Friends gave several presentations about their meetings. The number of Young Friends attending has increased over the last few years from quite a low point and this is encouraging. There is a part-time Youth Support Worker now in post and they have been working to bring Young Friends from Ireland together. Supporting Young Friends is a priority in the treasurer's financial report.

This was my second visit to IYM as a BYM representative. I found that people were friendly and supportive. IYM is more Christian centric which I like.

Being a small Yearly Meeting without major financial reserves, most of the work of committees is carried out by members. IYM, like BYM, is facing falling numbers and an ageing membership. However they appear to be building the strength of their meetings and encouraging Young Friends so there is a future for the Yearly Meeting.

Gordon Benson

## **Epistle**

Dear Friends,

As we share these parting words you find us back alongside the banks of the River Lee for the first time since 2013. This time around the city is awash with red and white flags and bunting as the Cork Senior Hurlers prepare to face Clare in Croke Park in Dublin on All Ireland Final Sunday.

Between the 17th and 21st of July we have been nestled on the grounds of Cork College of Further Education and Training near Grand Parade, grateful for the hospitality and welcome shown by local Friends.

We were delighted to share our gathering with visitors and representatives from other Yearly Meetings and faith groups who joined us both in person and online. In the spirit of Ubuntu, four representatives from local faith groups played an active part in our gathering, with their contributions reflecting our shared experiences.

As Quakers around the world prepare to gather at the FWCC World Plenary in South Africa in August, we have taken this time together in Cork to consider the theme of Ubuntu. We began by looking inward at the state of our own Yearly Meeting, before looking outward to consider our approach to Ubuntu within the wider Irish and UK societies.

Madeleine Pennington from Theos Think Tank and Johnny Currie from the Trussell Trust led us to consider how the theology of Ubuntu influences us as we grapple with economic inequality in our society, and how we must look beyond temporary fixes, such as food banks, towards solutions which empower those living in poverty to have more dignity and control in their own lives.

With guidance from Tracy Martin of the Quaker Council of European Affairs, we continued to move outward to consider our role in Europe and the wider world. Sylvia Wigham from Churchtown Meeting highlighted the struggles faced by refugees and those seeking international protection in Ireland.

With 1 in 69 people around the world displaced from their homes, befriending activities can provide an invaluable connection to those feeling isolated; from lending a listening ear to assisting with formfilling to providing driving lessons, our own small actions can have a powerful impact.

Having looked outward, we came back to ourselves and our relationships with others. The imagery of a windmill was used in a Peace Committee toolkit provided by Aoife Reaper Reynolds of Churchtown Meeting to convey the steps required to understand and improve how we deal with conflicts which may arise in our interactions. Inward reflection can provide the push needed to start this cycle, while self-care and care for others are essential to sustain momentum.

Larry Southard of Cork Meeting spoke to his book 'Wayfaring' which he sought to link to the theme of 'Learning Together'. The fundamental theme of the book can be summarised as envisaging God as a verb rather than a noun and divine guidance as a process. If you truly want to be led you must put yourself in a position that allows following Special Interest Groups before our gathering, Bible study and worship sharing each morning, along with the new addition of smaller base groups in our programme gave Friends many opportunities to share fellowship with each other and provided space and time to explore these issues in greater depth.

Although we had looked forward to the return of Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge to deliver our Public Lecture in person, unforeseen travel difficulties meant we had to return to the wonders of modern technology to hear her inspiring talk entitled Ubuntu: A Profound Universal Value and our Hope for World Peace.

As a lifelong campaigner for human rights and justice, she highlighted a number of examples of this theme in action from an Irish perspective. She also challenged us to find ways to use it in our own lives and communities.

True to Irish form, it's been a mixture of sunny spells and scattered showers here on the south west coast over these past few days. Despite that, there was no shortage of places and things to explore and see in the wider Cork area during our free time.

As our time together draws to a close, our thoughts are very much with Friends around the world as they get ready to travel to South Africa for the World Plenary organised by the Friends World Committee for Consultation. We hold our Friend Simon Lamb in the Light in his role as Clerk of FWCC and we pray that God's guidance will give him the strength to carry out his work, and to foster a sense of unity in the very diverse worldwide community of Quakers.

We also prayerfully uphold our two Irish representatives Dawn Marie Rafferty and Stephen Winder Baggot, as well our other Friends Lynn Finnegan and Margaret Fraser, all of whom will be present in person.

We are guided by a quote from IYM General Christian Counsel, Organisation and Christian Discipline "Live in love with one another as commanded by Christ, watching over one another for good, bearing with each other's failings, upholding one another prayerfully in times of difficulty and sorrow, and sharing with each other's joys."

Signed on behalf of Ireland Yearly Meeting,

William Haire, Clerk  
Hugh O' Farrell Walsh, Assistant Clerk  
Dawn Marie Rafferty, Assistant Clerk  
Philip McDonagh, Assistant Clerk

## **Netherlands YM**

### **Epistle**

To Friends everywhere,

Dear Friends,

From May 24<sup>th</sup> till 26<sup>th</sup> some 60 Friends gathered in the 'Friends of Nature House', Bosbeek, including six children and guests from Belgium and Luxemburg YM, Britain YM and Sweden YM. We have also welcomed new attenders.

Our theme was: *Sowing Peace – Seeds of Peace*.

Swallows were flying low, there was rain in the air.

The brooklets in the forest were full and all around there was the pink, white and purple of the foxgloves.



We live in turbulent times. Wars, crises, polarization.

We spoke of hope

What is hope?

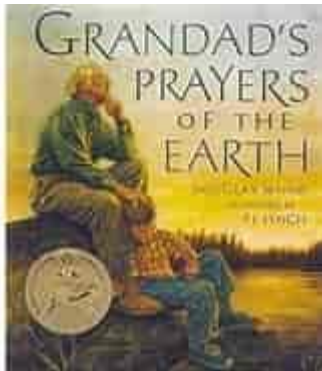
How do we keep hope?

Does hope help us to persevere?

How do we deal with fear and despair?

Are we able and do we dare to face up to our fears?

During epilogue the first evening the story of '*Grandad's Prayers of the Earth*' was read.



**To stoop in order to smell a flower is a prayer** this book tells us.

And: just *being* as everything in nature is also a prayer.

Frits ter Kuile, a peace activist made us work on Saturday. We engaged with questions about our principles of nonviolence and how to practice this. Which seeds of peace are there and how do we sow them?

And Kees Nieuwerth told us about the practical book/project document on

'*Inclusive Security*' which will be launched on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September during the Week of Peace in the Saint John 's Church in Amersfoort (see also [www.samenveilig.earth](http://www.samenveilig.earth)) .

### **Trees pray by reaching out to heaven.**

During the afternoon session Tracey Martin of the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) told us about her five seeds of peace. She told us about how her work in in different countries and different projects moulded her to work for peace.

She spoke from her own experience, which was inspiring and impressive.

Her two questions for us were:

How have the seeds of peace been sown in you?

Where can we find seeds of peace nowadays?

In our homegroups we explored these questions together.

### **Flowers pray by offering their fragrance and colour.**

Later during our Meeting for business we took a decision about our two Quaker meeting houses. For our Yearly Meeting this was a big and emotional step. We would like to use our financial capacities to make the divine visible in this world. By letting go of our properties and widening our involvement in our finances we can prepare the way to do this.

At the end of a long day we were offered in our special interest groups still more examples of how people are sowing seeds of peace in practice. From the work of QCEA, the movement started by the book '*Moral Ambition*' by Rutger Bregman, to the work of Charles Tauber in Vukovar, to Judy Moody-Stuart reminding us about the relationship between Friends in the Netherlands and the Friends Girls School in Sohagpur, India.

### **The high grass prays while it waves its arms under the sky.**

This Yearly Meeting Session brought us a lot.

To be together again, to get to know one another even better, has nurtured us.

We have been made to think and important decisions have been taken.

Seeds of Peace have been sown.

Do not forget to water them!

From our second epilogue:

'If you smile at me, I will understand. Because that's what everybody everywhere does in the same language' (from the song 'Wooden Ships' van Crosby, Stills and Nash)

Loving and peaceful greetings,

Peter Spreij,

Clerk

**Norway YM (Årsmøte)  
28–30 June 2024 at Fana Further Education College  
(Folkehøgskule), near Bergen**

**Report**

The theme was “The Legacy of George Fox”

Norway Yearly Meeting (NYM) meets at midsummer each year, this year at a Further Education College in a rural setting not far from Bergen, Norway’s second city. About 30 people were gathered over a weekend; this number represents about 20% of the total national membership. Given the huge distances between relatively small communities in Norway, for some people this was a rare opportunity to meet fellow-Quakers face-to-face. There are just a handful of local Meetings across the country, mostly in the larger towns. Meetings on Zoom take place on Sunday mornings and Monday evenings.

Norwegians have a particularly close relationship with (the rest of) nature in a way that is less familiar in denser and more populous countries, and this was reflected in the layout of the Meeting. For some of those present it started with a “forest bath”, where we were encouraged individually to move to various parts of a nearby forest, reflect silently on a particular theme and share perceptions silently with each other afterwards.

In a similar vein, many of us went for a walk round the Botanical Gardens across the way from the College, with opportunities for conversations with friends new and old. Again, a connection with nature that would be considered as a very everyday, but also special, event to most Norwegians.

In keeping with the Quaker focus on simplicity, and as one might expect in an Further Education. College, the accommodation and catering were simple. I was reminded that in the past year there has been a particularly painful difference of opinion amongst some Quakers in Norway around our attitudes to animals as fellow-partners in Nature, and the ethical challenges from veganism.

The business of the Yearly Meeting involved presenting the Annual Report and accounts, but also it focused on issues relevant to the operation of NYM. For example, the Norwegian State makes a financial contribution to all registered faith and some non-faith groups over a certain size on a per capita basis. This covers a substantial proportion of the income of Quakers as an organization. The Government is currently considering whether to raise the threshold of the minimum required membership numbers, which could risk excluding NYM, with its roughly 150 members, from essential funds.

Several addresses were given, the first entitled George Fox and Hans Nilsen Hauge 1624-1824-2024, which considered some similarities and difference between these two religious leaders, one the founder of Quakerism, the other a preacher who

sparked off a radical religious revival in thinking and practice, while remaining within mainstream Lutheranism, which is still the established church in Norway.

The second address concerned the writing of Journals as a spiritual exercise. The speaker referred to John Woolman's diaries/journals, as well as to the speaker's own journals, written every day over many years, and included the truly terrible loss of twenty-five years of his own journals in a fire. He encouraged us to avoid over-focusing on the negative and the concrete in our writing, and to work towards more compassionate forms of contemplation. "Give word to the wordless" (Gi ord til det ordløse), a quote from the Norwegian writer Jon Fosse, this year's Nobel Prize winner for Literature, seemed to summarize this address well.

NYM also considered its charitable role. Quaker Aid (Kvekerhjelp) has in the past supported initiatives in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, and currently works with non-violence projects in Rwanda, as well as initiatives to combat the abuse of women in Burundi. Its project in Gaza has had to be put on hold because of the recent destruction of its kindergarten.

Internally, NYM is working on a revision of its own *Advices and Queries (Råd og Spørsmål)*, and discerning around changes to language and content: should references to "God" or "Jesus" be regarded as metaphors, are animals and humans seen as equal. This revision follows a major exercise a few years ago in creating their own Book of Discipline (*Tro og Liv*).

To return to the constant presence of the (the rest of) nature in Norway: as an ex-pat myself, living in the UK, I was constantly aware of the long midsummer nights, the presence of the vast forests right outside the college, and the persistent rain. Delightful at times, but never to be taken for granted.

Scandinavians are sometimes considered to be rather reserved. This stereotype was put to rest at the final evening, with a version of Pass the Parcel, identifying errors in a (deliberately) jumbled-up version of *Advices and Queries*, and an amazing performance on the Hardanger fiddle by the Editor of the Quaker Quarterly *Kvekeren*, with its haunting melodic sounds that seemed to come straight out of the forest.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to meet with Friends, some old, some new, at this very special event, and look forward to further contact with them on-line and when I next visit Norway.

Sigurd Reimers



## Epistle

### To Friends Everywhere

Norway Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) were gathered for their 206th annual gathering, 28th to 30th of 6th month, 2024 at Fana Folk High School in Bergen. We were 37 participants, and in addition there were 6 guests on the Saturday. And there was time in our schedule for Quaker Service Norway to hold their annual meeting in the same place.

Some early arrivals had the opportunity to participate in a “Forest Immersion” in the beautiful surroundings as a help to open their connection to all creation. According to tradition, our programme also included other opportunities for contact with nature, and many took walks in the surroundings and visited the local botanical garden and arboretum.

We wished to celebrate the 400th birthday of George Fox, and Arnstein Finset gave the lecture, **1624–1824–2024: On George Fox, Hans Nielsen Hauge, and on us, Friends who live in the present time.** He broadened our perspectives by sharing glimpses of the two historical persons, in their ages, and following some of the threads into the present time. He shared his image of Fox’ experience of the following terms: religious experience, elements of faith, use of silence, and Quaker values. Unlike many classical mystics who tended to withdraw from “the World”, Fox typically found inspiration for action from his mystical openings. Fox saw the scriptures as spirit led traditions which we need guidance from the Spirit to comprehend, whereas Hans Nielsen Hauge, whose death in 1824 is also commemorated this year, had a Lutheran understanding of the Bible as the final Word of God. Hauge was afraid to be seen as a “pious dreamer” and remained in his Lutheran Church. Those of us who live in the modern, liberal Quaker tradition as “rediscovered” by Rufus Jones, like to use the terms used by George Fox, though in modern usage they may not have exactly the same meaning as they had to Fox.

We treasure the terms ‘that of God in everyone’, ‘the Light’, and the hope that ‘the silence opens for leadings from God’ as we have come to understand them. In one interest group Friends explored similar words and expressions from the Fox-anthology Truth of the Heart. In another interest group on current work on Norwegian Queries and Advices, we worked in smaller groups to explore how we may find our own words to express life-changing religious experiences. We struggle with texts and terms which hardly convey what we want to say. In a process for revision of Queries and Advices we expect to continue the search for both the right language and scope.

Our religious experiences as Quakers hold a richness which is difficult to describe but which represents our reality. Arnstein Finset quoted Tomas Tranströmer’s paraphrase on some words by Jewish philosopher Simone Weil, which spoke to us: “In the silence we experience something which we cannot fully imagine nor understand, but which is not an illusion.”

The Clerk opened our first business session by reading from no. 2.3 in our Norwegian Faith and Practice about the Quaker business method, how we wait together, in the Light, to discern what may be the right way forward. We remain open, listening, while also sharing our own view. Then the process may give us a shared understanding of reality. Our fellowship has again replenished us with gratitude and joy.

Bergen, 30th day of 6th month, 2024

Lara Marie Wik  
Clerk, Norway Yearly Meeting

## **Sweden YM 9–12 May 2024, Kväkaregården, Stockholm**

### **Report**

Swedish Friends held their 90th Yearly Meeting in the building in central Stockholm that they have rented for many years as a Meeting House – The Quaker House, a converted eighteenth century building with a meeting room, a library, a kitchen and a warden's flat, with gardens around it. About thirty Swedish Friends attended, together with half a dozen visitors, including Friends from Belfast, Norway and Finland (as well as Kerstin and myself from Britain Yearly Meeting). For the first time all sessions were “blended”, with Zoom links in place for any number from four to about a dozen Friends from other parts of Sweden. It has to be admitted that the Zoom technology was not always very satisfactory, although with considerable patience contributions could eventually be heard and fully appreciated by both groups.

The Yearly Meeting has an important role in Swedish Quaker life; it is the gathering at which the directions of Swedish testimony and practice are agreed for the coming year, where appointments are made and annual documents (such as accounts) are accepted and signed off. But the Meeting is also provided with a separate and overriding theme: this year it was “Quaker spirituality – sustainability, the sixth testimony”. For a geographically diverse and scattered community, attendance at some or all of the Yearly Meeting is an important part of their Quaker life.

I will take the year's special theme first. Swedish Friend Nicklas Adamsson gave us a moving and powerful presentation covering the dawning awareness of climate change as it has been perceived by scientists over the past twenty years, and the growing impact of this upon the world's general population over the past ten years. We remembered the role of Greta Thunberg in this - the lonely Swedish schoolgirl outside the Stockholm parliament building, and then her increasing role on the world stage. His presentation basically concluded with the time of COP26, the climate conference in Glasgow in November 2021. It steered clear of discussion about the political dimensions of the whole issue, the increasing public frustration with political

goals that are not met and increasing awareness about climate change's global effects.

Instead, Nicklas encouraged us to reflect upon how our own community manages in general, and how economic growth may continue in the coming times. He led us in a meditative wandering to a beautiful viewpoint close to the Meeting venue, followed by two lengthy periods of silent worship and contemplation during which many Friends made contributions. These varied from personal impacts, through to wider implications such as are likely to be brought up at the FWCC World Plenary Meeting on "Living the spirit of Ubuntu" to be held in South Africa in August this year. This was a moving time that united us in a Quaker appreciation of the world that we live in.

### **Yearly Meeting business sessions**

We had three Friends sitting "at the table" at all times (though roles did change occasionally): a clerk who introduced items and called for contributions; a minutes clerk; and a technical assistant who struggled with the shifting Zoom performance.

The business sessions covered a wide variety of topics. With only 130 full Members of the Society scattered over a large geographic area it is inevitable that there is a feeling that as high a proportion as possible should be involved in the decision-making process. There was occasionally a feeling that Friends participating through Zoom might bring forward a suggestion which, though relevant, might best be tested over a period of time when their implications could be given further consideration (for example, there was a request for making an immediate Quaker financial donation to help Palestinians suffering in Gaza).

The difficulty of finding Friends to take formal roles on committees, or within the business management of the Society, was clearly a theme of considerable familiarity to Friends like Kerstin and myself attending from Scotland. We are all aware how bringing forward appropriate Nominations is made so much easier if one has had occasion to get to know any Friends who are being considered on a social level, as well as meeting them within a Meeting for Worship.

Should there be a rewriting of the Swedish version of Quaker faith & practice (or rather its "Church Government" sections) and how should this be undertaken? There were calls in respect of both Nominations and Quaker Finance procedures. But a particularly interesting item related to Friends who now worship primarily online: what sorts of business matters can an online group take on? Should such Friends be regarded as having a different approach from those who meet up regularly in person, within a recognised Quaker Meeting?

Finally there was a special session related to the 60th anniversary of Swedish Quaker Service, led by Annika Hollsing. The scale of the work undertaken by this group of Friends is quite breath-taking, limited not merely to fund-raising but also involving Friends' visits to participate in a variety of projects. During the Saturday

evening session we enjoyed computer links with children being taught English in Georgia having fled from Ukraine, from children at a peace library established in Burundi and from an education project in Algeria; and our Meeting itself was attended by a number of refugees from Bangladesh now living in Sweden.

My wife Kerstin and I are especially grateful to Swedish Friends for their hospitality over the four days of the Meeting, and for Friends in Britain Yearly Meeting for inviting us to attend. We were in Stockholm at a time of sudden summer weather following what had been a long and rather dreary winter, and plenty of informal time was spent chatting outdoors among the flowers and the leaves that were sprouting on all the trees.

John Phillips

### **Epistle**

To Friends everywhere!

To the sound of singing birds and the glory of blooming flowers and budding leaves, we met together for our 90th Annual Meeting at Quaker House in Stockholm, from May 9 to May 12. It was the first time in decades that the meeting was held at Quaker House. It was also the first time the entire meeting was conducted in hybrid form: both physically and digitally. There were about forty of us present, Friends and attenders along with six foreign representatives and guests.

In spite of the fact that digital forms of meeting grew out of a global health emergency and given the challenges we were faced with, it was encouraging to experience how well the meeting turned out. It proves how quickly we learn and how rapidly we can adjust if we work together. Crises require us to see things in new ways, to choose new paths forward, and, with courage and joy, to actively walk those paths, be the crisis a pandemic, different kinds of conflicts between people, natural catastrophes, or the climate crisis now threatening our very existence. When obstacles cross our paths we can choose to focus on the path, not the obstacle.

The theme of our Annual Meeting was "Quaker Spirituality and Nature - Sustainability: our sixth testimony". Our Friend Nicklas Adamsson introduced the theme in a very informative and thought-provoking way.

During a meditative walk we were encouraged to open our minds and reflect upon how society basically functions, and whether or not economic growth can bear in the long run. What, for example, about the fact that the economy of our own society is kept afloat by stock dividends?

The following day we devoted a few hours to worship sharing with questions like: How do we give meaning to our testimonies? Where do we go from here? We found spiritual strength and intensity in this sharing. Is this what the early Quakers experienced and what the world needs today?

Some truths and insights about our vulnerability, the vulnerability of our social relationships, and of the environment we live in, can cause grief and despair. Yet we can choose to act with living hope - together with other Quakers and with all organisations and individuals who want to be positive forces and voices. How can we do this in a way that inspires others? If we realize that all people and all creatures are linked together, can we ourselves be links where links are needed? This is a discussion that will continue in August when we meet for the World Plenary Meeting in South Africa under the theme: "Living the Spirit of Ubuntu".

Quaker Service celebrated its 60th anniversary on Saturday evening. Annika Hollsing, the clerk of Quaker Service, opened with a short presentation of Quaker Service. The feeling of community was enhanced further by the digital presence of guests from Burundi and Georgia, and by friends from Bangladesh who were present in Stockholm. We heard about our Georgian Friend's English lessons for Ukrainian refugee children and about how sustainable farming contributes to reconciliation in Burundi. The dire situation in Gaza moved us deeply. We intend in the very near future to discuss how we best can contribute economically to Quaker Service's work there.

We found great pleasure in the fellowship of sharing meals and evening social events where we got to hear from our foreign guests and share poems, texts, music and stories, like the ones about Voltaire's and Jon Fosse's experiences of Quakers.

Quaker House, May 12, 2024 The epistle committee: Ingmar Hollsing, Berit Bylund, Sjoerd Uitslag och Julia Ryber

## **Switzerland YM 17–20 May 2024, Herzberg near Aarau**

### **Report**

Over Pentecost Weekend 2024, thirty-five adult Friends, two children, and one friendly pup gathered together at the Herzberg, near Aarau, in Switzerland. This was my first experience visiting another Yearly Meeting, and my first friendship was forged upon alighting the bus which drops you at the bottom of rolling hills leading up towards the Herzberg. A visiting Friend from Italy and I began the climb together, before being scooped up by a Swiss Friend passing in his car. My early arrival allowed me time to take in the Herzberg and its surroundings: the simple yet beautiful furnishings, the wonderful views of the Swiss countryside in the spring sunshine. It felt like the perfect place for Friends to gather together.

The theme of the Yearly Meeting was 'Contributing to a better world in the Spirit of Ubuntu: "I am because we are"'. I learnt that Swiss Friends had in the past expressed a preference for more of the Yearly Meeting to be taken up with discernment on a theme such as this, with less time devoted to Meeting for Worship for Business. A sizeable proportion of the Business was left until Monday, when

many Friends who were staying only for the weekend had left. I was also struck by how the relatively small size of the Yearly Meeting affected its relationship to structure, and how roles were distributed among Friends organically and according to need rather than procedure: one of the co-clerks was relatively new to Friends; one of the epistle drafters was a visitor. This felt refreshing in contrast to my Local Meeting context, where the struggle to fill various roles sometimes seems never-ending.

Most of the Yearly Meeting was spent worshipping on the idea of Ubuntu. On Friday, we spent time worship-sharing on Ubuntu, thinking about what it might mean for us to embrace our collectivity without privileging ourselves. In the following session, we thought about how we might develop skills to foster a spirit of Ubuntu through nonviolent communication – a concept which was new to me and about which I enjoyed learning.

This was followed by sessions in which we took Ubuntu ‘from words to action’: thinking about actions we were already taking, and discerning ways forward. One highlight was listening to Gordon Matthews reflect on his recent trip to the Middle East, and discerning together how we as Friends feel led to respond to the unfolding tragedy. I took away a strong sense that this was a Yearly Meeting for which Witness is foundational.

Alongside the Business which was conducted on Saturday afternoon, there was also a session where everybody was invited to share ‘highlights’ from the various Quaker Meetings, groups and bodies to which they belonged. I enjoyed hearing about the Life of the Swiss Local Meetings and worshipping groups, as well as from Swiss representatives to other Yearly Meetings. As visitors, we were also invited to share something from our home meetings, fostering a spirit of reciprocity.

In contrast to the solemnity of much of the Yearly Meeting’s subject matter, there were some wonderful light-hearted moments. Our evening entertainment included a performance of a series of comic sketches, based around Quaker witness over the years. On Sunday morning, following Meeting for Worship, we spent time singing Quaker songs, an activity which always brings me much joy, and over which our now sizeable group was able to bond some more. We also enjoyed a presentation by a Swiss Friend, whose child had won Eurovision for Switzerland just the week before. Listening to Swiss rap was not how I had envisioned spending the Yearly Meeting! Nemo, her child, was the first openly non-binary act to represent Switzerland at Eurovision, and I was struck by

the sensitivity, openness and love with which Friends listened and spoke over the course of the evening. There were even suggestions of gender diversity being included among candidate themes for Yearly Meeting 2025.

I came away from SYM feeling welcomed into a Yearly Meeting in which relationships are central. I was grateful for the opportunity to get to know Swiss Friends, and the other visitors, in the things which are eternal.

Eleanor Beswick  
Oxford and Swindon Area Meeting

## **Epistle**

Greetings to Friends everywhere in inner peace and loving action.

On Pentecost weekend, May 17-20, 2024, Switzerland Yearly Meeting gathered at the beautiful Herzberg near Aarau, Switzerland. Mornings opened with movement and several Friends enjoyed silent walks in the surrounding countryside. About 35 adult Friends and two children joined us to worship, do business and share fellowship together.

Our gathering began on Friday afternoon with the sad news that South African Friend Rommel Roberts, who had a strong connection with Swiss Friends and particularly Zurich meeting that he visited on his 70th birthday, had passed away in an accident. He was an activist and lived out the power of ubuntu in his hospitality, creativity and actions for peace.

The theme for our weekend was “ubuntu” and after introductions we began to consider what ubuntu means and how it relates to our personal lives in conversation and worship sharing led by Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge. While some Friends struggled with Biblical references to help translate the concept of ubuntu, the fact we met over Pentecost as we came together with different languages, cultural backgrounds and life experiences was a metaphor for deep exploration of “I am because you are” within the meaning of ubuntu. We even considered the original meaning of George Fox’s invitation to “walk cheerfully (courageously) over the world (society at large), answering to that of God (or the Spirit or the Divine) in everyone.”

We continued to explore ubuntu on Saturday as we listened to a reflection by a Friend from New Zealand, Janie Banfield, who invited us to consider Nonviolent Communication as a tool appropriate for Friends’ peace testimony. We then heard reports from Swiss meetings, worship groups and “unofficial gatherings” along with greetings and reports from other yearly meetings and organisational representatives in our Section.

On Saturday evening we enjoyed a presentation by co-clerk Nadja Schnetzler sharing about her child, Nemo, who just won the Eurovision song contest on behalf of Switzerland. As the first nonbinary winner, Nemo exemplifies a strong commitment to inclusion and human rights expressed through their art in song. We were impressed by their witness to ubuntu by hitchhiking from Switzerland to Sweden for their performance, trusting in strangers along the way.

On Sunday morning, we began with worship and song before hearing from FWCC EMES representative Evan Welkin about collaboration and positive and negative experiences we have had in group process, followed by a presentation by Gordon Matthews on his recent trip to Israel and Palestine and a discussion of what we could do to respond to the crisis there.

We then moved into considering ubuntu in the context of our yearly meeting and considered actions for the future focused on our working groups, particularly our Peace not War group which is focused on the Middle East. Patrick Taran offered a methodology for clarifying common purpose in organizing, which we explored together.

On Sunday evening, we shared a dramatic reading of the play “And the Beat Goes On: 300 years of Quaker Nonviolent Action”, exploring real and imagined scenarios related to Friends’ witness against slavery, arms trade, and “The Troubles” in Northern Ireland.

On Monday Friends decided to sign the letter called «A different future is possible» that was drafted by several Quaker organisations in response to the Israel/Palestine conflict. Some concerns and suggested additions for the letter were expressed; Friends decided to work on an addendum to the letter in the next weeks.

Friends also adopted the Sustainability Policy by EMES for future travels.

Swiss Friends were touched by the quote from Rumi, which we would like to share with Friends everywhere:

“Out beyond ideas of right-doing and wrong-doing there is a field. I’ll meet you there.”

In peace and light,  
Switzerland Yearly Meeting



## **Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) report to Meeting for Sufferings**

### **Introduction**

QCEA was founded in 1979 to bring Quaker concerns relating to peace, human rights and social justice to European institutions. It is governed by its members which are the Yearly Meetings in Europe plus a number of Quaker organisations, including the European and Middle East Section of the Friends World Committee on Consultation and European and Middle East Young Friends as well as support groups such as British Friends of QCEA, a Quaker-recognised body. BYM appoints a representative and an alternate to this body. The General Assembly appoints an Executive Committee to develop strategy and provide oversight.

QCEA currently focuses primarily on the European Union institutions (parliament, council and commission) and the Council of Europe.

QCEA currently has 3.5 members of staff: Director, Climate Justice & Peace Programme Coordinator, Communications & Programme Officer and Office Manager. The office is based in Brussels in Quaker House, a listed building that is also where the Brussels Worship Group holds its Meeting for Worship and is used for QCEA events as well as being rented out as a venue to other organisations.

QCEA is funded primarily from Quaker sources. Its biggest funders are BYM, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and VVQCEA (the Netherlands support group). Each Yearly Meeting makes an annual contribution and we also receive considerable donations from individual Quakers and meetings. We do not receive money from the EU.

### **Current strategy**

Our current strategy was approved by the General Assembly in March 2023.

It has three themes:

- Migration and peace
- Climate Justice and Peace
- Dialogues for transformation

We identified three kinds of change – react, reform and transformative and while we work in all these ways we agreed

QCEA also has a number of watching briefs relating to conscientious objection, just and lasting peace and civil society space.

You can read the strategy [here](#).

## Recent activities

You can read the 2023 annual report [here](#).

In June 2024 elections took place for the new EU Parliament and new Commissioners are being appointed for the new mandate to 2029. The Council of Europe appointed a new Secretary-General and Commissioner for Human Rights. Therefore QCEA has had a strong focus on relationship building this year.

## The new Parliament and Commission

Every MEP received a postcard from QCEA thanking them for their service and asking them to carry out their work with compassion, integrity and respect. You can see the postcard [here](#).

Square making was part of Ireland, Britain, Central Europe and Britain Yearly Meetings and some local meetings made squares together. We received 124 textile squares from Quakers in different countries, the majority coming from Ireland and the UK. Most of the squares have been delivered to new MEPs and others that we are particularly interested in building relationships with. We have had some positive feedback, particularly from Irish MEPs.

We also followed up the postcards with invites to MEPs and their staff to a series of events led by Quakers aimed at promoting dialogues across the divides and showcasing relevant Quaker experience and expertise.

## Migration and Peace

Up to the adoption of the EU **Pact on Asylum and Migration** in May QCEA was, with our partner civil society organisations, very active in calling for amendments to alleviate the most harmful aspects of the Pact and then, when this failed, calling for Parliament to reject the Pact. Despite these efforts, the pact was adopted and now moves to the implementation phase.

In collaboration with the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN), we ran a well-received Woodbrooke course on Migration and Peace.

We are currently collecting information for and writing a **migration and peace handbook** which will offer examples of nonviolent and peacebuilding approaches to migration that are already happening in different parts of the world. This will be launched in the first quarter of 2025 and we hope there will be a launch in the UK.

## Climate Justice and Peace

QCEA is active in the **European Alliance for a Just Transition**, which has had some success in moving just transition up the agenda. One of the new EU Commissioners has it as part of their job title.

We have developed **conflict sensitivity in green policy guidelines** to help policymakers in different areas recognise the potential for conflict that climate and

environmental policies might create or exacerbate and ways in which this could be prevented or managed.

At the Council of Europe we are involved in the civil society call for the inclusion of the right to a safe and healthy environment in the European Convention on Human Rights.

We work with other faith-based organisations to facilitate discussions between African organisations about what a just partnership with the EU would look like. This includes the Quaker-founded Conflict Minerals Campaign. The aim is to bring their concerns to the new parliament and commission.

## **Dialogues for transformation**

QCEA believes that dialogues between people with different beliefs, experiences and opinions is needed if we are to address the multiple interconnected challenges we face.

In 2024 we ran five dialogue events. These are events where we bring people from different institutions and organisations and with differing beliefs and opinions together to discuss some of the issues behind the policies and practices they are engaged in.

For migration and peace we focused on borders and what they mean to different people. For climate justice and peace we looked at how different human-nature relationships influence policy and practice relating to water, energy and food.

Some comments from participants:

*'I am very grateful that you gathered participants with so different backgrounds, beliefs, line of work. Very enriching exchange.'*

*'The awareness of having the privilege of engaging in such abstract thoughts keeping me rooted to the fact that still there are people out there suffering specifically because of the initial connotation that I gave to the word [borders].'*

*'It helped me understand that borders is much more than my normal work focus, and that it is not a black or white theme but one with many layers of grey/colour in between.'*

This is long-term but potentially transformational work and grounded in Quaker experience in mediation and quiet diplomacy.

## **Watching briefs and cross-cutting issues**

**Conscientious Objection:** The work in this area, specifically around protection for conscientious objectors from Russia and Belarus and the right to conscientious objection in Ukraine, continues to grow and we are working with others to bring this to the attention of MEPs and relevant European Commission units.

**Peace:** As a founding member of the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office, QCEA works to keep peacebuilding on the EU agenda and to secure funding for this work.

**Civil Society Space:** QCEA is a member of a coalition of civil society organisations called CS4EU which is aimed at getting MEPs to commit to supporting and liaising with civil society and recognising the important work they do. This work is also done through our membership of the Council of International Non-Governmental Organisations of the Council of Europe.

Quaker House is an ideal place to hold such sensitive conversations and is also often hired by organisations wanting to a quiet, discrete and welcoming place to talk about challenging issues with human rights defenders and policymakers.

## **Challenges**

The shift towards militarisation and against migration: Both national and EU politicians increasingly talk about the need to increase arms production and military defence. This is linked to a rhetoric about competitiveness which has extended beyond trade but also into defence, development and almost every aspect of policy. Several Member States are pushing for even stricter legislation against migrants and people who support them as well as outsourcing asylum processes to third countries.

The Brexit effect: fewer MEPs know who Quakers are so we have to work harder to establish relationships; QCEA is pleased that support from individual British Quakers and local meetings has not diminished and we thank British Friends of QCEA for their work in raising awareness and raising funds.

Funding: Like many Quaker organisations, we are finding it harder to cover our costs. While support from Quakers and Quaker trusts and foundation continues the overall amount often does not increase while the costs of running the work are increasing. Civil society organisations more generally, especially those working on peace, are finding sources of funding decreasing or disappearing altogether. We continue to explore opportunities of getting funding from non-Quaker sources.

## **But....**

Recent recruitment processes have shown that there are large numbers of young people who really want to work with organisations that are faith and value-based. They care about how they work and not just what they work on. Staff exit interviews tell us how much they value QCEA's ways of working

Civil society organisations we work with tell us how much they appreciate QCEA taking a peace-based nonviolent approach and offering spaces for conversations that are rare in policy and advocacy spaces.

We are grateful for BYM's continued support for QCEA's work.