

Follow up letter



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

7 March 2025

To members of Meeting for Sufferings

Meeting for Sufferings 1 March 2025

Dear Friends,

It was a joy to be with you once again for Meeting for Sufferings.

Much of our meeting was concerned with aspects of our witness in the world. The Clerk of Yearly Meeting introduced the agenda for this year's meeting, to be held 23-26 May, which is expected to focus on our peace testimony in the current world situation. We have been asked to find out who from our Quaker communities will be attending Yearly Meeting, and to offer them support as they prepare. Please do ensure all Friends know that there is financial support available for those who need help with the costs of attending Yearly Meeting and please do encourage attendance. As we move towards holding continuing Yearly Meeting sessions, we made a few more steps towards working out the details of that proposal. Representatives' expenses will be paid from central funds, and area meetings are asked to consider what they can give to help meet the costs of holding our Yearly Meeting sessions.

Fourteen years after our Canterbury commitment to working towards a low-carbon economy, we heard about the limitations of how that is working out in practice. We heard in particular how we need a system whereby any reporting of our work on sustainability feeds into decision-making and the importance of working for resilience in the face of possible societal collapse in the face of the climate emergency.

We also heard about the negative impact of the new police powers around regulating protest and committed ourselves to working to repeal measures that lead to the state overstepping its legitimate authority.

These items meant that the meeting ended with a recognition of how far we are from realising Gospel Order in our world. While there are practical steps we can take to address these issues, fundamentally we need clear-eyed attention to the reality of the world, confident in the knowledge that, if we cannot pray the good news, the Spirit will intercede for us, leading us into Truth.

It was good, however, that the earlier part of our meeting included several more uplifting reports. We heard from the Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations, the first since its new terms of reference were agreed. We heard that the Committee has found it challenging but has found innovative ways of taking its work forward, including the development of co-opted liaisons with the various churches and faith groups with which the Committee maintains relations. We also received the report of the Quaker Housing Trust, which again has been finding innovative ways to take its work forward.

You may remember that at Yearly Meeting last year, Meeting for Sufferings was asked to consider the theological and community implications of our online and blended Meetings for Worship. The Arrangements Group is working on bringing this to the meeting – probably at our residential meeting in October – and has been in correspondence with Woodbrooke about preparing us for this item. Friends might be interested to know that Woodbrooke will be running an online course in July called "What Happens When We Worship Online". It will start on 3 July and run every Thursday evening in July.

I look forward to seeing you once again at our July meeting.

In Truth,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Card". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Robert Card
Clerk, Meeting for Sufferings

The following papers are included in this mailing:

- MfS minutes March 2025
- Functions checklist



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

At a meeting of

Meeting for Sufferings

Held at Friends House and by video conference 1 March 2025

Minutes

MfS/25/03/01 Opening Worship and welcome

We have begun our Meeting in worship during which *Advices & Queries* 17 from passage 1.02 of *Quaker faith and practice* was read.

MfS/25/03/02 Agenda

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

MfS/25/03/03 Membership of Meeting for Sufferings

Since our last meeting we have received the following nominations and requests for release for Meeting for Sufferings until the rise of Yearly Meeting 2027:

Release requests received:

Ruth Anderson – Worcestershire & Shropshire Area Meeting (AM) alternate
Michelle Caulkett – Northumbria AM representative
Andy Hall – Mid-Somerset AM alternate
Les Hereward – Cornwall AM representative
Cherry Simpkin – South East London AM representative

Nominated:

Colin Billett – Worcestershire & Shropshire AM alternate
Michelle Caulkett – Northumbria AM alternate
David Jenkins – Northumbria AM representative
Debby Flack – Staffordshire AM alternate

We appoint the Friends nominated to serve on Meeting for Sufferings and agree to the requests for release from service.

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

Barbara Adshead – Northumbria AM

Apologies:

Kendal & Sedbergh AM, Thaxted AM, West Wiltshire & East Somerset AM

Other visitors:

Mark Bitel – Quaker Housing Trust clerk
Cato Pedder – BYM staff, Media Officer

MfS/25/03/04 Appointments

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

Book of Discipline Revision Committee

To serve until the work of the committee is complete, renominate:

Judith Thompson, Devon AM

Anya Nanning Ramamurthy, North London AM

Friends Trusts Limited

To serve from 1 April 2025 until 31 March 2028, nominate:

Jane Bennett, Hampshire & Islands AM

Martin Ford, Leeds AM

Alastair Jackson, Leicester AM

Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations (QCCIR)

To serve from 1 May 2025 to 30 April 2028, nominate:

Thecla Geraghty, South East London AM

Lynne Kirtley, Thaxted AM

To serve from 1 May 2025 to 30 April 2028 as the representative for General Meeting for Scotland, renominate:

Nigel Dower, North Scotland AM

Quaker Housing Trust

To serve from Annual Retirement Meeting (ARM) 2025 to ARM 2028, renominate:

Mark Bitel, South East Scotland AM

Beverley Goddard, West Wiltshire & East Somerset AM

Rici Marshall, South East Scotland AM

Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee

To serve with immediate effect until 31 December 2028, nominate:

Nyeri Otero-Flanagan, Mid Wales AM

BYM Trustees

To serve from 1 March 2025 to 31 December 2025, nominate:

Chris Jardine, South East Scotland AM

Clerk to Yearly Meeting Agenda Planning Committee

To serve with immediate effect until 31 December 2027, nominate:

Ingrid Greenhow, Luton and Leighton AM

Representatives to European Yearly Meetings

To serve at Ireland Yearly Meeting, renominate:

Kate Arnot, South East Scotland AM

To serve at German Yearly Meeting, renominate:

Martin Harnor, Cambridgeshire AM

To serve at Finland Yearly Meeting, renominate:

Mary Woodward, South East Scotland AM

b) Yearly Meeting Nominating Group brings forward the following name for release as indicated:

Central Nominations Committee

Release with immediate effect:
Matt Rosen, Oxford & Swindon AM

c) Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group brings forward the following names for service or release as indicated:

Meeting for Sufferings Support Group

Release with immediate effect:
Les Hereward – Cornwall AM

Appoint with immediate effect until Yearly Meeting 2026:
Dorothy Ball, Cambridgeshire AM

Group to review the process for registering and reregistering Quaker Recognised Bodies

Appoint with immediate effect for the lifetime of the review:
Andrew Bird, Cornwall AM
Ivan Hutnik, Surrey & Hampshire Border AM
Magnus Ramage, Northamptonshire AM

We agree to these appointments and requests for release.

MfS/25/03/05 Prison and Court Register

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

Margaret Biddle, North Wales Area Meeting, appeared in court several times in 2024 and 2025 following witness at the Defence and Security Equipment International (DESI) arms fair in London in September 2023. Margaret was one of six Friends charged under Section 14(5) and (9) of the Public Order Act 1986 for failing to move when asked from sitting in the road. Margaret was one of two Friends found not guilty, as the court was unsure she had been present when police gave appropriate warning.

We agree to include these details in the Register, and hold Margaret in the Light.

MfS/25/03/06 Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations

We have welcomed Elaine Green, clerk to Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations (QCCIR), to our meeting today. She has presented the QCCIR 2024 report, circulated in advance as paper MfS 2025 03 07.

QCCIR works by nurturing and enriching relationships with other churches and faith groups. Its 2024 report to us gives many examples of how committee members, co-optees, and BYM staff are strengthening those links. We are heartened to hear about our interchurch and interfaith work.

We were reminded that this work of creating and maintaining opportunities for on-going dialogue with others is central to our Quaker way of peace-building. The 2024 biennial joint conference with Woodbrooke, "Working Together in Faith", reinforced this, focussing on how to build relationships across faith differences.

We note that although QCCIR is still actively engaged with other faith groups, the closure of the Interfaith Network in 2024 due to the withdrawal of funding by the previous government has meant that the committee has no access to any other national interfaith body, apart from through Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and Churches Together in England.

The committee has helped develop our response to several Yearly Meeting priorities: reparations, the Quaker marriage declaration, and greater gender inclusivity. It has also helped develop further advice on responding to antisemitism.

We heard that QCCIR has been asked to work in different ways, and of the benefits and challenges this has brought. To compensate for reduced committee numbers, QCCIR is in the process of introducing the use of co-optees to expand the work it can do. These are not committee members but they report in writing to the committee. In 2024 the co-optees joined the committee for a face-to-face meeting in October. This was valuable and the committee intends to hold these annually. The new structures of QCCIR have been in place for just over a year and in 2025 the committee intends to review how they are working.

We thank Elaine for speaking to us today and the committee for its report.

MfS/25/03/07 Yearly Meeting 2025

The Yearly Meeting Clerk, Adwoa Burnley, has introduced the agenda for Yearly Meeting to be held 23 to 26 May at Friends House in London and online.

She started her report with a plea that we find out who, in our area meeting and local meetings, is planning to attend Yearly Meeting. She has stressed the importance of Friends coming to Yearly Meeting with hearts and mind prepared, so that we might discern the will of God, and has asked us to encourage and assist Friends in our local and area meeting with this preparation.

We have heard that Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee has discerned that the 2025 Yearly Meeting should focus on the peace testimony and the state of the world. This will be presented in three main areas, with peace at the heart:

- Conflict and violence in our local communities across Britain
- Radical peacemakers
- Aspects of international peace work done on our behalf.

The themes of Junior Yearly Meeting, our children and young people's programmes, and Yearly Meeting will mirror one another, and much work has been done on this.

The programme is varied and apart from reading papers and taking part in Yearly Meeting sessions, there will be opportunities to experience the themes creatively, including quilt making.

Details of the programme will be in Agenda and Notes, which will be available from the end of March. Online fringe events are happening from 27 April to 3 May.

Deadlines for booking are 6 April, if you plan to attend fringe meetings, and 27 April for Yearly Meeting.

We thank Adwoa for speaking to us today.

MfS/25/03/08 Quaker Housing Trust

A safe and secure home brings us health, well-being, and prosperity and we are grateful for the work of the Quaker Housing Trust (QHT) which provides much-needed grants and loans to meet real housing need.

Today, QHT's Clerk, Mark Bitel, has introduced a report on the Trust's work since March 2020 (paper MfS 2025 03 09). We have heard that its work is a practical form of Quaker witness although regrettably donations to the Trust have reduced significantly in recent years. Those who are denied access to housing are becoming increasingly marginalised.

The Trust set up the Quaker Asset Fund in 2022 to help local and area meetings that are considering the future use of their buildings to investigate if their properties might be converted in full or in part to provide social housing. We applaud this imaginative approach. We have been reminded of the Yearly Meeting's desire that Friends should challenge the attitude that housing be regarded as a financial asset rather than as a home and note, in the spirit of redeeming the Powers under which we live, the suggestion that Friends might consider passing some of the unearned increase in value on properties that they own as individuals to Quaker Housing Trust when that is liquidated.

We commend the work of the Trust, which we prayerfully uphold, and are grateful for this report.

MfS/25/03/09 Report from Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees

We receive minutes from the most recent meeting of Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees held on 8 February along with a written report (paper MfS 2025 03 10). The Clerk of Trustees, Marisa Johnson, the Assistant Clerk, Kit King, and the Yearly Meeting Treasurer, Paul Whitehouse, have spoken to us today and answered our questions.

We note that Trustees have encouraged the Book of Discipline Revision Committee to consider the inclusion of text on the spiritual roots of donations and financial contributions to our work and whether it should be laid upon area meetings to encourage Friends to give money.

We uphold our trustees, who are diligent in ensuring that Quakers in Britain continue in right ordering.

MfS/25/03/10 Representation at Yearly Meeting

We receive paper MfS 2025 03 11a, which deals with two matters set out in Yearly Meeting 2024 minute 37:

- Church Government Advisory Group (CGAG) thinking on the nature of representation and suggestions as to how representation from area meetings and other bodies might work at the new continuing Yearly Meeting

- Proposals from Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees for a system to support area meetings and other bodies with the financial costs of representatives' attendance at continuing Yearly Meeting.

Sarah Donaldson has spoken to the paper and she has pointed out that CGAG's specific suggestions for the number of representatives from area meetings and other Quaker bodies as based on the groups' understanding of the purposes of appointing representatives to Yearly Meeting, and the ways to achieve these purposes.

We have been asked for our views on this advice and whether there are any issues that need further work before proposals on representation come to Yearly Meeting 2025. We are content with the advice given by CGAG and offer no further guidance.

The BYM Trustees' proposal for funding representation at continuing Yearly Meeting is effectively to continue the system used to fund Meeting for Sufferings representatives. We agree to these proposals to continue central financial support for representation.

Meeting for Sufferings encourages area meetings to consider the financial support they can contribute.

We encourage members of Meeting for Sufferings to share this information with their area meetings or committee.

MfS/25/03/11 Individual financial support for attending Yearly Meeting

We receive paper MfS 2025 03 11b setting out thinking for changing what has been known as the bursary scheme for attending Yearly Meeting.

We note that Yearly Meeting entrusted this work to Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees, and we endorse their proposals.

It would be helpful if Meeting for Sufferings representatives could:

- Encourage attendance at Yearly Meeting
- Find out about any local sources of financial help
- Ensure Friends know that there is financial support available from BYM

MfS/25/03/12 Dates of Yearly Meeting

We agree to the dates of Yearly Meeting set out in paper MfS 2025 03 11c as follows:

- **2026**
 - 18 July 2026 (outside London – date TBC)
 - 21 November 2026 (Friends House, London)
- **2027**
 - 20 February 2027 (Friends House, London)
 - 1 May 2027 (Friends House, London)
 - 24 to 28 July 2027 (outside London, residential)
 - 20 November 2027 (Friends House, London)
- **2028**
 - 19 February 2028 (Friends House, London)

- 28 April-1 May 2028 (Friends House, London)
- 22 July 2028 (outside London – date TBC)
- 18 November 2028 (Friends House, London)

MfS/25/03/13 Sustainability and climate

We receive a report on sustainability work in relation to BYM operations, action taking place in local and area meetings, and centrally-managed work on climate justice (paper MfS 2025 03 12). Oliver Robertson has spoken to it.

We know that it is an incomplete overview of what is happening throughout the Society and we are aware that there are Quaker Recognised Bodies working on sustainability issues.

The Sustainability Monitoring Group set up by Meeting for Sufferings is not functioning, and we have considered the future of this work, taking into account that Meeting for Sufferings will be laid down in 14 months' time. We agree that it would be best to pass it to the new Agenda Planning Committee for continuing Yearly Meeting, in the first instance, and we have identified the following matters for consideration, which we offer to the committee for future discernment:

- A new method of reporting on sustainability has to take into account the need to feedback into our decision-making structures.
- Will there be a way for the excellent work of Quaker Recognised Bodies on this issue to be shared?
- In the face of possible societal collapse, resilience and community building might be more important work than measuring carbon emissions.
- We need to set ourselves a target for moving this work forward – it is imperative! A roadmap might be helpful.
- We need something to re-invigorate our passions for action around this climate crisis. This seems like a very important time to stand up and be counted.

MfS/25/03/14 Police powers and protest

Further to minute MfS/24/12/05, we receive paper MfS 2025 02 13 summarising new police powers and the effect these are having on Quaker witness and peaceful protest. We have been reminded of the original purpose of Meeting for Sufferings in alleviating the suffering of individuals and their families in facing the consequences of witnessing to their faith and in challenging the legal framework that attempted to shackle them. We are encouraged to engage in faithful witness in whatever form, whether that is direct action, material support, or upholding and prayer.

We are concerned that there is a creeping repression on the part of the state, which potentially undermines the trust on which society is based. We have noted that sanctions are unevenly applied and that we are drifting towards the unacceptable.

We must commit ourselves, both individually and collectively, to resisting the oppressive power of the state where this is necessary. We look to work towards the repeal of the measures restricting protest of which we have heard.

We expect to return to this matter at a future meeting.

MfS/25/03/15 Closing worship

We closed our time together in worship.

Robert Card
Clerk

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

	Requirement	March 25
A	To set the priorities for the centrally managed work	
B	To issue public statements in the name of BYM	
C	To receive regular interim reports from BYM trustees	9
D	To receive the BYM trustees' annual report & accounts for information	
E	To make a report on its own activities to YM	
F	To determine the dates of YM	12
G	To deliberate on how best to support the spiritual life of the yearly meeting and to further the development of its visionary and prophetic role	6, 7
H	To keep under review and to test as appropriate the existing and new concerns referred to it by AMs and others	8, 13, 14
I	To foster communication throughout the yearly meeting	
J	To receive minutes from area meetings	
K	To make appropriate entries in the prison and court register	5
I	To appoint representatives to attend other Yearly Meetings	4
M	To receive information about changes in the composition or status of general meetings and gatherings	
N	To make changes in the composition of area meetings	
O	To give assistance to area meetings in the amicable settlement of disputes	
P	To hear appeals against area meeting decisions	
Q	To give guidance on policy matters referred to it by the BYM trustees from time to time	10, 11
R	To authorise action and minute as required under other sections of <i>Quaker faith & practice</i>	
S	To set up an arrangements group and support and working groups to assist its own work as it sees fit	4