



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

# Preparing for Yearly Meeting

Compiled for Yearly Meeting Gathering,  
Online 19 July–8 August 2021



# Preparing for Yearly Meeting

## Introduction

Quakers meeting in London in 1668 wrote:

“We did conclude among ourselves to settle a meeting, to see one another’s faces, and open our hearts to one another in the Truth of God once a year.”

This year we will meet online – in a way our forebears could not have imagined – knowing that being together reinforces the sense of community in our meetings and in Britain Yearly Meeting.

We might add that Yearly Meeting is a meeting for learning, inspiration and strength for our witness. It searches our spiritual depths and refreshes our spiritual lives. We will see each other’s faces and we can all share in reflection and discernment and uphold Yearly Meeting while in session.

Yearly Meeting is important to the life of our Quaker community in Britain because when in session it holds the final constitutional authority for the Religious Society of Friends in England, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands, and the Isle of Man.

## Proceedings

A number of documents will help us meet with hearts and minds prepared. These are the ‘Proceedings of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain 2021’.

The full set comprises:

1. *Preparing for Yearly Meeting*, including community guidelines and spiritual preparation
2. *Yearly Meeting agenda & notes*, including etiquette for online meetings
3. *Testimonies*, including index of epistles
4. *Trustees’ annual report*, including financial statements for the year ended December 2020
5. *Patterns of membership*, including the 2020 tabular statement
6. *Minutes*, which are distributed after the conclusion of Yearly Meeting.

All documents will be available online at [www.quaker.org.uk/ym](http://www.quaker.org.uk/ym). Many Friends will read the documents online, but if you need printed documents, they will be in a printer-friendly PDF format. We ask Friends to print their own copies or to seek assistance from someone in their meeting. This will help us to save costs, especially while we are unable to print and send copies from Friends House.

If you require accessible documents, please request these when booking for Yearly Meeting Gathering. If these do not meet your accessibility needs, or the needs of someone you know, please email [ym@quaker.org.uk](mailto:ym@quaker.org.uk).

All *Quaker faith & practice* references are to the fifth edition, which can be found online at [www.quaker.org.uk/qfp](http://www.quaker.org.uk/qfp).

You can read about Yearly Meeting in **chapter 6** of *Quaker faith & practice*. Alternatively, contact Events & Committee Services on 020 7663 1040 or at [ym@quaker.org.uk](mailto:ym@quaker.org.uk), or go to [www.quaker.org.uk/ym](http://www.quaker.org.uk/ym).

# Our community agreement

## Quaker practice at an online Yearly Meeting Gathering

“Respect the wide diversity among us in our lives and relationships. Refrain from making prejudiced judgments about the life journeys of others. Do you foster the spirit of mutual understanding and forgiveness which our discipleship asks of us? Remember that each one of us is unique, precious, a child of God.”

*Advices & queries 22*

Yearly Meeting Gathering aims to be a spiritually enriching experience, where Friends build a loving and inclusive community. It is important for us all to consider what impact our behaviour and words might have on others. During the coronavirus pandemic many of us have been through a difficult time. We may be out of practice at listening and speaking to one another with care. Quakers are not immune to the bad behaviour that seems to occur more often online than in person. We need to maintain our discipline of coming together to “know God’s will for the gathered group”, despite the challenges of meeting remotely.

Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee asks you to share responsibility for creating a safe and loving community by upholding Quaker discipline at this online Yearly Meeting Gathering.

Throughout Yearly Meeting Gathering and beforehand:

- Follow the guidance on safeguarding and online security provided for events.
- When talking or writing to other participants about the subjects before Gathering, take care over how you communicate, using inclusive language and behaviour to avoid hurt. Pause before pressing ‘send’: consider whether you might be about to say something you would later regret.
- Be mindful of how important or sensitive the subject may be when discussing views and beliefs you or others may hold. Respect the experiences and opinions of others, even if they differ from your own. Be open to change.
- Do not lobby clerks, introducers, staff or other servants of the meeting regarding the agenda (see *Quaker faith & practice* **3.04**). Do not assume

that Friends who are closely involved will always be available to discuss a topic with you; people might need time off from the discernment between Yearly Meeting sessions.

- Do not claim to speak on behalf of others when expressing your own view.

In Yearly Meeting and preparatory sessions:

- Follow the general counsel on church affairs set out in *Quaker faith & practice* **3.01–3.07**.
- Yearly Meeting sessions are meetings for worship, so give your full attention to the matter before the meeting. Do not carry on a parallel discussion on social media, just as you would not chat to neighbours during a face-to-face session.

Interactions between Friends can result in pain and distress (online or in person). This may arise from unconscious patterns of behaviour, or it may be deliberate.

Behaviour such as bullying, harassment or verbal abuse is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. If you experience or witness unacceptable behaviour by anyone in our community, for the well-being of everyone concerned, please let an elder or a member of the Pastoral Care Team know.

Yearly Meeting Clerks and Elders may decide, exceptionally, to block access to the event for anyone who does not abide by these guidelines.

## Spiritual preparation

### **For our comfort and discomfort: living equality and truth in a time of crisis**

There are three strands to the theme:

- anti-racism: our Quaker journey
- acknowledging and welcoming gender-diverse people
- faith-based action for climate justice.

### **In this time of crisis, how are we to live our testimonies to equality and truth?**

Friends may experience comfort and discomfort at Yearly Meeting Gathering. There will be comfort in coming together and seeing each other's faces after a long time apart. It is also a time to be open to the Spirit, which can bring discomfort and challenge but ultimately growth. Friends will find both comfort and discomfort in sharing information about our work for climate and racial justice, as well as ongoing discernment around gender diversity. These issues are not new, but a better world is possible.

We approach these topics through our testimonies to equality and truth. Social justice, racial justice and climate justice are interconnected. The nature of Quaker worship means we commit ourselves to a process that may lead us in unexpected directions. Where will the Spirit lead us as we engage more deeply with these concerns?

Individually and collectively, we are at different stages of understanding and discernment with these concerns. Friends are strongly encouraged to engage with the spiritual preparation materials and attend theme-related events in advance of plenary sessions.

Our discernment together will be rooted in worship, and our focus will be on what Britain Yearly Meeting as a corporate body can say.

Our Quaker testimonies to equality and truth imply that Friends welcome everyone and reject discrimination. As a community we need to reflect on our response to racism. Are Quakers in Britain committed to being an anti-racist faith community? For this and all topics we will consider, we are doing this work because we love people.

Regarding gender diversity, discernment at the Gathering will represent early steps in a longer journey. As a starting point, we hope to name the places where there is unity, acknowledge that there are trans people in Quaker communities and state that they are welcome. It is likely that Yearly Meeting will return to questions around gender diversity, but we can pause after this step, to sit with it before thinking about anything that might come after.

Ten years on from the Canterbury Commitment, events at Gathering should inform, inspire, and encourage further faith-based action. In plenary sessions, we will focus on what our faith requires of us now, and how we can work with others to achieve our aims.

We will not turn our backs on Spirit-led engagement with these issues. Let us look again at what love can do.

## Spiritual preparation – resources

### Anti-racism: our Quaker journey

Dave performing his song Black, live at the BRIT Awards 2020 (Santan Dave/YouTube, 2020): watch on [YouTube](#) [5 minutes]

The outgoing epistle of the 2020 virtual pre-gathering of Friends of color and their families (Friends General Conference, 2020): read at [www.fcquaker.org.uk](http://www.fcquaker.org.uk) [4 pages]

*White Supremacy and Black Suffering* podcast by Anthony Reddie and Ravelle-Sadé Fairman (Nomad Podcast, 2020): listen at [www.nomadpodcast.co.uk](http://www.nomadpodcast.co.uk) [60 minutes]

*Who are we? How identity politics took over the world?* book by Gary Younge (Penguin Group, 2010): buy from the [Quaker bookshop](#).

### Acknowledging and welcoming gender-diverse people

A timeline from the Quaker Gender and Sexual Diversity Community (QGSDC) setting out the context in our Yearly Meeting: read at [www.qgdsc.org.uk](http://www.qgdsc.org.uk) [reading time: 14 minutes]

'A Friendly meditation on gender' article by David Swain (*The Australian Friend*, 2021): read at [www.australianfriend.org](http://www.australianfriend.org) [reading time: 4 minutes]

Video interview with Chloe, an American trans woman who links her transition to the testimony to integrity (Quaker Speak, 2019): watch at [www.quakerspeak.com](http://www.quakerspeak.com) [10 minutes]

TEDx talk by Sabah Choudrey, on being a brown, queer, trans Muslim (TEDx Talks/YouTube, 2015): watch on [YouTube](#) [15 minutes]

### Faith-based action for climate justice

Interview on climate justice and the 2021 UN climate talks (COP 26) with Livvy Hanks of Quakers in Britain (United Christian Broadcasters, 2020): listen on [Lightcast](#) [8 minutes]

Asad Rehman of War on Want discusses climate justice (Real Media/YouTube, 2019): watch on [YouTube](#) [12 minutes]

'How to be a hero for our children: A people's climate toolkit' guide to personal and political action (Quaker United Nations Office, 2020): download PDF from [www.quono.org](http://www.quono.org) [24 pages]

*On earth as it is in heaven: The Kingdom of God and the yearning of creation* (the 2019 Swarthmore Lecture) by Eden Grace (Quaker Books, 2019): buy from the [Quaker bookshop](#); (Woodbrooke, 2019) or watch on [www.woodbrooke.org.uk](http://www.woodbrooke.org.uk) [60 minutes]

These links can also be found at [www.quaker.org.uk/ym](http://www.quaker.org.uk/ym). Further resources will be added as they become available.

## Children and Young People’s programmes

### What is on offer for children, young people and young adults?

The Young Adults at Yearly Meeting sessions offer a way to be part of Yearly Meeting and to be in a smaller community. Sessions will take place from Saturday 31 July to Sunday 8 August for young adults. These will be times for worship, socialising and reflective sessions.

Children and Young People’s sessions will run in the final week of Yearly Meeting and there will be three age-related programmes taking place from Monday 2 to Friday 6 August. Booking is required for all Children

and Young People’s programmes. Booking closes on 13 June.

Full information can be found at [www.quaker.org.uk/ym](http://www.quaker.org.uk/ym). Children and young people are welcome at Yearly Meeting in session (the weekends either side of the first week of August). If young people would like to be a part of Yearly Meeting in session, they will need to complete the Yearly Meeting booking form to gain access.

## Yearly Meeting Gathering timetable

Yearly Meeting Gathering 2021 is taking place online over three weeks, with Yearly Meeting sessions timetabled over two weekends. Events will be spaced

to allow time away from your screen. You will be able to attend as much or as little as you choose. Some events will have limited capacity.

Week 1: Monday 19 to Sunday 25 Jul							Week 2: Monday 26 Jul to Sunday 1 Aug							Week 3: Monday 2 to Sunday 8 Aug							Available sessions and activities
M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	
																					Orientation; theme-related preparation in own time
																					Fringe (lectures, special interest meetings, groups fair)
																					Community-building
																					Worship; theme-related preparation
																					Children & Young People’s programmes
																					YM sessions

### Week 1: Monday 19 July – Sunday 25 July

In this week you will be able to familiarise yourself with Yearly Meeting Gathering and how to access it. There will be online resources to use and some orientation sessions. Theme-related, fringe and community activities will begin towards the end of this week.

### Week 2: Monday 26 July – Sunday 1 August

Yearly Meeting sessions will take place from Friday 30 July to Sunday 1 August. Theme-related, fringe and community events will run throughout the week.

### Week 3: Monday 2 August – Sunday 8 August

Children and Young People’s sessions and programmes will run from Monday 2 to Friday 6 August. Yearly Meeting sessions will take place from Friday 6 August to Sunday 8 August. Theme-related, fringe and community events will also run during this week.

# Booking information

## Can I come?

Yes. Everyone in our Quaker community is welcome, whether in membership or not.

## What do I need to do?

Register – From 1 June, you can do this online at [www.quaker.org.uk/ym](http://www.quaker.org.uk/ym). There is no charge to attend Yearly Meeting Gathering, but registration is essential.

We hope this document will help you begin to prepare for Yearly Meeting.

If you are unable to attend, you can still participate. You can find more information and follow updates online at [www.quaker.org.uk/ym](http://www.quaker.org.uk/ym), on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/bymeevent](https://www.facebook.com/bymeevent) or on Twitter [@bymeevent](https://twitter.com/bymeevent) (#YMG2021).

## What do I do if I have access needs?

We want anyone who wants to come to Yearly Meeting to be able to do so. Please tell us if you have access needs so that we can make necessary arrangements.

For all Yearly Meeting sessions, there will be speech-to-text reporting, providing real-time captions. You can let us know your access needs when you book. You can also email [access@quaker.org.uk](mailto:access@quaker.org.uk) or call the Yearly Meeting Office on 020 7663 1040.

## How can I help?

Yearly Meeting wouldn't be as rich without help from Friends attending. There is a role for everyone, no matter your resources. Roles include virtual doorkeepers, microphone stewards and pastoral care. You could offer a community activity or be a community champion, exploring ways to celebrate Yearly Meeting with your local community.

## How can I find more information?

The best place to start is the Yearly Meeting website, where you will find the answer to most commonly asked questions. And we will update the website as more information becomes available. If you can't find the answer to your question, email the Yearly Meeting Office at [ym@quaker.org.uk](mailto:ym@quaker.org.uk) or call 020 7663 1040.

Please note that following public health advice, Friends House is currently closed and staff are working from home to support Quaker faith and witness. We may take longer than normal to respond and we thank you for your patience.

Quakers share a way of life, not a set of beliefs. Quaker unity is based on shared understanding and a shared practice of silent worship – a communal stillness.

Quakers seek to experience God directly – internally, in relationships with others, and with the world. Local meetings for worship are open to all who wish to attend.

Quakers try to live with honesty and integrity. This means speaking truth to all, including people in positions of power. The Quaker commitment to peace arises from the conviction that love is at the heart of existence and that all human beings are unique and equal.

This leads Quakers to put faith into action by working locally and globally to change the systems that cause injustice and violent conflict.

Accessible versions of this document are available. Please contact the publications manager at [publications@quaker.org.uk](mailto:publications@quaker.org.uk) or call 020 7663 1162.

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