



# Preparing for Yearly Meeting Appendix

## Past Yearly Meeting minutes

This document contains the following minutes:

**Minutes 27 and 33, 2022** on reparations for the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/yearly-meeting-minutes-2022-substantive-final>

**Minute 24, 2021** received from Junior Yearly Meeting which draws things together

**Minute 33, 2021** on climate justice

**Minute 31, 2021** on including and welcoming transgender, non-binary and gender diverse people

**Minute 17, 2021** on becoming an anti-racist church

<https://quaker.org.uk/documents/yearly-meeting-minutes-full>

**Minute 36, 2011** (known as the Canterbury commitment) on becoming a low carbon community

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/minute-36-leaflet>

## Minutes 27 and 33, 2022 on reparations for the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/yearly-meeting-minutes-2022-substantive-final>

**Minute 27:** Action: learning uncomfortable lessons and taking forward our witness We began our discernment by hearing about research into the Quakers of Lancaster meeting in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, who profited from the enslavement of people, who profited from the labour of those people, and who participated in an economy based on exploitation. We have also heard about the variable and slow response to the concern minuted by London Yearly Meeting in 1727 relating to the enslavement and trading of people, and the unwillingness of Quakers to disown those Friends who continued to profit from enslavement long after this Yearly Meeting had recorded minutes censuring this practice.

Friends, these minutes alone are not enough to change the world! They alone are not even enough to change ourselves. We are a community of Quakers of many backgrounds and racialised experiences. We acknowledge the racialised privilege of many among us, and we value the breadth of experiences and identities among us. Our continued self-examination, discomfort, conviction and commitment is needed.

It is uncomfortable to face the truth, but in our hearts it is a truth we know already. Moving personal testimony in our Yearly Meeting sessions, from Friends who have been subject to racism, confirms this: just as our Quaker forebears were sometimes on the wrong side of history, so we all are complicit in systems of oppression today, including exploitative labour practices in the creation of the technology that enables this blended Yearly Meeting, and in the clothes that we wear. We must acknowledge our complicity in order to begin the work of dismantling those systems.

What then do love and justice require of us?

Love and justice require us to tell the truth, as best we can, about historical and contemporary injustices. We encourage local and area meetings to begin, or continue, work to understand how Quakers and Quaker structures benefited from the transatlantic slave trade.

Love and justice require us to believe those who have the bravery and honesty to share their stories with us.

Love and justice require us to examine our own practices and behaviours, and to work for systemic change. We have heard that love and justice also require us to consider deeply how the Society of Friends in Britain might make financial and other reparation for our part in the wrongs of the transatlantic slave trade.

**Minute 33:** Faith, Community, Action We have considered together the question: What is the next pool of light God is asking you to step into?

It is as we share our journeys; as we share what we think we are being called to do next, that we will find those in our community who are walking alongside us, those who can strengthen us with their support. We too may be called to accompany others. We are moving as a people of God.

We have heard ministry about the importance of true listening which pushes us to action. We have also heard encouragement to move forward with acknowledgment and apology for how our wealth has been linked to the enslavement of people. We do not need to have a perfect understanding of or response to history in order to take action. We have heard that Quakers and others are already taking forward work to understand how reparations might be made for the harms of the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism and economic exploitation, the trauma and impact of which is felt in the lives of Friends and others today. We do not need to begin this work afresh, but can build upon the foundations laid by others and work with partners including other churches and faith groups.

We ask Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees, Meeting for Sufferings and area meetings to examine the resources which they hold on trust, and to consider how they, and we, could move forward with this work.

## **Minute 24, 2021 received from Junior Yearly Meeting which draws things together**

<https://quaker.org.uk/documents/yearly-meeting-minutes-full>

### **Minute 24: Minute from Junior Yearly Meeting**

We have received minute 1 of Junior Yearly Meeting which reads as follows:

We considered the question “How can we become a Religious Society that centres justice and equity in it's anti-racism and climate justice work?”. As young Friends, we reflected that oftentimes, when discussing diversity in Quakerism, we use language that laments the absence of diverse Friends, without considering the root causes of why those people are not present in the first place. This root cause is often the fact that we are prioritising Diversity and Inclusion, over Equity and Justice.

People need to encourage conversations about the differences between diversity and equity, and inclusion and justice. Diversity tries to include a variety of people to make them seem as if they aren't discriminatory, but equity is about giving everyone the same opportunity. This means that anything can be adapted to ensure people are comfortable. Inclusion and justice here are opposites, as inclusion creates a general safe space. Justice, however, actively seeks out discomfort to ensure comfortability. Justice is okay with having uncomfortable conversations whereas inclusion is not.

Equity and justice address the root causes of these issues, rather than celebrating a result. As Quakers we need to understand that we are not exempt from racism because we wish to be anti-racist – it is our actions that will make a difference, not our intentions, since racism is so systemic that it's often subconscious. Therefore we must listen to how we can be more welcoming, and believe when we are told what issues we currently have, so that we can act accordingly.

We must listen not just to ourselves, but to others, to those outside our meeting, to those who may provide us with discomfiting truths, to those who have experienced racism or climate destruction first hand. For only when all are listened to equally, may all be treated equally.

To dismantle the prejudice present in our community, we must first dissect what makes us a society. Structural racism and bias is often subconscious but is present in most communities nonetheless. We must strive to make a difference to uphold our fundamental beliefs in all aspects of our society.

## **Minute 33, 2021 on climate justice**

### **Minute 33: Faith-based action for climate justice**

Friends across the world have long held a concern for us to live in right relationship with creation. We stand now, looking back at minutes from our own Yearly Meeting in 2011, from worldwide gatherings of friends in Kabarok and Pisac, and looking ahead to the COP 26 UN Climate Change Conference taking place in Glasgow later this year. Events of recent weeks remind us that climate crisis is here, and that it affects us already. There is so much to lose, and so much to gain.

What more does love require of us here, and now?

To those gathering at COP 26 we offer our anger, our grief and our kinder ground, as well as our hope that they can share a vision of a better world. We ask them to renew and redouble their

efforts, as we will do ourselves, giving no less than all we can to deliver a liveable planet and just societies.

From personal witness, let us build collective action. Those privileged by our current economic and political systems will not give up their positions without a struggle. To the extent that we hold privilege in these systems, we must also be ready to sacrifice this. We believe that our current political systems do not serve us effectively in this work. We pray that we will remain undaunted by obfuscation, delay and distraction in response to our work.

Seeking to reduce carbon emissions is an urgent priority, but without interrogating and disrupting our existing economic systems, this will only us back to an unjust system, and may encourage corporations, governments and individuals to delay necessary action and avoid systemic change.

While living faithfully, taking practical action to reduce our personal impact on the planet allows us to work in this area with integrity, it cannot be where our faith-led action ends. Eldership, building resilient communities, right ordering and witness are also fundamental parts of the actions we must take.

Climate justice is anti-racist work. The people most affected by the urgent and systemic crisis must be placed first in gaining this justice. If we have faith we will find many things to do but we cannot set the agenda without centering the experience and needs of people on the front line of climate change. Quakers in Britain must join with Friends and others across the world learning and acting together.

Can our anger, grief and love push us forward to renewed action?

## Minute 31, 2021 on including and welcoming transgender, non-binary and gender diverse people

### Minute 31: Acknowledging and Welcoming Gender Diverse People

Our testimony of equality stems from the religious conviction that all people are of equal spiritual worth, that each one of us is unique, precious, a child of God.

In 2003, Meeting for Sufferings responded to the Gender Recognition Bill, based on our testimony of equality, and encouraged Quaker Life Central Committee to promote the pastoral care of transgender people, their families, spouses and children, their friends and meetings. In 2015 the Tabular Statement started to record "Other" as well as men and women as one step to acknowledging the diversity among us. More recently, following consideration of trans and non-binary inclusion in a number of meetings, Quaker Life drafted an initial statement in 2018, inviting all Quakers in Britain to discuss and reflect together on gender diversity.

These discussions and reflections have not always been easy. Our consideration has coincided with wider consideration of legislation reform in Britain, and the associated conflict has been reflected among Friends in our yearly meeting. We recognise that we need to keep listening and searching together.

In an atmosphere of trust, we need to listen, to share our journeys, in silent worship, and in prayer. We all have human gifts and friendship to offer. We need to rejoice in the things that make us different, not be ashamed or excluded. Our differences are a blessing, and we must all work to ensure that the support is there in each meeting to allow this blessing to bear fruit.

We seek to provide places of worship and community that are welcoming and supportive to trans and non-binary people who want to be among us. Belonging is more than fitting in.

With glad hearts we acknowledge and affirm the trans and gender diverse Friends in our Quaker communities, and express appreciation for the contribution and gifts that they bring to our meetings, which are communities made up of people with a diverse range of gender expressions. The end of our travelling is for differences not to divide us. We rejoice in recognising God's creation in one another. This is what love requires of us.

## Minute 17, 2021 on becoming an anti-racist church

### Minute 17: Anti-racism, our Quaker journey

Tackling systemic racism is a spiritual imperative. (BYM Epistle 2020). Around our yearly meeting Friends have been hearing and acting on a call to tackle systemic racial injustice. In December 2020, Meeting for Sufferings minuted “Our testimonies to equality and truth demand that we engage in a drive towards real change, turning our declared intentions into reality. We are called to commit to becoming an actively anti-racist church.”

Preparatory events at this Gathering have given us time to reflect on Quaker responses to racism. We have heard about some of the ways Quakers have responded to racism, in local and area meetings and our local communities. We have had opportunities for discernment regarding racism and anti-racism, and to think more deeply about what we are tasked with doing.

As a religious society we are still failing to live up to our testimony on equality and we have been deeply moved by honest ministry about these failings. There is white privilege in our community, and there is work to do. As a body we must seek to inhabit feelings of shame and discomfort.

But if not now, then when? We cannot tolerate any further delay. We may not be ready, we may not feel that we are ready, but this next step we take in faith and trust that the Spirit will show us what we need to do.

We declare our commitment to becoming an actively anti-racist faith community. We are still wrestling with what this means for us. We have work to do and will return to this.

## Minute 36, 2011 (known as the Canterbury commitment) on becoming a low carbon community

### Minute 36: Our Canterbury commitment

*“Sustainability is an urgent matter for our Quaker witness. It is rooted in Quaker testimony and must be integral to all we do corporately and individually.” (A framework for action 2009-2014)*

A concern for the Earth and the well-being of all who dwell in it is not new, and we have not now received new information which calls us to act. Rather we are renewing our commitment to a sense of the unity of creation which has always been part of Friends’ testimonies. Our actions have as yet been insufficient.

John Woolman’s words in 1772 sound as clearly to us now: *“The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age.” (Quaker faith & practice 25.01)*

So we have long been aware that our behaviour impoverishes the earth and that it is our responsibility both to conserve the earth’s resources and to share them more equitably. Our long-standing commitment to peace and justice arises in part from our understanding of the detrimental effect of war and conflicts, in damaging communities and squandering the earth’s resources. As a yearly meeting we have considered this before, and in 1989 we adopted The World Council of Churches’ concern for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, minuting that this concern “grows from our faith, and cannot be separated from it. It challenges us to look again at our lifestyles and reassess our priorities, and makes us realise the truth of Gandhi’s words: *‘Those who say religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion is’*”.

In 2009 the Yearly Meeting endorsed the statement made by Meeting for Sufferings on ‘A Quaker response to the crisis of climate change’. This statement was addressed to the Copenhagen Conference and all Friends and meetings were urged to take up its challenges.

In preparation for this yearly meeting gathering, in the background reading, in many of the events and activities, in the Swarthmore lecture and in yesterday’s introduction and threshing groups,

prophetic voices have prompted us to wrestle once again with the immensity of the challenge we face.

We are grateful to those Friends who have responded in their own lives and who have encouraged and informed us. We know that some Friends and meetings have made changes to reduce their impact on the environment, and that there is much more which may yet be done.

We need to arrive at a place in which we all take personal responsibility to make whatever changes we are called to. At the same time, we need to pledge ourselves to corporate action. The environmental crisis is enmeshed with global economic injustice and we must face our responsibility as one of the nations which has unfairly benefited at others' expense, to redress inequalities which, in William Penn's words, are 'wretched and blasphemous.' (*Quaker faith & practice* 25.13)

The action we are ready to take at this time is to make a strong corporate commitment to become a low-carbon, sustainable community. This will require a process to establish a baseline of current witness and a framework in which individual Friends and local meetings can share their successes.

We need to allocate adequate resources to this process. This process needs to be joyful and spirit-led, with room for corporate discernment at local, area and national level. We believe this corporate action will enable us to speak truth to power more confidently. Growing in the spirit is a consequence of taking action, and action flows from our spiritual growth; here is the connectedness we seek. Only a demanding common task builds community.

'Whom shall I send?' We hear the call to this demanding common task. How will we answer it?

We have been reminded of the current work of Quaker Peace & Social Witness. We ask Meeting for Sufferings to work with area meetings and our staff to make better known our current witness and to give thought to appropriate aims for our corporate commitment and the framework which will allow our successes to be shared. We ask them to look at the priorities in *A Framework for Action* and ask Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees to see where there are resources that can be allocated to these priorities to support our corporate commitment and to take our action forward. In addition we ask Meeting for Sufferings to look at the issues of public policy that we might be led to adopt and advocate in the political arena.

We ask Meeting for Sufferings and Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees to report back to Yearly Meeting each year on the progress of this concern. We ask area meetings to consider how truth prospers with regard to sustainability, taking care to relate this to all our testimonies – peace, truth, simplicity, equality and care for the environment.

We encourage local and area meetings to practise speaking truth to power at local level by establishing relationships with all sections of local communities, including politicians, businesses and schools, to encourage positive attitudes to sustainability.

To individual Friends we issue a clear call to action to consider the effect of their lives on the world's limited resources and in particular on their carbon usage. We ask Friends to keep informed about the work being done locally, centrally and throughout the Quaker world and to educate themselves.

But above all that, Friends keep in their hearts that this action must flow from nowhere but love. If we are successful in what we set out to do, we will need to be accountable to one another, but we will also need to be tender with one another, and to support one another through the grief and fear that radical change will provoke.

*"I may have faith enough to move mountains; but if I have not love, I am nothing... Love keeps no score of wrongs, takes no pleasure in the sins of others, but delights in the truth. There is no limit to its faith, its hope, its endurance. Love will never come to an end."* (1 Corinthians ch. 13: verses 2-8 (parts), New English Bible)