

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

At the yearly meeting held in London at Friends House
4–7 May 2018



Minute 31: Is it time to revise *Quaker faith & practice*, our book of discipline? Part 7. Drawing together the threads

Minutes 16, 21, 24, 25, 27 and 28 refer

Over six sessions we have considered different aspects of the decision of whether or not to revise our book of discipline.

We have received and heard read by one of their clerks, a minute of Junior Yearly Meeting: 'Is it time to revise *Quaker faith & practice*', which unites with a revision with some urgency.

We have received and heard read (by video) a minute of the Young People's Programme, which also unites with a revision. We have also received a minute from the Spiritual Adventurers (9-11 year olds) and contributions from the Penn Friends (6-9 year olds) and Fox Cubs (3-5 year olds).

These minutes call for simpler more modern language to be added, and for the celebration of our diversity. We are glad that all of these groups have been present for some of our deliberations and worship. We have heard calls from Friends of all ages for young people to be fully involved in a revision process.

We agree that the time is right to start revising our book of discipline. We embrace and rejoice in this decision. Regular revision is an intrinsic part of who we are as a religious society of friends.

As the introduction to our current book of discipline says,

"We are seekers but we are also the holders of a precious heritage of discoveries. We, like every generation, must find the Light and Life again for ourselves. Only what we have valued and truly made our own, not by assertion but by lives of faithful commitment, can we hand on to the future. Even then, we must humbly acknowledge that our vision of the truth will, again and again, be amended."

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We accept the four specific recommendations of the Revision Preparation Group (see Minute 16).

- *The revision should begin with, but not be limited to, church government, namely the sections which focus on our procedures and corporate discipline.*
- *The revision should divide material between that in the main body of the book, which lays out principles, and supplementary material, which gives details.*
- *The revision should draw on the richness of theological thought in our yearly meeting, now and historically, seeing diversity as fundamental to our community, not as a flaw.*
- *The Revision Committee be given the freedom to be creative, while remaining in close contact with the Yearly Meeting.*

We feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the work of the Book of Discipline Revision Preparation Group (RPG). The high level of engagement of Friends throughout the yearly meeting, with both the *Reading faith & practice* exercise and the publication of *God, words and us*, have helped Friends to come to the consideration at this Yearly Meeting, prepared in mind and heart.

We look forward with anticipation to engaging further with these issues during the process of revision, accepting that we may expect to be changed, both personally and as a church. We should be ready to feel vulnerable, wounded, renewed or transformed as we engage with issues about our faith, and how we practise it together, with open hearts.

Quakers in Britain are diverse in matters of belief and the language we use to describe them and that is to be celebrated. We also experience in our meetings, unity and one-ness in the depths of our worship together.

We should be true to our own beliefs and listen deeply to other people's experience, as well as their words. We remember that sometimes ambiguity and archaic phrases from former times enable Quakers to search for the meaning for themselves and interpret it as they are led. Who are we, and who do we aspire to be? Can we also offer each other support by sharing honestly our real lived lives, including the parts we are not so proud of?

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We ask Meeting for Sufferings to draw up terms of reference for a revision committee, which should be as diverse as possible in its composition. It should include both younger and older Friends. We encourage the group to work flexibly to involve a broad range of contributions of different kinds from Friends.

We ask Meeting for Sufferings to appoint and oversee the work of this committee, expecting to receive regular reports and consultation as necessary at future Yearly Meetings and in other ways.

With regard to the first recommendation, we recognise that this will not necessarily mean waiting until work on church government elements is complete before moving on to other parts.

We encourage the revision committee appointed to challenge Friends in a wide variety of ways. Our continuing witness in the world should inform this revision, be invigorated and energised by it and not be diminished by it, by either resources or capacity.

We ask Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees to make appropriate resources available.

In bringing forward revisions to the church government parts of our book of discipline into core principles and supplementary guides, the revision committee should ensure that there is a consistency and a coherence between the core principles and supplementary material and within the various parts of the supplementary material. Modern media and technology can be used to help with this. We should use language which is as plain and simple as possible.

We want a book which can speak and be accessible to all present and future Quakers.

We encourage the revision committee to be prayerful, joyful, creative and bold. We hope that this book will help us to be more resilient for an uncertain future and that the process of revision will act as a catalyst for renewal.