

Yearly Meeting 2018

Introductions: Saturday 5 May – Session 2

Adwoa Bittle (see powerpoint 4)

Good morning Friends.

If I can handle this weekend, just about anyone can. I don't do change very well.

You should have heard me on the proposed changes to this room. The old space had been my YM space since I was 11. I remember the cardboard image of what was coming, the architect's drawings, the plans seemingly decided by others, a long train journey home from YM when I moaned the whole way about the proposed changes.

The first time I walked in here, after the renovations, I came alone. I didn't want anyone else near me when I faced such loss. Wow, it is a superb space. My first YM in The Light showed me that it's not about the room that we worship in, it's about the openness to the Spirit. It's about our willingness to open our hearts, be still and to listen. Not to our preconceived ideas, not to our fears, but to God. To the love between us.

When I first received the letter from Central Nominations asking if I was willing for my name to be considered for Revision Preparation Group I immediately phoned Christine Davis. I grew up in Dunblane Meeting and Christine was my Quaker port of call. (We didn't always agree as we were/are both strong and outwardly confident but we shared a bond and understanding that I am so grateful for) Christine was important in many ways, to many people. Wife, mother, grandma, friend, confidant, oracle, clerk, committee member, public servant and much more. She served our Yearly meeting as clerk from 1991 to 1994, as we went through the last revision. With Joycelyn Burnell as first assistant clerk they helped us through some tricky and sometimes painful sessions. "Friends, is this broadly acceptable?" springs to mind. I was as a young friend at all these sessions and valued every moment.

Back to the RPG potential nomination. My thoughts on this were "Why me?" Is this to tick the "young" (ish) "Scottish" box? I shared my concerns with Christine. Surely everyone knew how much I love this book and wouldn't want it to change? (pic of 1st edition of current book)

We had a long talk. Christine wondered if my name had come up for the very reasons that held me back. I decided to accept.

I arrived at the first meeting of the committee feeling an outsider. It was obvious to me that all the rest of the committee had either decided that the book needed to be revised or were “yes” men/people(?) to those in “Friends House” (pic of Friends House) who had decided that it needed to happen. I was sure that there was a plot to change the red book in ways that I would not be happy with. I felt that there were people in “power” that could make things happen even if others didn’t want them to.

My plan was to stick a spanner in the wheels of this process. I felt we were not ready. Friends had indicated just this, at YM in session at Bath. I felt the current book met my needs well, I felt there were more important things to be spending our time, money and people’s energy on. As it turned out, I was not the only person on the committee feeling negatively towards a revision. However, much as I tried to stick out my spanner, the work we undertook, very intensely and very conscientiously on your behalf, led me easily and reasonably quickly, to the conclusion so carefully laid out by Lesley just now.

The first step to this move of my position was when we looked closely at the Church government parts of the book. It became very clear to me that many of them are no longer fit for purpose. Following this mellowing, and a growing understanding that “Friends House” and all the super staff and committee members working on our behalf, are not the enemy (far from it), I came to see that there are gaps in the book that need filled. Indeed, you highlighted many of these in the consultation with Area Meetings in 2013. Where are the words on experience of assisted dying, marriage breakdown, being trans gender, sustainability, climate change?

I feel, now, it is very important to acknowledge any concerns or worries that some of you may have. Some of you will have been thinking about this for a while, some may be in the room unsure of what is going on. Some will be in a panic that your favourite parts may be taken out, some may be worried about change of language.

I think this is about trust and communication. If you decide that the time is right for revision, a committee will be set up to do this work on our

behalf. You know how this works. We pray hard and trust in God, our discernment processes and our careful nominations procedures. The new committee prays hard and works harder. The result, we will wrestle with in YM sessions, a few years from now.

I've had 3 and a bit years to get my head around this. I feel excited and that we may be about to start a very special journey. You have a weekend. For some it will be a no-brainer. For others it will be very difficult.

I feel this book is one of my connections to Christine. I feel it is my book. It's my generations book.

However, I know it needs to change, to have a new photo, to move on, in a dignified and loving way.

We are not going to lose this book. It will still be on our shelves, by our beds, on the table in our Meetings for Worship. Guiding us and connecting us. Being our link.

We have time (insert real time left) now to worship together, to consider how our hearts are responding to this challenge before us.