

Yearly Meeting 2018

Introduction: Friday 4 May – Session 1

Meeting for Sufferings – Anne Ullathorne

Introduction

Friends, something I love about being a Quaker and being a member of the RSOF is that there is a sensible reason for almost everything that we do together and not only that, more than that, there is very often a specifically religious reason why we do what we do. So when you get frustrated with the way that Friends do things – using the Quaker business method, negotiating our organisational structure – just remember that there will be a deep underlying spiritual reason why it is as it is and we just have to refresh our minds with an understanding of what it is!!

Meeting for Sufferings is our national representative council and acts as the YM decision-making body in between each YM –it's our equivalent of a synod and your AM representatives attend, bring their ministry to the meetings and then report back to you in your home meetings. We are very much a networking, communicating body enabling the whole of our yearly meeting to link together as one body.

As Ursula asked for shows of hands, I'd like to do the same: how many of you have served as MFS reps in your life as a Quaker? Hands up reps just finished their term of service? And How many have got involved with the work of your MFS rep by supporting and liaising with them? I would like that to be every one of you – supporting your rep.

Please do – MFS is your body within our organisation and represents the church, indeed all our congregations. You will hear on Monday morning from the BYM trustees about the Centrally-managed work of BYM , what we might call the charity. We will hear about the enormous programme of work that is undertaken on our behalf – all of this has originated at sometime with a concern that has passed through Meeting for Sufferings – and over a lifetime of 350 years it has grown and changed. MFS (and the reps) ensures that it has its ear to the ground in being aware of the work – we hear from the Central Committees, we hear from the trustees, we hear from other parts of the yearly meetings and we hear from each other and the work that is going on within various area meetings.

How have we worked in 2017

Things to celebrate about how we work – we aim to be a whole committee or council, meeting under the guidance of the Spirit, in accordance with our business method and 2 meetings in 2017 were particularly noteworthy – in October , we met in Manchester , not London – a different venue and some invited local friends joined us . We want MFS to be less remote to local friends and our proceedings to be easily accessed – our minutes are freely available on the website. And then in December, meeting in London, we were joined by the Young People participating in their

annual day at Friends House and on this occasion, some joined us in our sessions and contributed to the worship.

What we have done in 2017

This is within our written report and I don't intend to go through it – we assume you have read it.

Just to remember that:

For ourselves :We have considered our local meetings and our use of the framework agreed in 2015: Our Faith in the Future. How can we work towards this vision – what can we do? What can you do to help build the kingdom of God here on earth? As requested by YM 2017, we have started a process of looking at barriers to diversity within our ways of working. We have asked AMs to feed back to us about their own situation. We have been considering the way in which decisions are made for the centrally-managed work and will return to this later this year, with the new representatives.

For others: we have agreed statements about fracking and a manifesto about sanctuary everywhere. We have shared information about the various witness of our Area meetings so that we can work more effectively together.

We have two working groups which report through us to Yearly Meeting:

BYM Sustainability Group which has been working for the past 6 years on embedding sustainability issues in all our practice so that we can live our lives as a Quaker in demonstration of our values – we all need to help to see what God requires of us in our own specific situations. In February this year we received a detailed report of their work in 2017 (as recorded in our minute 18/02/10 recognising 'that we still need to see more engagement from individuals, local meetings and area meetings across the yearly meeting if we really want to see that Quaker values are active in the world.'

At our last meeting in April, we heard from the review group looking at this work and recommending that we should consider taking it forward by different mechanisms. We are holding a meeting in July of various stakeholders and hope to be guided as to the right way forward to ensure that this YM concern, like our concern for peace, is embodied in everything that do. We will return to this in the autumn at Sufferings and report to YM again next year.

BDRPG reported to us in December and we agreed that it was time for YM to consider that we should review our book of Discipline – I don't need to say any more about this because YM agenda for Saturday and Sunday is full of this consideration. Needless to say Sufferings felt it was right – you have seen our minute – and the feeling is very much that we need to proclaim the good news in a way that is easily accessible for all, today, in the twenty-first century!! Both Jesus Christ and George

Fox exhorted us to go out and proclaim the truths that we have found – that God can speak to us directly, that God is love and that there is that of God in each one of us ... we should be bold in describing the truth as it has been revealed to us and in a way that is understood by those around us – why keep the good news to ourselves?

(Ways forward)

As we go forward in faith, I am reminded of the words of the apostle Paul:

Guard the good treasure entrusted to you with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us. (This is from the apostle Paul, writing from his jail, to the young disciple, Timothy: (2 Tim 1 v 14)

Conclusion

So friends, MFS has met 5 times in 2017 and covered many items of business. We have checked our work against the list of functions required of us by QFP chapter 7.02. We are looking forward to the new triennium and to the challenges that the future will bring – we go forward under the guidance of the Spirit and pray that our experience and our expression of God's grace to us will only increase.

Those who are interested to hear more about our work and challenges, or wish to make contributions to help in our work , are welcome to the session on Sunday afternoon at 5.30 in George Fox Room when we can explore these issues further.