

**YEARLY MEETING
OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (QUAKERS) IN BRITAIN**

**AT THE YEARLY MEETING
HELD IN LONDON AT FRIENDS HOUSE
26 - 29 May 2006**

Minute 23: The Membership Procedures Group Report

Further to minute 30 of Yearly Meeting held 28 July – 4 August 2001, Meeting for Sufferings asked Quaker Life Central Committee to set up a Membership Procedures Group. Meeting for Sufferings, by minute 10 of its meeting held 5 November 2005, has endorsed and forwarded the group's report, as found on pages 76 to 85 in *Documents in advance*.

The Membership Procedures Group was asked to produce detailed proposals on:

- the processes for acquiring and transferring membership, which should be made as simple and undaunting as possible;
- the possibility that membership, once acquired, might be held in a way that is not specific to a geographic meeting, provided satisfactory arrangements can be made for the maintenance of an appropriate list and the oversight of those on it;
- all age groups should, as far as possible, be treated in the same way, in particular enabling children and young people to enter into membership when the time is right for them.

Yearly Meeting in 2001 affirmed its commitment to membership, and the group's remit was to consider the processes of membership.

The group has given three recommendations to us which follow as printed in their report:

1. "Our main recommendation is that the membership sections of *Quaker faith & practice* should be reorganised so as to shift the emphasis from the process of acquiring membership to a set of principles underlying this process. The procedures which monthly meetings establish for acquiring membership stem from these principles. This change allows for both flexibility and variation in practice and the retention of well-tested processes for acquiring membership. The principles apply to everyone. The procedures stemming from them can be adapted so as to enable children and young people to enter into membership when the time is right for them.
2. "With regard to transfer, we recommend keeping the present process. It seems to us that the main problem is that many Friends do not understand our current procedures. For this reason we recommend that the relevant section of *Quaker faith & practice* is amended so that it includes separate sub-sections with instructions to (a) the Friend whose membership is to be transferred, (b) monthly meeting clerks and (c) overseers. Use can be made of electronic media.
3. "We do not recommend the setting up of a system by which membership can be held non-geographically outside monthly meetings. It is clear that satisfactory arrangements cannot be made for the maintenance of an appropriate list and the oversight of those on it. However, membership procedures and oversight could draw on an individual's wider Quaker community beyond the geographic limits of the monthly meeting."

We agree these recommendations and ask Meeting for Sufferings to ensure that the necessary changes to *Quaker faith & practice* be drafted along the lines suggested in the report, by the Church Government Advisory Group and returned to us at a future Yearly Meeting.

We note the comment that the possibility of parents applying for membership on behalf of their children means that, in this respect, applications for membership of those of all ages are not treated in the same way. We ask Meeting for Sufferings to report back to us, with recommendations, on this matter, including how to involve the children and young people associated with the Yearly Meeting in the consultation process.

Our recording of membership status is a recognition of a living spiritual reality which is already present before we decide how to record it.

Membership is both a gift and a task, a gift of God and a task which brings responsibility to respond to the love of God in the service of the Society.

MARTIN WARD, *Clerk*