



Woodbrooke  
Quaker Study Centre



# Politics, participation and prophetic witness: seeking truth with power

## Preparatory materials for Britain Yearly Meeting 2010

Yearly Meeting 28–31 May 2010 at Friends House in London will have *Engaging with the political process* as one of its themes.

Part 3 (Sessions 13–17) of the Learning Materials produced for Yearly Meeting Gathering 2009 on the theme *Creating community, Creating connections*, is admirably suited to helping meetings prepare for this topic.

This **new expanded** introductory sheet is intended to help you make use of these sessions in the context of preparing for Yearly Meeting 2010. If you have already used this set of materials it may be useful to do them again with this new focus.

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# Notes for facilitators and participants

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## What this set of study sessions is about

Over the course of our history Quakers have been in the vanguard of many spiritual, political and social concerns. We have always held to the idea that witness and worship go hand in hand and enrich each other. Finding allies in the community, witnessing to our values, and reaching beyond our own meeting to other meetings or our local geographical community all feed our worshiping, spiritual and social lives.

Within the areas of peace, integrity, equality, justice, truth, simplicity, community and earth-care, we may be led, individually and corporately, to express our testimony in different ways to the nature of the kingdom. Working with others and engaging with different parts of the political process allows us to seek, discover and explore shared truths and to find ways together to contribute to significant spiritual, political, and social change.

This year, 2010, presents us with particular possibilities for engaging with political processes across Britain, and there will be sessions at Yearly Meeting that reflect this.

Participation in the political life of the nation is encouraged amongst Friends in many ways. *Advices & queries* 34 says “Remember your responsibilities as a citizen for the conduct of local, national, and international affairs. Do not shrink from the time and effort your involvement may demand.”

*Advices & queries* 31, 32, 33, 35, 41 and 42 also remind us of ways to participate and witness to our values and commitments as Friends.

Broadly speaking, there are five ways of witnessing to our Quaker testimony that help in the process of working with others, and which also demonstrate the key Quaker idea that the means should be congruent with the ends in any kind of political process.

Each of the five sessions from set 3 of the materials from Yearly Meeting Gathering 2009 explores one of these ways:

**Session 13: Nurturing a shared vision**

**Session 14: Building and demonstrating the alternative**

**Session 15: Celebrating, praying and praising others**

**Session 16: Speaking out**

**Session 17: Carrying out symbolic and practical action**

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## Choosing which sessions to do from these materials

Whether you do all five sessions or a selection, it will help to do them in sequence. If you only have time for one or two sessions, consider which theme is most likely to address the needs of your meeting, for example, if people tend to carry out their witness as individuals rather than as a meeting, you might want to do the session on **Building a shared vision**; or if you sometimes find your witness lacking in joy, you might want to consider the session on **Celebrating, praying and praising others**.

If you are starting as a new group with this set, consider beginning with the **Introductory Session** (included in the first set of materials and available online at the bottom of the page [www.quaker.org.uk/ymg-2009-creating-connections-pack](http://www.quaker.org.uk/ymg-2009-creating-connections-pack) or in paper form from the Recording Clerk's Office at Friends House). If you don't have time for a whole session, consider how to include some

introductory elements in your first meeting. If you have different people present at each session, think about how to integrate those who didn't attend previous sessions.

## **Young people**

If there are young people in your meeting then think about how you can involve them in the sessions.

Sessions 16 and 17 are particularly suitable for including young people so you may choose to focus on those.

There is also an issue of *Journeys in the Spirit* on engaging with Quaker testimony, this includes activities to enable people to think about how we can take action in relation to the Quaker testimonies and make a statement to the world.

You can access this by going to [www.quaker.org.uk/journeys-archive](http://www.quaker.org.uk/journeys-archive) then scroll down until you see the link to 'Youth Work Issue 1 Engaging with the Quaker testimonies'. If you click on this link that issue of *Journeys in the Spirit* will open in a new window in your web browser.

If you decide to use all the sessions with a cross-age group then it may be helpful to ensure that longer written passages are shared in the whole group so that language and more complex concepts can be explained. This kind of process supports knowledge transfer across the group as well as being more inclusive for younger teens.

It is especially useful to finish with the **Concluding Session** (included in the first set of materials, as above) as a way of rounding off your engagement with these materials and to think about next steps.

During this concluding session you are invited to reflect on your experience of working with these materials and to make notes to pass on to us.

Facilitators are also invited to evaluate their experience of facilitating the sessions – there is an evaluation sheet available on page 12 of the *Creating Community, Creating Connections* pack, available at [www.quaker.org.uk/ymsg-2009-creating-connections-pack](http://www.quaker.org.uk/ymsg-2009-creating-connections-pack)

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## **Notes for particular sessions**

### **Session 13: Nurturing a shared vision**

Even when a group contains those with very different party political leanings it is still possible to explore and nurture a shared vision. In your group there may well be a vision that transcends party politics, manifestos, or specific political ideology. This vision, in turn, might influence how you view your own political stance and the ways you engage with the political process.

When working through this session in preparation for Yearly Meeting 2010, keep the following questions in mind:

*What vision are you called to that is true to the Quaker way?*

*How will this influence your political activity?*

*How might you witness to this more widely?*

### **Session 14: Building and demonstrating the alternative**

In engaging and working with others through the political process we have the opportunity as individuals or as meetings to demonstrate the alternatives to confrontational or negative styles of political engaging and participation. This means building different, more collaborative ways of seeking truth with prospective MPs, councillors, government, and with others involved in the political mainstream.

When working through this session in preparation for Yearly Meeting 2010 keep the following questions in mind:

*What new ways or those which are tried and trusted might support a collaborative approach to social and political change?*

*How can we actively support people who are working in ways that are congruent with our approaches and testimony?*

### **Session 15: Celebrating, praying and praising others**

In every part of the political process there are potential allies and partners to seek out and work with. There are many groups and individuals whose work is worth celebrating.

When working through this session in preparation for Yearly Meeting 2010 keep the following questions in mind:

*Who, locally and nationally, is working with a common cause to the values we hold?*

*How can we support and add value to work that is already going on rather than duplicating other's efforts?*

### **Session 16: Speaking out**

Quakers have traditionally believed that we should 'let our lives speak'. But there have been many times in our history when we have given voice to particular instances of injustice, political possibility, and potential change.

Actively addressing key challenges facing us locally, nationally or globally is an important part of our faith commitment.

When working through this session in preparation for Yearly Meeting 2010 keep the following questions in mind:

*What are the issues that need voicing at this time?*

*What parts of Quaker testimony need to be spoken as well as lived?*

*How might we do this either personally or as a meeting?*

### **Session 17: Carrying out symbolic and practical action**

There are many actions open to us when an issue exercises us either as individuals or in meeting. Some kinds of action are effective but challenging and others simple to arrange but have less of an impact. You may have experienced the inspiration of a large demonstration or the feeling of commitment when only buying fair trade tea, chocolate, or coffee, or the sense of solidarity that comes when taking part in some kind of boycott.

When working through this session in preparation for Yearly Meeting 2010 keep the following questions in mind:

*What are the issues that we need to be active on right now?*

*What outcomes are important to us at this time – is it publicity, support, encouragement, witness or direct challenge?*

*What methods are most appropriate and congruent with our testimony to truth, integrity, peace, simplicity, and equality?*