

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

Epistle from Britain Yearly Meeting

held at Friends House and online, from 26 July to 30 July 2024

Dear Friends everywhere, we send you our love and greetings.

Gyfeillion annwyl ym mhobman, anfonwn atoch ein cariad a'n cyfarchion.

An all-age Quaker Community has gathered in Friends House and online. Video conferencing has enabled wider participation, but it can be harder to be aware of everyone in our sessions. Our time together has included programmes for children and young people, as well as Junior Yearly Meeting. We have welcomed representatives from other churches and faiths, and Friends visiting from overseas. Together we have celebrated the 400th anniversary of the birth of George Fox.

Change is a constant in life. As a faith community, we seek to follow the promptings of love and truth. As opportunities open, we try to adapt our ways and processes to meet the needs of living in a turbulent world.

We strive to be a loving body of Friends where we all support each other – but we often fall short. How can we open Quaker spaces so that everyone feels welcome? We know that we each have work to do if we are to hear voices that are unlike our own. We seek to be Spirit-led, as our experience and understanding permit. May we be aware of our limitations. May we be open to learn in love. May we be teachable.

How can we love those who do bad things? Loving is different from liking. It is an action, more than a feeling. Younger Friends invite us to say sorry to someone we love, even if we do not feel loving to them at that time.

In the Swarthmore Lecture we heard stories of people who had committed serious, violent crimes and all those who have suffered as a result. When we come close to people so hurt, there is no easy resolution to their anger, fear, disgust, shame, and despair. Our responses may include those same emotions. If we recognise these as part of ourselves, we may be more able to answer that of God in others.

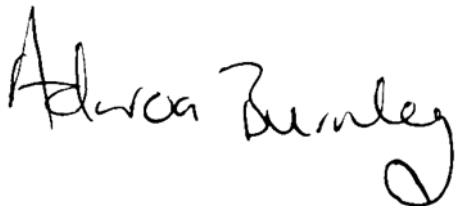
As Britain Yearly Meeting, we have minuted commitments in recent years: to care for our planet, to become an anti-racist church, to make reparations for historical injustices, to welcome and affirm those who are transgender, non-binary, and gender diverse. Much work has been done on all these by some individual Friends and Quaker meetings, as well as by our yearly meeting staff and committees. However, some have disagreed with the actions and approaches of others. This has been a cause of pain and anguish. We have heard in ministry that the strength of a church lies in how it is able to disagree with itself. In Quaker discernment, unity is not the same as unanimity. Minority views may well continue to exist. Among ourselves, we need to find kinder ground for our disagreements. Can we find joy? Can we bring joy?

At Yearly Meeting 2023 we recognised the need to simplify our structures to make them more transparent and release energy for practical ministry. We urged ourselves to be radical, courageous, and imaginative. The proposal to meet four times a year for church governance has been deeply tested, then accepted. In our discernment, our business method and the discipline this requires of us have proved robust. We look for the fuller involvement of all members and attenders in all our meetings. There are no observers in Quakers; we are all participants. Our work benefits when it is carried on by people who bring with them a range of lived experiences and spiritual insights.

Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand.

Isaac Penington in 1667 ([10.01 | Quaker faith & practice](#))

Signed in and on behalf of Yearly Meeting,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adwoa Burnley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, decorative flourish at the end of the name.

Adwoa Burnley
Clerk