

Follow up letter



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

15 April 2021

To members of Meeting for Sufferings

Meeting for Sufferings 10 April 2021

Dear Friends

Thank you all for your dedicated preparation and the prayerful consideration you gave to every item of business before us at Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) last weekend.

We despatched the various standing items, namely nominations and appointments, Prison & Court Register, one Quaker Recognised Body, the MfS report to Yearly Meeting and the letter of greeting to Irish Friends relatively quickly, thus enabling the meeting to hear from trustees at some length about action they are taking following our minute of December 2020, which committed us to becoming an anti-racist church. There have been further press releases since our meeting (see <https://www.quaker.org.uk/news-and-events/news/one-step-to-tackle-racism>)

Trustees also sought our guidance on two other matters. The first of these concerned the steps they are taking to connect the work of area meeting trustees with that of BYM trustees in a supportive relationship; the second relates to their initial soundings about simplification of our structures. Both matters will be followed by workshops for further discussion and Friends will receive information about this separately. Please contribute if you can, and encourage others in your area to get involved.

In returning to the matter of Assisted Dying we attempted to get to the very heart of what we believe and no one will have come away untouched by the personal experiences that were shared. The consideration had been sparked by minutes received in October 2019 about the law on Assisted Dying, and meetings across the country have all had the chance to contribute to the discernment.

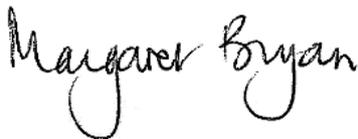
We were unable to reach unity on the question of possible changes to legislation, but when you report back to your area meetings I urge you to look not at what we *didn't* do but at the things we all *can* do. For some of us this will remain personal – talking openly in our meetings, with our family and friends, about death and dying; thinking about our own wishes, quality of life, the importance of compassion, the need (or not) for medical intervention. Others will want to take a more campaigning, public position, deeply concerned for current legislative change, the social inequalities exposed by the availability of good palliative care, the funding for hospices. We uphold all Friends acting under concern in this matter. I have included a link to the Big Voice London report mentioned in the meeting to add to the information you already had in your papers.

We received a minute from Manchester and Warrington AM about the plight of the Uighur community in China, and Friends are urged to inform themselves. Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture (Q-CAT) has produced a briefing (see link below) which you may find helpful.

Quaker Life Central Committee has been taking soundings about the word 'overseer'. Whilst there is a widely-held view that this terminology is completely inappropriate in 21st century Quaker meetings, there is no common consensus on which word to use instead to describe the responsibilities given in *Quaker faith & practice* chapter 12. The role is more important than the word however, and it remains fundamental in the building of our Quaker communities. Area meetings are asked to experiment with terms to describe the way in which, in Isaac Penington's words, we help one another up with a tender hand (*Quaker faith & practice* 10.01). We will return to the matter by the end of 2022 in the hope that 'way will open' to finding a word or phrase that can be used in the new Book of Discipline.

With the final meeting of our triennium on 10 July and Yearly Meeting later in the summer there is much to look forward to in our Quaker world. Who knows what the future will hold?

In Friendship



Margaret Bryan
Clerk, Meeting for Sufferings

- [Big Voice London report](#) from 2019 including the topic of Assisted Dying
- [Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture briefing](#) on Uyghur Genocide in China

Friends who want to understand more about Quakers' relationship to slavery will find these links of interest:

- Information about [people who were enslaved by William Penn](#)
- A recent statement on [Rowntree colonial histories](#) (with links to responses published by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust)
- An article about [Lancaster Quakers and the Slave Trade](#), and a filmed conversation with two Lancaster Friends about the [historic involvement of Lancaster Quakers in the slave trade](#)

The following papers are included in this mailing:

- Functions checklist
- MfS minutes April 2021

Meeting for Sufferings: Functions Checklist (*Quaker faith & practice* Chapter 7.02)

	Requirement	April 21	Comments
A	To set the priorities for the centrally managed work		
B	To issue public statements in the name of BYM		
C	To receive regular interim reports from BYM trustees	8	
D	To receive the BYM trustees' annual report & accounts for information		
E	To make a report on its own activities to YM	6	
F	To determine the dates of YM	14	
G	To deliberate on how best to support the spiritual life of the yearly meeting and to further the development of its visionary and prophetic role	10	
H	To keep under review and to test as appropriate the existing and new concerns referred to it by AMs and others	10, 12	
I	To foster communication throughout the yearly meeting	13	
J	To receive minutes from area meetings	10, 13	
K	To make appropriate entries in the prison and court register	4	
I	To appoint representatives to attend other Yearly Meetings	11	
M	To receive information about changes in the composition or status of general meetings and gatherings		
N	To make changes in the composition of area meetings		
O	To give assistance to area meetings in the amicable settlement of disputes		
P	To hear appeals against area meeting decisions		
Q	To give guidance on policy matters referred to it by the BYM trustees from time to time	9, 17	
R	To authorise action and minute as required under other sections of Quaker Faith and Practice	9, 12, 16	
S	To set up an arrangements group and support and working groups to assist its own work as it sees fit	15	



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

At a meeting of

Meeting for Sufferings

Held online from 10 April 2021 by video conference

Minutes

MfS/21/04/01 Opening Worship

During opening worship *Quaker faith & practice* 21.66 was read.

MfS/21/04/02 Membership of Meeting for Sufferings

Since our last meeting we have received the following nominations for and requests for release from Meeting for Sufferings until the rise of Yearly Meeting 2021:

Release requests received:

Ann Banks – Brighthouse West Yorkshire AM alternate
Silas Price – Norfolk & Waveney AM alternate

Nominated:

Richard Ashwell – Staffordshire AM alternate
Caroline Kibblewhite – Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee representative

We appoint the Friends named and thank the Friends released for their service.

Apologies:

We receive apologies from Northamptonshire Area Meeting which has not been able to send a representative on this occasion.

Visitors invited to represent area meetings/committees in the absence of the appointed representative or alternate:

Nim Njuguna – Quaker World Relations Committee visitor

Other visitors:

Neil Jarvis – BYM staff, Recording Clerk's Office
Anne van Staveren – BYM staff, Media Relations Officer

MfS/21/04/03 Agenda

The Clerk has introduced the draft agenda, and we have agreed to this.

MfS/21/04/04 Prison and Court Register

John Lynes, a member of Sussex East Area Meeting, received a summons to appear at the City of London Magistrates' Court for breaching Section 14 of the Public Order Act 1986 in the course of an Extinction Rebellion event last September. A solicitor from Extinction Rebellion was permitted to submit a plea of not guilty in February and a trial has been set for 15 June 2021.

We agree to include this information in the Prison and Court Register. We hold John Lynes in the Light.

MfS/21/04/05 Quaker Recognised Body

We receive paper MfS 2021 04 06 and agree to register Escaping Victimhood for five years, with registration to be reviewed by the end of April 2026.

MfS/21/04/06 Meeting for Sufferings annual report to Yearly Meeting

We receive a draft report from the Assistant Clerk (paper MfS 2021 04 07), amended in the light of comments received in advance and at this meeting. We accept the draft and agree to forward it to be included in the documents for Yearly Meeting.

MfS/21/04/07 Letter of greeting to Ireland Yearly Meeting

We receive from Quaker World Relations Committee a draft for our letter of greeting to Ireland Yearly Meeting being held online 8 to 11 April 2021.

We ask the clerk to sign the letter on our behalf. It will be sent immediately to the Clerk of Ireland Yearly Meeting so that it can be read out at their Yearly Meeting this weekend.

MfS/21/04/08 BYM trustees

Caroline Nursey, Clerk of BYM trustees, reported to us on their meeting in February. Paper MfS 2021 04 09 refers.

In addition to two items that are being brought to our meeting separately for consultation and guidance, namely simplification and the relationship between BYM trustees and area meeting trustees, trustees considered support for our governance structures, communications and anti-racism.

In the light of the decision, following conversations with Friends of colour, no longer to name a room after William Penn at Friends House, they have commissioned a paper looking at the complex relationship between Quakers and slavery as a first step towards engaging with this. We have heard that it is important to acknowledge the reality of the past including both our good work and our failures to address injustice.

We know that staff took part in an inclusive workplace training and development programme in 2019, and work is ongoing to review policies and procedures. We have heard reports of racism experienced by staff and others within our Religious Society of Friends and have been informed that trustees will also be attending anti-racism training. We welcome this initiative. It is important to recognise that we all have work to do – in our meetings and inside ourselves.

Britain Yearly Meeting is also responding to the recent Sewell Report from the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities.

We thank trustees for their report and their work on our behalf. The pandemic which has brought about so much change in our ways of working has meant that new trustees have not met their colleagues in person, and trustees are looking forward to being able to do this when circumstances permit.

MfS/21/04/09 Relationship between Area Meeting charities and BYM charity

Chris Willmore, BYM trustee, has spoken to us about the development of a memorandum of understanding between BYM trustees and area meeting trustees. We note the intention to talk to and listen to Friends across the yearly meeting which will begin in earnest with online meetings in May. We welcome this initiative and look forward to hearing about the work as it progresses.

MfS/21/04/10 Assisted dying

In 2019 MfS received minutes from Staffordshire and North West London Area Meetings seeking the discernment of the wider body of Friends on the issues of Assisted Dying. In the ensuing 18 months much preparation and prayerful consideration has taken place across the yearly meeting. A full list of the minutes received is attached, and we are grateful to all who have given so much time to considering this issue.

We focussed our discernment on three questions:

- What can we say as Quakers about this issue?
- Where does this sit in our testimonies to truth, peace, equality; or in our view of life itself?
- Can we unite with and/or work with others in supporting those for whom this is a matter of deepest concern?

It is clear that Friends have a genuine wish to engage in a wide range of issues, including:

- The importance of talking openly with one another about death and dying
- Following the leadings of the spirit in asking what does love require of us? How can we respond with compassion?
- The availability and effectiveness of good palliative and hospice care; we all want to feel loved and accompanied at the end of our lives, not abandoned
- Issues concerning Advanced Decision and Do Not Resuscitate instructions; unwanted or unnecessary medical interventions
- How does what I want, if it becomes lawful, affect others?
- Quality of life and the wish for a 'good' death'
- Respect for the views and wishes of the individual, their family and others.

There are strong feelings in all quarters, but it is clear that we have not reached a united view about possible changes to legislation.

We do not regard lack of unity as a weakness. Quakers as a religious body embrace diversity in what we believe individually but hold the space for opposing views; we can have conversations, answer questions of ourselves and of God, work through our contradictions and support each other in difficulty.

We have heard many personal stories which inform our understanding, and we uphold all Friends acting under concern in this matter, knowing they are following the promptings of love and truth in their hearts.

MfS/21/04/11 Appointments

a) Central Nominations Committee

Central Nominations Committee brings forward the following names for service or release as indicated:

Book of Discipline Revision Committee

To serve with immediate effect until 31 December 2023

Nominate: Juliette Chandler – Lancashire Central & North AM

Release from service:

Alice Southern – South Wales AM / CCR De Cymru

BYM Representatives to European Yearly Meetings

Representative to Belgium & Luxembourg Yearly Meeting 2021

Nominate: Jane Harries – South Wales AM / CCR De Cymru

Representative to Finland Yearly Meeting 2021

Renominate: Mary Woodward – South East Scotland AM

Representative to Netherlands Yearly Meeting 2021

Nominate: Edward Bruce – West Scotland AM

Representative to Norway Yearly Meeting 2021

Nominate: Laura Karadog – North Wales AM / CCR Gogledd Cymru

Friends Trusts Limited

To serve from 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2024

Nominate: Steven Burkeman – York AM

Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations

To serve from 1 May 2021 to 30 April 2024

Nominate: Will Haire – Ireland Yearly Meeting

Quaker Housing Trust

To serve from Annual Retirement Meeting (ARM) April 2021 to ARM 2022

Nominate: Morayo Fagborun-Bennett – South London AM

To serve from Annual Retirement Meeting (ARM) April 2021 to ARM 2024

Nominate: Peter Rice – Leeds AM

Quaker World Relations Committee

Release from service:

Annie Brock Womack – Sheffield & Balby AM

Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee

For information

Appointed by between meetings decision of the Meeting for Sufferings clerks to serve from as soon as possible until YM 2023:

Jessica Metheringham – Mid Thames AM

Yearly Meeting Elders

To serve for Yearly Meeting Gathering 2021 (including preparative arrangements before Yearly Meeting in session)

Renominate:

Jane Mace – Gloucestershire AM

Gloria Dobbin – Luton & Leighton AM

Tess James – Dorset & South Wiltshire AM

Nominate:

Caro Kelly – Lancashire Central & North AM

Ruth McTighe – Central Yorkshire AM

Wendy Sender – London West AM

Peter Squire – Devon AM

b) Yearly Meeting Nominating Group

Yearly Meeting Nominating Group brings forward the following names for service or release as indicated:

Central Nominations Committee

Release from service:

Meg Forrest – York AM

We appoint and release the Friends named accordingly, and thank them for their service.

MfS/21/04/12 Use of the term ‘overseer’

In 2019 we received a minute from Central Yorkshire Area Meeting regarding the use of the term ‘overseer’ to describe those in our meetings who hold responsibilities for pastoral care (MfS 19/12/14). We referred this to Quaker Life Central Committee and following a wide consultation they now report back to us (minute QLCC 21.06).

Their minute indicates that there is general support for a change to the term, partly because of the historical connotations dealing with hierarchy and oppression.

We unite with their discernment that this is the time for a change and we encourage meetings to continue experimenting with the structure of the roles and the terminology used until the end of 2022, when we look forward to hearing the results.

MfS/21/04/13 Plight of the Uighur Communities in China

We receive a minute from Manchester and Warrington Area Meeting from its meeting on 4 February (MWAM2021.02.04.15 in paper MfS 2021 04 15). It asks us to increase our awareness of the human rights abuses against the Uighur communities in China and urges Friends to campaign through their local connections. We commend this to Friends throughout the yearly meeting.

MfS/21/04/14 Yearly Meeting

We did conclude among ourselves to settle a meeting, to see one another’s faces, and open our hearts one to another in the Truth of God once a year, as formerly it used to be.

Yearly Meeting in London, 1668 (*Quaker faith & practice*, 6.02)

We have heard from Clare Scott Booth, Clerk of Yearly Meeting, on the agenda for Yearly Meeting in session between 30 July and 8 August, following a number of preparatory opportunities over the preceding weeks. Despite not being able to meet in person, we still look forward to seeing one another's faces and we are excited by the ambition of the gathering.

We receive minute YM Arr Com 2021/03/03 from Yearly Meeting Arrangements Committee which confirms that, notwithstanding the change to the Bank Holiday in 2022, Yearly Meeting will be held over the last weekend in May (27 to 30 May 2022).

We accept this recommendation.

MfS/21/04/15 Revised terms of reference for Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group

Following a review of MfS Arrangements Group and in response to our minute MfS 21/02/05 we receive revised terms of reference for the group. We approve them and note the next routine review will be in five years' time.

MfS/21/04/16 Terms of reference for a group to review appointment of members and attenders to central committees

We approve terms of reference for the group to review the current practice of appointing attenders to central committees only in exceptional circumstances. We look forward to receiving their report at a future meeting.

MfS/21/04/17 Simplification of central governance structures

We all share the aspiration of a simple church supported by a simple charity to reinvigorate Quakerism. We receive paper MfS 2021 04 19 from trustees which summarises the call, made by Meeting for Sufferings and trustees, to simplify our central church and charity governance structures working from first principles.

We support the approach to hold workshops for members of Sufferings so that we can explore the points raised in the paper further.

MfS/21/02/18 Closing worship

We closed our time together with worship. We look forward to meeting again in July.

Margaret Bryan
Clerk

The following area meetings sent minutes about Assisted Dying which are given in full in the MfS papers:

Central Yorkshire
Chilterns
Cornwall
Cumberland
East Scotland
Hardshaw & Mann
Ipswich & Diss
Lancashire Central & North
Leicester
Luton & Leighton
Mid Somerset
North East Thames
North West London
Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire
Sheffield & Balby
Staffordshire
Surrey and Hampshire Border
Sussex West
Thaxted
Wensleydale & Swaledale
York