

Follow up letter



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

7 June 2024

To members of Meeting for Sufferings

Meeting for Sufferings 1 June 2024

Dear Friends,

It was, as ever, a pleasure to join with you for our meeting for worship for church affairs.

This was the final session of this triennium, so we are saying farewell to a number of Friends who have reached the end of this particular service. I hope you genuinely feel released for other things, whether that's alternative Quaker service or something else.

Much of this triennium has been dominated by the consideration of making church structures fit for the next generation of Friends. We have also been in the forefront of experimenting with fresh formats for our meetings.

The first meeting of the new triennium will be in October following the appointment of representatives at Yearly Meeting in July.

At our meeting this time, we had three quite intense items.

First, the re-registration of Quaker Concern over Population as a recognised body. We agreed to re-register the group for a period of two years while further work is done to clarify and better express the intention of the group. Possibly even more important, we agreed to initiate work to clarify the process of registering as a recognised body and how to deal with situations in which that registration is questioned. Arrangements Group will be asking some Friends to clarify the issues for us.

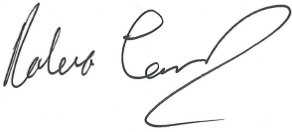
Second, we received a report from the Clerk of Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees challenging us to disagree with one another in such a way as to build up our community rather than to break the ties of solidarity. The Pauline epistles provide plenty of evidence that this is an issue with which we have been struggling since the days of the early church. "Part of the creative experience of a community is learning how to deal with conflict when it arises, and Friends are not usually good at this. 'Speaking the truth in love' is a Quaker cliché, but 'papering over the cracks' is the principle more commonly acted upon. Conflict met in 'brokenness' of spirit can take a

meeting a long way on its spiritual journey, whereas unresolved it deadens the life.”
(Q&A 10.22)

Third, we heard about our work in Palestine and Israel and have begun to consider whether our work in this area needs to adapt, in particular looking at the language that is used in relation to the conflict. We include material from the presentation, and on how to support EAPPI, in this mailing.

I look forward to seeing you again, either at Meeting for Sufferings or in another context.

In Truth,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Card', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert Card
Clerk, Meeting for Sufferings

The following papers are included in this mailing:

- Functions checklist
- MfS minutes June 2024

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

	Requirement	June 24
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	
D	To receive the BYM trustees' annual report & accounts for information	8
E	To make a report on its own activities to YM	10
F	To determine the dates of YM	
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	9
H	To keep under review and to test as appropriate the existing and new concerns referred to it by AMs and others	5, 9, 12
I	To foster communication throughout the yearly meeting	5, 11
J	To receive minutes from area meetings	5, 12
K	To make appropriate entries in the prison and court register	
I	To appoint representatives to attend other Yearly Meetings	4
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	
R	To authorise action and minute as required under other sections of <i>Quaker faith & practice</i>	
S	To set up an arrangements group and support and working groups to assist its own work as it sees fit	4



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

At a meeting of

Meeting for Sufferings

Held at Friends House and by video conference 1 June 2024

Minutes

MfS/24/06/01 Opening Worship and welcome

We have begun our Meeting in worship during which *Quaker faith & practice* 28.07 was read.

MfS/24/06/02 Agenda

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

MfS/24/06/03 Membership of Meeting for Sufferings

Since our last meeting we have received the following nominations and requests for release for Meeting for Sufferings until the rise of Yearly Meeting 2024:

Release requests received:

Ruth Cook – West Wiltshire & East Somerset AM

We agree to this release.

Nominated:

Natasha Alden – Mid-Wales AM/CCR Canolbarth Cymru

We appoint this Friend.

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

Avril Dawson – Ipswich & Diss AM

Sarah Dodgson – North London AM

Kate Hughes – Manchester & Warrington AM

Lynne Richardson – Banbury & Evesham AM

Apologies:

North West London AM, South London AM, Staffordshire AM, West Wiltshire & East Somerset AM

Other visitors:

Jude Acton – BYM staff, Head of Inclusive Quaker Communities

Grace Da Costa – BYM staff, Public Affairs and Media Manager

Jason Evans – Quaker Concern over Population

Elaine Green – Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations

Cato Pedder – BYM staff, Media Officer
Caroline Series – Quaker Concern over Population
Clare Wood – BYM staff, Head of Peacebuilding Projects

MfS/24/06/04 Appointments

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

Church Government Advisory Group

To serve with immediate effect for a triennium, renominate:

Pennie Quinton, Devon AM

To serve with immediate effect for a triennium, nominate:

Jackie Fowler, Worcestershire & Shropshire AM

Lesley Thomson, York AM

Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group

To serve with immediate effect for a triennium, nominate:

Charles Phillips, London West AM

Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations

To serve with immediate effect for a triennium, nominate:

Joyce Robertson, North Wales AM / CCR Gogledd Cymru

Quaker Peace and Social Witness Central Committee

Release from service with immediate effect:

Sila Collins-Walden, North Scotland AM

Quaker United Nations Committee Geneva

To serve as the Britain Yearly Meeting representative, for a triennium with immediate effect, nominate:

Ruth Agoi, Brighouse West Yorkshire AM

For information the following between-meeting appointments were discerned:

Friends Trusts Limited

To serve for a triennium with immediate effect:

John Capper, Thaxted AM

Alison Clarke, York AM

Malcolm Sterratt, Pendle Hill AM

Alastair Thomas, Lancashire Central & North AM

Mark Tod, Mid-Thames AM

Quaker Council for European Affairs

To serve for a triennium with immediate effect:

Gil Alcock, East Cheshire AM

Quaker Housing Trust

To serve for a triennium with immediate effect:

Karima Brooke, Oxford & Swindon AM

Peter Rice, Leeds AM (reappointment)

Morayo Fagborun-Bennett, South London AM (reappointment)

Representatives to other European Yearly Meetings

To serve as the Britain Yearly Meeting Representative to Switzerland Yearly Meeting in 2024:

Eleanor Beswick, Oxford & Swindon AM

b) Yearly Meeting Nominating Group

Central Nominations Committee

To serve with immediate effect for a triennium, nominate:

Jennifer MacLennan, Lancashire Central & North AM

Judith Roads, North East Thames AM

Dic Williams, North Wales AM / CCR Gogledd Cymru

We agree to these appointments and request for release.

MfS/24/06/05 Minutes from area meetings

Meeting for Sufferings receives four minutes (paper MfS 2024 06 06) for information:

a) Cyfarfod Rhanbarth De Cymru – South Wales Area Meeting Minute 2024.03.05 on the topic of Ecocide.

South Wales Area Meeting has affiliated to Stop Ecocide International. To take its concern on ecocide further, it has encouraged its Environment and Sustainability Cluster to work on this issue with other area meetings, and Quakers across the world.

b) General Meeting for Scotland Minute 24/03/12 regarding indeterminate prison sentences.

This is General Meeting for Scotland's detailed response to Meeting for Sufferings' request for information about the situation in Scotland regarding indeterminate prison sentences. The Order of Lifelong Restriction is the nearest equivalent legislation. It has two elements: a minimum period of imprisonment, followed by lifelong risk management within the framework of the parole licence. Currently, there are no major concerns about the way this works, therefore General Meeting for Scotland sees no need to align with the concern Meeting for Sufferings has recognised for the system in England and Wales.

c) London West Area Meeting and London Young Adult Quaker Meeting Minutes on gender questioning children.

London West Area Meeting has shared the discernment and thinking of London Young Adult Quaker Meeting on social transitioning of Gender Questioning Children, which informed the young adults' response to the Department of Education's public consultation on *Gender Questioning Children – Non-statutory Advice for Schools and Colleges in England*.

d) Sussex West Area Meeting Minute 24.17 regarding the Salter Lecture 2024.

This minute expresses the Area Meeting's appreciation of Friends who offer service. In particular, it is holding in the Light Friends serving on Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee, BYM Trustees, and Friends in the Quaker Socialist Society, as they resolve matters regarding arrangements for the 2024 Salter Lecture.

MfS/24/06/06 Revision to *Quaker faith & practice* chapter 16

Meeting for Sufferings decided in December 2023 to allow a choice of pronouns in the marriage declaration (minute MfS/23/12/07) and the Church Government Advisory Group brings us revised text for *Quaker faith & practice*.

We agree to the proposed changes.

In *Quaker faith & practice* 16.52, the basic English declaration will now read,

Friends, I take this my friend [full name] to be my spouse, promising, through divine assistance, to be unto [pronoun] / [commonly used name] a loving and faithful spouse, so long as we both on earth shall live.

In *Quaker faith & practice* 16.53, the basic Welsh declaration will now read,

Gyfeillion, yr wyf i yn cymryd fy nghyfaill/nghyfeilles/ffrind/ [enw llawn] yn briod i mi gan addo, trwy gymorth dwyfol, y byddaf i [rhagenw] / [enw a arferir yn gyffredin] yn briod cariadus a ffyddlon gyhyd ac y byddom ill dau fyw ar y ddaear.

We ask for the online, definitive, version of *Quaker faith & practice* to be updated accordingly.

MfS/24/06/07 Quaker recognised bodies

Friends with Jewish Connections

Friends with Jewish Connections, an existing Quaker Recognised Body (QRB), has been reviewed and we agree to re-register it for a period of five years.

Friends of Hlekweni

The Friends of Hlekweni has closed and so we agree to remove this organisation from the list of Quaker Recognised Bodies. We note that some of its work has moved to another QRB, 'Peace Works Zimbabwe.

Quaker Concern over Population (QCOP)

We receive paper MfS 2024 06 08b regarding the reregistration of QCOP.

Quaker Concern over Population an existing Quaker Recognised Body (QRB), has been reviewed and we have heard of the hesitations of some Friends that the language, and in particular the name, of the group is problematic in view of the legacy of racist and eugenic discourse in this area. Recognising that Friends have different views on this topic, we agree to re-register it for a period of two years by which time we would ask that the Group had addressed the name, the weaknesses of its management of potential racism at its meetings, and clarification of its aims. We ask that the staff link continues to work with the Group on the issues that have been raised.

We see that it may be appropriate to review how we determine Quaker Registered Bodies and agree to ask Arrangements Group to organize three to four Friends to explore the issues prior to our meeting in October.

MfS/24/06/08 Report of trustees

We have heard from Marisa Johnson, Clerk of BYM Trustees. We have been reminded of the service given by many Friends, and the damaging effects of indiscriminate expressions of lack of trust and of doubt of the integrity of these Friends both to the individual and to our corporate life.

We recognise that it must be possible to express concerns over structural failings, and to identify issues that may need to be revisited. Nevertheless, we commit ourselves to ensuring that our words serve to build up our community, even when we feel led to challenge.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (*Ephesians 4.29*)

MfS/24/06/09 Our work in Palestine and Israel

We receive paper MfS 2024 06 10 which sets out the current centrally managed work of BYM in Palestine and Israel – primarily through the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). The paper also includes recent minutes from Quaker Peace and Social Witness Central Committee (QPSWCC), Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations (QCCIR) and Young Friends General Meeting (YFGM) on this topic.

We affirm our stance against the use of fighting with outward weapons as a means of resolving conflict.

We have been reminded that EAPPI envisions a future in which the military occupation of Palestine has ended and both Palestinians and Israelis enjoy a just peace with freedom, dignity, and security based on international law. EAPPI attempts to provide a protective presence, to monitor human rights violations, to stand in solidarity with local peace and human rights groups, and to influence our governments on policies in the region.

Our stand of principled impartiality, acknowledging that all individuals caught up in this conflict, including terrorists, freedom fighters, conscripts, volunteer soldiers, and innocent victims are children of God cannot devolve to a neutrality that fails to acknowledge the abuses committed against the population of Palestine.

We recognise that human rights violations in this region are overwhelmingly against Palestinians, as documented over the years by both Palestinian and Israeli human rights groups. While the language articulating these violations is emotive and may be distressing, we may need to use it to be faithful to the truth of the situation. We ask QPSWCC to reflect further on this in the hope that we might return to it at a future meeting. In particular, what do we specifically mean by particular words, such as genocide and apartheid, and what is the likely impact of using them.

We acknowledge the powerful work that has been done and recognise the need to protect it. We must be conscious of the effect of the language we use on the vulnerable situation of people living in Palestine and Israel.

In a situation where hope seems absent, we pray for miracles.

We send this minute to QPSWCC and QCCIR

MfS/24/06/10 Area meeting compliance

Quaker Life Central Committee (QLCC) oversees an annual return from area and general meetings on compliance with various responsibilities required of charitable bodies. We receive minute QLCC 24.17 from the central committee.

We note that 11 out of 73 returns remain outstanding and are reassured the Recording Clerk is liaising directly with these meetings to receive the information and necessary assurance that they are meeting their legal obligations.

We note the following key findings from the returns, some of which are encouraging and some of which are a concern.

- Six area or general meetings which are registered charities reported not submitting their Annual Report to their regulator within the deadline for their most recent financial year. Some delays may have been due to the Charity Commission's new online submission system, which took effect in 2023 and caused delays as trustees needed to register for it.
- Excepted charities: 3 have yet to send BYM their annual report and 3 reported to BYM after the regulator deadline.
- Eleven area meetings reported having had a vacancy or shared responsibility for either their Clerk of Trustees, Treasurer or Safeguarding Co-ordinator role during 2023. In some cases, although not all, this may indicate a difficulty in finding and appointing suitable Friends to serve.
- Six area meetings are not registered with a third-party Safeguarding Advisory body; most of those registered are registered with 31:8, an independent Christian charity providing professional advice, training, support and resources in all areas of safeguarding children and adults at risk of harm.
- Twenty-one area meetings report having safeguarding concerns arise in 2023.
- All area meetings have a safeguarding policy, which was being regularly reviewed by trustees, as were health and safety policies.
- Roughly half of area meetings have a complaints policy, fire safety policy and code of conduct for employees and volunteers.
- Roughly half of area meetings regularly consider their key risks and manage them using a risk register or similar system.
- Two area meetings reported serious incidents to the Charity Commission or the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) in 2023.
- Eight area meetings noted concerns about record-keeping of key information, although a majority of these had plans to rectify which were in action.

We ask QLCC, through Quaker Life staff and local development workers, to work with area meetings to improve areas of concern.

We are generally encouraged that this new process of reporting is highlighting areas of weakness, which can be more easily addressed and we are hopeful that it will lead to improvement year-on-year.

We send this minute to QLCC and Yearly Meeting.

MfS/24/06/11 Memorandum of understanding between trustees

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the constituent charitable bodies of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain was agreed by Meeting for Sufferings in October 2023 (MfS 2023 10 13). Its purpose is to clarify existing relationships so that we can share the same understanding of our duties to, and expectations of, each other. The document has been circulated to area meetings and area meeting trustees are reminded to sign and return this document if they have not yet done so.

MfS/24/06/12 Safeguarding in our meetings

At the end of 2022, Meeting for Sufferings received for information a minute from Gloucestershire Area Meeting regarding their work to implement the safeguarding policy, procedures, and toolkit. It expressed the hope that other area meetings would be encouraged to share their experience of doing this.

Today, we have heard BYM's safeguarding officer Mark Mitchell, and Keith Walton, safeguarding co-ordinator in Kingston and Wandsworth AM speak on their work and service to help make our communities safe for children and adults at risk of abuse.

Safeguarding is a priority in our meetings and a responsibility we all share. We are pleased to hear that every area meeting has reviewed its safeguarding documents within the last three years.

We thank Mark and Keith for speaking to us. We are grateful to staff and Friends who help us with this important work.

MfS/24/06/13 Closing worship

We bring our time together in worship to a close. We give thanks for the service of all Friends appointed to Meeting for Sufferings in this triennium and uphold the Friends offering that service in the next triennium.

Keep your meetings in the power of God... And when Friends have finished their business, sit down and wait a while quietly and wait upon the Lord to feel him. And go not beyond the Power, but keep in the Power by which God almighty may be felt among you... For the power of the Lord will work through all, if... you follow it. (George Fox, 1658, *Quaker faith & practice*, 3.30)

Robert Card
Clerk